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The 1996 Elections and the Trap of Lesser-Evilism

David Finkel

A STRIKING OBSERVATION ABOUT LEFT-WING "LESSER-EVILISM" in electoral politics seems to be: the greater the actual evil of the "lesser evil," the louder the argument for supporting it.

For a rough empirical test of this proposition, think back over the past five Democratic presidential candidates — Clinton, Dukakis, Mondale, Carter, McGovern — each more conservative than his predecessor, more committed to and dependent on corporate America, more distant from labor's concerns and influence. Yet with each turn of the political cycle, the liberal and social democratic commitment to these candidates and to the Democratic Party seems to be more and more consolidated.

Not only that — even as the *real influence* of the institutions of labor, liberalism and their social democratic appendages within the Democratic Party shrinks toward the vanishing point, the shriller becomes their insistence on shoving the Democratic Party option down the throats of social movements and radicals. Refusing to support the Democratic Party right now, in (what is always) the most decisive election of the century, means abandoning the black community and the workers to the virtual onset of fascism.

The end product of lesser-evilism for labor and the left seems to be that we inherit all the evils. Since the 1992 election we have had a right-wing Democrat as president; for the past year, a right-wing Republican Congress; a year from now we may face Republican control of both Congress and the White House. But the greatest of all evils for the left is the absence of an independent voice — so that Clinton's wretched corporate health-care "reform," for example, was labeled by Gingrich & Co. as the left's program!

That lesser-evilism grows, not declines, with the evil of the lesser-evil — and even with the actual weakening of the lesser-evil ideologists themselves — seems paradoxical. In fact, the paradox is only an apparent one; but before returning to it let's deal with some consequences as we consider the left and the Clinton reelection campaign in 1996.

If my observation is valid, it both simplifies and complicates the argument about Clinton and the left. On the one hand, it becomes unnecessary, even irrelevant, to try to detail the Clinton Administration's atrocities. The fact that Clinton initiated the drive to "end welfare as we know it," meaning an attack on the poor; that "putting 100,000 more cops on the street" and more petty drug users in prison is the centerpiece of his reelection campaign; that his (extremely feeble) efforts to curb "permanent replacement" of strikers were linked to com-

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pulsory arbitration schemes that would effectively eliminate the right to strike itself; that his only first-rate appointments, Dr. Joycelyn Elders and Prof. Lani Guinier, were in the latter case abandoned in the face of a right-wing slander campaign and, in the former, preemptively fired for mentioning "masturbation" before the reactionaries even had time to mount their attack; that his crime-control and "anti-terrorism" initiatives contained provisions for secret trials and executive deportations that exceed the police-state wet dreams of the Bush, Reagan and Nixon regimes; and that his defense of medical care for the poor and elderly against Republican budget ax-murderers reduced itself to a technical dispute over which figures to use for a seven-year budget-balancing crusade — none of this, you see, actually matters.

We could say even more — how Clinton allowed the military gangsters in Haiti to massacre thousands, then sent troops in to "restore democracy" (and coincidentally, to steal the documents showing the CIA's deep involvements with the death-squad regime) after forcing the popular elected president to implement an International Monetary Fund program and to promise not to run for reelection. How he announced, then renounced, the end of the ban on gays in the military. All this and NAFTA too — but so what?

It's precisely *because* the political situation is so dire, the soon-to-arise chorus of liberal and social democratic commentary will tell us, that we must at all costs resist the ultimate horror of simultaneous Republican control of the White House and Congress. How could we be "indifferent" to the prospects of turning the entire government apparatus over to the right wing?

Since no facts about Clinton can affect the argument, it becomes necessary to turn to a more complex problem: the character of the evils we confront, and the possibility of alternatives. Clearly it won't do to rely on ritual formulas claiming that the Democrats and Republicans are identical, which they aren't; or to deny that the Republican agenda is, taken as a whole, a worse evil than the Democratic one, which it is. If there weren't greater as well as lesser evils in bourgeois politics, there wouldn't be a lesser-evil debate in the first place.

Let's outline, then, the more complex and practical case against voting for the Democrats, lesser evils that they are. It is necessary to grasp that the two political evils, while by no means identical, are profoundly co-dependent, as manifested in several ways.

(1) The greater, overtly right-wing and reactionary (roughly speaking, Republican) evil, which felt the political wind in its sails from the defeat of Clinton's wretched health-care pseudo-reform until the Republicans' own debacle in the budget wrestlemania of November 1995, can scarcely exist without the weakly pro-welfare state, slightly liberal (roughly, Democratic) lesser-evil opposition.

For one thing, after the collapse of Communism the "big spending," "soft on crime" and "weak on God and family values" Democrats are the only remaining official enemy so desperately required by the right. For another, on a practical political level, many angry and alienated white working people who voted for the Republicans in 1994 may have done so because of the belief that a divided government, with a Democratic administration still controlling the executive institutions, would prevent the Contract on America being implemented in a way that would directly impact on *them*.

This belief is actually mistaken, inasmuch as profound changes in U.S. and world capitalism underlie the truly bipartisan screw-the-people consensus in

today's politics — but who will present that reality to the working class public if there is no independent left to do so?

(2) The ever-more-rightward moving Democratic establishment, responding faithfully to the imperatives of its corporate masters, requires the looming menace of the Republican greater evil to discipline its own voter base. After NAFTA, after the betrayal of every Democratic promise to labor from the Carter-era labor-law-reform on, what could keep either the institutions of labor, or workers (two very distinct entities!) in the Democratic loyalist camp if not the hideous visage of Newt Gingrich?

By now, the process of political decomposition has reached the stage where even the menace of the right may not be able to hold the Democrats together much longer. I suspect that workers, unlike ideologues of the liberal or social democratic left, will not vote from purely cynical lesser-evil motives, but only for something that is seen to be, even if only in a partial and wrong-headed way, somehow *positive*. If the Democrats offer nothing, white workers either don't vote or try to get what they can from the conservative option (the illusory tax-cutting promise, for instance, or the pledge to wipe out affirmative action's "special privileges" for minorities).

(3) This dynamic affects the debate in the left in ways that are too rarely acknowledged. I mentioned at the outset that the shrillness of the lesser-evil argument escalates as the real political influence of its adherents diminishes. This is not so hard to understand.

At the elite levels, Democratic leadership pays less and less attention (or even lipservice) to the concerns of the left. For liberal intellectuals or social democrats within trade union structures, then, maintaining their last shreds of credibility within the Democratic Party depends on delivering the votes of constituencies that naturally incline toward the left. Crudely put: who needs a DSA (or some other left cover) if it cannot deliver or impose some discipline on any base? Self-preservation thus plays at least a scarcely acknowledged role in the formulation of the lesser-evilist argument.

(This is not the occasion for a full-fledged polemic, but there is at least a rough parallel here between social democrats' role in seeking to channel anger and political disaffection back into the Democratic Party, with their historic work of blunting the organizing of mass independent anti-war or disarmament campaigns during the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War.)

Let's move, then, to briefly consider alternatives to the lesser-evilist trap. The Perot phenomenon is of course symptomatic of profound political alienation, but circumscribed by the fact that the 20% of the electorate drawn to Perot are outnumbered, two or three to one, by those who (correctly) regard him as a political snake-oil salesman.

More interesting is the fact that Bill Bradley, for the one day he publicly contemplated an independent presidential candidacy, became a virtual front-runner — not because he was seen as either a left or right alternative to Clinton (generally he's somewhere to the right), but mainly because he looked like something different. Or that Colin Powell, as a possible moderate Republican candidate, threw both the Democrats and the Christian Coalition into a panic.

Obviously neither Bradley nor Powell represents anything in the nature of a progressive new political party. Their appeal, however, reflects the extraordi-

nary malaise that has the ruling class parties desperately looking for new faces, new images, new sound bites — anything but new politics.

For its part, the left can look — if it so chooses — to a number of developments in recent electoral politics. In several states, including New Mexico, not a traditional left bastion, Green parties made important steps forward in the 1994 elections. Labor Party Advocates will hold a founding convention by mid-1996. The New Progressive Party is on the political map in Wisconsin; Campaign for a New Tomorrow and other activists have carried out aggressive city council and board of education campaigns in Pittsburgh; Bernie Sanders has proven in Vermont that independent political action informed by populist and socialist convictions can succeed. Activists should be working to bring these and other local or state efforts into some kind of operational alliance.

This is not the place for a comprehensive survey or detailed strategic discussion of how to bring about such unity, but I would hope that this and other journals committed to independent politics would undertake it.

Chalmers K. Stewart 1910-1995

It is with sorrow that we note the death of Chalmers Stewart, a life-long socialist, educator, union organizer and writer whose activism was matched by his erudition.

While teaching in Akron, Ohio, Chalmers was an organizer for the AFL Teachers Union, and during the formation of the CIO helped to start the Progressive Workers School which attracted many workers who later became leaders of the United Rubber Workers, CIO,

In 1933, Chalmers joined the Trotskyist Communist League of America and later became part of the group led by Max Shachtman that left the official Trotskyist movement to form the Workers Party (WP) — the party of Third Camp socialism — which later became the Independent Socialist League.

On his return from Europe where he was a combat infantryman during the war, he became a WP organizer, serving in West Virginia, Philadelphia and New Jersey, and wrote important political and cultural articles for *The New Internationalist* under the names, James Fenwick, Donald A. Hill and Blake Lear.

Chalmers had planned to do his Ph.D. thesis on the WP/ISL, a project he tragically never had a chance to complete. He did, however, record a number of interviews with the movement's secondary leaders and kept a lively, thoughtful journal.

Chalmers Stewart remained a left-wing socialist until his death. He will be sorely missed.

A Cold Peace in Bosnia

Thomas Harrison

IN 1995, THE TIDE OF WAR IN EX-YUGOSLAVIA finally began to turn against the Serbian juggernaut. Croatia recaptured all the occupied territories except for Eastern Slavonia. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Pale Serbs were being pushed back. For the first time since the war began, there seemed to be a real possibility of winning a truly just peace — which would mean restoring Bosnia as an integral, democratic, multi-ethnic republic; returning refugees to their homes; disarming rebel forces; and putting war criminals on trial before *Bosnian* tribunals. Such an outcome depended on advances by the Bosnian army, not on NATO air strikes or Western diplomacy, all of which were aimed at consolidating a partition of the republic. A just peace is now probably farther away than ever, though, thanks to the United States-led intervention. In all likelihood, Clinton has snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

The October 12 cease-fire probably came just in time to prevent the complete collapse of the “Serb Republic” in Bosnia. Bihac had been liberated, and about half of the territory occupied by Serb forces in the Western part of the republic had been reconquered. Bosnian and Croatian armies were marching on Banja Luka, the only significant Serb-held city. At this point, reports the Belgrade weekly *Vreme*, one of Radovan Karadzic’s deputies called up Slobodan Milosevic to tell him that unless the offensive was stopped quickly, there would be a Serb rout. (cited by Branka Magas in *Bosnia Report*, Sept.-Dec. 1995 — a newsletter published in Britain) But it was Washington, not Belgrade, that came to the rescue, putting enormous pressure on Bosnian and Croatian leaders to halt their advancing forces and even allowing Serbian planes more freedom to attack any units that continued to move forward.

The result, the “peace” agreement worked out in Dayton, is a victory for the Serbs — a lesser victory than they might have hoped for, but a victory nonetheless. Karadzic could well boast: “we have achieved our objectives. We have half of Bosnia; we have more than 40 cities; we also got some pretty good land.” (*The New York Times* Nov. 25, 1995) Even though the Serb Republic is not officially recognized, the agreement does recognize it as a *de facto* independent entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina. Behind a facade of national unity — a rotating collective Bosnian presidency, federal parliament and other central institutions — the reality is two separate self-governing units, each with its own army.

Most of the areas that underwent “ethnic cleansing” since 1992 will remain under the control of those who did the cleansing. The 60,000 NATO troops sent to police the “buffer zones” separating the two sides will essentially freeze and enforce the current cease-fire lines (with a few modifications). They are explicitly not being given the mission of helping refugees to return or insuring free elections in the Serb half of Bosnia. (The agreement does not even establish a

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right of return, in any case, according instead merely a right to compensation.) This means that the Karadzic regime (with or without Karadzic, it makes no difference) will be given a free hand to persecute not only the Muslims and Croats who have the bad luck to remain on its soil, but also any political opposition that might arise within the Serb communities. If ethnic cleansing continues, NATO troops will probably just stand by, as UN forces did in Srebrenica and the Krajina. And this cynical swindle, this reward for rape, robbery and massacre, is, according to the Orwellian logic of Secretary of State Warren Christopher, nothing less than "a victory for all those who believe in multi-ethnic democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina." Probably, after all the horrors, most Bosnians welcome the agreement. But it is necessary to call things by their right names.

The brutal atmosphere of the Dayton talks was vividly, if unwittingly, captured by a *New York Times* report on November 23rd. During 21 grueling days in the conference rooms and vestibules of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, U.S. negotiators established "a remarkable rapport with Mr. Milosevic"; the Bosnians, by contrast, "ended up not fitting into the fraternal Realpolitik in which negotiators cut through days of stalemate over slugs of whisky." The Americans just couldn't understand why Izetbegovic was so glum, preferring to eat his meals in solitude and ungratefully refusing to get excited over U.S. promises of arms and economic aid; why, they felt, couldn't he be more like the Serbian president, who "sidled up to the piano," sang songs and tossed back highballs? With their persistent ambivalence and angry outbursts, the Bosnian officials seemed silly and infantile, while Milosevic was "flexible" and "accessible."

A JUST PEACE HAS NEVER BEEN THE GOAL of Western "peacemakers," who have done their best to placate and appease Serb aggression since Slobodan Milosevic came to power. In response to criticisms of the current partition plan, State Department spokesperson Nicholas Burns declared, "There is no need to separate peace and justice. There is no need for a trade-off." (*The New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1995) But just such a trade-off has always been the operating assumption of Western diplomacy, from Carrington to Holbrooke.

In 1991, most Western capitals feared the breakup of Yugoslavia and its destabilizing consequences for the Balkans and for the USSR far more than they feared Serbian expansionism, which was viewed as a lesser evil. The idea that Slovenes and Croats might have good reason to want to escape from a Milosevic-dominated Yugoslavia mattered not at all; the idea of defending on principle Slovenia's and Croatia's democratic right to national self-determination almost certainly never entered the Big Powers' calculations. Instead, they hoped that Belgrade and the Yugoslav Army would quickly defeat the Croats, preferably with a minimum of attention-getting violence. When the Serbian war machine turned on Bosnia, Western negotiators tried, as Leslie Gelb put it, to get "the Bosnian Muslims to recognize that their cause is hopeless; come to the bargaining table, and accept defeat." (*The New York Times*, Aug. 6, 1992)

But Western complicity goes beyond merely accepting the consequences of Serbian aggression. At every stage, the Big Powers have signaled encouragement to Milosevic and his proteges. The Powers' overt hostility to Slovenia's and Croatia's secession prompted Belgrade to believe that it had been given a green light to attack the breakaway republics; their initial reluctance to recognize the new states, and their furious denunciations of Germany for doing so

“unilaterally,” further encouraged Serbian aggression. The imposition of a blanket arms embargo on the whole of ex-Yugoslavia only ensured that Belgrade and its clients would possess and maintain an overwhelming military advantage over their opponents. In short, Western leaders helped ignite and continued to fan the conflagration that engulfed Croatia and Bosnia and brought death and misery to millions of their citizens.

Western policy has always been guided not so much by sympathy for Serbian aggression as by contempt for its weak and demanding victims, as well as by the “realist” assumption that Milosevic, as the “strong man” of the Balkans, would have to be accommodated in the interests of regional stability. This is very much in the tradition of appeasement; Chamberlain and Daladier were not over-fond of Nazis either, but they had no intention of letting insignificant Czechoslovakia stand in the way of a deal with “Herr Hitler,” a deal that promised “stability” in Central Europe. The trouble now, as then, is that the victims would not accept defeat. Despite the arms embargo, Croatia fought back, and so did Bosnia, though it took much longer for Sarajevo to mount a serious military challenge to the Serbs. Moreover, the almost unprecedented viciousness of Serb tactics shocked public opinion worldwide and thus forced the Big Powers to make a show of “doing something” on Bosnia’s behalf. Consequently, although the basic goal of appeasing Serbia by ratifying its conquests remained unchanged, adjustments have had to be made.

“Robust Peacemaking” and Massive Pinpricks

DURING THE PAST YEAR, WASHINGTON SHOWED ITSELF MORE WILLING than London and Paris to take a tough line against the Serbs. U.S. military trainers were sent over to help the Croatian and Bosnian armies, and the Administration seemed to favor strengthening Croatia as a counterweight to Serbia. These policy differences should not be overestimated, however; certainly, they did not mean that the U.S. had any greater interest in a just solution to the conflict. Clinton has been just as committed as his fellow world leaders to a cold-hearted carve-up of Bosnia in which the fate of the victims counts for nothing.

U.S. officials like Madeleine Albright shed a few crocodile tears over the mass killings in Zepa and Srebrenica, but there is plenty of evidence that the Administration welcomed the Serbs’ seizure of these “safe havens”; located close to the border with Serbia, they were logical sacrifices. Western passivity made it seem, for a moment, as though NATO’s threats to use its rapid-reaction force to protect the remaining safe havens might prove as empty as previous warnings. Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic was emboldened to promise that he would conquer Gorazde, Tuzla, Bihac, and even Sarajevo by the winter.

In response to Croatia’s reoccupation of the Krajina, Congress’s vote to lift the arms embargo, and the dramatic advances by Croatian and government forces in Bosnia, however, a policy shift took place. Domestic political pressure, the upcoming presidential election, and the obvious fact that the Serbs were now on the defensive all combined to push Clinton to the conclusion that it was time to be somewhat sterner with Belgrade and Pale. Due to NATO rockets, the siege of Sarajevo was lifted. But it was thanks to Croatian and Bosnian troops, not NATO, that Bihac was rescued — and this was probably a turning point in the war. Morale among Mladic’s storm-troopers, which had been falling for some time, now began to plum-

met. The notorious Serbian fascist Arkan and his "Tigers" had to be brought in to force young men to the front. As we have seen, Clinton stepped in just in time to save the Serbs, but Bosnia's military gains undoubtedly gave it a somewhat stronger negotiating position at Dayton. This is probably why Bosnian negotiators were able to stand firm against the Americans' apparent willingness to give Gorazde to the Serbs and to divide up Sarajevo a la Berlin.

To get Milosevic to the Dayton talks, Clinton used a rather small stick, while offering him a very big carrot. NATO air strikes were carefully calibrated so as *not* to weaken the Serbs' military strength relative to that of the Bosnian army, leaving Mladic more than enough weapons to defend his forces against Bosnian attacks. As Albert Wohlstetter put it in *The Wall Street Journal*, (Oct. 19, 1995) NATO attacks "followed the few comic pinpricks in the past with an impressively massive set of pinpricks. They impressed an impressionable media and some beleaguered Bosnians in Sarajevo, grateful for a loosening of the siege, if not elsewhere." So much for the "stick." The carrot is, of course, the removal of sanctions which have wreaked havoc on the Serbian economy. In addition, Milosevic and his proteges in Pale were offered a reward for their bloody aggression: secure, internationally-guaranteed and protected control over 49 % of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is territory which the five governments of the contact group will now undertake to guard *against* Bosnian forces. The Serbs' allotted portion is merely a somewhat scaled-down version of Greater Serbia, one that will be more compact and therefore actually easier to defend and eventually absorb into Serbia itself.

IF THE PEACE AGREEMENT ESTABLISHES A FORM OF PERMANENT APARTHEID in Bosnia, this will not be unwelcome to Western leaders. Even further ethnic cleansing would be considered merely a salutary "tidying up," albeit something to be deplored in public. Partition, for them, is an unfortunate necessity: if separated once and for all, perhaps Bosnia's quarrelsome ethnic groups will stop fighting. As Leslie Gelb reassured TV viewers on the "McNeil-Lehrer News Hour," (Sept. 12) with his fellow analysts — Zbigniew Brzezinski, Lawrence Eagleburger and William Perry — all nodding sagely: "It's not justice, it's realism." Actually, it is neither. Not only does the West's policy amount to a callous acceptance of genocide, it is also a fantasy — it won't work even in its own corrupt terms. Masses of wronged and displaced Bosnians are scarcely more likely to accept their fate than have Palestinians for almost 50 years. The victims will not meekly bow their heads.

The Dayton plan is only the most recent version of the Vance-Owen and other partition schemes, all of which, since 1992, have legitimized territorial aggression and genocidal mass murder. During the first two years of the war, the diplomacy of Lord Owen and the other international negotiators encouraged the Serbs to grab more territory and to intensify ethnic cleansing in advance of any possible ceasefire. Pretending to be neutral, these diplomats constantly revealed their biases by denouncing the Bosnian government while praising Milosevic and other Serb leaders for their "realism." Owen also criticized Clinton for encouraging Sarajevo to hold out by dangling before it the prospect of lifting the arms embargo. But Clinton always agreed with Owen and the other Europeans that the Bosnian conflict was basically a civil war for which all parties were equally responsible and in which all had the same objectives. His offer to lift the arms embargo was almost certainly insincere and meant to ap-

peace domestic public opinion, while actually avoiding any serious challenge to the other NATO members; in any case, once the U.S. became more centrally involved in negotiations in 1994, the idea of lifting the embargo was firmly set aside, and Bosnians were made to understand that Clinton would definitely not help them win the war.

The arms embargo has always been the key to the Bosnian situation, militarily and politically. If Bosnian forces had been able to obtain the tanks, artillery and air defense systems they needed, and still need, they might have had a chance to recover substantial amounts of territory, even to reunite the republic. But this is precisely what none of the “peacemakers” have wanted. Prior to the Dayton agreement, Richard Holbrooke and other American officials stressed that their goal was an “equilibrium of forces” between the two sides, not any sort of military advantage to the Bosnians. But even this promise was probably bogus, meant to scare Belgrade and lure Sarajevo into cooperating with the “peace process.” Now, the plan is to continue a total arms embargo for three months after the peace treaty is signed on December 14, and a ban on the sale of heavy weapons, including artillery, for six months. Bosnia is to be specifically discouraged from attempting to redress the enormous imbalance in weaponry, which currently favors the Serbs by ten to one in tanks and five to one in artillery.

In a theoretical sense, lifting the arms embargo did not require actually taking sides in favor of Bosnia: as many have pointed out, it is a violation of international law to deny any nation the right of self-defense. But stopping the embargo *should* have been part of a policy of supporting Bosnia's own struggle against Serb aggression, and Clinton repeatedly made it clear that this was not his policy.

In order to justify not taking sides, the UN and Western governments, including the U.S., have tried to deny or minimize the victimization of Bosnia's Muslims. This pattern is thoroughly documented in a recent study of the Bosnian war by Norman Cigar: *Genocide in Bosnia: The Politics of “Ethnic Cleansing.”* (Texas A&M University Press, 1995) One of the most grotesque examples has been the persistent myth that the Bosnian government often attacked its own people to win international sympathy. As Cigar shows, UNPROFOR Chief of Staff, Canadian General Lewis MacKenzie, was especially active in promoting this idea and in slandering the Bosnian cause generally. When MacKenzie said, in testimony before Congress in 1993: “Dealing with Bosnia is a little like dealing with three serial killers — one has killed fifteen, one has killed ten, one has killed five. Do we help the one that's only killed five?” (Cigar, p. 121), he was merely uttering a crude version of the official UN line. The UN has never been even-handed, however, and, in fact, it has always had a soft spot for the worst serial killer. One UNPROFOR commander even insisted that there was no siege of Sarajevo at all — merely a tactical “encirclement.”

Genocide and “Spin-Off War Crimes”

IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT THE U.S. ORIGINALLY ATTEMPTED to conceal information about Serb concentration camps. Officials in both the Bush and Clinton administrations avoided using the term genocide and even explicitly denied its applicability to Serb actions. It ought to be clear, though, that the killing or expelling of non-Serb populations has not been some “excess” of eth-

nic civil war, but is at the core of Belgrade's and Pale's political aims. To ascribe ethnic cleansing to intractable, centuries-old tribal and religious hatreds, as American officials and the media do routinely, to assume that it is some spontaneous product of village animosities, is to imply the guilt of the victims too, by suggesting that they would have done the same thing had they had the chance. But, as Cigar explains in considerable detail, ethnic cleansing was planned from above and in advance. It is the implementation of the ideology of an ethnically-pure Serbia, developed by Serbian academics and intellectuals and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Serbs' war has been directed *primarily* at civilians; this is because it is inspired by a paranoid, fascist-style doctrine of blood and soil which declares that Serbs are surrounded by racial enemies and can only survive in a common state from which all non-Serbs have been excluded.

Genocide has been the official policy of Belgrade and Pale, not of Sarajevo. In 1993, the Serbs' example, plus the grab-it-while-you-can signals being given out by Western diplomacy, encouraged Croat militias in Bosnia (the HVO) to do their own ethnic cleansing against Muslims. Muslims then began to retaliate, though their actions were never officially sanctioned by Sarajevo. Cigar calls these "spin-off war crimes." The point is, they must be understood fundamentally as the product of Serb aggression. Relations between Bosnian Croats and Muslims had been deteriorating since the early days of the war, when a pro-partition faction, led by Mate Boban and backed by Tudjman, took over the Bosnian branch of the HDZ, Croatia's ruling nationalist party. Zagreb's machinations were crucial in marginalizing the more moderate Croat leaders, but so was the Sarajevo government's inability to protect Bosnian citizens, including Croats, against Serb attacks. Many Bosnian Croats must have figured that joining Boban's forces was merely the prudent equivalent of abandoning a rapidly sinking ship. At this point, immediate and unambiguous Western political support to Sarajevo, including lifting the arms embargo, might have discouraged such calculations; instead, of course, they were greatly reinforced.

Nonetheless, the Croat community continued to present a complex picture, both in Bosnia and in Croatia proper. The split with Sarajevo was accompanied by growing anti-Muslim propaganda in Zagreb's government-controlled media. At the same time, there was widespread sympathy for Muslims among ordinary Croats, and the Tudjman regime was forced to shelter 250,000 Bosnian refugees. Western negotiators, on the other hand, actively sowed division. Cigar suggests (p.125) that the Vance-Owen plan was actually designed to destroy the Muslim-Croat alliance by allotting the Croats more territory than either their population or existing HVO control would warrant — all in order to increase the pressure on Izetbegovic to be more cooperative; that is, to surrender.

However, ethnic cleansing by the HVO was challenged within Croatia. The Catholic Church and almost all parties except the HDZ denounced persecution of Muslims. Cigar cites polls which show that, until recently, large parts of Croatian public opinion have continued to favor alliance with Bosnia-Herzegovina and oppose partition. And in parts of Bosnia outside Boban's control, in Tuzla and Sarajevo especially, Croats have continued to support government forces. It was at least in part because Tudjman's treacherous policies were so unpopular in Croatia — and also because the Bosnian Army was successfully resisting HVO aggression in several places and, of course, because of U.S. pressure — that he reconstituted the alliance with Bosnia in 1994 and officially,

though insincerely, renounced the goal of carving out a separate Croat-controlled "Herzeg-Bosnia" entity in Bosnia. In contrast to the situation in Serbia, where a much more monolithic public opinion allowed Milosevic a relatively free hand, Croatian public opinion forced Tudjman to play an ambiguous, as opposed to a straightforwardly imperialist, role in Bosnia. At the moment, however, amid the nationalist euphoria generated by his lightning reconquest of the Krajina, Tudjman is obviously under much less pressure than before.

Bosnian soldiers committed atrocities, especially in 1993, that included mass executions and expulsions, rapes, and the destruction of churches. These were on a much smaller scale than Serb war crimes, however, and lacked the systematic character of Serb, and to a lesser extent Croat, tactics. Since the war began, Muslim nationalism of a chauvinist and xenophobic kind has, unsurprisingly, made some inroads. Izetbegovic, who has toyed in the past with the idea of an Islamic state and has several times previously bowed to Western pressure to accept ethnic partition, is at best an unreliable supporter of the values for which Bosnia claims to stand. Nonetheless, these values — a democratic republic founded on universal rather than ethnically-based rights, a diverse society including Muslims, Serbs, Croats and others — are still formally those of the Bosnian government. The evidence suggests, too, that these values are still prized by most Bosnian citizens and soldiers. Acts of revenge, outbreaks of ethnic hatred against Serbs and Croats have occurred and may increase. But the Bosnian war effort has been directed primarily against the Bosnian Serb army, not against Serb civilians. And it is preposterous to claim that an ethnically-cleansed Muslim Bosnia is the goal of the Sarajevo government.

Still, it was never necessary to endorse the politics of the ruling Bosnian party, the SDA, in order to support Bosnia's fight for survival. To build a strong democracy, Bosnians need to develop alternatives to the ethnically-based parties which have dominated political life since 1990. Already, there are many in Bosnia who criticize the Izetbegovic regime for its compromises with Muslim nationalism; we shall see if the Dayton agreement encounters significant political opposition. But most of the SDA's political opponents in Bosnia seem to have understood, as many purported champions of "civil society" and diversity in the West have not, that the republic's best hope lay in the military defeat of its enemies. Some of the latter have pointed to Tuzla, whose municipal government is run by anti-nationalist political tendencies, as a model for Bosnia's future. Mary Kaldor, formerly a major figure in the British nuclear disarmament movement and currently a leader of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, a network of European peace, human rights, and environmental activists, is a prominent advocate of the Tuzla model. But Kaldor also has always rejected a strategy of supporting Bosnia's fight and opposed lifting the arms embargo; instead, she has been a supporter of the "safe havens" concept, under which Bosnians in places like Tuzla were supposed to disarm themselves in return for promises of UN protection. We have seen what those promises were worth. Had it not been for the Bosnian army Tuzla would certainly be in Serb hands today and the other safe havens would have fallen much sooner; the Serbs' share would be considerably more than 49%.

Who Was Responsible for the War?

KALDOR AND MANY OTHERS WHO HAVE WRITTEN ON THE CONFLICTS in former Yugoslavia — Misha Glenny and Bogdan Denitch are two whose articles have often appeared in the left press — blame the war not only on Serb aggression but also on the secession of Croatia and Bosnia and their subsequent international recognition as independent states. Like a good many leftists (and like the Big Powers too), they have never gotten over the breakup of Yugoslavia and harbor bitter feelings toward the successor states. They, and probably many other progressives, would probably agree with *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal when he wrote (July 25, 1995) that the Serbs have a “strong political case”; in seceding from Yugoslavia, Bosnian leaders knew that the Serbs “would fight to the end rather than be part of the new state, and that if the West and the Muslims had gone slower and paid more attention to the demands of the Bosnian Serbs the war might have been avoided.” What were these demands? That Bosnia could not secede under any circumstances, but had to remain part of a rump Yugoslavia completely dominated by Milosevic. This was non-negotiable; Karadzic insisted that Serbs could never live in an independent Bosnia no matter how many legal rights and protections they might possess. Those who condemn Bosnia’s (and Croatia’s) independence as “premature” never explain how it would have been possible to “go slower” or how reduced speed would have made any difference.

Milosevic and Karadzic had made it quite clear well before Bosnia declared its independence that their goal was a Greater Serbia. As early as the fall of 1990, in fact, insurgent Serbs had started to set up autonomous areas. By the beginning of 1992, members of the Serb militias had begun to take up positions surrounding Sarajevo; the “Serb Republic” was proclaimed on Jan. 9, before the Bosnian parliament had even voted to hold a referendum on independence. A similar pattern had occurred earlier in the Croatian *krajin*as.

As the intentions of Milosevic and Karadzic became clear, it would have made sense not to compromise but to act even more decisively; in particular it would have been much better for the Sarajevo government if it had quickly abandoned hope of salvation from the West and prepared to defend itself. Failure to recognize the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, moreover, would have made things considerably worse. Bosnia would have been consigned to the status of Kosova — a Serbian province whose Albanian majority suffer in relative obscurity, far away from the eyes of the world.

Norman Cigar’s discussion of Bosnia’s unpreparedness in the face of Serb aggression is among the most interesting in his book. For a long time before war broke out, Muslim leaders refused to believe that ethnic cleansing could occur. They were not unduly alarmed when the Chetnik movement was revived in Serbia in the mid-1980s. Even after Milosevic consolidated his power using overtly anti-Muslim themes, they remained passive, refusing even to verbally condemn Greater Serbian propaganda, much less to mobilize domestic resistance or appeal for international support. In short, Muslim leaders did exactly what the critics of “premature” independence reproach them for *not* doing — avoiding at all costs any “provocation” of the Serbs. The newly-elected Bosnian government willingly turned over the arsenals of the republic’s territorial defense reserves to the Yugoslav Army (JNA) in 1991. When the JNA attacked

Croatia, Izetbegovic not only remained neutral, but allowed the army to launch and supply its operations from Bosnian territory. Cigar shows that right up to the eve of armed conflict in Bosnia, Izetbegovic was denying in interviews for foreign newspapers that there would be any war in the republic. Had the Bosnian government been able to arm quickly — and here not only the naivete of Muslim leaders but also the criminality of the arms embargo are apparent — it might have been able more effectively to protect its citizens and its territory. Most of the Bosnian Croats and maybe even a significant number of Serbs might have rallied to it; instead, especially in rural areas, many of them gravitated toward their most violent and nationalist leaders, who had armed power, knew how to act decisively, and seemed to be winners.

Serb imperialism, aided and abetted by the NATO powers and Russia, has been the engine of war in former Yugoslavia. All the ghastly carnage it has inflicted might actually have been prevented if Western governments had offered strong, early support for the independence and resistance of the successor states. Far from being “premature,” recognition of Slovenia and Croatia came much too late — *after* the U.S. and Western Europe, by their open hostility to secession, had essentially given Serbia permission to attack Croatia. And accompanied by the arms embargo, this recognition had almost no political value. Recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina was truly a poisoned gift, since the Sarajevo government was not only barred from making a serious attempt to defend itself militarily, but delegitimized politically by being relegated to the status of one of three “warring parties.”

AS FAR AS ROSENTHAL’S “STRONG POLITICAL CASE” IS CONCERNED, it is not even clear that most Bosnian Serbs *did* refuse to be part of an independent state. As Noel Malcolm explains in *Bosnia: A Short History*, there is no way of knowing what proportion of the Serb population voluntarily boycotted the referendum on independence in February and March 1992. Many in predominantly Serb rural areas were forcibly prevented from voting by Karadzic’s gangs. A majority of Serbs in most major cities actually voted in favor of independence. Even after four years of war, as many as 200,000 Serbs still live on Bosnian government-controlled territory. (Estimates of the number of Serbs living under Pale’s jurisdiction are as low as 500,000 — less than half the prewar figure.) And on the only occasion when Karadzic’s party won a democratic election, garnering the votes of a majority of Bosnian Serbs in 1990, the platform of the SDS said nothing about resisting independence by force.

Even if most Serbs had supported Karadzic and his full program, it is hard to imagine a way in which they could have exercised their right to national self-determination on a *territorial* basis, because the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina is (was) so thoroughly intermingled. Independence against the wishes of most Bosnian Serbs was surely a lesser evil to that of negating the democratic will of two-thirds of the republic’s people and remaining in a Milosevic-dominated Yugoslavia. And, of course, the way in which the SDS militias and the Yugoslav army proceeded to carry out Serb “self-determination” was to slaughter and drive out millions of non-Serbs, thus *creating* by massive force and terror a new ethnic-territorial entity.

What About Croatia?

CROATIA WAS THE FIRST VICTIM OF SERBIA'S ARMED AGGRESSION. It is necessary to keep this in mind, despite the disgust one must feel for Tudjman and his regime. The mentality that dominates Croatia's ruling party is that of the murderous wartime Ustasha. As an outspoken Holocaust "revisionist," Tudjman himself stands squarely with Le Pen, Berlusconi, and other figures in Europe's neofascist New Right. Croatia's Serb minority had good reason to fear the accession of the HDZ and the republic's break with Yugoslavia. Still, it is absurd to equate Zagreb's discriminatory policies toward this minority with Belgrade's ferocious campaign of mass murder and expulsion and the destruction of whole cities that targeted hundreds of thousands of innocent Croats. Croatian Serbs had and have as much right to self-determination as Croats or anybody else. But the war was no more about this issue than Hitler's attack on Czechoslovakia was about the self-determination of the Sudeten Germans. Their grievances were used as a pretext for territorial expansion and ethnic cleansing.

In 1991 the West, and especially the United States, might have played a constructive role by showing concern for *both* the right of the Serb minority to security and autonomy and the right of Croatia's majority to establish an independent state within its established borders. Instead, Serb conquests were ratified. Eager to appease the Serbs in the hope that the war would end there, Washington followed the Europeans' lead in allowing them to occupy about one-fourth of Croatia. Provisions for the return of refugees and the eventual reestablishment of Croatian sovereignty were ignored for four years. Eventually Zagreb took action, but by then Clinton was determined to get a settlement at all costs. Serbia had to be brought to heel and Croatia appeased, so that Bosnia would be totally isolated. Now it was Zagreb's turn to receive a cynical green light for ethnic cleansing. Both in abandoning Croatia in 1991 and in "tilting" toward it in 1995, U.S. policy has been guided by anything but concern for human rights and self-determination.

It seems almost certain that Serb leaders themselves planned and ordered the mass exodus from the Krajina; Serb fighting units withdrew with most of their weapons, including heavy arms. By abandoning the Krajina, Belgrade may hope to concentrate Serb population in more defensible territories — eastern Bosnia, Vojvodina, and Serbia proper. But Tudjman must share responsibility with Milosevic for the destruction of the centuries-old Serb community in the Croatian borderlands. Croatia had a right to take back the lands that had been so brutally stolen by Serb aggression, but it also had a responsibility to provide guarantees and assurances to Croatian Serb civilians. Haunted by the memory of Ustasha terror during World War II, brainwashed for years by systematic Greater Serbian propaganda, many perhaps harboring a guilty conscience for their participation or complicity in anti-Croat atrocities, the Krajina Serbs also knew that between 1991 and 1995 thousands of Serb homes were destroyed in various parts of Croatia, and that Croats accused of committing atrocities against Serbs were not punished by Croatian authorities. So they fled, and Zagreb clearly achieved what it wanted: a speedy emptying out of the redeemed territories and a surgical solution to the "Serb problem" in Croatia. The ethnic cleansing of the Krajina's 120,000 Serbs, the burning down of Serb villages, and the revolting murder of more than a hundred sick and elderly Serb civilians are war crimes

for which the Croatian government should be held responsible.

The Fruits of Interventionism

AS FOR BOSNIA, PROSPECTS ARE GRIM. Will fighting resume next spring? If so, it looks like the arms embargo may still be in place — or at least the embargo on heavy weapons, which is what counts. Moreover, NATO troops will presumably deter Bosnian forces from trying to roll back Serbian conquests. What then?

For four years, attempts by Bosnia's supporters to get the U.S. and other Western governments to lift the arms embargo have failed. One reason is that the climate of pro-Bosnian opinion has been so thoroughly dominated by demands for military intervention. A consistent policy of lifting the embargo, repudiating Western diplomacy and opposing any outside intervention which is designed to partition Bosnia has never clearly emerged from all the protests, meetings, articles and op-ed pieces. Instead, most of Bosnia's friends have remained fixated on the fantasy of a benevolent Western intervention that will finally save democracy and diversity in the Balkans. This political escapism has been tremendously harmful to the goal of a reunited and democratic Bosnia.

Bosnia's cause has often been compared to that of the Spanish Republic in the 1930s. In both cases, a democratically-elected state faced an authoritarian rebellion backed by aggressive foreign powers and appealed for international support. Support came in the '30s, but it was not enough. Fascism triumphed. In some ways, the 1990s were even more favorable to the mobilization of international solidarity than the 1930s had been. The shelling of Sarajevo, the mass graves, the raped women — all the atrocious images were broadcast around the world; no one could feign ignorance and few could claim indifference. And although there is no longer a powerful international workers' movement, militant human rights consciousness is a powerful global phenomenon. Tragically, however, the networks of peace and human rights groups, radical and green parties, and grassroots pro-democracy activists that *could* have been mobilized in support of Bosnian resistance were disoriented and sidetracked down the dead-end road of military interventionism.

Supporting NATO intervention in Bosnia also helps create a political climate that legitimizes other interventions and weakens opposition to U.S. foreign policy. The initiatives that NATO has undertaken in former Yugoslavia should be understood not as gestures, however inadequate, in defense of Bosnia, but as efforts to expand the alliance's purview and test its ability to defend *its* interests outside its traditional field of supposedly defensive operations. And more broadly, NATO intervention in Bosnia cannot be separated from Washington's ongoing desire to assert its "right" to police other countries in defense of established wealth and power. Everything the West has done so far — the arms embargo, the endless rounds of negotiations, the various peace plans, and the current Dayton deal — has been aimed at ethnic partition of Bosnia, and thus dissolving it as a viable state and an integrated society. Citizens who care about Bosnia's fate and are outraged by the way in which the world's officialdom has been complicit in bringing about its destruction should disavow this sordid record of betrayal.

The French Lesson —

Is the Working Class Passé?

Julius Jacobson

IN LAST YEAR'S FRENCH NATIONAL ELECTIONS, the right's presidential candidate, Jacques Chirac, let it be known with characteristic immodesty that he was not only the best equipped to cope with the country's ailing economy but that he was no less humane and caring than his Socialist rival, Lionel Jospin. In effect, he said: I will give the highest priority to reducing the devastatingly high level of unemployment. Just elect me. My commitment is to the poor, the disaffected, to our troubled youth, to all of France. Just elect me. Our country's extensive social benefits and social safety net testify to the greatness of France and I, a compassionate man, will protect them. Just elect me. I promise anything and everything to anyone and everyone. Just make me your President.

Demagoguery and false promises paid political dividends as they surely accounted for the narrow two percent margin of Chirac's victory over Jospin, and for the wider right-wing sweep of local and parliamentary contests. But once in power, as was eminently predictable, all that survived of his solemn promises were the oratorical mannerisms replete with bombast and pomposity with which he now delivered the post-election news, that he would, in fact, do less than nothing to reduce unemployment, that he could offer nothing tangible to improve the bleak prospects of the disconsolate young, that France could no longer afford its current level of social benefits and welfare programs. It turned out that compassion for the masses in the Chiracian scheme of things is less important than satisfying Maastricht's hard-nosed ultimatum that by 1999 France would have to prove its "fiscal responsibility," reducing its deficit to no more than three percent of its gross national product as the precondition for participating in the club of single European currency nations. To reach the nirvana that would follow this balanced budget, to be achieved in just two years, a crash austerity program was made the order of the day. Workers, employed or jobless, were called on to make sacrifices, to tighten their belts a notch or two.

Thus the bouquet of roses that Chirac carried in his hand wherever he solicited votes as a candidate was now replaced by an ax which Chirac-cum-President proposes to use to chop away at social benefits and living standards for the sake of reducing the deficit. Public sector workers, roughly one-fourth of the French labor force would be among the first to feel the weapon's cutting edge. They would be required to work 40 years to be eligible for full pension benefits, compared to the present 37½ years. The rail system would be reorganized in such a way that thousands of jobs would be lost and special retirement rights violated. Taxes on most working people would be raised considerably in addition to the large increases already effectuated in the regressive value added tax which most heavily penalizes those who can least afford to pay

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Rabin's Assassination: The Golem Rebelled Against Its Maker

Tikva Honig-Parnass

THE APPRAISALS AND ANALYSES IN THE ISRAELI MEDIA of the circumstances which led to the assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, have focused on the opposition to the "peace process" among the religious-Zionist fundamentalists and the right-wing parties — as if their ideology and world view represented a clear deviation from what is prevalent in Israeli society as a whole. However, the commentators also understand the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the Oslo Accords as an expression of the quite substantive transformation which Israel is undergoing from a society whose basic identity is Jewish-tribal to an open society governed by Western liberal values. It is necessary, therefore, to remind the reader of the real nature of these agreements:

Israel continues to rule over the occupied territories, despite the transfer of certain civil administrative powers to the Palestinian Authority. The West Bank will be divided into cantons with varying degrees of Israeli presence — while the majority of the West Bank will be directly controlled by Israel, "Area C" in the terminology of the Taba Interim Agreement. Under the interim arrangements, the occupied territories are divided into three areas: Area A, from which the Israeli army will pull back, includes cities in the West Bank and 60% of the Gaza Strip; Area B includes about 450 Palestinian villages, in which civil life is ruled by the Palestinian Authority (PA), but "security" is in the hands of joint Israeli army-PA police patrols; Area C, two-thirds of the West Bank and 40% of the Gaza Strip, will remain under direct Israeli control. Israel retains ultimate responsibility for "security" in all three areas.

The settlement blocs which will ring the cities of Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron, as well as "Greater Jerusalem," the network of bypass roads which will allow the settlers to move about without coming into contact with Palestinians, as well as the map of the planned redeployment of the Israeli Army — all conspire to deprive the cantons of territorial contiguity. Furthermore, the continuation of Israeli control over land and water resources and the Palestinian economy as a whole, as well as the lack of PA sovereign authority over residence rights, turn the Oslo Accords into a stamp of approval for the continuation of Israeli control and exploitation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.

Indeed, there is a potential for the formation of a far broader consensus in Israel in favor of the Oslo Accords than is generally realized. Since the Accords are the fruit of pragmatism and serve clear Israeli national interests, in the

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final analysis they do not depart from the general lines acceptable to many in the mainstream of the settlers and the Likud, as well.

The leaders of the Likud have themselves repeatedly asserted that if they win the next elections, they will not nullify the agreements signed by the Rabin government, but will only try to introduce amendments while continuing the negotiations with the Palestinians. The mainstream of the settlers' movement would also be prepared to accept the political process, as long as the ring of settlements around each vacated city remains in place, as well as the settlements in the Jordan Valley along the green line, and those constituting "Greater Jerusalem," exactly as envisioned in the Rabin plan. Indeed, according to a report prepared by Peace Now in October, mainstream settlement leaders agreed to forego violent protests and let the army redeployment proceed as scheduled, in return for a promise by Rabin to allow continued construction in the settlements. Furthermore, Economics Minister Yossi Beilin, who — together with Shimon Peres — was one of the architects of the Oslo process, told a religious audience a few days after the assassination of Rabin, at an assembly organized by the moderate religious-Zionist Meimad movement and other of the more temperate settlement leaders: "The left says: the mass of settlements built by the right is not a phenomenon which can be ignored when it comes to the permanent settlement."

In response to Beilin's conciliatory remarks, one of the settlers' leaders, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, dared to reveal to the public at large the positions of part of the mainstream of the settlement movement: "There is a possibility that the agreements with the Palestinians will succeed, and that we will soon realize that what is taking place is a true peace. One of the astonishing things about Oslo II is that in it the Palestinians recognized the existence of the settlements *de facto*, at least temporarily." (Ha'aretz, 11-15-95)

Another settlement leader, Uri Elitzur from Ofra, considered the "mayflower ship" of the Gush Emunim settlement movement, declared after the assassination that already after Oslo I: "I had reached the conclusion that some compromise with the Palestinians was inevitable...some division of territory and sovereignty" (Ha'aretz, 11-20-95), and the Rabbi of Ofra even pointed to the aforementioned settlement cluster plan: "In Gush Khatif [in the Gaza Strip], the plan for settlement blocs was implemented, namely, a concentration of Jewish settlements. This is the best policy in the present situation...this can work in Judea and Samaria, [the West Bank] as well..."

However, it should not be forgotten, on the other hand, that this potential support for the government's plan is not yet explicit or overt, and there are still differences of opinion over the details of its implementation. Furthermore, sections of the settlement movement and the right in general adhere to the ideology which stems from the violent combination of nationalism and religion which blossomed after the 1967 war and the occupation. It was this ideological soil that gave rise to the political fundamentalism that was prepared to use terrorist violence against Palestinian civilians, and assassinate Jewish "traitors" as well, as we now see.

At the aforementioned gathering of moderate religious settlers, Beilin also said: "What the left and the right have in common is Zionism and concern for the future of the Jewish people, and it must take precedence over everything else." (Ha'aretz, 11-15-95)

What lies behind the potential general agreement that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at least possible — and that all that remains are quibbles over the details of the Oslo Accords — is a widely-accepted ideology that consists of support for the preservation of the Jewish-Zionist character of the state and rule over a maximum amount of territory and a minimum number of Palestinian-Arabs, a common version of the history of the conflict and the subordination of humanist-universal values to the supreme value of protecting the Jewish state and its security.

THE COMMON IDEOLOGY AND THE STRONG BONDS OF INTRA-JEWISH solidarity provide the basis for the well-known phenomenon of Israeli tribalism — one of the most characteristic features of Israeli-Jewish society and the Jewish-Zionist state. This phenomenon, which always waxes and manifests itself after any crisis, revealed itself more strongly than ever after the murder of Rabin. We witnessed almost every social layer of an entire population — especially among youth — mourning the death of the tribal “father.” Everyone alone and yet together, thousands gathered, ceaselessly, day and night, at various sites around the country, for an entire week of mourning. The tribe closed ranks, and demonstrated once again the bonds of solidarity holding its society together, as well as the strong glue of commonly-held values and ideology. Moreover, the bonds are even being strengthened by redefining the tribal collective to include most of society but, through much more forceful condemnation than ever heard in the past, exclude the fundamentalist nationalist-religious minority to which the assassin belonged.

The bolstering of Israeli tribal-statist-social solidarity following Rabin's assassination has also led to greater public acceptance of the Oslo Accords, and not merely the acknowledgment of the legitimate right of the democratically elected government to sign and implement these agreements. Explicit support for the contents of the Accords may grow among centrist public opinion, the so-called “floating voters,” and especially among the young, whose wide participation in the mourning rituals indicated their aspirations to live out their lives under conditions of peace, and who believe that the Oslo process is leading in that direction.

THE MEMBERS OF THE MOST EXTREME RIGHT-WING FUNDAMENTALIST organizations are concentrated in several settlements in the territories occupied in 1967, and in several cities inside the green line, and altogether have only a small number of members: several dozen in Eyal, the organization in which the assassin was active at Bar-Ilan University and in Kahane Hai, plus a few hundred in Kach. Within these movements there apparently arose an underground which planned for two years to kill Rabin and other Israeli leaders, as well as Palestinians, both PA police and civilians.

The assassin was not a “victim” of the open incitement to the murder of Rabin, which had been intensifying in the last six months. He and his comrades adhere to a systematic, unambiguous ideology which attempts to delegitimize the government and the state and calls for its replacement by a halachic state (one based exclusively on Jewish religious law). They were among the “producers” of the incitement, not its passive “consumers.” The incitement was accompanied by a series of rulings in religious law by Rabbis associated with the

religious-Zionist yeshivot [institutes of Jewish religious studies], particularly but not exclusively those located in the settlements which forbade soldiers in the Israeli army to obey orders to evacuate settlements and even army bases. These same Rabbis later asserted that Rabin was a moser [informer or conveyor of property to hostile peoples], for which the traditional penalty is death. The mounting wave of incitement was joined, or at least tolerated, not only by the extreme right-wing secular parties and the religious-nationalist party, but also by the Likud whose leaders allowed slogans labelling Rabin a murderer and a traitor to be chanted at demonstrations which they organized or at which they spoke. These same leaders also took an active part in the campaign of delegitimation of the government based on the racist argument that it "depends on a non-Jewish majority." Such an argument is aimed at depriving the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel of all civil and political rights. In its opportunist campaign for rightist votes, the Likud was even prepared to claim that Rabin had become Arafat's personal servant, ordered about by the latter. But the circles that influenced the assassin were considerably broader than the political right; they include the military, political and legal establishments themselves.

THE LAW ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM AND THE LEGAL ADVISOR to the Rabin Government did absolutely nothing to restrain the right-wing fanatics, and even refrained from using existing legal tools to keep them in check. The Rabin government's passivity represented a continuation of the general, long-standing leniency shown by the authorities, toward anti-Arab terrorism, including murder carried out by settlers, which reached its peak in the massacre carried out by Baruch Goldstein at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron in February 1994. It was the Palestinians in Hebron, not the settlers, who were punished in the wake of the massacre by the closure and curfew imposed on the city, among other means.

The racist practice of Israeli courts in showing leniency to Jewish murderers of Palestinians, giving short sentences to pogromist settlers, providing comfortable jail conditions for murderers of Arabs, and giving pardons to many of them before they finished serving their sentences — all this was done under the aegis of the governments of Israel. As early as 1980, the National Unity government of Likud and Labor tried to prevent the publication of a report by Advocate Yehudit Karp of the Justice Ministry on the non-enforcement of the law against extremist settlers, and even petitioned the High Court of Justice to stop it.

This racist, pro-apartheid world view underlying the lenient policy of the legal and political establishments toward settlers' violence nourished the protection that the Israeli army gave to the provocative activities of the settlers and even the participation of army units in the settlers' anti-Arab pogroms. Moreover, nationalist-religious fundamentalists entered the elite combat units of the army in large numbers, and there received encouragement for their stance and practical training for their deeds. Rabin's assassin served in the Golani Brigade — infamous for its activities in the territories occupied in 1967 and in southern Lebanon — and was considered an excellent soldier. In the words of one of his comrades-in-arms:

In the Golani Brigade we all dealt out beatings [to Palestinians]. I am also guilty of this...but Yigal [the assassin] was something special, in a class by himself. When we were doing search patrols in the Jabalya refugee camp, our commander would say

before we would break into a house: "Give them 'Treatment Ten Thousand.'" And Yigal would be the one to carry out these orders in the most complete fashion...He would beat, destroy furniture, he enjoyed screwing them over, just for the hell of it. The officers really admired him for this reason. (Maariv, 10-11-95)

The symbiosis between nationalist-religious fundamentalists and the army, whether by means of army links to the settlement establishment itself or through the many settlers who serve as reserve officers, served the interests of the Rabin and previous governments in suppressing the sparks of Palestinian resistance that smoldered throughout the 1980's and that burst into flame during the Intifada from 1987-1993. With the inception of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the Labor government acquired a new motive for the toleration of anti-Palestinian terrorism: to pressure the Palestinian people as a means for extorting Palestinian agreement at the negotiating table to Israel's plan to continue its control over the occupied territories by maintaining settlement blocs, among other means.

BY NO MEANS, THEREFORE, DID THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE employed by the Rabin government after the signing of the Oslo Accords bring about a delegitimation of the settlers. On the contrary. They continued to be considered as perhaps "mistaken" even by part of the "peace camp" but nevertheless as the inheritors of the Zionist spirit of sacrifice and pioneering. Of course, this ideological bias has been accompanied by a continuation of construction in the occupied territories, which reached a pace in 1995 it had not achieved since 1992, and by the investment of millions of shekels to build bypass roads for the settlers.

Nor have the Oslo Accords introduced any changes into the general public discourse which reflects the common statist-tribal ideology. The apparent "historic compromise" has not included any substantive recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people or of the PLO as a national liberation movement. It is still viewed as a gang of terrorists, which by force of circumstance — an unfavorable balance of power — was compelled to come to terms with Israel. The public discourse, whose parameters are set by the political establishment, has no space for genuine soul-searching regarding the historical nature of the Zionist movement, the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their land since 1948, and Israel's state terrorism in the territories occupied in 1967 and in Lebanon. In fact, the opposite seems to be occurring. Since the inception of the Oslo Accords, the government has persisted in upholding the joint credo of Zionism, shared by left and right, by its continued use of such terminology as: "our historic rights to the Land of Israel," and the readiness to "give up" territories in it.

The embrace of a credo which is not basically different than the right's is fully reflected in the way the government defended its refusal to release thousands of "security" prisoners and by its refusal to recognize them as political prisoners. The President of Israel refused amnesty to women political prisoners on the grounds of the oft-repeated argument that Palestinians with "Jewish blood on their hands" should not be freed. This concept, which is in marked contrast to the forgiving attitude displayed toward the Jewish terrorism of the settlers, is based on the assumption that Israeli-Jewish blood is much more precious than the blood of the thousands of Palestinian Arab civilians killed by

the Israeli military.

Therefore, the very sound pragmatic arguments for the Oslo Accords from the point of view of Israel's "national interests" (greater international acceptance, opening the regional economy, lightening the "defense" burden, and facilitating the elimination of "terrorism" by acquiring Arab-Palestinian partners) might leave many unconvinced, since it may well involve some territorial compromise.

IT MUST BE POINTED OUT THAT DESPITE ALL that has been said above on the ideological and organizational points of contact between the political establishment, on the one hand, and the nationalist-religious fundamentalists and extreme rightists, on the other, the contradictions between them are indeed significant, and are likely to grow greater in the future. As stated above, in the wake of the assassination, a number of progressive political commentators took pains to emphasize that the contradiction between the views of the nationalist-religious fundamentalists and the views of the majority of Israeli society relates to the question of the collective identities of these two groups. The reference, as sociology Professor Baruch Kimmerling put it (Ha'aretz, 10-8-95) is,

on the one hand to the tribal-religious identity often defined as "Judaism"...and for those individuals and groups who espouse it in a "pure" fashion, Jewish religious law, as filtered through a selective interpretation, constitutes the only source of authority, and the aim (whether overt or covert) of this section of the population is the establishment of a state based on halacha [Jewish religious law]. This will be a "Land of Israel" which will have room only for Jews... The other identity, that of "citizenship," is the identity characteristic of a modern state which functions according to the legal norms accepted in open Western societies, in which citizenship is a central concept... Constitutional rights and duties are defined according to written laws and according to the norms accepted at a certain time in the civil society. This is the identity of the "State of Israel."

Indeed, as Kimmerling holds, underlying the struggle between left and right (or doves and hawks) over the extent of permissible territorial compromise is a more basic struggle over political, social, and religious hegemony in Israel. Therefore, according to him, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, was a response to a policy "which threatened the centrality of Jewish tribalism and the identity of Israel as a Jewish state, which in the course of time would lead to the application of Jewish religious law [as the law of the state]." What is more, Kimmerling, and numerous other observers, believe that one may expect further violence in the future directed against those who are attempting "to steer the state toward the secular track."

The principal fault line in Israeli society, in this view, is the gap between "religious-tribal nationalism" and the "civil" majority of Israeli society, which is formed along the lines of a modern Western state. But this is not accurate at all, since the organizing principle of the Jewish-Zionist state itself is the fusion of religion and nationality as much as the lack of separation between religion and state. The national collective for the sake of whose well-being the state was established (in the language of one of Israel's Basic Laws, which enjoy quasi-constitutional status in Israel's legal system) is "the Jewish people," most of whom live outside the borders of the State of Israel, and not the inhabitants of the country, both Jewish and Palestinian-Arab. The majority of Israeli society

(including the Zionist left) still supports and adheres to this ideology and structure which has provided the soil for the birth and growth of nationalist-religious fundamentalism since the inception of the 1967 occupation.

Kimmerling himself admits that the '67 occupation, which brought about half of the Palestinian people under Israeli rule, resulted in the necessity of obtaining renewed legitimation of the unequivocal sort that religion was best suited to provide. The religious legitimation for Zionism was always shared by religious and secular Zionists alike, since before the establishment of the state and certainly afterward. Moreover, "The nucleus of state symbols today remains Jewish-religious. The rest is but a thin veneer of what appears to be secularism." (B. Kimmerling, "The Suffocating Connection of Zionism," *Ha'aretz*, 4-29-90) Therefore, since the '67 occupation, the previously small and marginal groups of religious-Zionists have become of central importance. They have become the colonizing and fighting pioneer vanguard of the Zionist camp as a whole. Thus as Kimmerling himself stated only three years ago: "The settler with the kipa [skull cap] on his head and submachine gun in his hands is the most authentic representative of the hard core of their collective identity, whether Israelis want it or not. It cannot even be said that this is a distortion of Zionism, but rather that it is its logical expression carried to the point of absurdity." (Kimmerling, *op cit*)

In the last three years, since the start of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the explosive process of the fusion of religion and nationalism has accelerated and has actually brought portions of the religious-Zionist community to a position which contradicts the original aims of this fusion. In other words, the golem has risen against its maker. The religious fundamentalists who stood for the Zionist value of the tribal state in its purest form have produced cells which openly challenge the legitimacy of the Jewish-Zionist state because of its pretensions of being a democracy — even if only for Jews.

In the end, the Oslo II agreement, including the plans for settlement clusters in the West Bank will win broad support in Israel. However, this will not be able to paper over the basic internal contradictions of Israeli society, the most basic of which is the contradiction between Zionism and democracy. It is true that this contradiction reaches its most open and dangerous expression in the antagonism between extremist religious-nationalist fundamentalists and the "secular" State of Israel. However, the more basic contradictions which have led — and will inevitably continue to lead — to confrontations between fundamentalists and the state authorities, are inherent in the Zionist structure and character of the Jewish-Zionist State of Israel. These same contradictions will certainly also prevent the Oslo process from bringing about the desired peace which is a precondition for strengthening democratic values within secular and "rational" Zionism itself.

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Mexico: A Society in Turmoil

Phillip Smith

FLYING INTO MEXICO CITY ON THE DAILY AEROMEXICO FLIGHT from JFK, it is easy to believe, as President Ernesto Zedillo optimistically opined, that for Mexico "the worst is behind us." The Mexican passengers are well-dressed, well-fed, and almost uniformly light-skinned, much like the carpetbagging American businessmen who share the flight. It is a vision of the new international class, the homeward-bound Mexicans loaded down with booty from the shops of New York, and the corporate privateers burdened only with laptops, briefcases, overnight bags, and dreams of profits.

Things are different on the ground. Mexico is in terrible shape — the children of its economic and political elites notwithstanding — worse than it has been for decades, perhaps all the way back to the Great Depression. The economy is an absolute disaster for all but a relative handful of powerful Mexican corporations and their international backers. The Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) "perfect dictatorship" is punch drunk, staggering like an aged prizefighter who doesn't know enough to realize he's finished. And in any real sense on the national level, "the left" is disorganized, rudderless, and pulled in conflicting directions.

It is a dangerous, highly volatile and unpredictable situation. Although the rumors of a coup that swept the country (and the international financial markets) in November were plainly improbable given the country's traditionally quiescent military, the fact that anyone took them seriously is a sure indicator of the fragile state of the political system.

The Slow Death of the PRI

THE OVERARCHING POLITICAL REALITY IS THE IMPLOSION of the PRI and the political vacuum that now stands in its place. For some 75 years, the PRI — or its direct ancestors — has ruled Mexico through an adept mix of cooptation and repression, but it is now in its death throes, and the wounds are largely self-inflicted. For decades the party, corrupt and authoritarian as it was, could lay claim to the mantle of nationalism, and its economic policies at least paid lip service to the needs of the Mexican masses, but with the arrival of the neo-liberal technocrats in the administration of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), the PRI began to

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drift away from its traditional mix of state power and private enterprise, abandoning common Mexicans and the party apparatus alike to the vagaries of the global economy.

That process accelerated under Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1992), who, in complete obeisance to international financiers, sold off the vast majority of Mexico's state-owned enterprises (often at bargain basement prices to well-connected insiders), inflated the value of the peso to appease middle-class consumers and domestic commercial borrowers, and made an unfavorable NAFTA treaty his crowning achievement. The results for Mexicans in general have been disastrous (see Curtis Skinner's article elsewhere in this issue), but Salinas's handiwork has also wreaked havoc with the party machinery.

Salinismo systematically if unseeingly corroded the bases of the PRI's power by shrinking the resources available to it. Selling off state enterprises eliminated opportunities for the party nomenklatura to get rich, breaking the power of the unions — especially the powerful PRI-supported unions — further foreclosed avenues to personal wealth, political power, and patronage favors, and “liberalizing” trade and commerce removed other traditional opportunities for corruption.

By the end of the Salinas administration, the shrinking pie combined with the dire prospect of democratically ceding power brought intra-party conflict to new and deadly levels. The still murky assassinations of PRI presidential candidate Donaldo Luis Colosio in March 1994 and PRI executive committee head Francisco Ruiz Massieu that September are the clearest signals that the old channels of conflict resolution within the party have failed, but there are other, less dramatic, but equally portentous indicators that party discipline and unity is irrevocably frayed.

In the Gulf Coast state of Tabasco, for example, PRI militants took to the streets to successfully block President Zedillo's effort to remove PRI Governor Roberto Madrazo Pintado. Zedillo had attempted to placate furious *perredistas* (supporters of the left opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution [PRD]), who had themselves earlier called strikes and demonstrations after Madrazo stole the election by spending more than 50 times the amount allowed under the election laws. Zedillo also apparently hoped to show that the party was indeed committed to “democratic reform” by removing Madrazo and replacing him with another party regular, but Madrazo's supporters in the Tabasco and national PRI organizations unleashed their militants to block the move, leaving Zedillo and the party hierarchy embarrassed and impotent before the rebellious state PRI organization.

Equally ominous for the PRI is the October defection of Manuel Camacho Solis, former regent of Mexico City, disappointed hopeful for the 1994 presidential nomination, and one-time peace negotiator with the Zapatistas. In one sense, Camacho's resignation from the party is nothing new: for the past 30 years, a “democratic current” within the party has periodically emerged and then bolted in dismay at its inability to persuade the PRI hierarchy to democratize. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the leaders of the Party of the Democratic Revolution followed this path in 1987. But with the PRI battered by infighting and weakened by the results of the limited democratic reforms it has grudgingly allowed (opposition parties now hold more governorships than at any time since the Revolution, and there is an outside chance the PRI could lose

control of the congress for the first time ever in next year's elections), Camacho's defection could not have come at a worse time.

From the perspective of PRI reformers, what is worse is that little effort was made to keep Camacho within the party. In fact, when, after a year's silence, he reemerged with a plea to open the PRI, he was immediately and unrelentingly attacked by high party officials with Zedillo's blessing. Perhaps he would have bolted anyway, but the surprisingly vicious official response solidified that decision. Now, Camacho is an influential free agent, with the ability to separate other important PRIistas from the party. He may well pull the PRI's contemporary "democratic current" either into the PRD or, given that party's dim future, a new center-left electoral formation.

In addition, an increasing number of party "dinosaurs," to use the technocrats' terminology for the authoritarian old guard, are rebelliously reverting to their nationalist-statist roots, thus opening up yet another fault-line in the PRI. In so doing, they reflect the sentiment of much of the PRI rank and file, especially within the party's labor and peasant sectors, who may know or care little about electoral democracy or the subtleties of international finance, but understand quite clearly that they can no longer feed their families. For many of the party's local bosses, mid-level activists, and rank and file, the party hierarchy is now a double threat: first, half-hearted moves toward democratic reform betoken a loss of power and privilege for long-time party loyalists; and second, its embrace of neo-liberalism has battered the popular standard of living. This potent combination of authoritarian nostalgia and statist economics is fertile ground for emerging fascist tendencies within the party, a phenomenon not unknown in Mexico.

All of these trends both reflect and fashion the weakest presidency in the party's history, which is very bad news for a party in which the president traditionally rules as unquestioned sovereign. Ernesto Zedillo, who was hand-picked by Salinas to replace the murdered Colosio, is mild-mannered by personal style — hardly the *caudillo* the PRI demands in its time of crisis — but his weakness is also, and most importantly, political and institutional.

The decline of the PRI's "perfect dictatorship" appears irreversible. Into the vacuum rush party factions and individual leaders left in the lurch and determined to look out for themselves and their clienteles. The PRI is in for a real dog fight, and may end up devouring itself along the way.

The PAN: Rising on the Right

IF THE PRI'S MOST FAMOUS CHALLENGERS, such as Cuauhtemoc Cardenas or Subcomandante Marcos are on the left, its most effective electoral opposition now comes from the right. The National Action Party (PAN), originally founded by Catholic conservatives in 1959, but now nationally dominated by neo-liberal *neo-panistas*, controls a handful of state governorships, has a significant presence in the congress, and is positioning itself to become the junior partner in a hoped for conservative two-party system.

In fact, given the strange behavior of PAN presidential candidate Diego Fernandez de Cevallos during the 1994 campaign, the party may have already made a deal with the devil, and Fernandez was the man to do it. Born into the party, Fernandez worked his way to a position as PAN's legislative leader by the

late 1980s. There, he made a reputation as an authoritarian leader and firebrand, but one who would cooperate with the PRI. In the televised presidential election debate, Fernandez came off the big winner, ripping into Zedillo and Cardenas alike, and pushing the PAN's poll numbers up past the PRD's and close to Zedillo's. The party seemed poised for a serious run at the presidency. Then Fernandez abruptly dropped out of sight for several weeks, allowing Zedillo to regain momentum. Many observers believe Fernandez reached an agreement with the PRI to quietly disappear in return for a greater role for the PAN in a Zedillo administration.

If so, it appears to have worked. A *panista* is now attorney general, the first non-PRI member to hold cabinet rank in memory, and in contested elections, the PRI has yielded to PAN protests and named its gubernatorial candidates winners, something it has never done for the PRD in similar situations. (Such concessions are not without their price for PRI politicians. As leader of the PRI, Luis Colosio imposed a PAN governor on Baja California PRI leaders in 1992, infuriating local party militants. Two years later, he was gunned down in Tijuana. There is no conclusive evidence that the local party was involved, but open speculation about such possibilities must have a sobering effect on would-be PRI dealmakers.) PAN legislators, while engaging in partisan sniping at the government, continue to work with it to pass legislation, and support both the broad outlines of its economic program and its less than heroic efforts at political reform.

Apart from the social conservatism of some of its bases, the PAN differs little ideologically from the PRI. It is not the PAN that has come around — its free market economic policies are organically rooted in its small business and middle class membership — but the PRI. The latter's neo-liberalism is precisely what the *neo-panistas* have been demanding for years. Thus, votes for the PAN should be interpreted not as a repudiation of *Salinismo* as economic policy but as a rejection of the PRI-state politics and as a recognition by disaffected voters that, unlike the PRD, PAN is being allowed to play the game.

The PRD: Opportunity Lost

IF THE PRI IS DYING A SLOW DEATH and the PAN is jockeying for loyal opposition status, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas's PRD must, after six short years of life, be considered near moribund. The "party of the Aztec sun" reached its electoral nadir in November, when its candidate came in third in the Michoacan governor's race. If any state should have been a PRD bastion, it was Michoacan, Cardenas' home state and political base, where he was himself elected governor in a landslide in 1986. After proving most notable by its absence in gubernatorial elections across the country earlier this year and falling to third place behind the PRI and the PAN in last year's presidential elections, which die-hard *perredistas* expected to win, the PRD is on the verge of total collapse.

From its inception as a vehicle for Cardenas's 1988 presidential run (where by most accounts the PRI stole his victory), what became the PRD has been plagued by weaknesses, the most critical being its acute programmatic schizophrenia and its over-identification with one man, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. Beginning with 1988, what would become the PRD served as a big tent for the Mexican left, incorporating everyone from former PRIistas like Cardenas and

current party leader Porfirio Muñoz Ledo to former Communists and left radicals in a bid at unity against the PRI. The result is a party divided, one that has devoted as much attention to infighting as it has to building a winning machine.

That schizophrenia was evident in the failed 1994 presidential campaign, when Cardenas and his advisors oscillated between trying to appear "moderate" in order to assuage the fears of urban middle-class voters and international financiers, and attempting to whip up their mass bases in the working class and especially the peasantry by attacking NAFTA, wooing the Zapatistas (an effort largely spurned by its intended subject), and vowing to raise holy hell in the event of a fraudulent loss. Thanks in part to such confusing campaign tactics, the PRI did not have to resort to massive fraud to fend off the PRD, as it did in 1988.

Cuauhtemoc Cardenas bears some personal responsibility for the party's electoral disasters and probable demise. The man around whom the Mexican left unified in 1988 is now himself a divisive figure, widely criticized within the left and even within the party he created. His performance in the 1994 presidential campaign was erratic. Obviously uncomfortable with the techniques of modern campaigning, as anyone who saw his disastrously wooden performance during the nationally-televised debate will testify, Cardenas devoted much of his time to visiting remote villages and greeting relatively small groups of supporters. Meanwhile, Ernesto Zedillo and the PRI filled the airwaves with slick, modern campaign propaganda that reached millions of voters.

Cardenas's tactical decision to concentrate on retail campaigning in the countryside neither overcame rural voters' doubts about the sincerity of his pledges to protect them from the ravages of neo-liberalism nor assuaged urban middle-class voters' fears of a peasant-based radicalism. According to even sympathetic observers, Cardenas' egotism made it impossible to persuade him to change direction — or at least choose just one — or acknowledge that his campaign was in serious trouble.

Mexicans had other, eminently practical reasons as well for abandoning the PRD. Most important, it was not allowed to win elections. The pattern was set in 1988 when victory was ripped from the party's grasp when the national vote-counting computers "went down" after Cardenas led in early returns. By the time counting had resumed, Carlos Salinas miraculously had pulled ahead. Ever since, while the PRI has proven amenable to negotiating contested elections with the rightist PAN, as in Baja California and Guanajuato, it has resolutely refused any such concessions to the *perredistas*. Where the PRI has not stinted is with locally-organized violence against PRD activists; some 250 were killed during Salinas's rule, and the toll in the last year is a like number. An electoral formation that is not allowed to win elections has few prospects.

As both cause and consequence of electoral futility, the PRD is split into rival tendencies, starting at the very summit of the party with the rivalry between Cardenas, who holds no official position, and his erstwhile comrade, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the PRD president (and once holder of the same position in the PRI!). Muñoz Ledo, a consummate power broker, split with Cardenas over the party's posture toward the PRI government. While the former supports dialogue — "You can win concessions from weak presidents," he says — Cardenas, who has bitterly criticized the peso crisis loan agreements with the United States

as compromising the country's sovereignty, calls for Zedillo to resign and the formation of a national unity government.

The PRD "blandos" (soft-liners) led by Muñoz Ledo include portions of the party's congressional delegation and other Mexico City politicians, while among its Cardenista intransigents are Tabasco party leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who was robbed of the governorship by the PRI's Madrazo and who threatens to bolt the party if his claim is abandoned in pursuit of dialogue with the PRI. The most radical current within the PRD is the *Trisecta*, headed by former urban guerrilla and current party secretary Mario Saucedo, and showing growing strength among the rank and file.

As if serious internal cleavages were not enough of a threat to the PRD's continued existence, it is now facing serious competition from other forces left of the Mexican center. In the realm of partisan politics, the Durango-based Workers' Party (PT), with its ten federal deputies and consistent radical rhetoric, seems bent on becoming the socialist alternative the PRD could never make up its mind to be. Ironically, the PT was originally set up by the PRI to undermine the PRD — one of the ruling party's oldest and most favored techniques.

For a Mexican left frustrated, abandoned, and cheated of its hard-earned place in the political process, the failure of the PRD is also making non-electoral options more attractive. Armed rebellion, either Zapatista-style or in more traditional guerrilla movements, is one option, but other, less deadly, forms of non-electoral political struggle are well-developed in Mexico and are increasingly the locus of political action. This phenomenon is known in Mexico as the rise of "civil society," and the Zapatistas may be said to represent its most extreme manifestation.

Outside the Party System

"CIVIL SOCIETY" IN THE MEXICAN CONTEXT REFERS TO THE EMERGENCE and rapid growth of independent, local or regional, usually — but not always — cross-class political action beyond the bounds of the political system. Typically dated to the independent citizens' response to the horrific Mexico City earthquake of 1985, when the government froze in the face of crisis, "civil society" now encompasses a broad array of grassroots social and political movements, from the fledgling environmental movement to neighborhood improvement associations to "good government" groups and the growing number of regional peasant organizations.

One of the most unusual, impressive, and potentially explosive examples of "civil society" in action is El Barzon (the yoke), a debtor's movement that in the space of the last two years has grown to claim a million members (and now has an international branch in New Jersey!). Originally a movement of conservative, debt-strapped agricultural producers based in Jalisco who sought better terms from Mexican banks, El Barzon has grown by leaps and bounds as the sharp rise in interest rates pushed millions of consumers and small businesses into default on loans. The crisis — and the influx of new members — has sharpened El Barzon's critique of the financial system. While clearly not socialist, the movement now appears radically populist as it calls for a fundamental restructuring of not only Mexican banking but the entire international financial system, beginning with the World Bank and IMF.

Joined by hundreds of thousands of middle-class credit card debtors and small business people, the *Barzonistas* are now a major political force willing to use both conventional and unconventional methods to advance their goals. From highway blockades by truck drivers and tractor-driving farmers threatened with bankruptcy to sit-down demonstrations at banks across the country, the movement exerts public pressure on the government. At the same time, its leaders sit in negotiations with the banks and the economics ministry to force credit reforms and forgiveness. While the government did announce plans in August to ease debtors' burdens, El Barzon has rejected the program as nothing more than half-measures designed more to protect the banks than aid badly-squeezed businesses and consumers.

Significantly, El Barzon has explicitly rejected political alliances with any party, opting instead to remain outside the existing system — a key feature of "civil society" movements. The debtors' movement, with its confused but inherently populist demands, is now one of Mexico's most dynamic and autonomous popular movements, with a profoundly disruptive potential for business as usual.

El Barzon's and the "civil society" movements' disdain for existing party politics is shared by the single biggest wild card in Mexico's political game, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Because of the rejection of politics and parties as usual by such important actors, the most important struggles for the near-term future for the Mexican left, and the political system as a whole, may occur outside the traditional political process. The Zapatistas and the "civil society" movements are thus opening up whole new spheres of political contestation and taking Mexican politics into heretofore uncharted territory.

Zapatistas and other Guerrillas

TWO YEARS AFTER BURSTING ONTO THE NATIONAL SCENE in the first of a series of dramatic shocks to the body politic, the Zapatistas have achieved mixed results. On the plus side, they have, first of all, survived — an impressive accomplishment in itself. And in the most literal sense, they have successfully shot their way into a place at the national political table. Although they are a most unusual guerrilla army in that they never fight, at least since their lightning attacks in January 1994, and even though they remain surrounded by the Mexican army in their remote Chiapas redoubts, their political impact continues to be powerful.

The Zapatistas have used the seemingly interminable negotiation process with the government to place their radically democratic agenda at the center of national politics. They have also created the embryo of a new national political formation with their National Democratic Convention (CND), which already claims three federal legislators (including Rosa Ibarra, long-time standard bearer for the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party, which recently dissolved in apparent anticipation of a new, Zapatista-led political organization).

But while the EZLN has successfully projected its message across the country and reinvigorated a sagging left, it has proven so far unable to actually improve conditions for its mass base. The Mexican army continues to surround and harass Zapatista strongholds, promised infrastructure improvements have yet to happen, and the rest of Chiapas is the scene of desperate struggles between emboldened peasants and recalcitrant old-guard PRI bosses and ranch-

ers. This state of affairs points to a crucial question for the Zapatista leadership: does it wish to be the nucleus of a national radical political movement or would its membership be better served by a regional movement concentrating on local grievances?

If some part of the Zapatista leadership, most probably the one-time Maoist cadre who arrived in the early 1980s, views the struggle as essentially political and national in scope, the rebellion has given rise to a legacy of violence, reawakening proto-guerrilla movements and bolstering death-squad-style groups, some linked to the army and police, some linked to the PRI, and some representing purely local forces, such as the "white guards" employed by the ranchers of Chiapas. (In keeping with the incestuous relationship between party, state, and economic power, some are all of the above.)

Parts of Chiapas outside Zapatista territory are now enduring what can fairly be described as low-level civil war, as armed groups identified with local PRI political bosses and ranchers clash with land-grabbing peasants affiliated with either Zapatista-linked peasant organizations or the PRD. During the fall months, parts of Chiapas have seen assassinations, village burnings, and the creation of hundreds of refugees as left-leaning peasants are driven from the land. The police and army either look the other way or actively aid the "white guards" and PRI militias.

And serious unrest has spread beyond Chiapas. In the sierras of Guerrero, whose last guerrilla movement is only 20 years past, some 70 people have been murdered since July, at least 30 of them for indisputably political reasons. The majority have been adherents of the PRD or the Organizacion Campesino de la Sierra del Sur (OCSS), the radical peasant union, 17 of whose members were ambushed and killed by state judicial police in June. In what the central government and besieged PRI Governor Ruben Figueroa take as a very ominous sign, the victims have also included five policemen gunned down in July by "30 men armed with AK-47s and AR-15s," and two more killed in a September attack by "men dressed in black and armed with AK-47s, AR-15s, shotguns, and .38 Specials, who then fled into the mountains," according to Mexican press reports.

In late September, Guerrero state judicial police announced they were looking for a column of "hooded men who are recruiting peasants to join the EZLN's 'first southeastern front.'" The dozens of police and special agents who are sweeping the mountains join army units who have been patrolling the area for months because, according to Mexican military intelligence reports, "there is evidence that arms are flowing in [to the mountains of Guerrero] and that subversive camps exist." According to guerrilla watchers such as Carlos Tello, the EZLN deployed cadres to various states in 1993, including Guerrero, to begin organizing peasants.

Police announcements and "leaked" army reports about new Zapatista fronts must be taken with a grain of salt; PRI hardliners such as Governor Figueroa are eager to paint any armed resistance as a Zapatista plot. The Guerrero peasantry, however, has repeatedly shown a will to fight, and worsening conditions in the countryside, along with official thuggery, provide plentiful reason to do so, with or without the EZLN. Whether the armed bands in Guerrero are formally affiliated with the Zapatistas is less important than the fact that they are essentially fighting the same war.

Similar reports of trouble in the countryside have come in from much of indigenous Mexico. While there is no clear indication that a major guerrilla outbreak is brewing, the prospects for interminable low-level civil war across much of southern Mexico are disturbingly likely.

Prospects

THIS NECESSARILY SKETCHY OVERVIEW of the state of the Mexican polity points to increasing conflict and instability across the political spectrum. The Zedillo administration is hamstrung politically by increasing demands for democracy on one hand and dangerously rejectionist party stalwarts on the other. Zedillo's maneuvering room is extremely limited by the country's dire economic straits, and especially the fact that the country's family jewels have already been hocked, leaving the government unable to buy its way out of trouble as it has done in the past. The PRI is busily engaged in devouring its own tail; its only hope now is that the economy will turn around quickly enough to give the party breathing room to restructure itself.

The PRD has effectively defaulted its position as the "second party" to the rightist PAN, leaving the electoral left in a shambles. One possible outcome is a redivision of the left into two or more parties. One would be a left-centrist party composed of actors loyal to the Muñoz Ledo branch of the PRD, and ideally — from their viewpoint — incorporating dissident former PRI members like Camacho Solís, along with progressive salon intellectuals such as the "San Angel group" around political scientist and author Jorge Castañeda.

Further from the center, a coalition consisting of the radical wing of the PRD, including most notably the *Trifecta* tendency, and the socialist left as represented in the Workers' Party is foreseeable. One rather large question here, though, is defining what Cuauhtemoc Cardenas really stands for. Even after two presidential campaigns, his political position is ambiguous, sliding from moderate reformism to the nationalistic populism that resonates especially deeply among the peasantry and working class.

A second crucial question for a potential hard left movement is what role the Zapatistas will play. While they appear to be positioning themselves to launch a national political movement with the CND as its nucleus, there are also strong tendencies within the EZLN calling for it to concentrate on regional concerns. And, of course, it must first decide whether it is a guerrilla army or a political movement.

In any case, rebuilding the electoral left will likely consume much of the energy of national-level politicians, leaving mass-based and "civil society" organizations to fend for themselves in local and regional struggles with occasional national overtones. While such an eventuality gives little hope for short-term radical change, it does lay the groundwork for an authentic, radically democratic, and left-leaning popular political culture that could eventually remake Mexico.

The Mexican Peso Crisis: Bankruptcy of Neoliberalism

Curtis Skinner

Una piedra del camino me enseñó que mi destino era rodar. Después me dijo un arriero que no hay que llegar primero pero hay que saber llegar.	A stone in the road showed me my destiny was to spin. And a teamster told me one need not arrive first but one must know how to arrive.
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(*El Rey*, José Alfredo Jiménez)

THE GLEAMING NEOLIBERAL MOTORCOACH CARRYING MEXICANS to promised prosperity lies mired in the ditch and arrival in the first world — the elusive destination of a 13-year journey — has been indefinitely delayed. The bus driver fled the scene, leaving his assistant to cope with the furious passengers, and was last seen running pell-mell for the northern border. The assistant is hopelessly lost but tries not to show it as he exhorts his exasperated riders to lighten the load and help push the lumbering behemoth back on the road. He's radioed the company for help, he says, and their only chance of finding a way out of the badlands is to stay with the bus. It's a beautiful bus, made in Mexico to Detroit's exacting specifications, with cruise control and a whole passel of horses. But the passengers are tired and hungry and short of faith and patience; they scan the empty roadway for some other conveyance — a *combi*, maybe, or even an oxcart — that can maneuver the winding route and get them somewhere familiar. A Mexican passage to the first world? Perhaps — with a new buggy, driver and roadmap. But many passengers would settle now for a significant kilometer post, like a living wage.

Although the lurch into the ditch was a brutal surprise, the neoliberal bus began to rattle, shake and slide out of control well up the road. Mexico's dramatic financial crisis of December 1994 had its origins in the Carlos Salinas de Gortari Administration's deliberate policy of keeping the peso currency over-valued relative to the dollar in order to cheapen imports, check inflationary pressures and support a comparatively high middle class standard of living during a presidential election year. To cover the yawning trade deficit produced by this currency policy and

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provide Mexico with the means to pay its other foreign currency bills, Salinas counted on a continuing inflow of huge amounts of foreign investment capital, much of it from the United States in the form of short-term debt obligations, especially dollar-pegged Mexican treasury bonds called "tesobonos." But for various reasons — an over-valued Mexican stock market, extraordinary political developments (including the Zapatista rebellion and the assassination of the ruling party's presidential candidate), growing recognition of the Mexican government's precarious foreign exchange position, and rising interest rates in the United States — these investors began pulling large amounts of money out of Mexico as early as February 1994. By the end of the year, the disinvestment stream had become a torrent as investors fulfilled their fears and helped drive Mexican foreign currency reserves to a minuscule \$6.5 billion, an amount sufficient to meet Mexico's import needs for only two months.

Even after the ruling party candidate won the presidential election in August, outgoing president Salinas, a Harvard-trained political economist, declined to take action on the currency problem in his final months in office, leaving the crisis for his successor, the Yale-educated economist Ernesto Zedillo, to resolve. Salinas's mysterious abdication of neoliberal duty (ignorance, cowardice, hubris?) helped sink his listing campaign for the directorship of the World Trade Organization, the new international trade oversight body. As the magnitude of the financial crisis and the Zedillo government's painful "adjustment" plan unfolded, Salinas fled into informal exile in the United States, accepting a tidy sinecure as a Dow Jones & Company director to soothe the sting of mounting Mexican allegations of economic mismanagement and political skulduggery. (Displaying his mastery of *yanqui* public relations along with its political economy, Salinas told the press that we would devote his Dow salary to scholarships for poor children.)

LEFT HOLDING THE NEAR-EMPTY MONEY BAG, ZEDILLO DEVALUED and then floated the peso currency against the dollar to stanch the foreign exchange hemorrhage. But the currency adjustment was too little and too late to ensure that Mexico would meet its foreign exchange obligations, including some \$16 billion in outstanding tesobonos held by U.S. investors. In this dark moment, Zedillo looked North and found succor in fellow Yalie Bill Clinton, who quickly cobbled together a \$50 billion bailout package consisting principally of high-interest loans from the U.S. Treasury Department and the International Monetary Fund. The deal came with two mandates: that Mexico would honor its foreign debt in full and that it would pursue an "open markets" strategy to restore the country's external balance, at the cost of a severe recession. To ensure compliance, the creditors conditioned disbursal of each loan installment on Mexico's meeting detailed fiscal, monetary, and debt payment targets as verified by the U.S. Treasury Department, which was granted unprecedented access to Mexican economic data. Zedillo further agreed to deposit some of the state oil company's foreign sales revenue in a special account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York that would be forfeited to the U.S. Treasury in the event Mexico defaulted on loan repayment. In sum, the Clinton rescue package provided for broad United States tutelage over an economic "adjustment" program designed to bail out rich debtholders by squeezing the Mexican working and middle classes and deepening the neoliberal policies that left Mexico vulnerable to a financial melt-

down in the first place.

True to his word, Zedillo quickly and skillfully engineered a spectacular economic collapse, destroying the country in order to save it, as it were, and reaping a decorous chorus of huzzas from his bondsmen in New York. To lower consumer demand and suppress inflationary pressures resulting from the devaluation, the Mexican president sharply reduced federal government spending, curbed the money supply, raised the value-added tax by 50%, jacked up subsidized prices on fuel, food and utilities, and limited minimum wage increases to a quarter of the expected rate of inflation. To attract a renewed flow of foreign investment in financial assets and restrain domestic credit, the government drove real interest rates up to 30% and above. The calamity that followed revealed the fragility of the economy built up under Salinas's neoliberal "modernization." As of mid-October 1995, ten months after the financial crisis broke into the open, almost one million Mexicans had lost their jobs, open unemployment had more than doubled, the economy had shrunk at a 5% annual rate, the peso had lost half of its value relative to the dollar, accumulated inflation had topped 40%, sales of consumer goods and services (e.g., cars, restaurant meals) had fallen precipitously, and an avalanche of consumer and business loan defaults had driven many of the nation's smaller commercial banks to the brink of failure. Although Zedillo's bag of dirty tricks would have damaged any economy, the crisis revealed the exceptional shallowness and vulnerability of recent Mexican economic growth that had come to depend on the artifices of ballooning consumer credit, short-term foreign investment flows, and an overvalued exchange rate acting as a price subsidy. Mexico's narrow consumer market, concentrated productive capital and low rates of household and business savings — all products of the country's highly skewed income distribution — robbed the economy of any resiliency when the financial props were kicked out and the fiscal screws tightened.

THESE STRUCTURAL IMBALANCES WILL DEEPEN AS ZEDILLO SUCCEEDS in settling accounts by transferring income from some of the poorest to some of the richest people in the hemisphere. And once again, Mexicans are proving docile under the yoke, as they have since the eruption of the 1982 debt crisis inaugurated a 13-year experiment in pain. After loud early objections to the recessionary stabilization plan, Mexico's principal business groups soon accepted its "necessity," and Zedillo has spent a hefty share of the bailout money to underwrite the banks' bad debt. The official Mexican labor movement, presided over by 95-year-old Fidel Velázquez, is as supine as ever while independent organized labor — still a weak force — has limited its reaction to modest public demonstrations. Perhaps the most visible opposition has come from the "El Barzón" movement of small business debtors demanding interest rate relief. But neither grassroots groups nor the political opposition have the strength to make Zedillo shift course, especially since the adjustment program appears to be working. Over \$26 billion in outstanding tesobonos have been paid off or converted to longer-term debt, the trade account has shifted from deficit to surplus, foreign exchange reserves have doubled to \$15 billion, the peso has stabilized, the badly-mauled stock market is recovering, and even some foreign investment is reportedly trickling in, lured by low stock prices and astronomical bond interest rates. With the financial fires dampened, Zedillo has promised major public works

projects to relieve unemployment and predicts Mexico will return to modest growth in 1996.

To get there, Zedillo is banking on making capital a more faithful lover, a homebody instead of a one-night-stand. He acknowledges that anemic domestic savings, investment and growth performance underwrote the financial crisis, but believes that the road to structural improvement lies in freeing capital, rather than disciplining it. To this end, the Mexican government plans to sell off publicly-owned seaports, airports, toll highways, utilities, telecommunication systems and petrochemical plants, liberalize foreign investment rules in real estate and financial institutions, and remove other impediments to the free flow of capital — possibly including strong labor law mandates affecting seniority-based staffing and dismissals, although Secretary of Labor Javier Bonilla García presently denies this. The administration will continue to lower protective trade barriers, dismantle price controls, eliminate industry subsidies, and keep fiscal and monetary policy lean and mean. The watchword, as under Salinas, is an outward-looking, market economy.

Will the program succeed? Some “trickle-up” growth is indeed likely, as an elite group of Mexican and foreign investors fatten on cheap labor, giveaway privatization deals, and lucrative debt instruments. While creating some jobs, this exclusionary growth will also concentrate capital, destroy small businesses, worsen income inequality and fail to raise living standards for the great majority of Mexicans, if the record of similar policies pursued by the Salinas and the preceding Miguel de la Madrid administrations may serve as a guide. A recent study published by the Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior shows that Mexican income inequality worsened significantly over the 1984 to 1992 period (the Gini coefficient rose from .436 in 1984 to .473 in 1989 and .490 in 1992) even as the Mexican economy grew in every year but 1986. From 1984 to 1992, the proportion of national monetary income received by the bottom 80% of Mexican households fell from 50.5% to 45.6%, while the share of the richest 10% of households rose from 32.4% to 38.1%. This growing inequality is fed by both immiseration and enrichment, according to data from the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America: Mexico's poverty rate (defined as households with income amounting to less than twice the cost of a basic basket of food) rose from 34% to 36% over the 1984 to 1992 period as the indexed value of the real Mexico City minimum wage fell from 100 to 45.5 during the 1980's. Neoliberal “modernization” has marginalized millions of Mexicans as job growth consistently lags far behind economic growth, contributing to an underemployment rate estimated at 30-44% of the working economically active population, while the double blow of import competition and shrivelled consumer purchasing power bankrupts thousands of businesses serving the domestic market.

At the same time, Mexico's powerful business oligarchy has thrived under the new regime. Before the peso crisis deflated paper fortunes, monopoly building, speculation and patronage privatization had spawned over two dozen dollar billionaires in Mexico, including such world-class fat cats as Emilio Azcárraga, head of the monopoly television network, and Carlos Slim Helú, principal owner of the recently privatized (and highly profitable) national telephone company. An already highly-concentrated manufacturing sector (in which large establishments represented only 1.3% of the total number of firms but 73% of value-added in 1988) appears to have become even more so over the 1985-90 period,

when large-firm employment grew significantly faster than that of smaller firms. The Mexican service and trade sectors also show very high rates of capital concentration. The familiar picture that emerges, mirrored in the economic history of liberal, open-economy development models (including the Mexican *porfiriato* of the 19th century) is of an increasingly polarized Mexican economy and society, with a dynamic, modern and externally-connected productive and financial oligopoly coexisting with few linkages with a stagnant and inefficient array of small domestic producers.

These indices of inequality are no mere temporary distortions that will correct themselves with sustained, market-based growth — quite the contrary. Poverty, unemployment and bankruptcy are the midwives of trickle-up growth, its nursemaids, and ultimately its gravediggers. The neoliberal policies that balance Mexico's books and stimulate a burst of skewed growth must founder on the poverty of resources that these policies impose: a scrawny consumer market, a squandered labor force of great potential left idle and underemployed, and a dearth of the mid-sized, mid-tech enterprises essential to a diversified and robust domestic economy. Can it be otherwise when wages are driven down, fiscal stimulus denied, education and training neglected, credit made inaccessible to farmers and small businesses, and imports admitted indiscriminately from some of the world's most sophisticated producers? Capital's cure becomes its poison, and as the productive economy slips into stagnation speculative investment grows, setting the stage for another round of financial collapse, austerity, trickle-up growth and productive stagnation. Such a fragile and shallow Mexican economy — boom-and-bust export and security markets in a wilderness of waste, need, excess and injustice — drives off capital even as it miserably fails its people.

SO WHAT IS TO BE DONE? MUST WE MERELY COMPLAIN or can we prescribe? Does Mexico have any "realistic" alternative to the neoliberal model when capital has great global mobility and many suitors? To what extent is policy constrained by the neoliberal measures already in place, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada, and Mexico's crushing \$120 billion foreign debt? Given the remote present prospects for global or continental socialism, can private and public capital be disciplined and put to work in a relatively dynamic and egalitarian mixed economy? How might have a progressive Zedillo — the Tijuana poor boy, perhaps, not the Yale technocrat — sought to cope with the 1994 financial crisis and its aftermath?

Given the critical state of Mexico's foreign exchange reserves, Zedillo had little choice but to seek financing help from the United States, Mexico's principal creditor and trading partner; to have gone it alone would have risked default on international obligations, a collapse of foreign trade and credit, and an even more brutal depression than the one the country is now enduring. Yet, as was the case during the 1982 debt crisis, Mexico evidently failed to use its bargaining strength to advantage — from the progressive perspective — with the *gringo* patron. President Clinton had and has a strong interest in keeping Mexico from a financial collapse that might destroy or set NAFTA back for years, expose U.S. debtholders to huge losses, and precipitate a general run on so-called "emerging markets" worldwide; moreover, the U.S. president found the means to finance the bailout without congressional approval. Had Zedillo been so in-

clined, he might well have successfully resisted U.S. demands for a deeply recessionary stabilization policy with humiliating economic micro-management by the U.S. Treasury Department; high interest rates and the petroleum sales collateral should have sufficiently secured the lender. Zedillo might also have struck a better deal on how the loans would be used. Paying off the maturing tesobonos, as opposed to unilaterally converting them to longer-term bonds, was probably necessary to keep future short-term capital flows open, but the Mexican president might have insisted on a steep reduction in the estimated \$14 billion in current annual service payments on the country's longer-term foreign public debt. After 13 years of hot air "restructurings" and more than \$150 billion in debt service transfers, Mexico's total foreign indebtedness is now a third greater than it was when the debt crisis first erupted in 1982. Annual service payments on this unpayable debt still absorb 30% to 40% of export earnings, draining money from domestic investment, skewing production to the export market, and fostering a dangerous dependence on short-term foreign capital flows. Mexico must insist that this old debt be either formally wiped off the books or informally written off with a steep drop in the servicing burden. The large U.S. commercial banks that are the country's principal creditors have in fact long since written down their Mexico loans in their internal accounting and would face little risk if the servicing windfall were to cease.

Shuffling off the debt coil would form part of a stabilization program to rectify Mexico's balance of payments without making the economy scream. Such a progressive policy would defend living standards for workers and the poor while attempting to wean Mexico from overdependence on export earnings and capital inflows and prepare the ground for job-centered, domestically-fueled growth. Zedillo to the contrary, the orthodox, neoliberal approach to stabilization — which fails miserably in all these respects — is by no means the sole tried-and-true method of stabilizing the external accounts. A workable alternative program might begin with a peso devaluation resulting in a two-tiered exchange rate. The peso would float against the dollar for most transactions but would be fixed at a more favorable rate for food, capital goods and other imports essential to maintaining production and popular living standards. To ease the adjustment burden and counteract the recessive effects of the devaluation, fiscal and monetary policy would be stimulatory, not contractionary. The federal government would seek budgetary relief, if necessary, by renegotiating the usurious terms of its domestic debt instead of squeezing the poor with an inflationary and regressive value-added tax and subsidy cuts on basic goods. In any event, a non-recessionary policy would maintain tax revenues and the government would finance a small deficit before forcing a surplus with destructive and unnecessary spending cuts, as Zedillo has. Administered price controls would contain inflation.

Is such an alternative program riddled with problems, shortcomings and pitfalls? This wouldn't be the dismal science if it weren't. The dearth of austerity would displease finance capital and Mexico would likely confront relatively greater foreign and domestic financial disinvestment, more speculation against the peso, a steeper and longer stock market decline, and restricted access to commercial capital markets. A slower correction of the trade deficit would also contribute to lower foreign exchange accumulation than would be the case under an orthodox, neoliberal stabilization program. Businesses often stubbornly

resist price controls, which are notoriously difficult to enforce and could fail to check inflation. In sum, the alternative program would sacrifice a quick financial adjustment to better defend jobs and production.

DESPITE THE FINANCIAL RISKS, THE EXCHANGE IS ADVANTAGEOUS — and not solely because it protects popular living standards, although that is certainly a sufficient reason to jettison the neoliberal program. The alternative stabilization plan shifts the policy bias from financial investment and export promotion to productive investment and internal market development. Although short-term investment in securities can be useful and desirable — bringing in foreign exchange, helping firms capitalize, financing government operations — the financial tail has wagged the economic dog under Salinas and Zedillo, to the detriment of direct, productive investment. Before the peso collapse, U.S. investors had twice as many dollars in Mexican securities as they had in factories, machines and buildings. Mexican private investment has similarly favored short-term financial instruments over real assets in recent years. This inflated financial sector is sustained by the same policies of fiscal austerity and tight money that discourage direct, productive public and private investment. And it is precisely this shallow and distorted economy that leaves Mexico vulnerable to repeated financial crises and makes these crises so devastating when they occur. The International Monetary Fund, in its wisdom, proposes to avoid future Mexican-styled financial meltdowns by monitoring the neoliberal regimen more closely and redoubling its rigors when the omens turn inauspicious, as when the current account slips into deficit. This is something like bleeding a patient to cure anemia.

Beyond the immediate financial crisis, a progressive alternative to the neoliberal development model would stand on three legs: income redistribution; a targeted industrial development policy; and strong investment in the general labor force, the domestic industrial and informational technological base, and productivity improvements for small-scale agriculture. It is no secret that virtually every industrializing nation in recent history — call it capitalist or socialist — that has managed to reduce poverty and raise popular living standards significantly over the long term has pursued a similar combination of policies with the government directing the overall development strategy. The reason this approach succeeds is straightforward: income redistribution creates a strong domestic consumer market while a planned industrial policy and productivity investments develop an efficient domestic productive sector to serve it. Compared to other “upper middle income” nations (defined by per capita GDP) that have achieved relatively high general living standards, Mexico performs poorly in both distribution and investment, as a few statistics may indicate. In 1984, the richest 20% of Mexicans received 13.6 times the income of the poorest 20%; the comparable ratios for Korea in 1988 and Hungary in 1989 were 5.7 and 3.2, respectively. Gross Mexican domestic investment grew at a barely perceptible average annual rate of 0.1% during the crisis-ridden 1980-1993 period compared to a Korean average rate of 11.8% over that period. Where 55% and 14% of Mexico's appropriate population age groups were enrolled in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions in 1992, the figures were 90% and 42% for Korea and 81% and 15% for Hungary. In 1984, Mexico counted 46,146 scientists, engineers and technicians engaged in research and develop-

ment and in 1989 it spent the equivalent of 0.2% of its GDP on R & D; Korea, with half of Mexico's population, had more than twice the number of equivalent R & D personnel and spent 2.1% of its GDP on research and development in 1992. While the composition of Mexico's leading exports has shifted dramatically from primary products (including petroleum) to manufactures since 1980, the country remains highly dependent on imported technology and transnationals to produce these (largely electronics and auto-related) exports.

Production for the domestic market, meanwhile, is bifurcated into highly-advanced and import-dependent transnational and national oligopolistic firms, on the one hand, and technologically-primitive, low-wage, small-scale national enterprises on the other. Agriculture shows a similar polarization between an efficient, big business-dominated export sector (coffee excepted) and an investment-starved, low-yield smallholder sector producing basics for the domestic market. What is needed for both industry and agriculture is a program of mid-level technical capacitation (e.g., irrigation systems, advisory and input services for farmers, industrial process engineering, labor skills training), market development and affordable credit for small and medium-scale producers. To succeed, this reorientation of production must be accompanied by income distribution and, very likely, a selective system of producer subsidies, import controls, and public infrastructural investment.

GRANTED, THE ROAD TWIXT "WANT" AND "CAN" IS TORTUOUS. Even under the most favorable political and economic circumstances, the feat of redistributing income, conducting a successful industrial policy and selecting the right mix of productivity investments presents formidable technical challenges for a progressive government. The would-be planner must accurately identify the industries and occupations with strong employment, income, and market potential for Mexico. The planner must then forecast how the affected classes and regions are likely to respond to changing incentives and find the right combination of carrot and stick to develop the targeted industries while avoiding the waste that plagued much of Mexico's past import-substitution development effort. A major shift in distribution and investment policy will disrupt the existing production and revenue base and prove initially costly, demanding a source of stable, long-term public financing, either by borrowing or raising taxes. Mediating a welter of popular demands and containing a probable capital strike requires great political skills.

Mexico may have missed the bus to this mixed-economy paradise. Having squandered a window of opportunity in the postwar import-substitution decades, the nation now confronts serious obstacles to a progressive alternative to neoliberalism: the public debt; the NAFTA caps on import barriers, investment controls and producer subsidies; the (hopefully short-lived) global triumph of capital, permitting it to dictate extortionate terms for its participation; and, perhaps most important, the very powerful alliance of Mexican big business, transnationals, and financial capital that profits from the current system. Even so, Mexico must find a way off the neoliberal road to mass poverty, walking or crawling, if necessary. In Don José Alfredo's immortal words, *hay que saber llegar*.

Québec: The Referendum Aftermath

S.A. Longstaff

YOU MIGHT THINK THAT QUÉBECERS WOULD BE DEMORALIZED after the bitterly fought referendum on sovereignty that was held last October 30. Actually it is the rest of Canada — or ROC as we have started to call ourselves — that now seems fractured and deflated, as the implications of the paper-thin federalist victory sink in. The showdown was supposed to produce a needed respite from Canada's chronic political uncertainty. In the wake of two failed attempts in the past eight years to accommodate Québec's demands for new powers and a special status within Confederation, the whole country was suffering from constitutional burnout. By the same token, Canada's staggering debt (higher proportionally than in the USA and most other OECD countries), its deteriorating social programs, and intractable unemployment all called out for sustained attention. Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was considered to be on solid ground in his determination to ignore the constitution, despite the election of a noisy and effective contingent of 54 separatist MPs, *le Bloc québécois*, in the 1993 federal election that brought Chrétien's federal Liberals to power. Unfortunately for him and for ROC generally, the galvanizing effect of Bloc leader Lucien Bouchard, who was thrust to the front of the floundering Yes forces less than three weeks before voting day, threw the whole federalist strategy off center. With polls showing the revitalized sovereigntists poised to win, and distraught federalists in Québec pleading for help, Chrétien was forced to make some panicky commitments in the last days of the campaign — commitments which, given the hostility to Québec's constitutional aspirations elsewhere in the country, he has little chance of fulfilling.

He, too, was for constitutional renewal, Chrétien said. He understood Québec's desire for formal recognition of its distinctiveness and for a veto over constitutional change. This awkward about face was enough, barely, to deny an outright victory to the Yes side. (The No camp won by a mere 55,000 votes out of 4.3 million cast.) But the winner of the campaign was clearly the charismatic Bouchard, who will leave Ottawa to become Parti québécois leader and Québec premier early in 1996. (To the relief of almost every PQ member, Premier Jacques Parizeau announced his resignation the day after the referendum.) There Bouchard is expected to bide his time for a year or so before calling an election which, in turn, will pave the way for another referendum on independence, to

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be held in 1997.

And that, in all likelihood, will set the stage for a peaceful if painful secession. Especially painful for ROC, which will suffer dismemberment (with the four Atlantic provinces having no landlinks with Ontario and the West). Even more significantly, ROC stands to lose its historic identity of belonging to a bilingual and bicultural political community. For Québec, the pain will mostly be economic, though what the costs of a transition to independence will be is anyone's guess. There will be a certain amount of emigration, especially among the anglophones and allophones (immigrants and their children) who make up 18% of the population. There will be some disruption of flows of goods, people, and capital — severe enough, some predict, to force Québec to create its own currency. And whatever portion of Canada's debt Québec assumes (a highly contentious issue), it together with Québec's own provincial debt will be serviced at higher interest rates. Many of these economic costs will be borne by ROC, too, of course, as the Parti québécois strategists never tire of pointing out — this in explanation of why English speaking Canadians, despite their disappointment, will be willing to negotiate new confederal arrangements once sovereignty is seen as a *fait accompli*.

At the center of the Yes campaign — in fact, written right into the question that Québécois were asked to address — was a promise by the Québec government to extend to ROC “a formal offer of economic and political partnership.” This was meant to be reassuring to “soft” nationalists, and apparently it was. According to polling results, some 25% of Yes supporters were of the opinion that voting yes would not involve breaking up Canada. Québec would still send MP's to Ottawa, it would still remain a Canadian province. Residents of a sovereign Québec would continue to use the Canadian dollar and retain their Canadian citizenship (should they so desire). Strategists of the Yes side even put the Canadian dollar at the center of some of their campaign posters. Discussions will proceed calmly and quickly, Bouchard assured Québécois during the campaign, speaking of the “*traité du partenariat*,” that he himself would negotiate with the government of Canada. For the first time, we will be speaking from strength, and English Canada will have no choice. Too many of its jobs will be at stake.

ROC AND THE NEW QUÉBEC STATE WILL CERTAINLY HAVE A LOT TO negotiate after Bouchard obtains a majority for the Yes forces the next time around. Québec's continued use of the Canadian dollar is a possibility; so are some sectoral trade deals and a joint tariff policy or customs union, agreements that will work to minimize economic dislocation. Nevertheless, the negotiation of a new, two-nation partnership or confederation is highly unlikely, if only because it lacks even a practical appeal to Alberta and British Columbia, where hostility to even the most moderate of Québec's aspirations runs deep.

All this, in any case, ROC has been spared for the moment, though it has only 18 months or so to prepare. What is striking about the campaign that has just concluded is how unpersuasive the Yes side's economic arguments generally were. That the Government of Canada is hugely wasteful, that it is consistently unfair to Québec; that the nation would be so much more robust, economically speaking, once it stopped sending taxes to Ottawa — such were the themes of a shelf-full of works commissioned by the PQ government during the

run-up to the campaign. The message, in fact, turned out to be counterproductive, especially after the cabinet minister in charge was discovered to have suppressed three or four studies whose conclusions were not entirely consonant with the government's victimization thesis. In any case, it was only after Bouchard, in replacing Parizeau at the center of the Yes campaign, began focusing on questions of linguistic and cultural survival, on bargaining from strength, and on Anglophone Canada's chronic insensitivity to Québec's needs — only then did the Yes side's numbers began moving upward. A No vote means putting ourselves at the mercy of the benighted English premiers, Bouchard reiterated with surpassing eloquence. It means getting on our knees before Chrétien and other figures who have betrayed and humiliated Québec in the past. If this emphasis on past treachery had a powerful resonance, as it did among *francophones de souche* (old-stock Québécois), it was because it contained an element of truth. Chrétien, as one of Pierre-Elliott Trudeau's senior cabinet ministers, had played a prominent role in "patriating" the Canadian constitution over Québec's fierce objections back in 1982. Canadian politicians have been preoccupied ever since with trying to repair the damage.

What then did Lucien Bouchard achieve in bringing the Yes forces so close to a majority? Mostly a sense of the inevitability of Québec's leave-taking, a perception that already (five weeks after the vote) is hardening bargaining positions on both sides. "I am a *souverainiste*. Period!" Bouchard insisted recently, when asked if there was anything Canada might offer to keep confederation intact. Bouchard's great rhetorical gifts, his ability to infuse logic with emotion, have carried him a long way in only a few years. That he is seen as both strong and trustworthy, even by No voters, baffles many Anglophones, who essentially view him as an opportunist and a turncoat. In fact, his checkered political career — as a Trudeau federalist, a René Lévesque nationalist, a cabinet minister in Brian Mulroney's Conservative government in Ottawa in the late 1980s, and, since 1990, as the founder of his own separatist party — says a lot about Québec nationalism's present lack of political definition (unlike in the 70s when issues of both class and nation infused its *projet de société*). The same can be said about the distrust that Parizeau felt for Bouchard, which threatened for a time to bring the sovereignty movement to grief.

The questions posed by Parizeau and Bouchard's rivalry went beyond matters of turf or precedence. They touch on how open and above board the party could afford to be regarding the costs and risks of sovereignty, a question made all the more acute by the PQ's sacrifice in the '80s of its traditional constituency among workers and the poor in favor of a highly *dirigist* "market nationalism." Here we touch on a fundamental reality of Québec politics, one that held, at any rate, up till October 30. Neither the constitutional status quo nor outright independence has much appeal for Québécois. Nevertheless, if confronted with a stark choice, they are likely to opt for the status quo by a solid margin. Thus only if "soft" nationalists (i.e., those who don't want Québec to secede from Canada) could be won over was a Yes victory possible. But in Parizeau, the PQ was saddled with a leader who was singularly ill-suited to appeal to such voters. As one constitutional scholar put it prior to the referendum: "Mr. Parizeau's entire political career has been devoted to the cause of sovereignty, and there is no evidence that he would stray from this course even if it were to impose large costs on the citizens of the province." After being acclaimed leader of the shat-

tered PQ in 1988, Parizeau had essentially distanced the party from the strategy of the Lévesque years, which entailed a promise to make sovereignty contingent on continued links with ROC (i.e., "sovereignty-association"). In the wake of the failure of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, Parizeau, while in opposition, had promised a quick independence vote on a straightforward question. Such a commitment seemed to carry little risk at the time when polls showed upward of 65% of decided voters ready to opt for independence. But by the fall of 1994, when the PQ finally regained power, Canada and Québec's darkening economic horizon was having its impact. Polling figures on independence had settled back into their usual pattern. By the same token, the PQ's minuscule plurality in the popular vote in the election that saw it take over from the discredited Québec Liberals suggested that the drive for sovereignty was stalled. Not surprisingly, corporate leaders began insisting that the economic uncertainty posed by the referendum threat was working hardship on Québécois and Canadians alike. It was imperative that the PQ call the referendum early in its mandate, as promised. Either that or abandon the idea altogether.

It was under these exceedingly unpropitious circumstances that the *partenariat* strategy was adopted. "I had no faith at all that our offer would be taken seriously [by Ottawa]," Parizeau confided after the referendum. "But for the sake of the people we had to at least try." It was only after being threatened by a palace revolt, instigated quite openly by Bouchard in Ottawa, that the premier finally bowed to the logic of "sovereignty-association" once again. That was in June 1995, and for a time the polling results were encouraging. High enough, at any rate, to go ahead with the vote despite much nervousness in party ranks. But, as the campaign progressed, the bad news kept accumulating, until, almost too late, it became apparent to Parizeau himself that his own leadership wasn't going to be enough.

Since he did give way and the vote was as close as it was, the distance between hardline separatists and moderate nationalists in the PQ ranks has all but disappeared. The objective, as a francophone columnist recently put it, was to win on October 30, "and everyone knew it was Mr. Bouchard, not Mr. Parizeau, who was the only leader who could deliver." Indeed, Bouchard's coronation has created a kind of euphoria among nationalists. But there is this much to be said for Parizeau's resistance to the "partnership" strategy, especially as embodied by Bouchard. A victory based on the charismatic appeals of a nationalist "saviour" plus the chimera of smooth relations with a dismembered ROC may not be the best preparation for the belt tightening that Québécois will, inevitably, be subject to. Austerity measures will be necessary in ROC, too. But at least there the politicians will be able to blame Québec for their economic woes. Perhaps Bouchard and his fellow nationalists should count themselves fortunate that, in the upcoming 1997 referendum, the subterfuge of a partnership strategy probably won't be necessary.

IT REMAINS TO DEAL WITH PARIZEAU'S SPLENETIC ELECTION-NIGHT OUTBURST and what it portends about the Bouchard-led party as it readies Québec for independence. "It is true, we were defeated, my friends. But by what? By money and the ethnic vote. Three-fifths of us, of who we are, voted Yes." To considerable cheering, the premier went on to speak vaguely of Québec's French society soon having its

“own revenge.” That day would come when finally “we give ourselves a country.”

Who we are has long constituted a problem for the PQ, which has had little success appealing to Québec allophones and anglophones. Formally the party insists that its nationalism is territorial not ethnic; its practice and rhetoric often belie this. Thus, despite promises to recruit anglophones and allophones into Québec's public sector, state employees remain 98% *pure laine*. One rarely sees or hears assimilated allophones on Québec's French language radio or television. Cultural grants to *les autres* are exceedingly meager.

Worse still, during the run-up to the referendum one heard frequent demands — emanating from nationalists inside and outside the PQ — that those in the “cultural communities” (i.e., non-anglophone “ethnics”) should desist from voting. The real Québécois must be free to decide for themselves, it was said. It would constitute an intolerable act of racism if minority Québécois, voting en masse for the federalist option, were to block majority wishes for independence. That, of course, is precisely what happened, and since October 30 there has been a good deal of anguish expressed by anglophones and allophones, especially among those who, valuing the cultural diversity and distinctiveness of Québec have no plans of leaving. Meanwhile some anglophone leftists are issuing warnings of their own. “The cultural fascists and free traders are in the ascendant,” a prominent McGill economist, Tom Naylor, warned before the referendum. The PQ “is going to gut what's left of the welfare state. Parizeau and company will have to be on their best possible fiscal behavior vis-a-vis Wall Street ... And it may well be that Québec is so under siege that there is no room for dissent.”

This goes too far. There is actually a strong if presently recessive social democratic element in the PQ. The Québec labor movement was once the most militant in North America. Nor is the party in any respect fascist or even inherently pro-business.

The root of the problem lies in the party's Jacobin model of national construction, which is likely to be deemed too centralizing and assimilationist by most North American leftists. But against this one must always consider the fragility of Québec's linguistic and cultural survival. In any case, the morning after independence is achieved, a new struggle will break out. The Parti québécois will be split. We can only hope that the considerable forces of community, tolerance, and diversity, which are still strong among Québec nationalists, will win.

Discussion

Black Intellectuals in Conflict

Introduction

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF *NEW POLITICS* (VOL. V, No. 3), MANNING Marable, in an article entitled "Black Intellectuals in Conflict," responded to Adolph Reed's controversial essay in the *Village Voice* (4/11/95), "The Current Crisis of the Black Intellectual." "Reed's basic argument," Marable wrote, "was that these scholars who presented themselves as 'authentically black' spokespersons, actually lacked viable constituencies or any genuine accountability within the African-American community." Some of Reed's criticisms he found "mean spirited" and while he defended Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, bell hooks and others he felt were much too harshly criticized by Reed, he said: "There is a growing sense that a significant number of black scholars speak primarily to white elites, rather than addressing the specific problems of the African-American community."

Reed's characterization of Washington, Marable believes, is "grossly inaccurate." "Washington was certainly a black Republican, an opponent of labor unions and, publicly, an apologist for Jim Crow segregation but, without question, he had a strong following among a segment of the black community." Marable continued, "Washington's accommodationist approach toward white power was profoundly flawed and, at times even criminal, in that it gave legitimacy to the lynching and disfranchisement of black people. However, that doesn't make him an 'Uncle Tom.'"

Marable noted that for a number of years the far right has been waging "an ideological war against the politics of liberal democratic social change." He went on to say: "With the declining strength of the organized labor movement, the deterioration of the liberal wing of the Democratic party and the disarray of the civil rights movement, one of the few sectors of growing left-of-center influence in national political culture is the black intelligentsia." That set the stage, in Marable's view, for a vicious attack on Cornel West by Leon Wieseltier in *The New Republic* (3/95), denouncing West's writings. Reed, Marable said, "backhandedly defends Wieseltier's thesis as being 'right for the wrong reasons,'" a position, he argued, that "directly feeds into the retreat from an anti-racist politics among white liberals and so-called radicals..." Moreover, he continued: "To join the chorus of the far right, to deplore and denounce the works of an entire group of black intellectuals espousing progressive ideas, is alien to the best traditions of black scholarship."

"Many black activists," Marable says, believe the real reason for Wieseltier's attack "was West's principled decision to participate in the National African American Leadership Summit called by former NAACP national secretary Benjamin Chavis, last June. West strongly defended the political initiatives taken by Chavis to revitalize the NAACP, and vigorously opposed Chavis's ouster. His well-publicized defense for the need to dialogue directly with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, and his endorsement of the Senatorial campaign of Al Sharpton in New York ... may have triggered the polemical attack in *The New Republic*."

In conclusion, Marable wrote: "Reed himself apparently has few connections with real social forces, with the present-day struggles of women and men who are attempting to halt the tide of political reaction against black folk by the Republican right. For if he did, Reed would not so easily be convinced that West, Gates and Company should be the primary objects of his scorn and contempt."

What follows is a discussion of these and other matters related to black intellectuals and the African-American community.

In Defense of Adolph Reed

Danny Postel

AMONG THE MANY PROBLEMS WITH MANNING MARABLE'S ARTICLE "Black Intellectuals in Conflict" (*New Politics*, Vol. V, No. 3, Summer 1995), one deserves special attention. Marable begins his final paragraph by speculating that "Reed himself *apparently* [my emphasis] has few connections with real social forces, with the present-day struggles of women and men who are attempting to halt the tide of political reaction against black folk by the Republican right. For if he did, Reed would not so easily be convinced that West, Gates and Company should be the primary objects of his political scorn and contempt."

One can, and should, debate the many matters of perspective and opinion to which Marable addresses himself in his piece. In the lines quoted above, however, Marable commits some truly obscene errors on matters of fact, and in so doing raises serious questions about his level of understanding of the realities about which he assumes a voice of such authority.

It is "apparently" the case to Marable that Reed lacks any engagement with actual struggles being waged on the front of countervailing the onslaught of right-wing offensives. Undoubtedly, Marable could have gained access to the answers to such questions without much trouble. Couldn't he have sent one of the members of the Institute for Research he directs at Columbia on a basic fact-gathering mission, for example, to discover that Reed co-chairs the Coalition for New Priorities in Chicago, an umbrella network of more than 100 labor and community organizations? (Among other things, Reed helped to organize the recent March and Rally for Jobs and Justice in Chicago, a mass effort of the multitude of groups forming the Coalition Against the Contract on America.) However Marable conducts his "research," one would expect him to go beyond what simply "appears" to him to be the case.

Certainly in Marable's own political organizing work, he must have come across the fact the Reed sits on the steering committee of the Labor Party Advocates. If not, where has he been? If so, why did he fail to mention this in his discussion of Reed's *apparent* political disconnectedness?

Finally, concerning Marable's claim that "West, Gates and Company" are "the primary objects of [Reed's] political scorn and contempt." Marable

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opens his piece as a response to Reed's April 11, 1995 *Village Voice* essay on "The Current Crisis of the Black Intellectual," and proceeds to deal exclusively with this one publication of Reed's (with the exception of a passing reference to Reed's book, *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon*). Given this, on what basis does Marable rest his claim that "West, Gates and Company" are "the primary objects" of Reed's critical efforts?

The fact is that even a casual glance at Reed's publications of late indicate that "West, Gates and Company" occupy only a *sliver* of Reed's focus. What one will find on the list of Reed's recent works include an exhaustive and truly devastating critique of *The Bell Curve* (in *The Nation*); a comprehensive analysis of the mystifications known as "underclass" theory and poverty research (in *Radical America*); a stack of his columns from *The Progressive* ranging from a critique of the resurgence of racism in the social sciences to a critical review of Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* to reflections on left strategy and organizing struggles. Reed's two forthcoming books deal with: 1) the political thought of W.E.B. DuBois; and 2) black politics in the post-segregation era. They concern contemporary black intellectuals such as West and Gates *only* within the context of wide-ranging discussions of the books' central issues. Based on what evidence, then, is Marable in a position to accuse Reed of making "West, Gates and Company" the *primary objects* of his scorn and contempt?

Either Marable hasn't read much of Reed's work lately (he certainly didn't mention any of it), in which case he's making irresponsible claims about whom and what exactly has been occupying Reed's critical attention; or he knows perfectly well that "West, Gates and Company" account for only a fraction of Reed's "contempt," in which case Marable has consciously distorted things in order to make his point. In either event, Marable leaves great doubt as to whether interventions such as his, ostensibly intended to steer ongoing debates toward "a thoughtful, civil dialogue" among those who "share democratic, progressive values" are at all likely to even reflect those goals, let alone contribute to their realization.

In the Post Civil Rights Era

Peniel E. Joseph

THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY IS ABUZZ OVER ADOLPH REED'S ASSAULT on black "public intellectuals" in the April 11, 1995 issue of the *Village Voice*; and with good reason. Reed's thoroughly reactionary yet revealing essay is especially significant in light of the recent rise to prominence (and access to fame, fortune, and publications) of a dozen or so African-American scholars. Their prodigious scholarly output, demand on the lecture circuit, and penchant for publicly speaking out on "hot topics," have led many to describe this "new" breed of black scholars as "public intellectuals." The reaction elicited by Reed's controversial broadside at African-American scholars reveals that the role of the black intellectual, most famously explored by Harold Cruse in his classic *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, is no less problematic a subject today.

Manning Marable's article "Black Intellectuals in Conflict," (*New Politics*, Vol. V, No.3) while accurately criticizing Reed for his *ad hominem* attacks on Robin Kelley, bell hooks, and Michael Dyson, failed to place what Reed correctly described as the "current crisis" of the black intellectual in its necessarily broader context. The increase in the number of prominent black academics (if not the number of blacks in the academy as a whole) is a direct result of conventional civil rights ideology's obsession with accelerating piecemeal and token black advancement into mainstream corporate and educational institutions within U.S. society. The power and prestige of certain black "public intellectuals," along with their shockingly low numbers, is both a tribute to the success of the civil rights movement's quest for inclusion and a revealing indicator of the failure of liberal-integrationism's politics and paradigms.

Reed correctly points out, while conspicuously excusing himself, the disconnection between so-called black "public intellectuals" and much of the African-American community. Consequently, even the "progressive" black intellectuals, whom Marable staunchly defends, are negotiating difficult territory. What all these individuals (including Marable, whose commitment to leftist politics though almost legendary, has garnered him national attention along with a position at an ivy league university) have in common is their attempt to examine and analyze the reasons for continued African-American immiseration. However, much of their writing is marked by

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a slavish adherence to academic jargon and consequently has little effect on disfranchised blacks yet concomitantly increases their prestige, exposure, and marketability. Moreover, the overtly political nature of their writing, since it is seemingly disconnected from organic vehicles of political organization and mobilization, smacks of opportunism and sloganeering.

The intense focus on the rise of these so-called black "public intellectuals" is, in itself, an exercise in obfuscation. The emergence of this popularly constructed and media sanctioned narrative, which turns reality on its head by disingenuously positing a world wherein black intellectual legitimacy, power and prestige are actually increasing, is reflective of the hegemony of post-civil rights conservatism. The publicity surrounding black "public intellectuals," most of whom are black men and women at ivy league or prestigious public universities, popularizes the fiction that race and gender equity within a virulently racist and sexist academy have finally been attained. The fact is that an ideology of white supremacy, which has long flourished throughout educational and corporate institutions, continues to permeate these institutions today. Moreover, the majority of black scholars do not teach at, nor have they received degrees from, ivy league institutions. Consequently, the "representative blackness" of the public intellectuals and the access to power and resources this status affords, considering the pervasive and systemic racism within higher education, coupled with their refusal to acknowledge the ways in which their "hyper-visible" status within the academy is actually utilized *against* African-Americans, becomes extremely problematic. Furthermore, in light of the solidification of conservative hegemony in the political arena, the public intellectuals' conspicuous lack of grassroots community ties is even more glaring. Marable asserts that for these scholars words are "weapons," yet too often their words are, in fact, directed to everyone but the black community about which they write, teach, and speak so passionately.

REED'S CRITICISM, ALTHOUGH UNNECESSARILY MARKED by a self-righteous tone, seeks (in light of increasing African-American underdevelopment) to re-examine critically the role of black intellectuals within postindustrial and postmodern U.S. society. The fundamental question is: what level of commitment, beyond what Joy James has described as "radical rhetoricalism," do black scholars (especially those "representative blacks" who explicitly seek to examine African-American history and life within both the public and academic arena) owe to the black community? Judging by the actions of some of the most prestigious black intellectuals the answer is none.

In contradistinction to Marable, I found what appears on the surface an overly harsh assessment of two of the most famous black "public intellectuals," Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Cornel West, to be, to quote Reed himself, "right for the wrong reasons." In his *New Politics* piece Marable states that Gates "probably has no aspirations to play the role of a popular race leader of the masses." Yet, this is precisely what the power of "representative blackness" constitutes within the "liberal" circles in which Gates writes, teaches and speaks. Consequently, when Gates writes in *Forbes* that "there is a culture of poverty" he reinforces pathological, ahistorical, and racist caricatures of black poverty not as an individual but as a representative "expert" on black folks.

Similarly, Cornel West's best selling *Race Matters* reveals the inherent limi-

tations of black intellectuals whose writings often contradict their avowed political sentiments. Contrary to Marable's assertion that many black progressives started to distrust West due to his message of coalition-building with Jews and his embrace of liberal politics, *Race Matters* has been rightfully criticized due to West's penchant for appropriating dominant anti-black and conservative paradigms to contextualize his analysis of African-Americans. Many black and white leftists found West's obsessive focus on black "nihilism" as *the* reason for black misery, rather than systems of domination, racism and oppression, a contradiction of West's self-avowed "radical democratic" politics. Furthermore, *Race Matters'* narrowly one-sided focus on black anti-semitism (coupled with its silence on the subject of Jewish anti-black racism) led many African-Americans to believe that political and academic self-interest had superseded both West's analytical abilities and his commitment to principled radical struggle.

In a recent and provocative *Social Text* piece written by Lewis Gordon, the author criticizes black scholars, some of whom might come under the broad rubric of "public intellectual" for "...the extent to which, when all is said and done, the only political organizing they are engaged in has more impact on the linings of their pockets than on the forces of dehumanization in their specializations and communities."¹ Gordon's words cogently characterize the "current crisis" of the black intellectual that Reed's flawed article attempted to describe. Indeed, currently a number of black intellectuals are being handsomely paid to write, teach, and speak about black folks, history and culture. However, these scholars owe the black community a measure of progressive social commitment beyond attending conferences, writing books, and collecting honoraria on the lecture circuit.

For those within the black community who are actively committed to social change it would be wise to draw upon the salient issues that Reed's critique addressed and demand the reemergence of black "activist-scholars." Nothing short of hands-on, grassroots involvement with the communities that these scholars teach, read and write about, should be expected at such a pivotal moment in African-American and U.S. history. At the end of the day, the impact of black scholars who "share democratic, progressive values" will be judged not by words alone, but by their deeds and actions.

¹Lewis R. Gordon, in "Race and Racism: A Symposium," *Social Text* 42 (Spring 1995), p44.

Notes on the Niggerati

Norman Kelley

The philosophy implicit in the Negro's Folklore is infinitely superior to the opportunistic philosophy of Negro intellectuals who want to save their jobs and enjoy material comforts.

E. Franklin Frazier

INTEGRATION IS DEAD. THE FACT THAT MARTIN LUTHER KING has become the emblem for the right's colorblind rhetoric ought to make clear to blacks that they were victims of one of history's great frauds. Granted, the most egregious manifestations of second class citizenship have been eradicated and Africans in America are not overtly barred from participation in the American way of life. Yet the promotion of affirmative action (first enunciated by Lyndon Johnson but given a Machiavellian twist by Richard Nixon) as the mechanism to get blacks through the door of so-called equal opportunity has been taking a serious bashing, and the term has even tinged the black middle class with a gloss of pathologies that welfare and rap have come to represent. Murray and Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* has brought to the surface the mainstream sentiment that, genetically, even middle class blacks cannot live up to the assumptions of affirmative action.

To date, the rallying cry has been "Save Affirmative Action!" This underscores the structural weakness of the black professional class: it cannot sustain itself without government mandated assistance or corporate and educational largesse from the dominant society. It also demonstrates the bankruptcy and ineptness of black leadership which cannot formulate a strategy for group empowerment beyond the legacy of the now-dead civil rights agenda. Of course, today's black leadership has either promoted or is the beneficiary of affirmative action programs. Affirmative action, however, is not about group empowerment but rather a patronage system of selective recruitment for the black elite. Useful for propagandistic purposes during the Cold War, it outlived its usefulness with the demise of the Soviet Union. There is no longer a need to prove that America is democratic, non-racist, and egalitarian.

This brings us to the problem of black intellectuals. Today's black intellectuals, touted in *The New Yorker* and *Atlantic Monthly*, excoriated in *The New Republic* and *The Village Voice*, have benefited from the struggle for integration, the *raison d'être* of the civil rights movement,

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and what passed as integration has had a profound effect on blacks. Chiefly, fragmenting the black community and stratifying it along class lines more pronounced than before, into black *communities*. Post-civil rights intellectuals are roughly divided into left and right: the left, the Niggerati, and the right, Pet Negroes (both terms coined by the Divine Z, Zora Neale Hurston). Both represent the sum total of what integration has wrought: self-promotion and self-aggrandizement masked as leftist theoretical discourse or (neo)conservative public policy pronouncements. Both are totally irrelevant to the lives of the vast majority of black people. Both, basically, speak to and perform before whites, their real audience (and constituency). Put another way, they are *market* intellectuals, intellectual commodities. Most are deracinated and, as Aldolph Reed aptly put it, they tell whites what the drums mean and how not to offend their black subordinates. In short, compradors.

TRAINED IN THE HIGH-FALUTIN THEORETICAL ABSTRACTIONS of academic feminism, cultural studies, semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism, literary theory, and meta-theory, the Niggerati are the best example of the computer age maxim: "garbage in, garbage out." None has yet matched the work of earlier generations: *Black Reconstruction* (Du Bois), *The Black Jacobins* (James), *The Betrayal of the Negro* (Logan), *Class, Caste and Race* (Cox), *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Woodson) and *The Black Bourgeoisie* (Frazier). *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* by Harold Cruse, is the most searing indictment of the black intelligentsia to date. Only obliquely mentioned or referred to by either black or white commentators during the "debate" about black intellectuals, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* critiqued black intellectuals as being incapable of having an original thought. They either became superficially familiar with Marxism during the 1930s or mouthed the shopworn ideas of the dominant society in the 1960s, both replaced by left theoretical abstractions or Republican marketplace ideology. Their greatest failure has been their collective inability to develop a comprehensive view of the unique historical position of blacks in America, encompassing politics, culture and economics.

Instead, they have readily subscribed to any half-baked theoretical construct devised by whites; and the academy since the late 1970s has been knee-deep into structuralism, Foucault, cultural studies, pop culture, etc., all of which has had a disastrous effect on the academic left. Enconced in the academy, the left began talking to itself in an unintelligible language, promoting entirely self-referential concepts. Schooled in such language, charter members of the Niggerati — Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Houston Baker, bell hooks, Michael Eric Dyson — were able to dazzle the white world with their mixture of "street" analysis and postmodern argot. West and Gates were allowed through the portals of western civilization when West published *Race Matters*, a meretricious piece of social-democratic sop that pales in comparison to King's *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, and when Gates addressed the purported rise in black anti-Semitism in *The New York Times* (challenged in Ishmael Reed's *Airing Dirty Laundry*. Reed asserts that the Anti-Defamation League had not found black anti-Semitism on the rise).

The civil rights era (or at least its results), has to be understood as having had the following effects: (1) it convinced whites that racism had ended, and (2) it severed black leadership — political, intellectual, and business — from the

masses. The result was a large-scale payoff to the black elite and black intellectuals — left, center, and right — which would hardly lead them to question the efficacy of affirmative action. The fact is that they have become a sliver of that 20 percent of the nation's population, cited by Christopher Lasch, as being indifferent to the fortunes of the other 80 percent. (Their support of Colin Powell [September 25, 1995 *New Yorker*] is understandable. As the most successful affirmative action graduate, Powell legitimizes them and points out the irrelevance of the black Democratic Party elite.)

We are witnessing the complete collapse of the civil rights agenda, namely integration. But an analysis of what happened is not forthcoming from the Niggerati. As Manning Marable has said:

The new black public intellectuals...are engaged in a totally different political enterprise. They are not building educational institutions like Tuskegee Institute, or political machines which negotiate for influence within the white establishment. They utilize power of words to impact the contours of political culture and public discourse....[T]heir commitment is to theoretical and cultural engagement, analyzing the meaning of race, gender and class issues in the context of a post-civil rights reality of unrelenting attacks on affirmative action, welfare and multicultural education.

Their "political enterprise," if one can indeed call it that, has nothing to do with people but with theory, identity, books, publications, journals, television appearances, assignments from elite journals read by whites, socialist confabs, etc. In reality, self-promotion masquerading as intellectual discourse, positioning them as market intellectuals. The Niggerati aren't about politics in a land that, as Gore Vidal observed, doesn't have politics but elections. They are running a game and a few people (Adolph Reed and Leon Wieseltier, for different reasons) have called them on it. Marable himself has noted that "Gates sees himself as something of an entrepreneur; he has extensive influence within foundation circles and inside the white media" and "embraces a social philosophy of inclusionist integration, appealing to the most liberal wing of white corporate and political power." In other words, a racket, an intellectual racket but still a racket. This is the game of both the Niggerati and Pet Negroes (Clarence Thomas, Shelby Steele, Stephen Carter, Stanley Crouch, Thomas Sowell): to get into the rackets, make a killing, and claim it for the race, as the individual pursuit of excellence, increasing the gene pool, social criticism, serious theoretical political work.

THE NIGGERATI MADE ITS APPEARANCE AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME that multiculturalism did and, like affirmative action, it is another pet project of that clique. On the surface, the argument for greater inclusion and participation by blacks, Asians, Latinos and other so-called people of color is laudable. But one can detect its self-serving nature: it allows the Niggerati to promote themselves as interpreters of "their" fellow Others to people of pallor. One has only to listen to or read the scribbling that passes as discourse on rap and hip hop to see how the term multiculturalism is as interchangeable as Benetton's colors. David Rieff has observed that while many academicians cited the emancipatory powers of multiculturalism during the go-go eighties, "the conditions of the poor, of working-class women, and of America's non-white citizens deteriorated dramatically." Witness the congressional election of 1994 and the Oklahoma City bomb-

ing. The left, black and white, is only interested in talkin' theory, but the right is interested in taking power. For black America, the impeding "crackdown" (as Andrew Hacker has termed white hostility to the civil rights agenda) is a complete and utter disaster.

The black intellectual class has totally abandoned its social and intellectual responsibilities. Socially, emotionally, politically, and spatially removed from the day-to-day concerns of ordinary blacks; it is as remote as most whites are from blacks. (At least some blacks have a degree of interaction with whites, though fleeting and indifferent.) The Niggerati and Pet Negroes have no interest in establishing or strengthening black institutions. There is no prestige or money at Moorehouse, Howard or Jackson State that can rival or compete with Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, or Stanford.

Since the election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of the New Right, signs have been posted along the political terrain indicating that black gains were under threat, but black leadership — intellectual and political — failed to heed the warnings. Suffering from "African amnesia," African-American leadership failed to recognize that the nation was shifting to an inhospitable period that paralleled the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. Historical works such as *Black Reconstruction* and *Betrayal of the Negro* chronicled the deals that led to the disfranchisement and the lynching of blacks. The crime is that the Niggerati, intoxicated with deep theory, have no use for history, or providing blacks with a social analysis of the forces arrayed against them. Instead, they offer treatises on the hybrid nature of identity or the Foucauldian "nature" of power. Let them study theory... African-American intellectual "leadership" has been in a meltdown since the civil rights days. The drive toward integration has resulted in affirmative action for the aspiring middle class and welfare for the poor, but both are now on the chopping block.

Black intellectuals, particularly the Niggerati, have never viewed black in-group economic development as a necessity for group advancement (and group protection), for that would be nationalistic ("essentialist") and capitalistic. Neither West nor Gates has shown much sympathy for that track. They have gained much more as beneficiaries of an elite patronage system that needs a smattering of dark faces to legitimize the rhetoric of meritocracy. Gates's relationship, as Marable noted, with the "most liberal wing of white corporate and political power" mirrors the old corporate dependency program of the NAACP, and we all know how relevant that organization is. Gates probably does not aspire to play the role of "a popular race leader"; he is successful as a race entrepreneur, a Booker T. for the 1990s.

West professes to be a socialist but belongs to the Democratic Socialists of America, an adjunct of the terminally dead Democratic Party. Attributing the decline of inner cities to nihilism, as West does, is no different from the sort of condemnation heard from white and black conservatives, neo-conservatives, and neo-liberals. West, like Gates, is far more comfortable dealing with whites and addressing their concerns than those of blacks, ostensibly his people. His book with Michael Lerner (editor of *Tikkun* magazine) *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*, shows how utterly bankrupt the Niggerati have become. It takes no great courage for West to speak to progressive Jews of his class, but he would be a real mensch if he talked to the Crown Heights Hassidim. This so-called intellectual risks nothing. (I could be wrong. He supports Louis Farrakhan's march

of a Million Black Men, too.) Both West and Gates know that to become influential, they have to be “court blacks” (as some Jews were “court Jews” during the era of European monarchies) and the role of court blacks at Harvard is not to challenge power, as Noam Chomsky does, but to act as agents for a discredited policy that only benefits a few at the expense of the many. To paraphrase a biting comment once made about a Harlem Renaissance poet: these people are not thinkers, but nobody would dream of reproaching them for it, because, on the contrary, they possess an extraordinary faculty for defining the confused sensations that constitute the collective conscience of simple minds.

THE BLACK ELITE IS THE ONLY PARVENU CLASS that expects to ascend to power through moral suasion. But considering whites’ constant state of denial regarding race, it ought to have been clear years ago that programs such as affirmative action would only be a window of opportunity for developing parallel black institutions controlled by blacks themselves and thus not at the mercy of white mood swings. The comprador mentality of black intellectuals, however, prevented them from seeing beyond integration and the false foundation of the new black middle class. Even Du Bois, the patron saint of black “public” intellectuals, reconsidered his pro-integrationist philosophy in light of the Depression, arguing that blacks might have to engage in self-segregation in order to address the problem of group economics within a market society. Because of that, he was driven out of the NAACP. It should be no surprise that Farrakhan has a degree of credibility with some blacks: he *talks* about black self-empowerment through economic cooperation — with emphasis on talk. Despite his limitations as a strategic thinker, Malcolm X, as a student of Elijah Muhammad, understood that black liberation would have to come through the development and control of black institutions. That is not a project that merits the attention of the Niggerati.

Today’s black intellectuals are prime examples of what Frazier saw as a drive toward dominant beliefs and values, an unconscious striving toward middle-class assimilation. But the Niggerati do it under the cover of so-called radical theory. The collapse of black America and the impending “crackdown” will only offer the possibility of more lucrative contracts for books, television appearances, tenure at elite universities ... all this while black America continues to rot and decompose. This is corruption, postmodern.

Protect the Legacy of Debate

Adolph Reed

I SUPPOSE I COULD THANK MANNING MARABLE for giving me an opportunity to amplify some points of my *Village Voice* essay on the black “public intellectuals” (April 11, 1995). Marable takes issue with three substantive features of my essay; I’ll respond to them in turn.

His first objection is that I do not adequately account for the differences among the group of Super Friends — Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Cornel West, Michael Dyson, Gloria Watkins (bell hooks) and Robin Kelley. He never suggests, however, how considering these putative differences — which amount to variations in style and personal association — would affect the argument I make about their common role as “public intellectuals.” “Gates sees himself as something of an entrepreneur,” Marable indicates; are we somehow to believe that West, Watkins and Dyson don’t? This is a doubly curious charge in fact. Yes, Gates runs an institute at Harvard, but Marable runs one at Columbia. What’s the dif?

In a phone conversation Marable expressed amazement that my *Voice* article seemed to treat Gates less harshly than some of the others, notably West. When I assured him that that was my intention, he seemed taken aback. I suspect that much of Marable’s objection is to Gates’s explicitly centrist politics even though he sees my joining Gates in thus characterizing his stance as a “mean-spirited criticism.” I also disagree sharply with Gates’s centrism, but — as I argued in the *Voice* article — he is clear and consistent about his political orientation. His defense of liberal principles in black discourse — even from his centrist perspective — is often not only thoughtful but progressive relative to the mushy romanticism of some whose pro forma pronouncements Marable prefers.

Even if, as Marable maintains, West “has a very different political history” from Gates, how do those differences bear on the problematic character of their shared status as “black public intellectuals”? Why and how does it matter how Watkins “established her reputation” or that she has written a series of books, etc.?

He never hints at answers to these questions. He tepidly admits that her work has little impact inside the academy — where she earns

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her living and is most visible — but retreats to a defense that “hundreds of thousands of black women... find her ideas and commentary inspirational.” This a tired move, repairing to an arena where claims can be neither verified nor disconfirmed. The real impact is always somewhere else, where we either aren't looking or can't see it; so we must rely on Marable's authority as conduit to clue us in. For what it's worth, I think his defense is bogus, but even if it were true, what would it mean? Watkins indeed does write inspirational prose — basically the same prose over and over in one superficial book after another. So do Marianne Williamson, Starhawk and Clarissa Pinkola Estes (whose *Women Who Run With the Wolves* has sold more than a million copies). Are they also public intellectuals? If so, the category is meaningless for progressives.

Marable's point about Dyson and Kelley is not that I don't adequately differentiate them; in fact he himself lumps them. He seems to think that my criticism is undone by pointing out that they have written books. At this point I began to wonder whether he'd actually read my essay. I remarked favorably on Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe*. And it is precisely with their supposedly “special awareness of the centrality of popular cultural forms, such as Hip Hop, to the construction of a political consciousness of resistance and group empowerment” that I take issue. Responding to that criticism requires more than asserting that they are a new scholarly “vanguard.”

Marable also notes, instructively, that West “became associated with the white moderate left in his capacity as nominal leader of Democratic Socialists of America.” This statement is an astounding admission. West “became associated...as nominal leader”! That is precisely the sort of political posturing I wrote against. The idea that one joins a movement by being dropped from nowhere into the leadership of an organization is exactly the kind of fake, photo-op politics that legitimizes the pretense that a bunch of professors speak for a non-existent black movement.

AND HOW EXACTLY DOES HANGING OUT WITH THE MOTLEY CREW of Ben Chavis, Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton come to validate a claim to progressive politics? Farrakhan is simply a fascist; his political agenda for black people is nightmarishly reactionary — sexist, homophobic, steeped in punitive moralism accelerated with the self-righteousness of an aggressive theology. Sharpton is an opportunist hustler, D'Amato supporter and former (?) police informer. Then there's Chavis. As I argued in *The Progressive* in October 1994, the fact that Chavis was attacked partly by the wrong people for bad ulterior motives doesn't exonerate him for his real transgressions. Putting aside his likely guilt of sexual harassment about which there technically may be room for debate, he misappropriated NAACP funds and got the organization sued, then lied to the board about having done so. In addition to his apparently horrible record of mismanagement, Chavis sold out the environmental justice movement by shilling for a new, phony environmental organization created by oil and chemical companies. And for good measure, after the NAACP board voted to oppose NAFTA, Chavis surreptitiously lobbied members of the Congressional Black Caucus to vote for it. This is progressive black leadership? No, what we have here is a group of race leaders-without-portfolio joining together to pimp association with one another as a way of legitimizing a public status for themselves. Marable should know better.

Marable's second objection is that the Booker T. Washington case is more complicated than I represent it and that comparing him with the others is faulty. Marable points to Washington's imperial operations from his Tuskegee base as a partial defense of the latter's complicity with the racist right. What makes the same behavior a call for leniency for Washington and an indictment of Gates? Is the principle something like: All empire builders are equal, but some are more equal than others? And of course Washington had a black political base. He wasn't the only accommodationist around. Does the fact that some other black people agreed with him validate his reactionary politics? Besides, if Marable had been around when there actually was an insurgent black political movement, he'd realize that the guys who had the ears of the funding sources always had a constituency in the black community. That's one of the reasons they were able to defeat the radical tendencies in the 1970s; because of their support from white elites, they had resources that enabled them to propagate and enforce a non-threatening, incrementalist agenda for black politics.

Today's "black public intellectuals" certainly differ in significant ways from Washington. How could they not? They operate in a much different social context. I never suggested that they're homologous. I liken them on one dimension only — willingness to adopt the role of link to the generic racial mind (a dimension on which Gates is least like Washington among this cohort). Marable does not contest that judgment.

THE THIRD AND MOST DISAPPOINTING FEATURE OF MARABLE'S ESSAY is the cheap, circle-the-wagons move around his charge that criticizing the "black public intellectuals" is politically irresponsible. The right always attacks black intellectuals who aren't its housepets. That apparently means, in Marable's view, that we can never be publicly critical of one another. This position is ridiculously anti-intellectual and politically inexcusable. It stifles dissent in a way that reflects the very Washingtonian impulse that prompted my comparison in the first place. Its implication is that any black person who makes any utterance in the public forum can demand quiescence if not assent from the rest of us — provided, presumably, that she announces herself to be a progressive. And even granting him this unacceptable premise, Marable clearly misses a point that could hardly be more explicit in my original essay — that I don't accept the Super Friends' claims to be seriously committed to progressive politics.

Worst of all, the notion that we must take special care to protect and insulate from criticism a group of celebrity professors with safe, cushy jobs because the right wing bogeyman might get them is offensive and demeaning to the exemplary legacy of lively critical debate among black intellectuals in previous generations, people who actually did incur substantial risks. Not to mention the long line of genuine political martyrs and ordinary black people who have been ground into the dust by racial oppression. Face it, every principal in this debate — Marable and I as well as the others — lives a reasonably comfortable, secure middle to upper middle class life. We all make nice incomes by most Americans' standards, and we all have the protection of tenure. West has dinner in the White House and gives lectures to business schools, for Pete's sake. Let's have some proportion in the rhetoric.

FINALLY, AS TO MARABLE'S PARTING ALLEGATION that I have "few connections with

real social forces, with the present-day struggles of women and men who are attempting to halt the tide of political reaction against black folk," I'm not sure what exactly he means. Those with whom I work politically in Chicago have found it comical that this charge came while we were in the middle of frenzied, round-the-clock building for a major local mobilization — not long after I'd sat through a four-hour meeting at a community center just to get an organization's endorsement and commitment to turn out. His move is a backhanded attempt to invalidate my criticism by implying that I'm in some way politically or racially inauthentic. It's dishonest in another way. Not only is this gambit evidence of the Proudhon scam I discussed in the *Voice* (shifting back and forth opportunistically between intellectual and activist pretensions, thus avoiding the warrants of either practice); but I also expected better than that from Marable. As he repeatedly said to me on the phone, we've known each other for over 20 years. He knows my history of political involvement over the last 25 years or longer. He also knows that I know that he and the others came of age only after the political insurgency of the 60s and 70s had evaporated. It's not entirely their fault, but the fact is that they haven't a clue about what a political movement is, or about the tedious, mundane and unending processes of political organizing and grassroots mobilization. That's why — assuming their intentions are honorable — he, and they, remain incapable of discerning the difference between a movement and a press conference.

Manning Marable Responds

THE BLACK INTELLECTUAL TRADITION IN THE UNITED STATES has always been anchored around several axioms or basic principles. As an oppressed people, we were faced with "a condition not a theory." In other words, an abstract theoretical interpretation of our politics or social status had little relevance to our actual situation in this country. Theory always had to be tested by practice. Traditionally, black intellectuals used their skills and research interests to address basic problems within African-American communities. They challenged racist ideas and interpretations of black folk. And most importantly, they articulated programs and modes of intervention which would transform the social and material conditions of African-Americans. To be sure, there were sharp distinctions within the black intelligentsia over ideology, tactics and strategies for black empowerment. Scholars like Charles S. Johnson were socially conservative; nevertheless, they were actively committed to a scholarship which challenged Jim Crow segregation. Although black conservatives, liberals and socialists in the first half of the 20th century could vehemently debate each other, there was a general understanding that we were, in many ways, involved in parallel projects. We were all black and we all faced the very real conditions of race and class inequality.

It is in this context that one must address the political polemics of Adolph Reed. Reed is a sometimes brilliant and always provocative interpreter of African-American politics and society. I have learned from much of his work, and he certainly ranks among the most thoughtful and insightful critics of the contemporary black experience. It is unfortunate that a scholar who is so passionately committed to progressive politics fails to make the distinction between honest

debate and disagreement between one's colleagues and the conflict between those with whom we share virtually no common values or politics.

I won't address all of Reed's points, but I would like to highlight a few obvious problems with his reply. Reed would have us believe that anyone who speaks in public, appears on television or publishes in widely-distributed journals is "an entrepreneur." Technically, although Cornel West, bell hooks and others are often in the public arena, they are essentially women and men who engage in intellectual work. To describe them as "entrepreneurs" is to distort the basic activities they perform, both as individuals and as a social group. Reed's simplistic equation of Gates' Institute at Harvard, or my Institute at Columbia, as entrepreneurial enterprises ignores the actual academic content of what these and other programs are attempting to accomplish. It is also probably true that Reed would not hesitate to head one of these academic enterprises himself.

Research centers, such as Charles S. Johnson's Race Relations Institute of Fisk University a half century ago, can play vital roles in shaping public policy alternatives which address blacks' interests. Conversely, a series of conservative think tanks and institutes have emerged, which support reactionary policies and a racist agenda. Ideological conflict requires the development of academic institutions which seek to address race and class inequality.

From the sectarian left, centrists, liberals and socialists all look alike. That's the distorted perspective of Reed. When you're so far out in left field that you can not see home plate, you may not even know what game is being played. Skip Gates is a personal friend, but we clearly disagree in our strategic political orientations. But, there are many more issues on which we agree and can productively work together. West and I have a political and personal friendship, which goes back nearly 20 years. There are issues where we probably disagree with each other, but during a period of conservative reaction, it doesn't make sense to focus exclusively on issues which narrowly divide us. To repeat, we're faced with a condition, not an abstract theory.

REED IS NOT INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE with some of the most influential African-Americans on the scene today. Their "prominence" doesn't necessarily make them right or wrong on specific issues. But as black scholars who shape our political culture, they have to be taken seriously. White racists for many years have not viewed African-American scholarship as credible. From *The Bell Curve*, to Dinesh D'Souza's, *The End of Racism*, there has been a nearly unending attack on black scholarship and intellectuals. Reed's assaults on West, Dyson, hooks, etc., seems to echo the extreme language of the right.

On the issue of Booker T. Washington, Reed displays a surprisingly poor grasp of African-American history. To argue that Washington was in "complicity with the racist right" shows that Reed has no understanding of what the Tuskegee strategy represented a century ago. He should reread "Of Booker T. Washington and Others," by Du Bois. Du Bois deeply respected certain aspects of Washington's program, especially on economic development. It was Du Bois, after all, who first suggested the creation of the National Negro Business League, founded by Washington.

Reed's contempt for Washington is part of a broader misunderstanding about the tradition of "accommodation" within black politics. From Reconstruction to

the present, there has been a pragmatic tradition of political moderation advocated by broad elements of the black middle class. It was reflected in the more moderate agendas of African-American politicians during Black Reconstruction. In the 20th century, one can trace the pragmatic conservatism of Booker T. Washington through the contemporary moderate Republican politics of Colin Powell. Although Reed and I both are clearly at odds with the elitist politics of the black petty bourgeois, we must nevertheless recognize the reality of this political tradition and its social class base. Washington and Powell may be many things, but they are not Uncle Toms or simplistic apologists for "the racist right."

Perhaps Reed is most out of step with Black America in his descriptions of both Farrakhan and Chavis. I deeply disagree with Farrakhan's conservative black nationalism, patriarchy, homophobia and anti-Semitism. I criticized the program of the Million Man March for refusing to offer a coherent public policy critique of the "Contract With America," and for barring the participation of African-American women. Nevertheless, about one million African-Americans came to Washington last October in the largest public gathering of our people in history. Farrakhan astutely understood the deep alienation and anger simmering within our community. We as progressives have the responsibility and obligation to understand why Farrakhan has attracted such a strong following. This means that we must engage conservative black nationalists in dialogue and debate, without surrendering or compromising our political beliefs and values. We must talk with Farrakhan, but make it absolutely clear where our politics are in conflict. Calling Farrakhan a "fascist" will not facilitate any dialogue either with him or other conservative black nationalists.

Reed's comments about Chavis underestimates the progressive tendencies his brief tenure as national secretary of the NAACP. Chavis made many mistakes, both personal and political. But he also attempted to expand the base of the NAACP, reaching out to the Hip Hop generation and a range of black constituencies outside of the middle class. As in his other political critiques, Reed raises many valuable issues, but engages in intellectual overkill. Chavis still represents real social forces with whom we must actively negotiate around concrete issues in the black community.

I HAVE RELATIVELY LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT THE OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS to the forum. They largely speak for themselves. Norman Kelley's essay raises many interesting points. I agree that in the post-Civil Rights era, black intellectuals as a group are generally disengaged from real social protest movements. I also concur with Kelley that integration, or what I would refer to as "inclusion," represented a strategic vision which was profoundly flawed. Seeking representation within the existing structure of power could not transform the material conditions for the vast majority of African-American people.

I was impressed with Peniel E. Joseph's essay, which has several important insights. Joseph is absolutely correct that the vast majority of African-American intellectuals have absolutely no relationship to white elitist institutions. Our judgment of what it should mean to be an "intellectual" should be based on our ability to relate to the real problems and daily issues which confront the vast majority of our people. Finally, Danny Postel's comments completely misunderstand my final original comments concerning Reed's political history.

As Reed says, we have known each other for more than two decades. He

was in graduate school at Atlanta University in the mid-1970s when I was a young professor at Tuskegee Institute, and a fellow at the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta. I have general knowledge about Reed's political activism and history. But of course, he knows my history as well. Neither of us is so young that we stood outside of social protest movements a quarter of a century ago. I was an active leader of the National Black Political Assembly in the 1970s, and was in various organizations on the left. I co-chair the Committees of Correspondence today. So, Reed's assertion that "if Marable had been around when there actually was an insurgent black political movement," is not only false, but dishonest. And he knows this. What is really disappointing to me is that a scholar of such obvious intellectual gifts as Reed squanders his ability to influence real political forces. At this time of political retrenchment and mass conservatism, we need Reed's voice as part of the political discourse which has an effective role to play in national black politics. His confrontational style and harshness of tone undercut his own constructive intellectual insights.

The Abandonment of Black America

Barry Goldberg

IT IS NO FUN BEING AN AVOWED "LIBERAL" THESE DAYS. If you have any doubts, just ask the senior Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He awoke to liberalism's critical condition when he looked around the Senate chamber and Capital Hill and discovered he was the most passionate Senatorial voice defending Aid to Families with Dependent Children. He reminded his colleagues that their version of "welfare reform" represented "the first time in the history of the nation that we have repealed a section of the Social Security Act." Apparently it was one thing to wage war on the 60s (after all, he once proposed "benign neglect" as the most astute response to racial injustice), but it was altogether different to dismantle the accomplishments of the 30s. As if to hammer home the legislative triumph of mean-spirited ignorance, he quoted an odd ally on the right, the conservative pundit, George Will. Moynihan admitted that he was not sure how to "end welfare as we know it," to use the President's phrase. Nonetheless, as the upper chamber's scholar-in-residence, he informed his colleagues that research on the causes of poverty and its remedies pointed to no simple solution. Under such circumstances, where social science gave no clear answer, at a minimum, he advised them to "do no harm." But more fascinating than his claims to scholarly wisdom and moral outrage, was his expression of bewilderment. "I had no idea how profoundly what used to be known as liberalism was shaken by the last election," he confessed. More bluntly he repeated, "I cannot understand how this could be happening. It has never happened before."

Stephen Steinberg's new book* offers a partial but vital explanation, but it is not one that Moynihan will read with pleasure. It is not an inquiry into the racial politics of Newt Gingrich and his friends, or about the racial beliefs of white Americans. Rather it is a penetrating analysis of Moynihan and company, how "liberal" thought and policy abandoned the battle for racial justice long before the latest conservative triumph. Whatever his genuine discomfort regarding the latest shift in policy, he fails to recognize his own complicity in the war against the black poor.

While a majority of political pundits and academics have concluded that the attempt to achieve racial equality provoked the polarizing racial "backlash" that set the stage for conservative Republican resurgence, Steinberg's "iconoclastic scholarship" (to borrow his publisher's promotional language) reminds us of the equivocations of liberal thought and practice in its golden era, when Lyndon Baines Johnson's "Great Society" promised to expand the New Deal welfare state and overcome tolerance of white supremacy. Whereas conventional wisdom argues that liberal race policy went too far in attempting to redress

*Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*, Beacon Press, 19.95. 276 pages, \$25 hb.

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past injustice and not far enough in addressing the pathologies of the black poor, Steinberg convincingly argues that liberal thinkers and policymakers did not have the intellectual capacity or political fortitude to go far enough in the fight against racial injustice and were all too willing to blame the black poor for their own degradation.

Of course, as he acknowledges toward the end of the book, "liberals are not the enemy," but they were and remain part of the problem. Their own tendency to blame those "rendered powerless" put a "kinder and gentler face" on racial reaction. Furthermore, Steinberg argues that the scholarly backlash continues and is creeping to the left. With Newt and his buddies shaping policy, and Charles Murray and Dinesh D'Souza erecting aggressive right wing paradigms, it may be a bit heavy handed to concentrate on the flaws of William Julius Wilson and Cornel West. But whatever the virtues of recent discussions of "class" and "culture" within the democratic left, there are indications that faced with politicized white resistance, we are beginning to turn our backs on the black poor as we scramble to rebuild a flawed liberal coalition.

STEINBERG'S ANALYSIS WILL BE FAMILIAR TO READERS OF *New Politics*, where much of it originally appeared, but the book is far more than a convenient compendium of his recent interventions on race matters. The whole is truly more than the sum of its parts. Organized more or less chronologically, Steinberg's analytic narrative is convincing in its essentials because of its cumulative details. Its impact is all the more impressive when we realize that his argument does not rely upon new sources or the mobilization of trendy theoretical paradigms. The names, texts, and events will be familiar to many readers, but Steinberg's interpretative framework and generous use of quotations remind us how much we have forgotten about liberal policy and thought as the nation moved to the right: Gunnar Myrdal's unwillingness to demand action to stop the economic and physical violence of white supremacy; Nathan Glazer and Moynihan's denigrating dismissal of the cultures of New York's African Americans and Puerto Ricans; the early vehement white liberal attack on the mainstream civil rights leadership's advocacy of what came to be called "affirmative action."

His rereading of the postwar liberal tradition — classic social science texts and policy recommendations — provides a needed corrective to both conservative and liberal accounts of racial ideology during the latter half of the 20th century. In theory and practice, post-war liberalism did not commit itself to black equality. While liberals did reject biological racism and could be enlisted or reluctantly pressured to challenge *de jure* segregation, they never grasped or challenged the "enduring legacy of slavery." In particular, Steinberg exposes the connections between liberal and what came to be dubbed "neo-conservative" racial thought. Rather than a response to the ideological excess of "Black Power" and the political reaction called "white backlash," the post civil-rights era's "retreat from racial justice" represents a liberal homecoming to the evasions of the post-war social science and policy.

Appropriately, Steinberg pays a great deal of attention to Myrdal's celebrated paradigmatic *An American Dilemma*. Funded by the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation, it documented the pervasive dehumanization created by American racism in the North as well as South. However, having discredited biological racism and exposed the sordid facts of white supremacy, Myrdal retained a naive(?) faith in the

"American Creed of liberty, equality, justice, and fair opportunity for everybody." A gradual but inevitable application of national values insured the coming of racial democracy. After all, he wrote, "What America is constantly reaching for is democracy at home and abroad. The main trend in its history is the gradual realization of the American Creed." Progressive democratic teleology took the place of civil rights and anti-lynching legislation. This architect of Swedish social democracy saw no need to recommend government action.

The facts exposed by social science were contained by its rhetorical packaging. The moral certitude of American progress neutralized a call to political action. In the mystical chronology of liberal America, freedom was imminent, in lived historical time the oppressed had to be patient or risk being considered unworthy of the "dream." Scholars, often children of European immigrants, acknowledged the evil of racism, but took the white ethnic experience as the benchmark of expanding tolerance. As Steinberg notes, their political vehicle accommodated Dixiecrat racism. He might have added that the urban white ethnic working class engaged in massive resistance to residential integration long before 1960.

Appeals to the "American Creed" were certainly relevant to the civil rights struggle, but Steinberg reminds us that it was black activism that shattered "business as usual" in the busses, Woolworths, courts, public schools, unions, and universities of America. African Americans and their white allies challenged liberals in academia to stop postponing a theoretical engagement with racial oppression and compelled liberal Democrats to reckon with their complicity with racial dictatorship. Primarily black voices and bodies compelled white America to take another look at its "creed." For some activists and scholars, Steinberg included, this led to a more radical analysis of the historical structuring of white supremacy. As Steinberg notes, whatever the flaws of the "colonial model," insurgent social scientists were beginning to confront the political economy of racism and the structural constraints of the liberal state.

EVENTUALLY, THE MAINSTREAM CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERSHIP ADVOCATED POLICIES that would foster equality in result. The right to eat in any restaurant meant little to those who could not pay the check. But noted white liberals such as Myrdal, Sidney Hook, and Norman Podhoretz balked at attempts to modify the rules in order to redress the cumulative legacy of centuries of racial privilege in a white republic. For one thing, 20th century liberalism's ambivalent embrace of market individualism continued. Repelled by the all-too-visible consequences of the "free market," but reluctant to abandon their faith in meritocracy, liberals had struggled to redefine and establish the boundaries of "fair" competition and its outcomes. They never fought to achieve equality of opportunity and outcomes among whites. For another, the liberal imagination could not cross the color line. Kenneth Clark told Hook, Myrdal, and Podhoretz at a Town Hall roundtable in 1964, "I must confess bluntly that I now see white American liberalism primarily in terms of the adjective, 'white.'" Such liberals were quite comfortable "envisag[ing] the gradual absorption of deserving Negroes one by one into white society." Anything else would undermine the color-blind commitment to individual rights characteristic of the traditional liberal mentality. Any solution that tampered with the allocation of benefits in "white society" could not be accepted — even if, as in federal housing policy, those benefits had helped build

the segregated world of the post-war North as well as South. Federal dollars built the white suburbs and the black ghetto.

Yet, as Steinberg points out, on June 4, 1965, Johnson came close to breaking with liberal convention when he delivered the commencement address at Howard University, the nation's most noted historically black institution of higher education. Entitled "To Fulfill These Rights," the address was a bold declaration of this liberal Democrat's apparently expanding commitment to racial equality. Rather than resting on his laurels as the Southern-born President who had helped engineer legislative blows against legalized white supremacy, Johnson told the nation that it had to overcome far more than Jim Crow laws and the rope and faggot of white terrorism. Essential though it might be, mere racial "freedom" was far from enough. In an oft quoted passage, Johnson called upon the nation to finally acknowledge the continuing burden of its racist history:

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with the others," and still believe that you have been completely fair.

Going a crucial step further, Johnson reasoned you had to make sure that these just recently freed men and women could not only run, but would finish the race among the winners. Johnson's sports analogy called for a "more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom," he continued, "but opportunity — not just legal equity but human ability — not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result." Since post-war America's liberal elite had rejected biological racism, the implication was clear: equality of results would become the measure of equality of opportunity.

Johnson had set forth, what Steinberg persuasively calls, "the most radical vision on race that has ever been enunciated by a president of the United States." It was a tacit admission that white supremacy had been so pervasive, and its consequences so entrenched, that liberal thought and policy would have to reconstruct America's opportunity structure to secure racial justice. As during the Progressive Era and New Deal's confrontation, the injuries of class, liberalism seemed prepared to refashion itself when pressed by a mass mobilization of the disempowered. Color blind formalistic rights talk had to yield to historically grounded discussions of the culture and political economy of race. To move forward meant to move beyond simple equality before the law. A government truly committed to obliterating the invidious color line, to simple "fairness," had to take a more active roll in reshaping the American opportunity structure through preferential hiring procedures and compensatory programs. The time had arrived to stop blaming not only the victims, but those past oppressions that currently living white citizens were not responsible for or capable of redressing without allegedly surrendering their own inalienable "color blind" right to win America's "race."

THOUGH NOT WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL BENEFITS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN workers and members of a soon to be growing middle class of managers, Steinberg's dissection of liberal social policy and theory helps explain why this "radical" moment proved to be so fleeting and its implementation halfhearted.

As Steinberg cogently observes, even Johnson's commitment to substantive equality withered on the rhetorical vine. His "radical" departure did not even

last to the end of the speech. Nowhere in his remarks did he enunciate a new policy initiative. The speech was, in Steinberg's words, "riddled with contradiction." Johnson called attention to the "widening gulf" between black and white America and "the special nature of Negro poverty." But as the speech went on, the causal significance of the institutional structure of white supremacy faded while the self-destructive weaknesses of the African American community received notice. In particular, following a line of reasoning soon to be identified with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the co-authors of his speech, Johnson called attention to "the breakdown of the Negro family." Indeed, he advised, "unless we work to strengthen the family, all the rest: schools and playgrounds, public assistance and private concern, will never be enough to cut completely the circle of despair and desperation." The "semantic infiltration" of allusions to black social pathology became increasingly prominent during the retreat from racial justice. Indeed, like the biological racism of the pre-war era, it legitimated "benign neglect."

When not invoking liberal principles, opponents of the policies that are grouped under the heading "affirmative action" called for political realism. In an argument that has become even more familiar as moderate politicians scurry for votes and contributions, and liberals try to rescue the New Deal alliance, Moynihan argued that while black poverty was a special problem, its scale was so massive that no solution would be supported by American voters if it did not promise benefits to white and black alike. In his own transitional brand of racial realpolitik, Richard Nixon's public rhetoric pandered to the white electorate's racial feelings while advancing the administrative extension of affirmative action enough to make "affirmative action" a household word and target of a Nathan Glazer polemic, and well publicized legal challenges. Confronting an increasingly sophisticated defense of "occupational apartheid" in the name of "merit" and race-blind "fair" play, Democratic liberals gradually learned the necessity of "turning back" to the day when mere "freedom" proved a sufficient guarantee of fairness in the "race" of life. We have come to see that political realism dictated more than a tactical or even strategic retreat. As Bill Clinton's abandonment of Lani Guinier revealed, Democratic politicians aim to suppress any conversation on race. The racial code words of the right will be met by silence — if not mimicry.

Clinton's spineless betrayal of Guinier merits derision, but I am not too sure it serves Steinberg's basic argument to treat Cornel West and William Julius Wilson in close to the same fashion, (though Wilson's endorsement of candidate Clinton may warrant it). To refer to West as the "Backlash of the Left" or Wilson as "The Intellectual Reincarnation of Daniel Patrick Moynihan" certainly drives home Steinberg's critical assessment of the intellectual content and political consequences of their ideas. However, I am not sure if such rhetorical demonization gets us very far. It may even draw attention away from the intellectual and political confrontation Steinberg hopes to achieve. Let us simply acknowledge that it is quite difficult to agree on the proper tone in which to discuss "allies" who, one concludes, are giving aid and comfort to the enemy. It is also trickier to assess the substance and form of such criticism. Let me simply say, Steinberg's attacks are a bit too personal for my taste.

Which is not to say they are misplaced. Though theorists and social scientists should not be held accountable for simplified appropriations by opportu-

nistic politicians, by calling attention to the appeal of West and Wilson's ideas to Clinton, Steinberg does remind us that attempts to define the "left of the possible" can portend the collapse of "emancipatory politics" and critical social analysis. Given the triumph of the "backlash," it is incumbent upon left intellectuals to assess the triumph of racial reaction without echoing the theorists and engineers of racial reaction. They may have won, for the moment; that does not mean they are right.

GIVEN AMERICA'S CHRONIC DENIAL OF CLASS AND ITS INJURIES, Wilson's attempt to focus on the changes in the urban political economy of recent decades is not in itself a problem. But, as Steinberg points out, his "class" analysis occludes the continued maintenance of invidious racial boundaries. For all his attention to the changes in the structure of the economy that impede black employment opportunities, his "class" analysis tends to reify the "culture" of "the truly disadvantaged." Their attitudes, resulting from increasing isolation from stable working and middle class role models, seems more crucial than their racial exclusion from the labor market. For Wilson, they are simply an unskilled "marginalized" workforce, rather than loathed "racial pariahs." Calling attention to Myrdal's original social democratic conception of the "underclass," Steinberg reminds us that by definition the "underclass" is a group whose fortunes are not improved by general macroeconomic policy. Strategies for full employment do not reach them unless they are targeted to address the specific dynamics of their particular exclusion. In the American case, this means there needs to be a direct assault on what Steinberg calls "occupational apartheid." Our "underclass" is our under-race, the historical and contemporary creation of the political economy and culture of racism.

Furthermore, even if the black middle class has grown and is more occupationally varied, there is compelling evidence that it is still racially segmented. Rather than demonstrating the limited impact of affirmative action, the post-civil rights record has shown that without numerical goals integration does not occur. Indeed, as Steinberg stresses, support for affirmative action by King and the integrationist black leadership was not a betrayal of principle, but a logical extension of their quest for racial justice. Rather than accommodating the political reaction to affirmative action, we need to call continuous attention to the institutionalized maintenance of white supremacy in the job market.

Steinberg takes West to task for his overly apologetic acknowledgement of the need for affirmative action, but it is not the main thrust of his criticism. More important, in his very attempt to acknowledge the devastating consequences of racial domination, West, according to Steinberg, winds up portraying a dispirited self-destructive black community in need of moral uplift rather than political change. For West, the collective depression of black America has become as much a cause as a consequence of the community's degradation. The "nihilistic" culture of the ghetto has taken on an autonomous power of its own. While West tries to attribute this literally deadly tragedy to the structure of racial domination, Steinberg emphasizes that West's portrait of demoralization reproduces longstanding stereotypes of a black community so ravaged by crime, drugs, lack of personal attachments, and a purposive orientation to the future that no amount of structural change or new opportunities can save these lost souls. Though rooted in objective historical forces, the cycle of despair repro-

duces itself.

While West takes pains to focus on the structural forces that stymie community and individual change, Steinberg calls attention to the similarity between his portrait of oppressed America and the "culture of poverty" that legitimated liberal retreat and "benign neglect" in the first place. In terms of policy, the radical may reach the conclusion of the conservative: the poor must be left to their own devices, nothing we offer can help. The last 30 years of reaction may have caused this human devastation, but there is a real danger that this language of the impoverished "other" has described people who have crossed a human divide that even "progressives," blacks as well as whites, fear to bridge. They are the living dead who cannot be touched. They can terrorize us and drag us down if we link our hopes to their fate. I think, however, it would be more fruitful to see West not as a radical succumbing to a neo-conservative moralism, but as a man of the left mired in a perennial radical conundrum: how can we simultaneously portray the oppressed masses as both the degraded victims of oppression and as their own heroic liberators. This is not a new problem, or an exclusively racial one. Remember the days when the left spoke of "false consciousness" or of the dangerous "lumpenproletariat," or Wobbly cartoonists drew "Mr. Block?" Rank and file activists as well as theorists have tried to grapple with workers, slave or free, who refuse to throw off their "chains." Malcolm X condemned the "slave mentality" of prospective converts and Martin Luther King stressed the vital importance of gaining a sense of "somebodiness." While I am uncomfortable with West's melodramatic description of the "nihilistic" personality, I am more concerned by his lack of clarity regarding the "politics of conversion." Powerlessness can corrupt. It is not reactionary to talk about the social psychological reproduction of class, racial, and gender formations. But we need a language in which structure and culture are dynamically related and subject to change. We do not need more jeremiads, but a clearer sense of the resources subjugated people continue to draw upon, the habits of mind and body that inhibit creative solidarity, and the kinds of interventions that can release radical agency. Both Reverend King and Malcolm X understood that the oppressed affirm their dignity through struggle.

Naming one's world and one's oppressor is essential to this struggle. We cannot escape history, but must confront it, work through its continuing presence. This is what makes Shelby Steele's campaign against "enemy memory" so obscene. There may well be a paralyzing personal psychology of victimhood. We all know whiners who never cease reliving their misery — and asking us to join them. But to deny "the enduring legacy of slavery," as Steinberg calls the last section of the book, is irresponsible. Undoubtedly, there are unproductive ways of talking about racial slavery and the Jim Crow South, just as there are unproductive ways of talking about the potato famine, immigrant steelworkers' twelve-hour days, and the Nazis' Judeocide. Silence, as Holocaust survivors stress, is not a mark of reclaimed dignity, though remembrance may not always contribute to liberatory politics. The dignity of the oppressed comes to some extent with the ability to speak their truth to power. Just as African Americans recast the past, they were advised to stop wallowing in their victimhood, their "enemy memory," as if all it amounted to was the whining of a childish race. As Steinberg notes, Steele's pop psychologizing robs African Americans of narrative authority, their right to define the world from their perspective and join in the inter-

pretation of their own experience — and that of others, including the bystanders to, and perpetrators of, their suffering.

PERHAPS NOWHERE HAVE THOSE DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE been more complicated or revealing than in our interpretations of the immigrant experience, past and present. Undoubtedly, a good deal of patriotic bourgeois cant permeates the official renditions of the Euro-American odyssey, but the fact remains that emigration was a result of human agency. The journey was a choice, a strategy to cope with the consequences of political oppression or an expanding capitalist market. As Ronald Takaki observes, even despised impoverished Asian immigrants were driven by more than “necessity”; they had “extravagant” dreams. Initially restricted at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and often feared as cultural and “racial” pollutants, the experience of “white” immigrants and their offspring became a central component of the 20th century American saga. Their incorporation came to symbolize the progressive, if difficult, fulfillment of the “American creed” that allegedly prefigured the end of racism and its consequences. Against this Whiggish current, Steinberg argues that for African Americans, European migrations became a crucial part of the enduring legacy of slavery. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, blacks were kept in the semi-slavery of the plantation South as the North industrialized. The “white ethnic” struggle against Anglo-conformity was an important component in the evolving cultural war against exclusionary Americanism and biological racism, but it also contributed to the rise of pan-ethnic white Americanism.

Today the relationship between immigration policy and racial justice has become even more complicated. Certainly, Steinberg admits, the recent waves of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean has rekindled the racist dimension of nativist thought and practice. But, while it may be comforting to imagine a growing alliance of “people of color” that will deal a death blow to white Euro-American hegemony, the reality is far more complicated, according to Steinberg. The reassuring research on the neutral or beneficent effects of labor migration is superficial. The structure of the labor market does pit immigrants against descendants of African American slaves. Studies that identify equal levels of black unemployment in cities that have experienced both dramatic increases in the immigrant population and those that have not, avoid observing the actual operation of labor markets, especially employer preferences. As Steinberg puts it, there is a massive disinvestment in native workers. Unskilled African American labor is being rendered superfluous not simply by changes in the occupational structure, as Wilson argues, but because of the availability of an immigrant reserve of “stoop labor.”

To complicate matters further, the entry of “non-white” immigrants with valued skills may undermine traditional racial boundaries and stereotypes while at the same time it may lead to more defamatory characterizations of the descendants of African American slaves. Asian, Cuban, and West Indian success stories can be used to corroborate the “end of racism” and irrelevance of racism and the legacy of the slave past to the African American condition. Instead “the content of one’s character,” to borrow Steele’s phrase, or the quality of a one’s cultural attitudes would be used to explain success or failure in the opportunity structure.

Meanwhile, some “whites” will become relative losers as well. Legitimate

class concerns will interact with virulent racism — as in the past. This poses new problems, practical and theoretical, for those of us on the left. Steinberg asks us to opt for restrictive policies that will help protect the black poor's possibilities in the labor market as well as impel investment in American labor. His reasoning is clear and his motivations honest. Lady Liberty may still welcome some, but it turns its back on many African Americans. But at the same time his defense of immigration restriction may itself be a retreat from "emancipatory politics." While we may owe something to descendants of "our" slaves, what about the descendants of other nation's slaves or those whose lives have been shaped by America's informal empire or by the global reach of multinational capital? As we enter the new millennium, the relationship between class, race, ethnicity, and national citizenship is increasingly complex. How can we forge communities of resistance against profit-seeking capital while broadening internationalism? Is populist internationalism an oxymoron? Steinberg asks us to "do no [further] harm" to black America. I agree. But as in the past, each lost opportunity to confront the enduring legacy of slavery makes our task more difficult. New oppressions command attention, old oppressions remain, and they roam the world in search of recognition and relief.

IN 1964, AT THE TOWN HALL MEETING I MENTIONED EARLIER, James Baldwin told Podhoretz, Hook, and Myrdal, "... [Y]our version of American society is really difficult for me to recognize. My experience in it has simply not been yours." Steinberg would add, even though our experience and skin is different, critical reason and human empathy can enable us to look at America through what the late African American historian Nathan Huggins called the "deforming mirror of truth." The complex mediations of culture and the tools of historical and social inquiry aid as well as hinder our ability to see and change the world. As Steinberg's own autobiographical reflections reveal, we cannot change our skins or our past, but we can learn to renegotiate the meaning of racial difference.

Having accumulated the cultural baggage and academic perspective of nine years at Berkeley, Steinberg met the subjects of his books when he returned to New York to teach at City College. Not only did he carry Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* up to west Harlem, he assigned it to the students about whose families it was written. They made him see it through their eyes. They helped him see America from a new perspective, just as the struggle for black empowerment led other social scientists and historians to come to terms with 300 years of racial dictatorship and the effective marginalization of black voices. Thirty years later, things have changed, but such border crossings are more necessary than ever.

Indeed, if the book's title, "turning back," denotes the retreat from racial justice, Stephen Steinberg is also asking us to "turn back" to that historical moment where we finally confronted our racial past and took intellectual and political risks for a new future. We have all paid a price but he reminds us that the enduring burden of race that stunts every American's humanity is born most heavily by African Americans. As we choose or are forced to retreat to whatever relative security we can find during the hard times ahead, let us remember the casualties that will be even less fortunate. As in the past, in life and death they will give meaning to the shape of our shared but still unequal future.

Affirmative Action And Liberal Capitulation

Stephen Steinberg

THE CURRENT ASSAULT ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS FUELED by rising racism and reaction. Anyone on the left will agree with this proposition. Why then is the left — or elements of the left, to be precise — engaged in an agonizing debate over affirmative action? Is it not obvious that a left default on affirmative action is a capitulation to racism and reaction?

I recently attended two left forums on affirmative action. The first was held on October 10 in the tidy auditorium of the CUNY Graduate Center. Sponsored by *Dissent* and the Democratic Socialists of America, and advertised in *The Nation*, the event was billed: "Affirmative Action: Left Perspectives." An earlier symposium in *Dissent* (Fall 1995) had a broad spectrum of opinion, including vigorous defenses of affirmative action by Martin Kilson and Jerry Watts. Opinion on the panel, however, ranged from equivocal support (Joanne Barkan, Randall Kennedy, and Michael Walzer) to unabashed opposition in the case of Michael Lind. Another panelist — Theodore Shaw, an official from the NAACP Legal and Education Defense Fund — was added at the eleventh hour to assuage critics who complained that the panel was not balanced. Shaw defended black-majority voting districts, but he did not engage the misgivings and criticisms of the other panelists. Neither did the audience, which numbered 100 or so people. With the notable exception of Gertrude Ezorsky, author of *Racism and Justice: The Case for Affirmative Action*, no one in the audience challenged the anti-affirmative action tenor of the panel. Imagine this spectacle from the vantage point of the nation's ghettos. After all, if this is the most that we can expect from would-be leftists who profess devotion to the cause of racial justice, then what hope is there? Is it any wonder that a million black men marched on Washington without issuing any demands for political redress, so resigned were they to the fact that they could rely only on themselves for racial uplift?

Three days later I participated on a panel at the ramshackle quarters of the Brecht Forum. The title was similar to that of the *Dissent*/DSA forum: "Left Responses to Affirmative Action." In terms of political content, however, the two events were poles apart. All three speakers at

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the Brecht Forum were unequivocal in their defense of affirmative action. (The other two speakers were Robert Fitch, author of *The Assassination of New York*, and Timothy Johnson who is a librarian at Touro College.) The audience of roughly 100 was also unanimous and steadfast in its support of affirmative action. Many were unionists and seasoned activists, toughened by years in the trenches, accustomed to losing political battles, and above all, defiant in the face of seemingly insuperable odds. Below are some comments from the audience that I recorded:

At this point in time, this is where the barricades are. If we don't fight, we will lose and hand them a big political victory. This is a minimal democratic demand: the left must support it. We must correct the wrong that was made historically. If this battle is lost, the rights of women, Latinos, and others will suffer.

Beneath the surface difference in viewpoint between these two gatherings was a difference in political gestalt. For the speakers at the *Dissent*/DSA forum, affirmative action had no concrete reality, but was merely a troublesome abstraction. Consider the following argument by Michael Lind in his *Dissent* article:

The multicultural left is racist insofar as it has abandoned the trans-cultural Enlightenment humanism that informs liberal nationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism alike for a racial and ethnic mysticism described euphemistically as "celebration of difference" and "diversity."

Alas, it is the multicultural left which has abandoned "the trans-cultural Enlightenment humanism" that reigns in the ghettos across America! It is the multicultural left which has injected race into political discourse, thus defeating the principles of liberal nationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism which provide the ideological basis for "transracial political coalition." One would not know from Lind's apotheosis of liberal nationalism that we live in a nation pockmarked by racial ghettos and inhabited by the descendants of slaves who have toiled on American soil for centuries and sacrificed their children in national wars, only to find themselves treated still as a pariah people and, as a crowning irony, lectured on their abandonment of "liberal nationalism."

The world that Lind inhabits is that of the salon and the debating society, places where intellectuals gather in transracial harmony to reflect on the issues that tear up the fractious world outside. Here, without fear of contradiction, they can contemplate political scenarios — such as non-existent interracial coalitions — that might fulfill the promise of a liberal nationalism that also has never existed insofar as African Americans are concerned.

For the crowd at the Brecht Forum, affirmative action is not an abstraction, but a reality that they have grappled with in their unions and workplaces. They know from first-hand experience that affirmative action is the wedge that opened up their workplaces to women and minorities. They also know that it is this integration of the work force that has created the basis for genuine transracial politics. They recognize that the abandonment of affirmative action — far from enhancing liberal nationalism — means returning to the caste divisions in the world of work that make a mockery of the liberal ideals that Lind espouses. Finally, these stalwart activists are not inclined to retreat in the midst of battle. They instinctively know that you do not surrender hard-won gains without a fight, and that retreat is even worse than losing because you invite

yet other assaults on your political terrain. To Lind and others who say that defending affirmative action is "suicidal," they would respond that a left that cannot stand up for racial justice is not worth saving.

What was sorely missing at the *Dissent*/DSA forum was a clear sense of history. The "debate" was not anchored in an understanding of how affirmative action evolved as policy, what has been achieved under affirmative action, and therefore what is at stake if affirmative action is gutted. Nor did the panelists seem aware of the political implications of a left acquiescence in the gutting of affirmative action. With these issues in mind, let me address the chief arguments against affirmative action that are advanced by detractors on the left.

1) *Affirmative action has not worked. At best, it has helped the black middle class. Therefore we are not giving up very much.*

This argument is based on totally false premises. Affirmative action is the most important policy of the post-civil-rights era, in that it went beyond civil rights to attack the institutionalized inequalities on the basis of race and gender. Nor was affirmative action the invention of "a Marcusean left coalition of feminists and minorities" (Lind). Affirmative action evolved as a policy of last resort, only after it became clear that the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which proscribed discrimination in the workplace, had failed abysmally to alter entrenched patterns of racial and gender discrimination in the workplace. Indeed, two of the crucial initiatives in the evolution of affirmative action policy — the ATT-EEO Consent Decree and the Philadelphia Plan — were undertaken during the Nixon Administration in response to pressures from civil rights groups and grassroots activists.

Affirmative action, furthermore, has been a dramatic success. This is widely acknowledged in the case of women, but it is also true of blacks. Most of the black middle class is a direct product of affirmative action programs that have been in place for over 20 years in both the public and private sector. Nor is it accurate to say that affirmative action reaches only the middle class, though listening to the affirmative action discourse, one might think that affirmative action exists primarily for brain surgeons and literati trained at Yale and other elite institutions. In point of fact, affirmative action has had a great impact throughout the occupational world — not only in the ranks of corporate management, but also in major blue-collar industries which, for the first time in American history, have opened craft and production jobs to blacks and women.

For blacks the impact of affirmative action has been greatest in the public sector. For decades after World War II, practically the only jobs open to blacks in the vast federal work force were in the postal service. Today 1.6 million blacks, constituting one-fourth of the black labor force, are employed by government, mostly as social welfare providers in such areas as education, welfare, health, employment security, and public housing. Most of these supposedly middle-class people have few assets and are only a pink slip away from poverty. To say that affirmative action mainly helps the middle class misses the point. One wants to scream, "That's how they came to be middle class!"

The executive orders issued by Presidents Johnson and Nixon applied to some 15,000 companies employing 23 million workers at 73,000 installations. Whatever ethereal issues one might wish to raise, to whatever extent affirmative action "divides the value commitments of the left" (to quote Michael Walzer),

there is simply no other mechanism for influencing employment practices and outcomes on a large scale. Affirmative action is no panacea, but its achievements are considerable, certainly far too great to give up in blatant appeasement of the right. As Frederick Douglass once commented: "You sacrifice your friends to conciliate your enemies."

2) *Affirmative action is merely a reform. Even worse, it amounts to a form of cooptation designed to buy off dissent.*

It must be conceded that affirmative action is *not* revolutionary. It does little or nothing to alter the basis of power and wealth, and while it alleviates racial inequality, it implicitly substitutes blacks for whites, leaving structures of inequality intact. Nevertheless, affirmative action is no ordinary reform. It has helped to remedy the most grievous of all of the ravages of American capitalism: slavery and racial subordination down to the present. This is not a reform that can be dismissed with a sleight of hand. As one man in the audience at the Brecht Forum commented sardonically: "Affirmative action doesn't solve everything: let's have a revolution!"

Whatever its limitation, affirmative action enhances democracy and erodes racism, and no amount of hairsplitting and political calculation can obscure this elemental truth. Besides, as Timothy Johnson, one of the panelists at the Brecht Forum commented, paraphrasing Lenin: "In the struggle for the partial, the struggle for the whole may emerge." Nor can this be dismissed as ideological cant. In point of fact, the civil rights movement was the catalyst for the most progressive politics in this nation's history. As Aldon Morris writes at the conclusion of *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*:

. . . the civil rights movement served as a training ground for many of the activists who later organized movements within their own communities. Indeed, the modern women's movement, student movement, farm workers' movement, and others of the period were triggered by the unprecedented scale of nontraditional politics in the civil rights movement.

Leftists who stubbornly insist on subsuming race to class should take a lesson from history.

3) *Affirmative action is politically divisive, thus playing into the hands of the right. It would be far better politically, and more consistent with the left credo, to base affirmative action on class instead of race.*

The argument for a class-based affirmative action is specious on both practical and theoretical grounds. As Andrew Hacker shows in his *Dissent* article, a class-based affirmative action program would mainly benefit the middle-class children of divorced whites. It would not reach many blacks and Hispanics, not only because they constitute only a minority of the poor, but because they are the poorest of the poor. Furthermore, what evidence is there that a class-based affirmative action can be implemented on a large scale? On closer scrutiny, the argument for class-based affirmative action is only a politically respectable cover for liberal capitulation.

The idea of class-based affirmative action is also conceptually flawed. Affirmative action was designed to address the inequities of *caste*, not class. It is premised on a recognition that the victims of racial oppression have suffered the impediments of race as well as the disabilities of class. For all their hard-

ships, white workers have always benefited from a system of racial preference. They do not need affirmative action to gain access to the construction trades and other coveted working-class jobs. Blacks and women do.

One also has to beware of the argument that if we could eliminate poverty and unemployment, then blacks would benefit disproportionately. This is a seductive, but fundamentally dishonest argument. The first problem, of course, is with the conditional "if." We are being asked to forsake a policy already in place, and one that has been a demonstrable success, for political goals that are unrealistic and unattainable, at least at the present time. All in the name of realpolitik!

The second problem with race-neutral programs is that they amount to a leftist variant of trickle-down economics, and invariably reach blacks last and least. Race-neutral policy simply does not address the unique problems that blacks confront as a stigmatized and segregated minority that is still subject to pervasive discrimination, especially in the job market. The significance of affirmative action is that it constitutes a frontal attack on institutionalized racism. It is the only policy that has decisively breached the wall of occupational segregation. Our choice is not between class-based or race-based public policy, but between protecting the gains that have been made under affirmative action, or witnessing a gradual return to old ways of doing business.

4) *"You are right historically and you are right morally, but you are wrong politically." Affirmative action only triggers a popular backlash that defeats the liberal agenda.*

The backlash is real, but it has been whipped up by right-wing politicians in an ideological attack on the welfare state. It is unbecoming and hypocritical for leftists to surrender to this kind of racebaiting. Besides, appeasement will not diminish reaction, but on the contrary, will only fuel reaction. While the attack on affirmative action invariably is made with reference to blacks, the impending evisceration of affirmative action will surely impact on white women, who have been its greatest beneficiaries. As a young woman in the audience at the Brecht Forum commented: "Since racism is central to the reactionary upsurge, we cannot counter reaction by avoiding racism."

It is painfully obvious that the left has no power in America. However, as Eric Foner recently commented in *The Nation* (October 30, 1995):

Since the days of the abolitionists . . . the role of the left has been to put forward utopian ideas, to offer a moral and political critique of existing institutions, to worry less about what is politically possible than about what might be.

The secret weapon of the left lies in the power of ideas — the ability to shape intellectual discourse and to hold the right, which does have power, to account. In this respect the left represents a last line of defense against the reactionary onslaught. A left that surrenders its principles to political expediency loses its most valuable asset: moral credibility. A left that capitulates to racial backlash loses its defining characteristic as a left.

U.S. Labor Wars: Bottom to Top

By Kim Moody

THE 20TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE AFL-CIO will probably go down in history as a turning point in the history of what has been for decades the shareholders' meeting of American business unionism. This year saw the first contested leadership election in the federation's 40-year history. This time resolutions on federation policy and functioning were fought over and actually made a difference. Unlike its early conventions from 1955 through 1960 where A. Philip Randolph was practically a lone voice for the recognition of black labor, or the many subsequent ones where the issue was ignored, this year saw a lot of talk about, and at least a little movement toward, diversity in the leadership. This year the usual few hundred time-servers, appointees, and elected officials who routinely attend were joined by hundreds of observers, many with a message for the new leaders.

A seldom mentioned but crucial difference this year was the presence of significant numbers of rank and file workers who came to be heard. For the most part they were strikers and locked out workers who had come to demand support and action from the new leadership. They came in jeans, strike T-shirts, and union jackets to make their cases heard. Not only were they allowed to speak, in contrast to past practice, but when they did they set the hall on fire. As one observer put it, when Dan Lane, a locked-out worker from A.E. Staley on his 53rd day of a hunger strike, called for confrontation with Staley-customer Pepsi, "the suits stood on their chairs, waving clenched fists in the air, and shouting boycott Pepsi." To be sure, in saner moments deals were cut in appropriate smoke-filled rooms. But the blue collars had put the suits on the spot and brought the new leaders face-to-face with struggles reflecting the enormous transition that has thrown organized labor into crisis.

War Zones from Coast to Coast

AROUND THE MIDWEST TODAY THEY ARE CALLED AMERICA'S LABOR WARS. These are the strikes and struggles that have shattered the complaisance of many blue collar communities and begun to challenge a new production paradigm sometimes called "lean production." The class war label began in Illinois where activists in the prolonged struggles at A.E. Staley, Caterpillar, and Bridgestone/Firestone dubbed their state a War Zone. It burst onto T-shirts and leaflets in Detroit where hundreds of newspaper

KIM MOODY, *longtime labor activist, works for Labor Notes in Detroit.*

strikers and supporters from a dozen unions clashed with scabs and police week after week. But the concept applies as well to strikes by Teamsters at UPS and Ryder, UAW local unions at General Motors plants in Flint and Pontiac, Michigan, and at GM's quintessentially "lean" joint venture with Toyota, NUMMI, in Fremont, California. More recent conscripts from the coasts are those like the telephone workers at Bell Atlantic, where lean methods have invaded the "service" sector with a vengeance, and the Boeing workers, who have seen 48% of their work contracted out to low-wage shops the world around.

In all of these struggles the central issue is the same: work — its organization, its length, its intensity, and its future availability. For lean production brings with it not only work teams, quality programs, new technology, and just-in-time delivery; but downsizing, subcontracting, outsourcing, overwork, overtime, and overstressed workers. As workers are dumped, their jobs sent to low wage contractors, those who remain are expected to work a 57-second minute, 10 or 12 hour days, and a 50-plus hour week. At the other end of the new production chains, where the subcontracted and outsourced work ends up, are the millions of contract and temporary workers, runaway rural plants, new urban sweatshops, or overseas operations where low wages and few benefits are the rule.

The decade and a half since 1980 during which lean production took root and spread was accompanied by the first absolute decline in union membership since the end of World War II, mostly in the former bastions of integrated mass production. Private sector union density fell from about 25% in the 1970s to 10.9% in 1994. While there were many forces behind this drop, the downsizing and outsourcing that shaped the lean system were major contributors as work moved to non-union plants in the midwest, Sunbelt, or abroad. At first, it was hard to comprehend this process, which itself was often hit and miss. Various theorists saw it as "deindustrialization," "flexible specialization," or the rise of a new small-scale entrepreneurial class. Others called these trends the prelude to post-industrial society.

But as Bennett Harrison, a former deindustrialization theorist himself, has argued in *Lean and Mean*, what has emerged is a coherent system of industrial production in which giant multinational corporations dominate extended chains of suppliers and contractors through direct ownership, equity deals, joint ventures, and alliances of all sorts. In this system technology is a strong enabler, but not the primary shaper. The visible hand in this process is found in the same old corporate headquarters in the same old G-7 countries. The result, as Harrison puts it, is "decentralized activity with concentrated control over resources." While lean production was developed in manufacturing, its methods have spread to key service sectors like telecommunications, transportation, health care, retail trade, and the public sector.

This new system is partly an emulation of Japanese production methods forced on North American and European companies by intensified international competition. But the driving force behind the competition itself has been the quarter century old crisis of profitability that has increasingly pushed business abroad in search of better returns. The enormous intensification of work, the lengthening of the work day and week in much of industry, and the constant search for cost cutting, however, are responses to falling returns on investment in industries relatively isolated from global competition as well as those in its

midst. What is clear, is that the combination of prolonged systemic economic crisis with the transformation of integrated mass production has thrown the unions on the defensive and disoriented traditional collective bargaining relations.

The War Above

HAVING BATTERED DOZENS OF UNIONS FOR YEARS, the crisis of this historic transformation, or rather its results and symptoms, have now caught the attention of those at the very pinnacle of organized labor. The events that determined the timing of the palace rebellion led by John Sweeney of the Service Employees, Rich Trumka of the Mine workers, and Linda Chavez-Thompson of the State, County, and Municipal Employees were certainly those in the political realm, above all NAFTA. But it is the hemorrhaging of membership and loss of power that has created tensions within the consensus regime of the AFL-CIO. The Fortune 500 downsizing job massacre that began in 1990 and is still going on could not be ignored. It is this relentless decline in the private sector that has also given birth to the major panacea of recent years: general unionism through union mergers and random organizing outside the union's traditional jurisdiction.

General unionism, the practice of recruiting anyone with the money for dues regardless of industry or occupation, is by now the unspoken faith of almost all labor leaders in the U.S. Mergers, which until recently reflected the trend toward general unionism and away from industrial unionism, have been the other major defensive response to decline for some time. Only with the merger of the two garment unions into UNITE and the announced merger of the Auto Workers, Steelworkers, and Machinists into one big metal workers union, has this trend taken a shaky and bureaucratic turn toward an industrial union strategy appropriate to the era of lean production.

Mergers with unions in decline and ruthless competition with others for random workers, however, were not enough to stem the decline in the private sector. Indeed, the drift toward general unionism was one of the symbols of the lack of focus that characterized the decade and a half of Lane Kirkland's reign as AFL-CIO chief. Random organizing failed to address the loss of bargaining power even where it alleviated the problem of shrinking finances. Organized labor simply could not avoid the need to organize the millions in their own or related industries right down to the "contingent" workers. As much as labor leaders might blame the decline of the institutions that provide their elevated life style and prestige on poor labor laws or free trade, it had become evident, even at the top, that someone has to organize the millions who have come into the workforce in the last decade or so. This, in turn, required the recognition that a large proportion of these newer workers were women or people of color. And that meant change.

And so, the contest between Sweeney's "New Voice for American Workers" slate and the old guard slate of former AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Tom Donahue and Communications Workers' secretary-treasurer Barbara Easterling was characterized by a debate over who would throw the most money at organizing and who was more serious about race and gender diversity. Despite the presence of Easterling and Chavez-Thompson on their respective slates, the

question of diversity remained more a posture than a reality in the campaign up to the convention. As Leon Burris of the Postal Workers said on a New York radio labor talk show, the initial rebellion was "Eleven white guys plotting against another group of white guys." The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, which stayed neutral in the contest, put forward an 11-point program for increasing diversity, including a focus on organizing industries with high proportions of people of color.

At the convention, however, the question of diversity in leadership came up in two counterposed proposals for changes in the Executive Council. Sixteen unions in the Donahue-Easterling camp, led by Morty Bahr of the Communications Workers, proposed that the presidents of the federation's 78 affiliated unions compose the Executive Council. This would have precluded any kind of election and meant that all but a couple of the council members would be white males. The Sweeney forces proposed to expand the Executive Council from 33 to 51 and that it continue to be elected by the convention. This proposal passed and a compromise slate, in which former Donahue supporters actually have a slight majority, was elected that included seven women and six people of color — hardly a total transformation, but the most diverse leadership body the federation has ever seen.

There were also some real differences on other issues, at least in emphasis. Donahue puts faith in recruiting white collar professionals through associate membership, while Sweeney's emphasis is on organizing low-wage workers, including immigrants and people of color — a position more in line with the CBTU's approach. This is no small difference given the realities of the new workforce being created by lean production and expanding service industries. Furthermore, Sweeney's SEIU has a track record on this in its Justice for Janitors campaign and its attempts to organize nursing homes.

While the new labor-management cooperation programs associated with lean production were not an issue in the Sweeney-Donahue contest, not all unions or their leaders endorsed Donahue's pet project, the AFL-CIO Committee on the Evolution of Work. In its 1994 report, "The New American Workplace," the Committee put forth a sweeping endorsement of "a new labor-management partnership." While most unions have embraced some form of labor-management cooperation program, not everyone is prepared to hand a blanket endorsement of the new system to management. A few, like the Teamsters and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers remain hostile to such "partnerships." Thus, shortly after "The New American Workplace" appeared in February 1994, the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department published its own statement on the future of unions which reflected a more traditional and adversarial role for unions.

Then there is the crucial matter of AFL-CIO foreign policy and specifically the Department of International Affairs (DIA). The DIA's far flung vintage Cold War labor espionage operations are primarily funded by Congress through the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID. But it also draws a \$2 million annual headquarters budget and an undisclosed, but significant amount to cover the rest of its operations. Neither Sweeney nor Donahue so much as breathed the words "International Affairs," but it is known that many in the Sweeney camp want to cut it back and put the money elsewhere. Trumka, now the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, hinted at this during the campaign when he said, "the point is to make the AFL-CIO relevant again by converting it from a

creaking old Cold War clock into a sleek fighting machine."

Furthermore, Sweeney promises to put a third of the federation's budget into organizing and more into new political action and leadership training institutes by shifting funds around. Donahue, who was a prime mover in DIA affairs, argued during the campaign that any new organizing funds must come from additional sources. The implication being, hands off the DIA. In all likelihood, the Sweeney victory will mean at least some reining in of the DIA.

Any shrinking or changing of the DIA and its related overseas institutes foreshadows a decline in the influence of America's most peculiar political sect, the Social Democrats-USA. Since the 1960s, SD-USA members populated the DIA and other federation departments by virtue of appointments from George Meany and Kirkland. The best known union leader associated with SD-USA is Albert Shanker, president of the AFT. Donahue, like Kirkland, was also closely associated with the SD-USA crowd and married to one of its leaders. SD-USA's glue as a political current was always its Cold War, State Department anti-Communism, which brought it into alliance with Reaganites such as Jeane Kirkpatrick. Clearly, both the ideological and historical basis of this foreign policy cult have withered. More importantly, SD-USA's Cold War mind-set and slavish devotion to the narrowest version of American business unionism run counter to the need for genuine international labor solidarity in this era of globalization, as some top union leaders now realize.

The degree to which the DIA is reduced in stature and the SD-USA in influence, however, remains to be seen. There are rumors that a deal was made behind the scenes to leave the DIA in its current hands. The Clinton Administration, despite all, still beloved by labor leaders on both sides of the leadership contest, has some use for a trade union evangelist for its aggressive international commercial policy. The AFL-CIO's Cold War overseas institutes could fill the bill with their emphasis of U.S.-style business unionism. Clinton's appointment of deposed AFL-CIO head Lane Kirkland as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations was certainly a message to the new leaders that he had confidence in the foreign policy of the ancien regime. The fact that a slight majority of the new Executive Council have been associated with the Kirkland-Donahue regime may also spell continued influence by the Shanker-led Cold Warriors turned global traveling salesmen. In addition, any drastic reorganization of the federation's headquarters structure was vetoed by the Building Trades Department, which threatened to pull its members out of AFL-CIO state and local bodies, reducing their dues base and political clout. In all likelihood, the struggle over the federation's international relations will be a prolonged one.

This year's leadership clash, after all, was a contest of seasoned bureaucrats who made precious few waves in the years that Lane Kirkland led the federation downhill. Donahue went right from college to union staff jobs — his longest in Sweeney's home local SEIU 32B/32J. Sweeney worked as a grave digger in New York before becoming a local officer, but since becoming president of the SEIU in 1980 made up for lost time by continuing to draw his 32B/32J salary along with his hefty presidential salary of \$210,000. Last year he reduced his 32B/32J salary from \$79,000 to \$10,000, perhaps in anticipation of his role as rebel. Now he will drop it. He continues, however, to support 32B/32J president Gus Bevona, a slimy character who received similar double salaries and who has recently been found spying on union reformers in his local. Barbara

Easterling, Donahue's diversity partner, is one of the few women labor leaders who doesn't advocate reproductive choice. And so go the rather shabby records of old guard and rebels alike.

Although they debated on TV, distributed buttons and stickers, and outdid one another in appearances at the rallies that punctuate America's labor wars, they were campaigning union members with no votes. A few dozen international union officers cast most of the votes at the AFL-CIO convention. Indeed, once the Sweeney forces had lined up 58-60% of those votes over the summer, the election itself was a ritual. The "New Voice for American Workers," which finally won by 60%, will nonetheless now have its say.

The War Within

THE GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE U.S. will not come simply from new leadership in the AFL-CIO's Washington, DC headquarters. But the rebellion at the top may itself encourage increased motion below. The spirit of rebellion, already abroad in many unions, is contagious. Sweeney himself already faces brushfires of opposition in the SEIU. Service Employees for Democratic Reform, a caucus of local officials and activists based mainly in the West, calls for a democratized SEIU and pushes for direct election of top officials — something Sweeney vigorously opposes. Even more symbolic of the future is the rebellion in SEIU Local 399 in Los Angeles, birthplace of the most successful Justice for Janitors campaign. Here a unique alliance of rank and file African American health care workers and Latino janitors formed the Multicultural Slate in the union's 1995 elections. The slate won every position it challenged. When the new executive board tried to rein in the power of the incumbent president, who they didn't challenge, Sweeney imposed a trusteeship. Indeed, Sweeney recently summed up his views on democracy when he told the *Wall Street Journal*, "I'm very interested in union democracy and rank-and-file involvement, but it can't be accomplished overnight." At least not if he gets his way, it would seem.

Despite Sweeney's views, the war within has been legitimatized by his own rebellion at the top. An even more powerful advertisement for change is the graphic example of the benefits of real union reform to be seen in the successful administration of Ron Carey, who swept the Teamsters' corrupt old guard from office in 1991. Carey's reform regime, with heavy participation from the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, has been responsible for a string of successful strikes at a time when these are still the exception in the labor wars. His high profile fight against old guard cipher James Hoffa, Jr. will broadcast throughout the labor movement the difference change can make.

Nowhere might the reverberations of Carey's example be felt more strongly than in the merger process opened by the Auto Workers, Steelworkers, and Machinists this June. While the three old bureaucratic machines will weigh heavily on this process, they must write a new constitution all can live with. According to Steelworkers president George Becker, the new union will have direct vote on top officers, as the Steelworkers and Machinists do now. While this is no guarantee of democracy in itself, it is a wide opening of the door for those forces prepared to fight for change, notably the UAW New Directions Movement and some smaller groupings in the Machinists. At its October con-

ference in Detroit, New Directions voted to organize meetings of activists from the three unions to discuss the merger process.

Perhaps most important, the merger and the likely direct vote spell an end to the near monopoly of power the UAW's Administration Caucus has wielded for nearly half a century. Perhaps it was this realization that led new UAW president Steve Yokich to tell a gathering of 200 appointed officials recently that the UAW was a two-party system in which respect for dissent would be observed — a distinct shift in official attitude toward New Directions. Whether sincere or not, it seems clear that the type of headquarters-to-workplace machine the Administration Caucus constituted cannot be extended to the new merged union.

Furthermore, deprived of the convention delegate system of electing top officers, it loses its power to intimidate the "voters" on the spot as it did at UAW conventions. While the Machinists and Steelworkers have powerful top-down structures that reinforce their respective leaderships (including the ability to nullify local union elections in the Machinists), neither possesses an organized political vehicle for perpetual rule as comprehensive and deeply rooted as the UAW's Administration Caucus. With the direct vote on officers, the mandatory retirement of Yokich by merger completion in 2000, and a lot of organizing in the next few years, the reform forces in the new union could mount a credible challenge just as Carey did in the Teamsters.

In general, the leadership change at the AFL-CIO reflects a broader leadership transition that is partly generational and partly political. Changes at the top have been common in the last several years throughout organized labor. Most of these were not accomplished by organized reform movements even when there was a contest. But most did involve the moving up of leaders whose experience is rooted in an era of crisis and industrial transformation, rather than in the period of growth and relative prosperity during which the Kirkland generation came to office. While this certainly doesn't guarantee a progressive or left outlook, there is more of a sense that the same old methods won't work. Trumka is in many ways representative of this generation of leaders and frequently makes this point himself. There are others, such as Bob Wages of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers and Ron Carey of the Teamsters who are more consistently progressive and militant. Probably more who are less consistent than Trumka, such as Yokich of the Auto Workers. Behind this generational layer is another now taking office in countless local unions whose life experience is even more affected by a sense of economic and social crisis. Some, like the New Directions caucus in Transit Workers Union Local 100 in New York's transit system, are both racially diverse and politically to the left.

The contest at the top is in many ways a reflection of this broader transition and of the disgruntled rank and file that is pushing the process along in more and more unions. With the lash of lean production and the more general decline in working class living standards forcing more people to take action, even when it is likely to end in one or another degree of defeat, the engine of political change within organized labor is likely to continue and even gain momentum in the next several years. The importance of the change at the AFL-CIO is not to be found in the personalities who now run the show, so much as in the overall process that propelled them to action — a process that will continue driving them toward some approximation of their stated commitment to orga-

nize the unorganized. This alone would change the balance of forces in the U.S. for the better and open still greater political possibilities.

Mean Jobs, Angry Workers

ASIDE FROM ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED, THE BIGGEST QUESTION that confronts organized labor is how it will respond to the continued transformation associated with the spread of lean production throughout the U.S. economy. Though this new production paradigm has a number of consistent characteristics, it is no more identical from country to country, company to company, or plant to plant than the "Fordist" version of mass production it modifies and replaces. Lean production will certainly retain the modified just-in-time inventory system of parts delivery, the reconfigured assembly lines, the high levels of technology, the extensive outsourcing and subcontracting, the hierarchical relationships between assemblers and suppliers, and the constant attempt to reduce labor input and job cycle time to the absolute minimum. But there is nothing inevitable about the specifics of worktime, production speed, degree of outsourcing, or the new 10-hour day "alternative work schedules" and flexibility schemes favored by management in more and more industries. Where there are unions all of these questions are open to negotiation and challenge, as the recent strikes and conflict at GM show.

In fact, the limits of this system are already becoming apparent in Japan itself where modifications in just-in-time set-ups, the use of teams, the use of the andon board that allows workers to stop the line, levels of automation, and production configurations are increasingly introduced to become more "competitive" and to deal with profitability problems. Equally clear is the diversity of practices in newer lean plants across the U.S. and Europe. Even the teams and other structures of labor-management cooperation that give this system its appearance of employee participation or empowerment are expendable.

As Dave Robertson of the Canadian Auto Workers told a gathering of European auto workers in 1994:

Management can get to lean without collaborative appeals. It doesn't need teams. It doesn't even need continuous improvement groups. It can get to lean by changing production methods, process flows and the design of our jobs.

The reason for this, of course, is that the basic contours of the system, including such stressful aspects of work intensification as the "advance" from the 45-to 57-second work minute, and how to achieve them, are now clear. This is, no doubt, the heritage of two decades of experimentation in leaner methods, in which worker input was important. For this reason the structures of cooperation, the teams, etc., may well continue in industries or workplaces where lean methods are newer and the individual and collective knowledge of the workers is still needed or where the unions still needs to be tamed, but be phased-out where these tasks have already been accomplished. The new management tool of "benchmarking" the world's best practice and then applying to their own production set-up provides management with an allegedly objective standard for intensifying work. While teams might be the ideological conveyor belt for obtaining consent on a new best practice, they are clearly not needed to brainstorm or measure it.

While the system in its broad outlines is certainly the winning global paradigm, there remains a vast terrain of "detail" in production organization, standards, speed, work loads, etc. to be contested. As the incredibly sloppy measurements employed in the much-heralded hymn to lean production, *The Machine That Changed the World*, shows, the very notion of the system's efficiency is itself hard to pin down in a scientific way. Most of the work measurement techniques in lean production are those inherited from Taylorism. In effect, all the traditional issues of workplace conflict remain central to unionism under the new system once it becomes de-mystified in the eyes of the workers.

Moreover, due to the pressure of lean methods for constant productivity increases; the speed, intensity, length, and safety of work become ever more pressing issues. In auto assembly plants, where lean methods are most advanced in the U.S., injury and illness rates are running four to five times higher in the 1990s than they were in the 1980s. Exposure levels of toxic substances originally measured by OSHA on the basis of the eight-hour day become irrelevant as workers are exposed for ten or twelve hours. Questions of working time, staffing of work stations, line speed, outsourcing, subcontracting, and work schedules are at the root of most of the major strikes and struggles of the last few years.

The three War Zone struggles in Illinois at A.E. Staley, Caterpillar, and Bridgestone/Firestone all broke out at companies with elaborate labor-management cooperation or employee participation programs. The main issues in each were lengthened workdays and weeks (10 to 12-hour day schedules), workforce reductions coupled with increased output, and drastic deterioration of health and safety conditions. The Detroit newspaper strike was also about future reductions in staffing and flexibility in worktime, while the Teamster strikes fought various forms of subcontracting, part-timing, and work intensification. The 1995 strike by the Machinists at Boeing is over subcontracting. Dozens of smaller strikes around the U.S., often too small to make the official statistics, reveal a similar pattern of resistance to many of the contested aspects of lean methods as applied to different industries. Almost all of these struggles were defensive in character.

The 1994 strike of UAW Local 599 at GM's Buick City complex in Flint, Michigan was significant as the first offensive strike against the excesses of lean methods: understaffing, intensification of work, excessive overtime, etc. The union's central demand was simple: hire more workers to relieve overwork. This amounted to "de-leaning" many parts of the plant. Local 599 prepared its members by months of education on the issues and the "false promise of partnership," as local president Dave Yettaw put it, and by accumulating hundreds of grievances over which the UAW contract allowed a strike. The local won its central goal of more workers, 779 in all, by turning the lean system's just-in-time supplier chain on its head. Since Buick City was both a supplier and receiver of parts within the GM system, a strike was certain to close down several other plants in short order, with more going down each day of the strike. And so it was, with GM plants around the midwest closing down one after another, they won after four days.

As the workers in different industries learn the weak points of the new system as well as what is negotiable and what can be changed, they will learn how to fight it more effectively, as the members of Local 599 did. Just as it took

years and even decades to develop the confidence to unionize and take on mass production and the corporate giants who shaped it, so it will take some time to invent a unionism appropriate to lean production that is not simply a surrender to it.

As they learn this lesson, workers are also learning that the new system is closely related to the social crisis they observe across the U.S. One hears at all the picket lines and rallies that it is the downsizing, the lengthening of the work day and week, the intensification of work that is killing high wage jobs, on the one hand, and all the outsourcing, subcontracting, part-timing that is creating low-wage jobs on the other. Increasingly, workers in the blue collar communities affected by these trends see them as part of the larger social crisis. The belief that corporations are attacking these communities and, indeed, future generations of working class people is now widely held in blue collar America.

Even much of what is seen as service sector growth is in reality a shift of jobs from the goods-producing to the service-producing columns via massive contracting of functions formerly performed in-house by industry. For example, at Boeing, where 32,000 workers went on strike in October against subcontracting, 48% of the work is performed by outside contractors, at home and abroad, whose workers will not show-up in the "manufacturing" category of official labor statistics. The largest creator of new jobs over the last five years were temporary labor agencies who now supply workers to factories and construction sites as well as offices.

The other side of the coin is that when workers resist this new system, they are fighting the social crisis as well. As Jerry Tucker put it at the New Directions conference, "when we demand shorter work time, staffing increases, a human pace of work, and livable pensions, we are also helping to create decent jobs." Another person pointed out that GM workers put in enough overtime in 1994 to create 88,000 auto jobs. Shave the overtime and shorten the basic work week across industry and you create jobs in even greater numbers. It is in this kind of thinking that the ideas of a new social movement unionism are being born.

The Links of a New Social Unionism

AMONG THE ACTIVISTS IN LABOR TODAY, the links between resistance to new lean norms, the new militancy, union reform or transition at the top and within individual unions, and a new organizing and political agenda for labor are often quite direct. The strategy-wise leaders of UAW Local 599, for example, are New Directions leaders and members of Labor Party Advocates (LPA). In Decatur, the president of the UAW local at Caterpillar is New Directions. Along with the Staley and Bridgestone/Firestone local unions they put together an independent "friends of labor" slate in the last city elections, though they didn't win. Many are LPA members. The connection with the new Teamsters leaders and Teamsters for a Democratic Union is well known. Many of them are LPA as well. A successful rank and file rebellion in the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees is the reason that union is one of the four international unions endorsing LPA. Virtually all of these activists and leaders supported the Sweeney forces, despite the criticisms and doubts they might have had.

Of course, it is not some neat progression of militancy, reform from below,

change at the top that we are seeing. Things are out of order, partial, tendential at best, and reversals are possible. But there is a sort of core politics of a new unionism taking shape within the unions that is not unlike the left-leaning social unionism of the 1930s and 1940s. Workplace militancy, union democracy, a sense of social responsibility, and independent class politics figure in this emerging consciousness. It is coupled with an increasing rage over what is happening to the "American dream," as many still call it. This is not just the "angry white male" syndrome we read about, although it overlaps it with all the dangers that implies. It is a rage shared by working class women and people of color denied decent jobs after decades of affirmative action, by immigrants whose dreams are shattered in sweatshops and servile jobs, and by all the low-wage workers locked into the bottom of a highly competitive labor market with no hope of crawling up the occupational ladder, as well as by those blue collar workers currently fighting under the banner of the dream.

Can the new leaders of the AFL-CIO organize and direct this rage in a progressive direction? On their own, almost certainly not. They do not have the ideological equipment. As Jerry Tucker of UAW New Directions points out, their proposals for various institutes lack any ideological glue to give them coherence. Specifically, they talk confrontation out of one side of their mouths and "partnership" out of the other. In a similar vein, they talk of a new political effectiveness, while embracing the Clinton Administration and the decaying Democratic Party. Furthermore, with few exceptions, they are not risk takers. They are administrators and negotiators for the most part, not generals preparing for war.

It just might be, however, that they have opened a process they cannot control. They have raised expectations, for one thing. They have blessed confrontational struggles, for another. They have legitimized internal union debate and opposition. They have taken small steps toward recognizing the diverse reality of the American working class. Perhaps most important, they have committed money, personnel, and their reputations to do a serious job of organizing. This in itself might be enough to propel the process beyond their promises or wishes, and to begin to turn the tide of battle in America's labor wars.

Gompers and Globalism: Memories of Business Unionism

Paul Buhle

A PUFF PIECE IN THE WASHINGTON POST A DECADE AGO noted with fond fascination that Irena Kirkland, second wife of Lane Kirkland, just happened to be best friends with Nancy Kissinger, Henry's wife, and that all four were regulars — no doubt with the friendly military lobbyists and neo-con movers and shakers — at famously posh post-Yom Kippur bashes at William Safire's mansion. Henry, perhaps best remembered, at least until his war crimes, as the 1950s Harvard graduate student (and special protégé of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.) who opened his fellow students mail and sent the contents to the FBI, in turn placed Lane on the "controversial Kissinger Commission on Central America," as the reporter demurely put it.* There, he lined up with the hawks, as he had on Vietnam with future Kirkland-loyalist Al Shanker and with their corporate executive American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) companions who had helped arrange the overthrow of a certain elected government in Chile which had dared to tamper with Kennicott Copper interests.

Ordinary AFL-CIO members had never been consulted. Unless, as happened now and again, they happened to pass a resolution condemning some U.S. action abroad, or asserting local freedom of action on some international issue. Then they heard plenty, usually by way of an intimidating visit from a national chief, with the standard message to local chiefs: want help (or no trouble) in the future? Keep the lid on.

In short: business as usual. This is the way it has gone for so long that unionists, and even sometimes historians, have forgotten where it all began, and that it could ever have been different. But the recent overthrow of the most morally corrupt leadership in American labor history has potentially illuminated the centrality of foreign policy to 20th century American labor. It has also potentially illuminated the centrality of deception and manipulation to the ways in which labor's internationalism has been guided by those at the center of the picture. By giving us the inside picture of Samuel Gompers at work on key foreign policy op-

*Kathy Sawyer, "Lane Kirkland: Made in America," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1984.

PAUL BUHLE's collection of his labor history essays, *From the Knights of Labor to the New World Order*, will be published in the Spring of 1996 by Garland Publishers.

ponents, Elizabeth McKillen's work offers invaluable help to the future democratization of American labor.**

The precedents for Gompers' sweeping moves of the later 1910s and 1920s had been few, and none of them certain. Foreign policy had been beyond the scope of most union movements until the 1890s, except those occasional craft movements which pressed for tariffs to protect their manufactures, or far less benignly, pressed for restrictions on immigration from Asia, in particular. During the 1890s, as the AFL consolidated itself along increasingly conservative lines and the U.S. embarked upon the conquest of a world market and island empire, a response became inevitable.

Emerging labor autocrat and noted racist, Samuel Gompers had sometimes argued against U.S. non-continental colonization because it would inevitably bring too many non-whites into the labor market. Outside his ruling offices, division reigned. *The Jewish Daily Forward* used the Spanish-American War as a moment to embrace American patriotism as well as pay back the Spaniards for the Inquisition five centuries earlier. The standard adopted by the *Forward*, that those who somehow survived invasion and scorched earth warfare would surely be uplifted by the U.S. military and economic presence, might indeed be called an instinctive or primordial neo-liberalism. Many other unionists, including most socialists and several important unions at large, cursed empire-building. Had Gompers taken it as a moment for consolidating cooperation with the federal government, AFL leaders would still have lacked the mechanisms to even attempt to compel acquiescence among their ranks.

THINGS CHANGED LITTLE UNTIL THE DAWN OF WORLD WAR I. Socialist internationalism had a weak center (the Europeans who would cave in when the guns started firing), but their brave words encouraged a pacifism native to working-class life in the U.S. as elsewhere. They were, however, very slow at best to act upon European outrages in the colonized world, which should have been a tip-off.

Nevertheless, American visions of labor pacifism or non-interventionism possessed strengths that we can only imagine today. Jewish working-class opinion, for instance, was overwhelmingly against military involvement as bringing only suffering in Eastern Europe, a history of being forced to fight for one ruler against another. German-Americans were not likely to favor the Kaiser, but could see no sense in any kind of war. Irish-Americans, to take yet another case in point, popularly regarded potential European warfare as an opportunity for American rulers to join hands with the English oppressors of the toilers in the *ould sod*. These groups, along with a variety of Slavs and Yankees, happened to be the center of American labor.

McKillen's chosen subject is the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL). Disproportionately Irish and led by the mercurial John Fitzpatrick, the CFL was a combination of craft privilege and social idealism. Progressive to outright socialist, the circle around Fitzpatrick fought for unionization of their city and simultaneously fought against the national centralization of unions which Gompers craved as a means to expand his influence and clamp down on dissent

**Elizabeth McKillen, *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy, 1914-1924*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 239pp, \$30.

in advance. The 1916 Easter Rebellion in Dublin, with the martyr's death of syndicalist James Connolly (who had, for some years, lived and worked in the U.S.), roused the CFL and prompted it to the awareness that nationalist rebellions against imperialism were a part of the world class struggle and not a mere sidelight.

Thus Woodrow Wilson's Preparedness Campaigns of 1915-17 sent up a red flag of warning. "We feel and believe," read a typical CFL resolution in response, "that wars are unnecessary and caused by the exploiters of labor for the express purpose of advancing the portion of large capitalists ... and ... call upon the working people of America who must do the fighting if war occurs to register their emphatic protest... ." Union locals protesting the Contra Wars or the Gulf adventure couldn't have put it better.

As U.S. entry into war neared, the CFL wanted a congress of labor groups to vote on workers' positions, the last thing that Gompers (or any subsequent top American labor leader) would have permitted. Local activists formed Labor's National Peace Council, enrolling more than a million members before indictments were handed down on charges of conspiracy to prevent the shipment of munitions to Allies. Bit by bit, Woodrow Wilson was showing the mailed fist, and Gompers his eagerness to see it used. The CFL, like a large section of the Socialist party, struggled bravely on, with massive peace propaganda, anti-preparedness parades, and attacks on the sensationalist press which yearned for war. The scheming Gompers, meanwhile, invited the president to attend the 1917 AFL convention and appeal to union leaders personally.

Gompers saw two great goals he could accomplish in short order. He could at least neutralize traditional government hostility toward unionization and perhaps reverse it for the interim, on the basis that AFL unions would be good supporters of the war. And he could put away his radical opponents, most especially the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), once and for all. With the help of the Justice Department, local red squads and various vigilantes, he accomplished the second goal. The first was, as we shall see, very much a house of sand.

He had already, as McKillen points out, quietly laid out plans for a business union internationalism. Endorsing the "ward" status of U.S. rule in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, he insisted only upon the rights to create AFL-style unions in such places as the U.S. conquered. His irrational rationale sounds remarkably like that blur of rhetoric from the AFL-CIO's International Department under Kirkland: colonial status would give workers the high wages to buy American products; and simultaneously make products manufactured in these places sufficiently expensive that American capitalists would become uninterested in exporting jobs there. Gompers, like Wilson, dreamed further of what William A. Williams would call the Open Door, imperialist control of the Americas at large. Unions would spring up unsponsored from Canada to Chile, guided by the U.S. example and, of course, by the cash and influence of Americans like Gompers himself. That, he argued, would discourage the spread of socialism, anarchism, aggressive nationalism and other popular beliefs that might inhibit U.S. interests.

Much as it did for the intellectuals like Walter Lippmann and John Dewey around *The New Republic*, World War I offered a short cut to a national government of bureaucratic partners, in which labor leadership would be offered a

large and permanent role in the public order. Wilson had foreseen this possibility from his first day in office, creating a Labor Department and a Commission on Industrial Relations, thus instituting the model for business and labor leaders exploring their common interests, focusing on economic growth and forestalling such threats as the radical redivision of wealth.

GOMPERS' OWN ENTHUSIASM FOR PREPAREDNESS PAID OFF QUICKLY when he gained a position on the Civilian Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense. An AFL convention shortly afterward endorsed the official resolutions, and historians have often mused about how the outspoken resistance of so many labor leaders to a blank check for government policies had disappeared so quickly. To be brief, Gompers smeared opponents as agents of German sabotage, denied them any positions on convention committees (which he personally appointed), and strong-armed others with the combination of threats and bribes that have become common to labor officialdom's foreign policy tactics ever since. Some of the most important erstwhile war opponents, such as Sidney Hillman, abstained because they saw in the opening of war markets a union valhalla. Others simply chose to stand pat rather than threaten their good standing with Gompers and Wilson.

Wilson himself moved to create enough subcommittees to include a large handful of labor leaders in respectable positions — just as Franklin Roosevelt would create “labor statesmen” during World War II. By agreeing to approve the labor side of military-related projects, Gompers temporarily gained enormous power. In turn, the National War Labor Board, formed in 1918, mediated between business executives and unions to avoid strikes—not quite what had been promised.

Gompers had quite a hand in quelling the genuinely international labor initiatives for an early peace, urged especially by British labor leaders facing rebellious workers. As the AFL president memorably put it, “one had to be an effective nationalist before one could be an effective internationalist,” so that such labor calls for early peace must have been inspired by the Germans rather than arising from ordinary Americans. The Europeans socialists, by this time, wanted as McKillen says to “make labor an international force in its own right.” Gompers wanted only labor participation with business and government leaders in decision-making councils. Indeed, by siding with British political leaders against the British unions, Gompers managed to derail any real labor internationalism, which was just what he wanted to do. When a labor peace conference finally commenced in January, 1919, it was too little and too late for decisive action.

Local unionists in Chicago, as local unionists in so many places during the Vietnam War and the various wars to follow, learned that their protests had no practical effect within national union headquarters except to bring down the heat upon themselves. The CFL continued gamely, charging rightly that Wilson and Gompers had become mere agents of business interests, heedless of the untold personal costs of war; and that their high-handed maneuvering violated any sense of union democracy. Gompers responded by organizing the ostensibly private and volunteer American Alliance for Labor and Democracy (AALD), funded quietly by the Committee on Public Information, just as later ostensibly private organizations would be funded by the CIA, and with the same type of

erstwhile socialists proclaiming their independence while lining up quietly for favors. Yesterday's Sidney Hooks or David Horowitzes, the former syndicalist William English Walling and former socialist propagandist John Spargo among others, could never have converted the Socialist party at large. But they quietly endorsed, or at least did not protest, the suppression of the Socialist party and the IWW, just as their successors would faithfully endorse McCarthyism at home, U.S. military adventures and CIA actions abroad.

THE SHARP WARTIME RISE IN UNIONIZATION, often claimed as a benefit for labor's patriotism, was due far more to the tightness of the labor market (with heightened production and the disappearance of immigration) and to the aggressive unionizing tactics of the CFL and its counterparts around the nation. The National Labor Board, which briefly seemed to favor union organization, rapidly turned toward "arbitration" which dumped labor whenever convenient.

Meanwhile, the CFL had brought to the floor of an AFL convention a resolution on Irish independence, and Gompers' henchmen prevented a vote. When the CFL demanded that labor delegates to peace commissions be democratically elected instead of hand-picked by Gompers, the AFL leader sent out an AALD "truth squad" (as they would be called in the Vietnam War days, and again in the Contra War days) to "investigate" elements of "Bolshevism" and "Feinianism" in Chicago. Meanwhile, he carved out a place for himself on the Commission on International Labour Legislation, creating the International Labor Organization (ILO) under the League of Nations. Gompers turned around to oppose any effort by ILO officials to make international law, however; the nation-state, his nation-state in particular, would never tolerate this kind of internationalism. His hopes that diplomats would support his own attempts to create an international labor bill of rights fell on deaf ears.

With the war's end, businessmen didn't need labor's avid cooperation any more, anyway. At Woodrow Wilson's Industrial Conference of 1919, union leaders learned that the sacred right to collective bargaining had in no way become accepted. Walking out in rage, leftish bureaucrats believed Gompers would now come to his senses. As they should have expected, Gompers instead seized the opportunity to explain that the "responsible elements" were now completely in charge of labor, voicing total support for the notoriously colonialist and winner-takes-all Paris Peace Treaty. Predictably, Wilson soon quietly dissolved the war boards, leaving labor hanging. Still, Gompers mobilized to beg for crumbs (or payoffs), organizing the laughably titled AFL Nonpartisan Political Campaign to support Wilsonian Democrats. After the overwhelming Republican victories of 1920, Gompers complained only that the groundswell for a Labor Party had not been effectively squashed.

As the AFL melted away domestically, Gompers pressed his international initiatives. The Pan American Federation of Labor (PAFL), established to liquidate pacifist tendencies in Central America, was rapidly converted into a business union for all Latin America. (Its organization, Gompers noted without irony, was premised on the Monroe Doctrine.) Conservative unionists were invited north, wine, dined, and presumably paid off, just as in later generations. Revolutions or would-be revolutions in Russia, Mexico, Ireland were meanwhile bitterly opposed except where they could be controlled. "Labor's diplomatic power," as McKillen says, "depended on proving to the American government and to key

business allies that the trade union movement was a valuable ally.” But it could be a valuable ally only in a “stable” world, “stability” being something very much like business-as-usual. Even if nationalist revolutions had jumped through every other hoop, protection of American business interests would define the accepted limits of political change.

The rest of McKillen's book, dealing with the attempted formation of a Labor Party for the 1924 election, is on more familiar ground.*** She reprises the rise of labor parties locally, Gompers' predictable repression of the impulse even against the rightward turn of national politics, and the heroic struggle of the weekly *New Majority* (organ of the CFL) to enunciate an anti-Gompers politics at large. Going after imperialism in all its forms, the New Majority and the third party proto-formations guaranteed themselves a vicious response from the press and the AFL higher-ups. Like the Socialist party before it split wide open in 1919, CFL initiatives nevertheless reaped the benefits of widespread disillusionment with the World War during the early 1920s. But without labor's help, the wide political support needed for a substantial third party never materialized outside the fringe of northern midwest and plains states.

Communist maneuvering amidst flagrant interference from Moscow finished off the last hopes of a real labor party for 1924 — and probably, for a very long time to come. Progressive Party candidate Robert (“Fighting Bob”) LaFollette, staunch anti-Communist, offered labor all that it might presumably want that year, if the AFL meant to protest the business mentality of Republicans and Democrats alike. But LaFollette had opposed World War I from the Senate, leaving behind his middle class Wisconsin constituency for a grassroots following of workers and farmers. He was not at all the sort of person that Gompers could trust (or control).

After the election the AFL leaders, having sabotaged the LaFollette campaign by backing off quietly from it, renounced third party politics generally. By that time, the PAFL's business-unionism-in-one-hemisphere was all that Gompers had to brag about, an opportunity to travel abroad, denounce radicals, and praise the “constructive” business unionism that he had forced upon all those within his reach. On a train ride back from Mexico City, he died in his sleep.

If Gompers had known that his style of labor politics from the top down would one day bring the AFL (or rather, its descendent AFL-CIO) to the verge of ruin, might he have ruled labor differently? Not likely. He had chosen self-importance, his acceptance by business and government leaders, over labor democracy in every instance. Perhaps he really believed that business and the politicians would repay labor at large for his personal loyalty. More likely, as an advanced model for Hubert Humphrey and the Cold War liberal as well as the hawkish labor leader, he so believed in his own “democratic” rhetoric and in his capacity to manipulate institutions and individuals, that he brushed aside all the uncomfortable consequences for others. By the time of his death, he was, at any rate, already the caricature of labor leadership that George Meany and Lane Kirkland would become: the overweight, mean-tempered bully who stares into the mirror from tiny pig-like eyes and, most amazingly, sees a Greek god looking back, smiling the golden smile of a champion of life.

***See the latter chapters of James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1924* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), for the standard account.

A Portrait of Walter Reuther: Idealist and Union Pragmatist

Jim McNeill

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AND WITH VERY LITTLE FANFARE, John Sweeney joined the Democratic Socialists of America. Sweeney mailed his membership donation to DSA while in the midst of his insurgent campaign for the AFL-CIO presidency. Perhaps Sweeney, like thousands of other guilty liberals, was simply responding to one of the group's aggressive direct-mail efforts. Or perhaps he was trying to prove his progressive bonafides to some official on labor's left flank.

Whatever the reason, Sweeney's move reveals something remarkable about the U.S. labor movement: in what other major American institution would a candidate seeking top office risk being designated a "socialist?" Today's DSA may be a pale remnant of the party that Eugene Debs led from behind prison bars, and John Sweeney's labor federation may bear little resemblance to John L. Lewis' CIO, but both organizations still stand for something that — in theory, anyway — poses a challenge to the established order.

Sweeney, of course, is far more cautious than the fretful business press fears. But his election reopens possibilities for labor that were closed during the catatonic Kirkland years. One finally gets the sense now that the AFL-CIO is serious about reversing its decline, and that high-level officials in the federation may be ready to reinvent the American labor movement. One can only hope that at this critical juncture, someone slips Sweeney a copy of Nelson Lichtenstein's invaluable new book.* For in this biography of Walter Reuther, the late UAW president, Lichtenstein shows how even the most inspirational labor leader of the 20th century — despite his political acumen, penetrating social vision and technocratic genius — was unable to decisively check the power of American capital. If Sweeney hopes to succeed where Reuther failed, he sorely needs to learn the deep historical lessons of *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*.

Until now, Lichtenstein, a historian at the University of Virginia and a sponsor of *New Politics*, was best known for his 1982 book *The War at Home: The CIO in World War II*, the definitive history of labor's struggle to maintain its standing in American society during the war. But now, in focusing on Reuther, Lichtenstein has found a dramatis persona that allows him to track American labor from the momentous CIO organizing drives of the '30s all the way to the drab business unionism of the '60s. Lichtenstein derives his curious title from a 1945 statement by George Romney of the Automobile Manufacturers' Association. "Walter Reuther is the most dangerous man in Detroit," said Romney of

*Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor*, Basic Books, 1995, 575 pp., \$35

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the then-rising UAW official, “because no one is more skillful in bringing about the revolution without seeming to disturb the existing forms of society.” For New Left radicals, who knew Reuther as a defender of Lyndon Johnson’s Vietnam policies, Romney’s quote may seem absurd. And Lichtenstein admits that Reuther — along with the labor movement he helped lead — had, by the ’60s, largely abandoned the socialist vision of his youth. But in chronicling the great labor leader’s life, Lichtenstein shows that right up until Reuther’s untimely death in 1970 Romney’s charge would retain a ring of truth.

THE SECOND SON OF A DEBSIAN SOCIALIST, Walter Philip Reuther was born in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1907. Reuther quit high school at fifteen to train as a tool and diemaker, and at 19 he left Wheeling for Detroit, lured there by the high wages being paid to skilled workers in the booming auto industry. In his brief description of Reuther’s upbringing, Lichtenstein covers roughly the same terrain as *The Brothers’ Reuther*, the inspiring, if somewhat sanitized, 1975 memoir by Walter’s youngest brother, Victor. But beginning with Reuther’s arrival in Detroit, Lichtenstein’s biography provides a consistently fresh perspective on Reuther’s life.

Soon after arriving in Detroit, Reuther found work at the Ford Motor Company, eventually moving to the company’s massive River Rouge complex. As Lichtenstein notes, Reuther was hardly a militant unionist when he began at Ford. Rather he was an ambitious youth bent on self-improvement, enrolling in after-work classes at nearby Fordson High. Reuther even joined the anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic Masons when a supervisor in the Rouge explained, as Lichtenstein writes, that “[m]embership in the order was a virtual prerequisite for promotion, and sometimes was enough to keep one’s job during layoff.” Due probably in large part to his Masonic ties, Reuther retained his job at the Rouge during the darkest days of the Great Depression. Soon, however, the misery he witnessed around him — and the radical education he received during classes at Detroit City College — rekindled the Debsian faith of his childhood and transformed the professionally ambitious toolmaker into an idealistic member of the Socialist Party (SP). In 1933, Walter, along with his brother Victor, left Detroit for the Soviet Union, where they would spend two years working in an auto plant at Gorky.

This dramatic encounter with Soviet-style socialism — and Reuther’s close association with Communists upon his return to the U.S. in 1935 — is almost certainly the most difficult and delicate subject confronting any Reuther biographer. During his tortuous rise to the UAW presidency, a fierce debate raged over the extent and duration of Reuther’s Communist sympathies. UAW left-wingers who considered him an ally in 1936 would condemn him as an opportunist after he adopted an increasingly fierce anti-Communism in the late ’30s. And right-wingers outside the union also remained wary of Reuther; they insisted that his anti-Communism was a convenient pose used to further his personal ambitions. Reuther himself was notoriously equivocal when queried about his political past. Consequently, a key test of any Reuther biography is how skillfully the author unravels this complex dispute. Lichtenstein handles it masterfully: instead of determining the moral correctness of Reuther’s accusers and defenders, he painstakingly reconstructs the history behind the debate.

Lichtenstein respectfully rebukes Reuther’s claim that his two years in

Russia had left him alienated from the Soviet system. In fact, as Lichtenstein assiduously documents, Reuther returned from Gorky an enthusiastic supporter of the Soviet Union. Though Reuther remained a loyal SPer, Lichtenstein suggests, on the basis of compelling evidence, that he briefly paid dues to the CP in the fall of 1935. In February 1936, union militants — CP members among them — invited Reuther to join the upstart UAW local at GM's Ternstedt plant in Detroit. Lichtenstein is careful to note, however, that for union organizers such alliances with Communists were common at this stage in the UAW's formation. "Although the SP had not been inactive in auto plants," Lichtenstein writes,

the Communist Party played a more central, more organic role in virtually every effort to organize a union of autoworkers. The CP was far more deeply rooted within the community of skilled craftsmen and second-generation immigrants who would be the shocktroops for the nascent UAW.

This was also the height of the CP's "popular front" era, when party members worked aggressively in groups spanning the entire spectrum of the American left. When some delegates at the UAW's 1936 convention protested the rising influence of "reds" within the union, Reuther — who won a position on the union's executive board — was a key target of their attacks. From 1937 to 1938 Reuther, though most closely allied with the SP, worked with the Communists in the UAW's Unity Caucus, the left-wing group that opposed the erratic leadership of right-wing union President Homer Martin.

Of course, before the bitter factional fights erupted within the UAW, the union mounted perhaps the most inspirational organizing drive in American history. And Lichtenstein wisely detours from his meticulous treatment of Reuther's sectarian feuds to ponder the transcendent possibilities unleashed during the sit-down strikes of late 1936 and early '37. "History sometimes turns on a narrow pivot," he writes:

The deep structures of economic power and social consciousness usually constrain the opportunities and shape the choices men and women have to make. But there are also times when circumstances conspire to greatly diminish our usual sense of social inertia and institutional stasis, when tradition's chains begin to crack and old fears diminish, thereby making the world once again seem plastic and open, not just to an ambitious few of will and vision but to a multitude of ordinary people who burst forward onto the stage of history. In the auto centers of the American Midwest, such a time came late in the winter of 1937.

In November 1936, New Deal Democrats such as Michigan Governor Frank Murphy had swept into office on FDR's long coattails, and they refused — at least temporarily — to call out the militia when UAW members began occupying auto plants. Lichtenstein argues that the UAW's historic victories were "possible not so much because of the vast outpouring of union sentiment among autoworkers, but because General Motors was temporarily denied recourse to the police power of the state." Throughout the strike wave of 1936-37, most General Motors employees "continued to report to work each morning. ... [U]nion consciousness would crystallize only after the UAW had won the strike and stripped the company of its capacity to penalize their allegiance." **

**Lichtenstein's treatment of the UAW's sit-down strikes provides my only opportunity to quibble with his history. In passing, Lichtenstein says that the first sit-down strike in

But even after the UAW organized the nation's largest automaker, its survival was far from certain. As the deep recession of 1938-39 decimated the union's rank and file, factional strife consumed the leaders of the Unity Caucus and their opponents in UAW President Martin's Progressive Caucus. In April 1938, Reuther's relationship with the Communists in the UAW's Unity Caucus was strained to the breaking point when they reneged on an agreement to support his brother Victor for a position with the Michigan state CIO. With the Communists attempting to isolate the popular Reuther, he began in June to form a middle-of-the-road caucus, and by November he had ousted all Communists from leadership positions in Local 174, the amalgamated local he led on Detroit's West Side. Over the next 15 years, Reuther would prove an uncompromising anti-Communist. Although Reuther was genuinely opposed to CP influence within the UAW, Lichtenstein shows that he more than once manipulated anti-Communist crusades to unfairly discredit factional opponents. By 1953, however, Reuther would temper his anti-Communist attacks; he recognized then that the greatest threat to labor was from the right, not from the remnants of the sectarian left. As CIO president, a post he assumed in 1952, Reuther called off attacks on Communist-influenced unions.

BUT IN THE LATE '30s, REUTHER REMAINED EMBROILED in the UAW's vicious infighting. In January 1939, CIO leaders finally intervened to oust Martin, who had secretly been negotiating with Ford to "unionize" 100,000 of the company's workers and lead them into a non-CIO union. In Martin's place, the CIO installed the ideologically neutral R.J. Thomas, a welder who had played almost no role in the UAW's early organizing. Reuther, still considered too left for the top office, was given the monumental task of rebuilding the union's General Motors Department. When he took over the department in May 1939, only six percent of the company's workers were paying union dues. But Reuther, displaying the organizational and political flair that would distinguish his eventual presidency, moved quickly to rebuild UAW strength within GM. He cultivated support among the rank-and-file by holding meetings of the department's various councils and sub-councils, a network that had fallen dormant during the chaos of the Martin era. And yet, even as he promised to increase rank-and-file power, Reuther said it must be "power under control" — clearly indicating that he would not tolerate the wildcat strikes of previous years. In order to shore up his support among the union's right-wingers, Reuther tapped a substantial number of former Martin allies.

By June 1940, Reuther had negotiated a new contract with GM. The 1940 agreement eliminated wage competition between the company's plants, and paved the way for contracts that would provide near-middle class wages for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. But that agreement also established a grievance system that would, very quickly, turn into a legalistic nightmare, and would help establish the business unionism that dominates today's UAW.

The long-term consequences of the contract were hard to decipher in 1940.

an automobile factory took place at South Bend's Bendix plant in 1936. In fact, UAW Local 72 in Kenosha, Wis., which organized the Nash (now Chrysler) plant there, has always insisted — and UAW officials recently conceded — that it conducted the first auto industry sit-down in 1934.

More immediately evident, however, was the effect of the expanding war in Europe, which presented American labor with a series of challenges. As the European war escalated, the U.S. rapidly increased its own defense spending. And as it began converting to a wartime economy, the government created special agencies to oversee the mobilization. During the war, those boards — which set wages and prices and planned industrial output — would prove crucial battlegrounds for labor, which almost always found itself outgunned by management. Throughout World War II, Reuther expended enormous energy attempting to influence the government boards; and he achieved much for labor, securing seniority rights, more equitable wage rates and government protection for the union shop.

But Lichtenstein argues that Reuther and other labor leaders ceded too much power to the warfare state. Union officers had signed no-strike pledges after Pearl Harbor, and as companies instituted speed-ups and longer workweeks, many workers began to resent labor leaders for consenting to such a system. In particular, Communist-linked unionists — who had abandoned their pacifist line when the Hitler-Stalin pact collapsed in June 1941 — earned the enmity of many rank-and-file workers for supporting all-out production drives. The CP's eager embrace of a 1943 plan to introduce incentive pay into defense plants (a move that would effectively reestablish dreaded piecework rates) proved deeply unpopular. Reuther, sensing the rank-and-file discontent, lined up firmly against the incentive pay schemes, giving him an effective issue with which to bludgeon his still-potent Communist opponents.

But even Reuther was hard-pressed to appease the new and increasingly militant UAW members who filled the nation's defense industries. As the workers who built the UAW headed overseas, they were replaced by employees unfamiliar with the union-building process. And when these new members held wildcat strikes during the war, their aim was not always to extend or preserve union power. Lichtenstein writes that many of these wartime wildcats "lacked the overall leadership that had given prewar strikes of this sort a more progressive character." Lichtenstein notes that Detroit's infamous race riots in 1943 were preceded by a weeklong "hate" strike of 20,000 UAW workers at Packard, who protested the upgrading of black workers. Reuther saw perhaps more clearly than any other labor leader that such problems would persist after the war; unfortunately, he proved only marginally more capable than most unionists in devising solutions.

ONE PLEASANT SURPRISE OF *THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN DETROIT* is its description of the immediate postwar years, which provides a bracing corrective to the Harry Truman hagiographies that have been pouring out of America's publishing houses. Lichtenstein resuscitates the skepticism of journalist Samuel Lubell, who bemoaned Truman's irritating "faculty for turning two bold steps into a halfway measure." His appointment of conservative officials to lead the Office of Price Administration (OPA) weakened that crucial planning agency, and began the rollback of the New Deal state. Today, it's simply received wisdom that government intervention in the economy can have only negative effects. In fact, as Lichtenstein notes, the nation's GNP doubled between 1940 and 1946, when government planning was at its peak. And by the end of the war income inequality would reach its lowest level of the 20th century.

But by 1945 Reuther realized that Truman was either unable or unwilling to negotiate a continuing compromise between government, labor and management. According to Lichtenstein, Reuther understood that "only a direct assault on a key corporate adversary would blunt industry resistance and prod the government into putting some backbone into the OPA's postwar price guidelines": so Reuther planned to strike General Motors. Understanding that the productive capacity of the auto industry had expanded enormously during the war, Reuther insisted that GM could substantially hike wages without increasing prices. In fact, Reuther argued, unless the nation intended to slip back into Depression-style poverty — with workers too poor to purchase the output of a vast industrial economy — wages would have to be hiked, and prices restrained throughout the American economy.

Begun on November 21, 1945, the GM strike lasted 113 days. The UAW gained an 18½ cent an hour pay increase by the end of the walkout. But the OPA's power to control prices quickly collapsed, and as inflation skyrocketed, the wage gains disappeared in a matter of months. With the demise of the New Deal's planning agencies, it would become virtually impossible for labor visionaries like Reuther to seek a transformation of industrial and social relations. Instead labor would be forced to settle for the narrow contractual gains that could be won through collective bargaining.

Although the 1945-46 strike failed to achieve Reuther's larger social and economic goals, it did allow him to further consolidate his power within the UAW. In 1947, Reuther finally secured the UAW presidency. And in 1950, he would sign the famous "Treaty of Detroit," the five-year agreement with GM that instituted cost of living adjustments for hourly workers. A series of contracts with the big automakers and agricultural implement companies eventually earned UAW members generous health and pension benefits and a doubling of living standards in a generation. But these gains affected a deceptively small segment of the American workforce. Those working in large, stable firms in core industries could count on the corporatized welfare state. But workers in more marginal businesses never did share in that security. And while Reuther's collective bargaining strategies impressed — or infuriated — domestic observers, they seemed far less appealing overseas. From the '50s onward, Reuther regularly traveled to Western Europe, preaching the gospel of "free" collective bargaining. Although Reuther was warmly received by the continent's social democrats, they wisely declined to adopt the depoliticized forms of negotiation that he promoted. Lichtenstein skillfully explains how IG Metall — the enormous West German union comprised of workers in the steel, auto and electrical industries — had crafted a far more comprehensive economic and political program than Reuther's UAW. "IG Metall was organized on a unitary basis with no special divisions for industries or firms," Lichtenstein notes. "Strikes were often conducted on a regional basis by workers in a variety of companies. . . . More important, their links to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) were qualitatively far closer and more decisive than those between union leaders and Democrats in the United States; collective bargaining and political action, therefore, were organically linked."

By the late '50s, Reuther had achieved virtually all that was possible within the limits of collective bargaining. He had hoped that the AFL-CIO merger in

1955 would increase labor's political muscle, and perhaps create the conditions necessary for an American social democracy. But the fundamentally conservative nature of AFL-CIO President George Meany, and the continuing jurisdictional disputes between unions prevented the federation from acting as any sort of cohesive political force.

Frustrated by the options available within the house of labor, Reuther began to work more closely with the Democratic Party. He did gain access to President Kennedy. But the President never adopted Reuther's liberal economic policies; instead Kennedy in 1962 pursued a supply-side scheme that sought to stimulate the economy by disproportionately cutting the taxes of corporations and the wealthy. And where Reuther maintained cordial relations with Kennedy, he grew almost intimate with Lyndon Johnson, who solicited Reuther's counsel the day after Kennedy's assassination. Though the new President made similar overtures to other prominent liberals, Johnson would continue his close relationship with Reuther in the years to come. During that time, Reuther tirelessly promoted the President's War on Poverty. Johnson's programs incorporated only fragments of the UAW leader's social democratic dreams, but Reuther believed he could build a broad left-liberal movement around the Great Society programs and continue pressing for more progressive legislation.

And in the early '60s, Reuther's dream still seemed possible. He eagerly sought alliances with fledgling New Left groups such as Students for a Democratic Society. SDS's legendary 1962 Port Huron statement was drafted at the UAW's education center in Michigan; and Reuther invited SDS leaders to the union's June 1964 convention in Atlantic City, where they listened politely as LBJ reiterated his commitment to the War on Poverty. But by the end of the summer, that fragile coalition would begin to fracture — and Reuther would play a key role in its eventual collapse. When Reuther returned to Atlantic City in August for the Democratic Party's 1964 convention he helped block the seating of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which sought to replace the state's segregated delegation. That move earned him the opprobrium of many civil rights advocates. And within a few years, Reuther's uneasy but unwavering support for the President's policies in Vietnam would further alienate him from the New Left that arose in the '60s.

In one of the book's more provocative passages, Lichtenstein contrasts Reuther's political embrace of the Democrats with the more wary stance of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Lichtenstein argues that King's civil rights movement, unlike Reuther's union movement, utilized state power without becoming beholden to it. The "legitimacy and success" of such social movements "are well advanced when a Lincoln, a Roosevelt, or a Kennedy links his statecraft to the growing power of an insurgent social movement," Lichtenstein avers. "But a fine line has to be drawn between the rhetorical, symbolic alliance forged with the governing power and the capacity of the movement to maintain an independent, perhaps even an unpredictable, trajectory in the field." Lichtenstein argues that Reuther "stepped over the line."

Despite his failings, Reuther didn't step as far over that line as most labor leaders. Though he remained supportive of Johnson's appalling war, he distanced himself from the far more hawkish Meany and the reactionary foreign policy promoted by the AFL-CIO. (Reuther resigned from the federation's executive council in 1967 and the UAW disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in 1968.)

Domestically, Reuther proved his liberal sympathies were intact. He provided crucial support to Cesar Chavez's farmworkers and other trade unionists whose innovative boycotts again transformed labor campaigns into struggles for social justice. As Lichtenstein writes, "Reuther's identification with these insurgencies was profound, arising out of the humanism and solidarity still lodged deep within his Debsian soul."

Ironically, Humphrey's defeat in 1968 finally freed Reuther from the embrace of Democratic orthodoxy. No longer constrained by his ties to the Johnson Administration, he turned sharply left. He forged links with Eastern European trade unions, allied with the Teamsters in a quixotic effort to build a progressive alternative to the AFL-CIO and took an increasingly strong stand against the Vietnam War. In April 1970, as Nixon officially expanded the Indochinese conflict into Cambodia, and the war at home took its casualties at Kent State and Jackson State, Reuther joined with his brother Victor in sending the President a telegram denouncing the escalation of the war abroad, and condemning the killings at home. Soon after sending that telegram, however, Reuther himself would be dead. While flying to Black Lake, the UAW's northern Michigan education center, Reuther's plane crashed in a stand of trees; the plane burst into flames killing Reuther, his wife May and all on board.

LICHTENSTEIN CONCLUDES HIS BOOK BY POSING THE IRRESISTIBLE QUESTION: "What would Walter do?" Given labor's precipitous decline over the last 25 years, seeking guidance from beyond the grave seems about as sensible a course as any. And yet, Lichtenstein makes clear that there is probably very little Walter could have done to slow labor's decline. His union's fortunes were tied too deeply to the well-being of the sagging auto industry, and America's unions had no political outlet other than an increasingly corporate Democratic Party. But that is no reason to despair. In some ways, Reuther's Debsian vision was defective. A tool and die maker to the last, he fiercely believed in the power of productivity to improve human life.

If we're looking for a vision that can sustain us today — as productivity rises and wages fall — perhaps we should look to another figure profiled by Nelson Lichtenstein. In 1990, Lichtenstein penned the introduction to a new edition of Harvey Swados's 1957 classic *On the Line*, a collection of short stories documenting the inescapable toll of life in an auto factory. Fortunately, in reissuing *On the Line*, Lichtenstein also included a brief essay that Swados published soon after he finished the book. The following passage from that piece offers a vision at odds with the consumer capitalism that Reuther eventually, if reluctantly, embraced: "If we want a decent society — by which I do not mean a society glutted with commodities or one maintained in precarious equilibrium by over-buying and forced premature obsolescence — we are going to have to come face to face with the problem of work. [I]f we cling to the belief that other men are our brothers, ... including millions of Americans who grind their lives away on an insane treadmill, then we will have to start thinking about how their work and their lives can be made meaningful."

Exchange on Cuba

Combining Class and Cultural Analysis

Hector Melendez

I HAVE READ SAMUEL FARBER'S CRITIQUE of *The Problem of Democracy in Cuba* by C. Bengelsdorf, in *New Politics*, Summer 1995, with great interest. While not having read the book, I would like to comment on some of the issues raised. The survival of the Cuban state despite the vicissitudes of the economy and the aggressive policies of the United States but also, morally, despite the well-founded criticisms of the left, is a curious fact which ought to be examined. This would not only satisfy theoretical curiosity but shed light, as well, on the left's analytical constructs of reality and prospects.

Farber's denunciation of the Stalinist character of the Cuban state and the *caudillismo* exercised by Fidel Castro is, as his writings usually are, accurate and responsible.¹ They are pointed scientific critiques from a left-wing socialist standpoint. Nonetheless, Fidel's and the Cuban party-state's moral and intellectual standing continues, even increases, among wide sectors of the Americas and elsewhere, especially in the Third World.² The Cuban state appears to provide hegemony in absorbing and creating its own opposite ideas, thus consolidating its project.

Symptomatic is Fidel Castro's assertion that the Cuban state continues the sense of national unity developed by the 19th century Cuban patriot, José Martí. It seems to me that, indeed, the present state has formed a Cuban identity which fundamentally corresponds to those features that the enlightened middle class intellectual groups of late 19th century had proposed in Cuba. That is, a strong emphasis on national sovereignty in the face of both Spanish and U.S. imperialism that strives to create a uniquely American culture recognizing, and giving expression to those historically marginalized in Latin America — peasants, blacks, and women. Subordinate popular strata, elevated by the progress of education and science, would merge under the big umbrella of the nation through the tutelage of an administratively honest leadership.³

Hispanic American independence was attained in the 1820s and 1830s under the leadership of particularly conservative upper social classes. Under their rule, laboring classes, small peasants and subordinate ethnic groups have experienced similar or, in some respects, even worse

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oppression than they did under Spanish colonialism. By contrast, in Cuba and — to a lesser degree Puerto Rico — nationalism arrived late on the scene in the latter part of the 19th century. It was led not by the upper class but by middle class and intellectual groups attracted to progressive, sometimes radical, U.S. and European social movements and ideas. Their avant-garde social thought evolved from Latin American and Caribbean abolitionist struggles. Of these intellectuals, Martí was perhaps the most brilliant.

Cuban nationalism is so strong because of its popular ingredient; many of its radical proclivities stemming from the leading role of blacks and mulattos in the struggle for national liberation. The present Cuban state has pursued the kind of nationalism that reproduces these traditions, successfully incorporating outcast groups despised elsewhere in Latin America, albeit with the obvious limitations imposed by Stalinism or "State socialism."⁴ This can be seen in the popular support for the state despite the economic crisis and the proverbial blunders of bureaucratic planning.

Under a strange bureaucratic-Stalinist hegemony, the Cuban state has, contradictorily, achieved features of a modern state by incorporating the popular strata into the national enterprise, an idea preached by the Western liberal and radical bourgeoisie since the 18th century, now made possible through access to forms of social life absent before the 1959 revolution.⁵

On the other hand, the surplus produced by the laboring masses is appropriated from them to support the privileged high-ranking functionaries who, theoretically, will discover the right track for national economic development. Democratic participation is limited only to those within the official apparatus. But inside that official channel genuine discussion actually does take place.⁶ One result, however, is that popular public opinion has serious difficulties checking and counter-balancing bureaucratic narrow-mindedness or anti-democratic inclinations. Thus, economic errors are magnified, leaving many to question whether they result from misjudgments or the nature of the system.

IN MY VIEW, THE NUCLEUS OF THE DISCUSSION SHOULD BE how to combine class and cultural analysis. From a class standpoint, it is true that the Cuban state wields power over the working class and the people. From the standpoint of modern identity-formation, however, the Cuban party-state apparatus is fueled by a national-popular energy making possible a sovereign state and a national economic course.⁷ This has been the claim of the Cuban state for many years and experience seems unable to deny it.

National identity based on the popular classes does not contradict the existence of a surplus appropriated by a state which is not ruled by the working class. But it is a powerful commentary on how class struggle, in the long run, is determined by culture, and culture, in its turn, is determined and represented by class relations. It must be recognized that the Cuban drive for national identity draws from deeper reserves than proletarian traditions of workers' management and revolutionary socialism. No doubt Stalinist and bureaucratic ideologies and controls are a major obstacle to the resurrection of these socialist traditions within Cuban cultural conditions. At the same time, while the Cuban working class is not in power, it is more integrated into the life of the national state than any other working class in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cuba has formed especially solid productive forces that are articulated

through a nationalist ideology and predicated on the ideal of a national accumulation of wealth, resources and collective cultural achievements. In that sense, far from being a weak state as depicted by the leading media in the U.S., Cuba is perhaps the most solid state of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is the Latin American case closest to the Western model of national accumulation, rationalization and rule of law championed by modern bourgeois theorists but prevented in practice by imperialism throughout the Third World.

Latin America was, and still is, classical Marxism's great silence. In the face of Latin America, Marxism often appears mute and confused. Fortunately, Antonio Gramsci's categories shed light on the possibilities, both political and theoretical, for a reconstitution of historical materialism. It should be recalled how Marx castigated the South American liberator Simon Bolivar. One of his criticisms was that Bolivar intended to form a civil society (that is, a social, economic and cultural terrain for daily and private life) from above, that is from politics and government. Thus, he termed Bolivar a would-be despot and a scoundrel imitating Napoleon.⁸

Bolivar's project was the formation of a new, typically "American" culture and society arising from nation-building. Indeed one may well ask, what form of civil religion, other than nationhood, could be the leading one in the radically modern hemisphere — America — developed and organized from the outset for the production and circulation of commodities? In this sense, Bolivar represents the national-popular, the force of American popular identity-creation.⁹ Marx, it seems, could not see that, although he did recognize "the force of myth," regarding popular fantasy which he said Bolivar incarnated. Thus, in Cuba politics created civil society. Cuban modernity has emerged from a national project.

A CENTRAL CHARACTERISTIC OF STALINISM HAS BEEN THE CONSTRAINT, or rather suffocation, of civil society. Ironically, in Cuba, civil life sometimes manages to overshadow official grand discourse. Potent popular cultures reveal the limits of official discourse while — paradoxically — reinforcing the state's prestige since official public discourse, in its turn, increasingly seems to recognize the civil and the popular. Within the one-party state, Cuban civil society and popular cultures manage to expand and negotiate with state controls. For example, if in the 1980s we saw the Miami-based Cuban exile-made film *Conducta impropia*, harshly denouncing official repression of homosexuals in Cuba, in 1994 we had *Fresa y chocolate*, the internationally highly-praised film sponsored by the Cuban government discussing homosexuality with unusual wit, humor and maturity, connecting gender relations to ethnic and national identity, while criticizing bureaucratic repression and the crude intellectual development of Cuban youth and cadres.

Popular and national identities that developed through the plantation system, slave trade, enclave economies, export-seeking regimes, economies of subsistence and overwhelming foreign investment, are likely, it seems to me, to remain subordinate for a long time. They will tend to reproduce their "origins," as it were. Their subordinate character indicates, time and again, the way they entered modernity. The past accumulates in the present. But the past re-emerges in new negotiations between the ethnic (popular cultures) and the inevitable modern structures such as the world market and the nation-state.¹⁰ As a result,

both achievement and failure in Cuba must be qualified in the light of a centuries-old past that will hardly be changed in a few generations. That past might partly explain the prestige of the Cuban state; the feeling of many that, against all odds, it has, on balance, been doing a good thing. Cuba shows that national sovereignty is, at least, a modest refuge from a vast surrounding turmoil; from the continuous hurricane of monopoly capital, the world market, and the modern world.

There is a need for an end to Stalinism in Cuba, and for full popular and working class power and revolutionary democracy. At the same time, the fact that the state is not an instrument of a capitalist class or of foreign interests, and that it is working to improve itself and secure the welfare of the nation in the long-run, above all in comparison with most states, minimizes the potential explosivity of popular irritation with the Cuban regime. As Farber acknowledges, the Cuban state enjoys popular consent.

Popular support could weaken as a result, for example, of the state's pursuit of hard currency. There are hotels and shops only for foreigners, prohibited to locals. This anti-democratic policy has undermined the state's position, creating what is sometimes called social "apartheid." In capitalist societies, of course, class and ethnic divisions preclude many from access to some hotels and shops. The difference is that, whereas in other societies the prohibition is tacitly established by civil society and the market, in Cuba it is overtly imposed by government.

Circulation of U.S. dollars was allowed in Cuba in order to curb the scarcity resulting from the end of Soviet aid through preferential trade policies. Thus another social divide appeared between those with dollars and those without. In many cases, those with dollars are members of traditionally more privileged social and ethnic groups, with relatives and friends in Miami and other parts of the U.S., while the vast majority are those without dollars. The marked presence of a money culture naturally exacerbates competition, reducing solidarity and eroding the level of social communication that may previously have existed.

ANOTHER RECENT ISSUE IS WHETHER THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT is casting a blind eye to a new tide of prostitution. So-called "sex-tourism," where Cuban women — often very young girls — are made available to tourists by burgeoning local illegal networks is apparently tolerated because of the government's need for hard currency. This, in turn, expands the promotion of tourism to Cuba from rich countries.

Pressure for productivity is seen in recent official mobilizations where people from urban areas have been put to work in the countryside, through a mixture of patriotic appeals and diverse degrees of coercion. Coercion should not be understood merely as police repression, given Cuba's rule of law. It is rather social coercion, meaning pressure exercised by others on those less ideologically identified with the state, often led by local militants and cadres of the Communist Party. Although this pressure is intended to be moral and political it sometimes takes the form of mob action.

Cuban national identity has been constructed through school, health and media systems; work and productive ethics; diffusion of science and technology among productive layers, especially the young; political discussion within the

given structures; sports, literature, music, film and other art forms both folkloric and highbrow; military, medical and educational solidarity with other countries, and through other means of social communication. The memory of the revolution as a victory for the people, an extraordinary achievement where, for the first time in the Americas, the poor expelled the rich and the imperialists, is, of course, a unifying theme of cultural socialization. But an ideology of "statolatry," or idolatry of the state, has largely swallowed the revolution. Hence the glorification of the apparatus and the secret police that protects it as a synonym for the nation and the revolution.

No other Latin American state has achieved the social incorporation of subordinate strata into the national identity to the extent and degree that the Cuban state has. That may help to explain why most dissidents in Cuba do not want to overthrow the Cuban state but to improve it, modernize it, make it more inclusive and therefore more effective. The harsh repression of these dissidents reveals a clumsy police mentality that has permeated Cuban circles of power.¹¹

But the levels of modernization achieved in Cuba are often underestimated. They have traditionally been ignored by the U.S. State Department and also underestimated by left-wing socialists critical of bureaucratism. The latter often react to those on the left who naively refuse to recognize that the Cuban state does repress dissidents who are not opposed to the government but want to democratize it, like workers demanding free trade unions and others protesting scarcity, privileges, working conditions, or those who demand freedom of information and publication.

My point is, then, that given the modernization of the state, the road to further liberation in Cuba seems to be through reform rather than revolution, a different road than is required elsewhere.

NOTES

1. *Caudillo* in Spanish means a strong leader, the chief who enjoys a large following with a degree of sympathy, but with uncontested power. It is linked in Hispanic literature to visions of heroism, warfare, dictatorship, and national foundation.

2. That prestige may be greater in Africa. On Cuba's involvement in Western Africa see D. Deutschmann, ed., *Changing History of Africa: Angola and Namibia*, Ocean Press, Melbourne, 1993. See also F. Castro and N. Mandela, *How Far We Slaves Have Come*, Ocean Press, 1994.

3. These were common themes among progressive intellectuals of late 19th century Cuba as well as other American countries. See J. Martí, *Manifiesto de Montecristi*, (The Cuban Revolutionary Party's Manifest to Cuba, 1895) and *Nuestra America*, among others of his writings; Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba, Between Reform and Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 145-148; Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1983, pp. 286-303; and Louise L. Cripps, *The Spanish Caribbean: From Columbus to Castro*, Schenkman, Massachusetts, 1979, pp. 119-135.

4. I see Stalinism as a political ideology which gave birth to state socialism as a political system. Stalinism is a much wider phenomenon involving a particular culture and way of conceiving of socialism, Marxism, culture, history and politics. State socialism lives in the tension of being an alternative strategy of development while controlling the market in order to control the civil freedoms the market requires which threaten the

state socialist edifice.

5. For accounts on the modern state and relations between culture and the state see A. Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, pp. 14-23, 192-195, 279-287, and 388-399.

6. See for instance Gail Reed, *Island in the Storm: the Cuban Communist Party's Fourth Congress*, Ocean Press, 1992.

7. I use the term national-popular in the sense of Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, that is, as the ensemble of cultures that a social force must lead, interpret, narrate and control in order to command society; it can be understood also as an ensemble of classes and groups, as well as folklores, cultural zones, traditions, etc. See D. Forgacs, "National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Routledge, London, 1993. Gramsci's national-popular resembles the notion of ethnicity put forward by A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, Chapters 6 and 7.

8. *Bolivar y Ponte*, Marx's encyclopedia article does not appear often in the editions of his selected writings. Actually the issue has seldom been discussed, although it is an evident source of tension and political limitations for the left-wing, and a blurred area for the social sciences, in Latin America and the Caribbean. Pioneering discussions can be found in Pedro J. Rua, *Bolivar ante Marx y otros ensayos*, Huracan, Puerto Rico, 1978; Marx and Engels, *Materiales para la historia de América Latino*, ed. by P. Scaron, Pasado y Presente, Mexico, 1979; and José Arico, *Marx y América Latino*, Alianza Editorial Mexicana, Mexico, 1982.

9. These points are further developed in H. Melendez, "The Popular as Political Subject: The Impact of Latin America and the Caribbean on Socialism and the National Idea," Doctoral Thesis, University of Birmingham (Department of Cultural Studies), England, 1993.

10. I am using Gramsci's point that the past is in the present and that actuality condenses multiple cultural epochs to suggest advancing the debates on development, especially following the discussions on accumulation and development of A. Gunder-Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, and Leon Trotsky.

11. See Amnesty International's report on Cuba, 1994.

Samuel Farber Replies

The Illusion of Revolution from Above

HECTOR MELENDEZ'S COMMENTS TOUCH ON A FUNDAMENTAL DIVIDE in the history of the left: the distinction between social and political change "from above" and "from below." In other words, is the struggle for democracy an indispensable and central element of a liberatory social transformation or can it be dispensed with or relegated to a secondary role? Hardly a new issue, Karl Marx opposed Ferdinand Lassalle's support for the authoritarian Chancellor Bismarck, a true nation builder. Nor can we minimize Bismarck's skills in the areas of "integration" and "identity formation," to use trendy social science language. Bismarck was a pioneer in social legislation (with more progressive views on health insurance than Hillary and Bill Clinton) and played a major role in the development of German nationalism. Bismarck was also quite concerned with the consolidation of German Protestant culture and carried on a *Kulturkampf* against the "ultramontane" Pope and his Catholic Church to insure the German state's control over such important matters as education and civil marriage.

While Marx opposed Bismarck and his supporter Lassalle, he was far from indifferent to the German national question. An articulate supporter of German unity, Marx counterposed revolutionary, democratic and republican German unity to the authoritarianism of Bismarck and Lassalle. Only such a unity, Marx believed, would provide a healthy foundation for the German nation. History would later show the dire and disastrous consequences of authoritarian German unity from above. In sum, Marx proposed a political method which, with the appropriate national and historical modifications, is applicable to a host of subsequent nationalist figures such as Peron, Mao, Khomeini and Castro.

It was Marx's political method that also led him to criticize Bolivar's dictatorial tendencies which made the success of the revolution against Spain more difficult. (See the excellent article by Hal Draper, "Marx and Bolivar: A Note on Authoritarian Leadership in a National-Liberation Movement," *New Politics*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Winter 1968, pp. 64-77.)

The Cuban "Founding Father," Jose Marti, was a product of a different milieu and historical period with far stronger roots in liberal nationalist and democratic political currents. Melendez completely misses the point about Castro's appropriation and distortion of Marti's legacy, in particular, Castro's ludicrous claim that Marti's plea for Cuban unity somehow signified an anticipatory endorsement of the "democratic-centralist" Communist Party and the Cuban one-party state.

HECTOR MELENDEZ CLAIMS THAT FIDEL CASTRO'S GOVERNMENT has modernized Cuban society. Here, as elsewhere in his essay, Melendez provides little if any

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factual support for his vague assertions and generalizations, leaving me unsure of what he has in mind. It is true that in some areas such as health, education and social security Cuba in 1989 (before the collapse of the Soviet bloc) was more modern than it was before the revolution. However, in other areas, such as the political and legal systems, the country retrogressed to conceptions more compatible with the epoch preceding the American and French Revolutions than with modernity. In this context, I am astonished by Melendez's claim that the "rule of law" exists in Cuba. The most cursory reading of any of the hundreds of reports written by such independent organizations as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (Americas), and PEN will show that it is precisely the "rule of law" that is non-existent in Cuba.

The combination of modernity and pre-modernity is typical of Fidel Castro himself. An analysis of Fidel Castro's speeches show him to be intelligent and a voracious reader who tries to keep abreast of developments in a wide variety of fields. This could be interpreted to mean that as a modern political leader Castro has all sorts of information at his fingertips to be used as general background for making wise political decisions and for an informed choice of economic and social priorities. Unfortunately, this is where the pre-modern Fidel Castro steps in. Castro seems to think that if he reads a few books and articles in a particular area he can act the role of professional practitioner in that field whether it be cattle breeding, biotechnology, or military science. Thus for example, in the mid-60s, Thomas R. Preston and Malcolm B. Willis, two British specialists in cattle breeding, came to Cuba full of enthusiasm and willingness to help the revolutionary government, but left bitterly disillusioned a few years later. The reason: Castro's insistence, against all scientific evidence produced by Preston and Willis, in carrying out an extensive program of crossbreeding, combining the native stock and purebred imports, which resulted in the infamous F-1 hybrids. Needless to add, Castro's cow was a total failure. Rene Dumont, a well-known left-wing French agronomist, experienced similar difficulties with the Cuban leader in the field of agriculture and was duly denounced as a CIA agent. The whims of a pre-scientific intellectual dilettante with unchecked power led to a waste of the Cuban people's natural and human resources. What is modern about that?

Modernity, in any case, is a dangerous notion on which to base political support or sympathy. Hasn't Puerto Rico experienced an even more dramatic surge of modernity under the colonialist auspices of U.S. imperialism? Or how about Chile under Pinochet's murderous rule? I'm sure that Melendez has not the slightest inclination to support either U.S. imperialism in his country or Pinochet's Chile notwithstanding the high degree of modernity in both places.

More than 40 years ago, Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills pointed out that the concept of culture constituted one of the "spongier" notions in the social sciences. Although Gerth and Mills recognized that this concept "in the hands of an expert," could be "enormously useful," they added that it "is often more a loose reference to social milieu than an adequate idea of social structure." (*Character and Social Structure. The Psychology of Social Institutions*, p. xviii.) While one can only marvel at the expert cultural interpretations of an E.P. Thompson, a Raymond Williams or a James C. Scott, it is shocking to witness the fashionable use of the concept of culture to obscure rather than clarify issues, that is, to "change the subject," as a way of avoiding politics or institutions, class power or

social structure. Thus, the concept of "culture" can and has been used as intended or unintended apologia. It is very strange, for example, that many of the same people who argue that the culture of democracy was weak in Cuba can nevertheless defend an autocratic one-party state that perpetuates that absence of democracy. Similarly, the fact that homophobia has strong roots in Cuba's Spanish heritage can hardly be used as a defense of the present Cuban government which has done more to *promote* homophobia than any regime in the country's history.

This apologia can also take the form of a passive cultural determinism or fatalism, as when Melendez states that "both achievement and failure in Cuba must be qualified in the light of a centuries-old past that can hardly be changed in a few generations." Even if it were true that important social changes require generations, such a passive attitude, stepping outside of living history where choices are and must be made on a daily basis, is a form of apologia. It excuses and blunts criticism and absolves Cuban political leaders of responsibility, not only for their choices, but for a social and political system ostensibly justified by its purported superiority to capitalism.

IN THE CASE OF CUBA, HECTOR MELENDEZ SEEMS UNABLE to distinguish between the island's official and its real culture, the former having the awesome powers of the state at its disposal. It is in reaction to the arbitrary use of these powers that for many years, even before the current economic crisis, large numbers of writers, actors, dancers, musicians and visual artists have been leaving Cuba creating a massive hemorrhage of talent. Melendez is wide of the mark when he sees the production of "Strawberry and Chocolate" as an example of "Cuban civil society and popular cultures [managing] to expand and negotiate with state controls." This excellent film was produced by ICAIC, the state film monopoly, and its showing was the result of the same political process that, a few months earlier, had suppressed the satirical "Alice in Wondertown." The almost non-existent civil society had nothing to do with it. The only negotiations that may have taken place were among conflicting cultural bureaucrats unsure of how to handle this potentially explosive issue. In fact, since the appearance of the film, several leading ICAIC actors and functionaries have left the country and Tomas Gutierrez Alea, the film's director, has adopted dual citizenship in Spain, perhaps as insurance against future political problems. Most recently *Melodrama* by Rolando Diaz has been suppressed. All of this may sound familiar to those who followed the bureaucratic control of the cinema in former Soviet bloc countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia.

The treatment of Afro-Cuban religions is also instructive. For decades, the Cuban government had a dual policy regarding "Santeria." On one hand, it was "honored" as part of the national cultural heritage, confined to museums and the concert stage. At the same time, its popular practice was sharply restricted and, in the case of the non-political but secret "Abacua" brotherhood, suppressed through a variety of means, including imprisonment. It should be stressed that the government cared less about "Abacua" theology and ritual than about its organizational independence, as was the case with the suppression of the dozens of non-political but independent mutual aid "Colored Societies (Sociedades de Color)" in the early years of the revolution. Since the Fourth Communist Party Congress liberalized the practice of religion in 1991, the Afro-Cuban reli-

gions have had a significant resurgence (as have the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths). However, it should be noted that this is the result of the present *Communist Party policy* encouraging religion as a safety valve in a period of sharp economic crisis. It is not legally and constitutionally protected religious freedom. It is also true that, occasionally, prior to the Fourth Party Congress, the leadership allowed greater room for complaints and even some political discussion in pre-Congress meetings. This liberalization created expectations of political reforms, for the most part unfulfilled, when the Congress occurred. However, to say as Melendez does, that "genuine discussion" continues to be the norm within official channels is an exaggeration and a distortion.

A civil society exists in Cuba only to the limited extent that some religious groups and the small human rights community have attempted to organize the atomized population *against* the repressive activities and all-encompassing powers of the Cuban Leviathan. It is revealing that one of the favorite expressions of the Cuban government, "what the Revolution has done for the Cuban people" (*lo que la revolucion ha hecho por [para] el pueblo cubano*) reveals a subtle but real distinction between the subject "the revolution" (subtext "the government") and the object "the Cuban people."

IT IS ODD THAT HECTOR MELENDEZ'S COMMENTS ARE MADE several years after the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc, and when China is transforming itself into one of the more brutal examples of the capitalist road to economic development. Do we need any further proof of the illusory character of modernity, cultural development, and national integration claimed by such social systems and all too readily accepted by a good part of the left?

As a result of the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc Cuba is in the midst of a wrenching economic crisis with profound social, moral and political consequences. In response, the Castro leadership has taken substantial steps in the direction of the Chinese model combining capitalist-type economic reforms with continuing political repression. A new technocratic leadership (e.g., Carlos Lage, Jose Luis Rodriguez) is rising to the top of the Cuban government. It is not difficult to conceive of a situation in the not-too-distant future in which the Cuban people are confronted with the worst of both worlds: capitalist market economics enforced by a Communist one-party state.

Hector Melendez ends his essay with the message that the road forward for Cuba lies in reform rather than revolution. The problem is that he sent the message to the wrong address. It is the intransigence of Fidel Castro and his government that stands in the way of political reform. Time is growing short as the government's popularity declines. (I believe that Castro would now lose an election against a unified opposition candidate.) Its repressive activities militate against the emergence of the independent civil society required for the development of a progressive alternative inside Cuba. This may constitute a short-term victory for the government's survival, but it is bound to benefit U.S. imperialism and the Cuban right-wing in the long, perhaps not so long-term. A population demoralized by acute economic crisis and accompanying corruption is bound to become increasingly open to cynicism and pro-U.S. capitalist sentiment, a tendency already detectable, particularly among those Cubans born after the 1959 Revolution.

The Crisis of British Socialism

Martin Thomas

"WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN A SOCIALIST MAGAZINE?" some comrades of mine were asking working-class 16-to-19 year olds at Further Education colleges recently. The students' response was neither more hostile nor less friendly than usual, but more puzzled. Again and again they asked: "Socialism? What's that?" We might as well have been promoting theosophy or bimetallism. In the late 1980s an opinion survey found a majority preferring a "basically socialist" society, dominated by a welfare state, to a "basically capitalist" one. Since then the Tories have dumped Margaret Thatcher; yet her project of killing off socialism in Britain continues to score points.

Tory governments have acted over 16 years — though not with clear strategic deliberation — to reposition Britain as a cheap-labor, low-social-overhead site, offshore from Europe, for multinational branch plants and international financial dealing. This weakens the trade unions. More of what their members do becomes dispensable or easily replaceable, for the British capitalist class or even for the particular employer. The strike rate is now the lowest since records began, and decreasing, although, of course, there are still strikes, important and even successful ones. Trade union membership, while still stronger than in many countries, is dwindling, from well over 50% of the workforce in Trade Union Congress (TUC)-affiliated unions in 1979 to under 30% now. Among the youngest workers, those under 20, only 10% are union members.

British capitalism has been drastically restructured. About a quarter of all manufacturing jobs were destroyed in the first couple of years of Thatcher's government, 1980-81. The shattering of the coal industry after the great miners' strike of 1984-85 has cowed the whole labor movement. Shipbuilding, steel, longshore, and national newspaper printing have also been wrecked or totally reshaped. Other industries now exist only, or mainly, in the form of branch plants for Japanese or other multinationals: cars, computers, electronics. The public services, now the main bastions of trade unionism, are being reshaped by sell-offs to private capital (telecommunications, gas, water, electricity, buses and, soon, rail) or by reorganization into semi-autonomous "agencies."

In face of these difficulties, trade union leaders continue to cringe and retreat. They have generally failed to organize new industrial sites, except perhaps through "sweetheart deals" offering the employer strike bans in return for union membership. Drives by the big general unions, the TGWU and the GMB, to reach out to other workers, especially the low-paid, part-time, female or young, have generated more glossy leaflets than real organization. The unions have also failed to organize the unemployed. Their main response to dwindling membership has been to seek mergers, often with no industrial logic at all.

The success in by-elections and opinion polls of Tony Blair's "New Labor" is a welcome counterpoint to the retreat by organized labor on the industrial front.

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It confirms that most working-class people are dissatisfied with the Tories, and many downright furious. But that this feeling should be crystallized around this PR man's dummy, Blair, shows that workers still lack confidence in direct action against the Tories, or in radical political alternatives to them. And Blair's success means a threat to organized labor, as well as the hope of ousting the Tories.

The previous Labor Party leader, John Smith, had already weakened the links between the Labor Party and the trade unions. Blair wants to break the links altogether. At present the trade unions have a decisive voice in Labor's conference and its National Executive, though not sufficient self-confidence to use it. In time they will regain self-confidence. Blair wants to use this moment to block the road to them, to make "New Labor" a sort of Christian-Democratic party, with the unions only external supporters or clients. Despite everything in his favor, he faces a long and hard battle on this.

BLAIR IS AS MUCH OPPOSED TO FULL DEMOCRATIC SOCIAL WELFARE, to public ownership, and to strong legal rights for trade unions, as the Liberal-Democrats whom he is more and more openly wooing. He says that he believes in "social-ism," not "socialism"; and no-one, not even a manic free-marketeer, could object to this "social-ism," which means only that "the rigor of the market" (upheld by Blair's new Clause Four) should sometimes be supplemented by social welfare. Ideologically, Blair represents the continuation, to new depths of servility and brainlessness, of Labor's long-standing tradition of tagging along with the left fringe of the established bourgeois political consensus, at a time when that consensus has been pushed far to the right.

Blair represents radical innovation in British politics in only one respect: organizationally. He has a private staff of at least 23 political full-timers, paid for partly by a state grant and partly by funds donated by sympathetic business people. Most of his staff come from outside the labor movement — from the old Social Democratic Party, the BBC, the City, the diplomatic service — and they work together with similar teams around Blair's close colleagues, like Gordon Brown. In combination, the entourages of Blair and Brown outnumber the Labor Party's own headquarters staff (perhaps 30 political full-timers). No previous Labor Party leader has been remotely as "presidential." Blair has a virtual "party within the party," one conducting its politics as a marketing exercise aimed at the bourgeois media, over the head of the labor movement.

At present the labor movement is largely willing to let Blair go over its head. Blair won nine-to-one in the ballots run by the Communication Workers' Union and by many Constituency Labor Parties on scrapping Labor's Clause Four commitment to common ownership of the means of production. So far he has steamrollered the trade union leaders on the one issue where they had promised to fight him, the level of a minimum wage to be legislated by the next Labor government.

The mediocre Blair cuts such a big figure in British politics only because this is a time for vacuousness. It is a time when many ordinarily shrewd workers tell us, and themselves, that Blair's right-wing speeches are *lies* told to win the election — that, despite promising no increased public spending anywhere, Blair will in fact restore the Health Service and create jobs. It is a time when a trade union leader can tell Blair, as John Sheldon of the NUCPS did at his

union's last conference, "Just offer us *something*."

This curious cult of the nonentity is generated by difficult circumstances for the labor movement — circumstances we did not and could not choose — and also by the way we have responded to those circumstances, governed by an ideological crisis which we can and should surmount. For the last several years, the conference agendas of the Labor Party and the Trade Union Congress have included no radically dissident resolutions on general economic policy. The broad left's challenge has been limited to issues like the level of the minimum wage and cuts in military spending. Some trade unions, like the GMB, criticize Blair for not proclaiming full employment as an aim for a Labor government, but their ideas about how to get full employment go no further than Jacques Delors' Euro-reflation. While large numbers of Labor and trade union activists still desire a radically different political economy, too few feel confident about pushing it as an immediate alternative to Blair's feeble "social-ism." Consider: who, or what, sustained and defined the broad Labor and trade union left's belief in "socialism"? There was a curious interaction between the work of the Labor Party machine and that of the radical left.

The radical left argued openly for a cooperative commonwealth regulated by a democratic workers' government. Spreading out from the small radical groups through pamphlets, newspapers, leaflets, speeches and individual conversation, this argument reached millions. The Labor Party machine was parasitic on the radical left: its stable core vote had to be people who were sufficiently convinced of different values to those of capitalism that they would be immune to bourgeois media influence, and the Labor Party machine itself did not argue for those values.

The radical left leaned on the Labor Party machine, too, to an extent: we relied on the Labor Party's occasional socialistic demagoguery to help convince people that our socialism was not a wild minority enthusiasm, but an extension of something already present in mainstream politics. Some revolutionary groups encapsulated this business in the phrase, "Labor to power with socialist policies," or "a Labor government with a socialist program." I think the slogan was misguided, but the attempt to build bridges between current labor movement concerns and our socialist aims was not.

The Labor Party machine provided a well-known, catchy tune, which they would only hum, but to which the radical left provided the only words that would fit. For a long time — and quite reasonably, given facts as they were — the radical left hoped that, through the Labor Party leaders being unmasked in office, this interaction could be so developed that the mass of workers would, so to speak, learn the whole song, not just odd catch phrases, and start singing in unison. Both tune and words are now being broken up into a jangle of soundbites and slogans.

The old "average socialism" of the British Labor and trade union left was heavily colored by nationalism and Stalinism. Until about the middle or late 1970s, the Communist Party was the most influential force on the radical left: theirs was a "British road" to a "socialism" presented as a liberalized and democratized version of the USSR. Many of the Trotskyists were also tainted by nationalist and Stalinist influence: even where they were not, they promoted the essentially elitist idea of a Labor government bureaucratically enacting social measures from the top down.

THE SENSE OF BEING SOME WAY ALONG THE ROAD TO OUR OBJECTIVE, with big obstacles ahead but with the path clear and momentum behind us, was destroyed by the gradual discrediting of all *national* alternative economic strategies in the 1980s and the decay, then collapse, of the USSR. The defeat of the British left in its ill-chosen battle to pull Britain out of the European Community in the 1975 referendum on that issue; the collapse of the Mitterrand government in France into "austerity" after its first slight reforming efforts brought trouble to the international financial markets in 1981-3; the capitulation of Swedish social democracy to the principle of high unemployment, welfare cuts, and privatization under pressure from those international financial markets in the early 1990s; all these, as well as the events of 1989-91 in Eastern Europe and the USSR, changed the landscape.

In his pamphlet which started the drive to scrap Clause Four, Labor frontbencher Jack Straw spelled it out: Labor could and should argue only about options within "liberal capitalism." He did not claim, as earlier "revisionists" might have, that capitalism had grown over into some fairer system, thus making the old socialist critique outdated. No, capitalism was still capitalism, but the collapse of the alternative, in the USSR and Eastern Europe, forced us to accept it as our horizon. Most activists in the trade unions and the Labor Party disagree: despite the postal ballot results, the campaign to save Labor's Clause Four commitment to common ownership won a lot of ground, including the two largest trade unions, UNISON and the TGWU. Yet the confidence and ability of those activists to carry larger groups of workers with them has plainly declined: the Clause Four ballots show that, and so does the decline in Labor's *core* vote since 1983, though Labor remains very capable of gaining a big opportunist vote.

The ideological crisis is severe, but none of it touches the validity of the socialist critique of capitalism, or the socialist argument for a new society, as different from the state-monopoly exploitation of the USSR as it is from Western capitalism. Over the last 15 years in Britain, capitalism has produced permanent mass unemployment, mass homelessness, beggars on the streets, decayed public services, increased inequality, and increased exploitation at work; and no mainstream political party promises any great improvement. Unless human beings are less able to organize our social affairs rationally than ants or monkeys, we can and should fight for a better society. That the need for *international* action has been made clearer, and that Stalinist tyranny has been eliminated as the first-line, ready-made alternative, makes it easier, not harder, to explain unfalsified working-class socialism.

The point, perhaps, is that illusory strength can in some measure translate into real strength, by giving confidence and a sense of shared momentum. The USSR's supposed economic success, and Labor governments' willingness and ability to talk about, or even sometimes carry out, socialistic reforms in a national framework, gave the British left such illusory strength. Losing the illusory strength, and the illusions are, in the short term, daunting but in the long term, refreshing. Diminished confidence among workers, and among Labor and trade union members: that is the core of what the Tories have changed in the political culture. It is not the same as a shift to the right. The Tories' privatizations, for example, emulated as they are by nationalist, social-democratic and Stalinist governments across the world, are unpopular in Britain. In

1983, 49% of the British public wanted "less state control" of industry; by 1990, only 24%.

The Tories' erosion of the National Health Service and of state education is even more unpopular, and on this issue a lot of people feel confident about an alternative: take back the nine or ten billion pounds per year given to the top 10% by Tory tax cuts since 1979, and put it into social welfare. Moves to organize on this theme, such as those recently initiated by the Welfare State Network, provide the left with an immediate opening to rally hundreds of thousands of people to defend and extend those elements of what Marx called "the political economy of the working class" imposed on British capitalism by decades of the labor movement's reforming efforts. They also give us a means to explain to the working-class youth baffled by the word "socialism" what we mean: it is nothing more than the Health Service's principle of social welfare for need, extended to the whole of society and democratically regulated.

One opinion survey done during Labor's Clause Four debate was very instructive. "Do you support Tony Blair's moves to modernize Labor's constitution?" A huge majority says yes. Clause Four is read out: "to secure for the workers by hand or brain the full fruits of their labor... on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production..." Do you agree with that? A clear majority (excluding "don't knows") says yes! Almost all the face-to-face debates over Clause Four were won by the left. But, as one worker in my Labor Party branch put it when explaining why he had voted for Blair in the referendum after backing common ownership in our branch discussions: "What can you do? It's the way things are going. You've got to give Blair support to win the election." He, and hundreds of thousands of others, did not feel confident enough in their own judgment to counterpose it to that of the man who says, and plausibly, that he can win the next general election and oust the Tories. They deferred to Blair's judgment; they did not share it.

SOME ENTHUSIASTS FOR THE DEATH OF CLASS POLITICS claim that it is being replaced in Britain by a sort of niche politics, where people mobilize for animal rights, or against road-building, while refusing to slot themselves into the old categories of left and right, Labor and Tory. But do those people really believe that cramped conditions for exported animals, or excessive road-building, are greater social evils than mass human poverty and unemployment? Or is it that on those issues they feel they can cut with the social and cultural grain, and win immediate improvements, whereas the greater issues are intractable?

In fact the most interesting developments in British politics are the growing waves of action over welfare-state issues — most recently, a widespread parents' revolt over school funding — and the influx of new members into the Labor Party. After a long period when the membership of all political parties fell, and Labor's went down to 261,000 at the end of 1991 (from 1,105,000 in 1953), Labor recruited some 150,000 new members in 1994-5.

No one knows exactly who these new members are. Certainly a large proportion are inactive. Certainly some are middle-class right-wingers, attracted because they know what Blair is about and agree with him. However, 40% of those recruited in 1994 came through the cut-price membership scheme for members of the affiliated trade unions — mostly manual workers' trade unions. The balance of the local impressions I have been able to collect is that the social

mix of the new members differs little from the pre-1991 membership (weighted toward the better-off white-collar working class); that the new members are vague politically, pro-Blair because they think Blair will beat the Tories; and that they are open to anti-Blair arguments on all the issues — Health Service, welfare state, trade union rights, renationalization of utilities, Clause Four.

Even the Young Labor movement, “saved” for the Labor Party leadership by destroying it in the late 1980s, has begun to revive, in a heavily controlled form. The vast majority of rebellious youth, however, remains outside the labor movement and outside organized politics. Socialists must find ways to reach them: if we do not, the fascists (still much weaker in Britain than in France, Germany, Italy, etc.) will. Either through an industrial revival, as trade unionists find their footing in new circumstances, or through the mobilization of the higher hopes created by a Labor government against that government’s inevitably conservative policies, the tide will eventually turn. To contribute to and help maximize a labor revival, we on the left must do three things: resolve and clarify, in our own minds, the issues in the ideological crisis of the British labor movement; take the re-stated ideas of working-class socialism to as many working-class youth as we can reach; and establish solid roots in the Labor and trade union movement.

Italy: the Conflict-Ridden State

Dario Renzi

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, A BYZANTINE STRUGGLE HAS BEEN RAGING between a segment of the judiciary and part of the Italian political establishment. Despite the din of daily revelations which are always scandal-mongering and superficial, these developments have captured public attention to an extraordinary degree. Because the controversy encompasses the entire judicial system, its reverberations are being felt in the halls of Parliament and impact directly or indirectly on every institution of the Italian Republic. The confrontation also touches on civil society, its political weight and relation to the state. Accordingly, the unfolding events have aroused popular passions. The present situation, triggered by chance incidents involving the state, is also the product of a profound national crisis which has become a universal feature of contemporary capitalism.

In the beginning was an anti-corruption drive known as Clean Hands whose vanguard was a new generation of judges which sought to free itself from the conventional, rigid and almost absolute control of the executive branch. Milan has been the center of investigative activity because it is located on the frontier between the rich North of Europe and the devastated underdeveloped South of Italy. As a result, Milan has become a city of deals, intrigues, and corruption involving industry, governmental institutions and parties; a lawless badlands seemingly forever lost to honest economic dealings and modern politics.

Vaguely resembling some forerunners from the early 1970s, this platoon of gowned commandos is a sociological mélange of former '60s student radicals, modern Solons, and conscientious law students born in the province. Obviously smart and relatively independent from the political arena, they found sufficient cause to initiate targeted investigations. Individual inquiries invariably ran across multiple close ties between the business world, the bureaucratic jungle, and the corrupt partyocratic galaxy, referred to hereafter as the triangle.

Nothing could escape this triangle of systematic fraud of every kind in Milan: public and private business; municipal, regional, and state problems; contracts and sub-contracts; commissions and orders; production, distribution, and everything in between. Battle-hardened and voracious, a small army of modern pharisees and nepotists, yuppies and errand-boys, repentant radicals and invited guests have become caught up in the workings of this new geometry of power run by the manager and the tycoon who will inevitably be found on any side of the triangle. Exposed was a feral social bloc represented by a group of politicians known by the apt, if a trifle unscholarly, name of CAF which stands for the initials of its leaders: Bettino Craxi, [former Socialist Prime Minister] Arnaldo Forlani, [former Secretary of the battered Christian Democratic Party] and Giulio Andreotti [former Christian Democratic Prime Minister]. CAF was

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financed and organized by the Milan triangle.

While the militant wing of the judiciary could not ignore the organic character, breadth, complexity, and illegality of the triangle's operations, the investigators could not, and did not want to, pry too deeply into the web of collusion among the various sectors. Probing further would have meant calling into question the foundations of capitalist domination.

What is it that formally and theoretically goes against the prevailing norms and laws or at least some of them, undercutting the basic imperatives of the liberal state and bourgeois common sense? What is it that ruffles the feathers of so many moralists as well as hypocritical reformers? What is it that elicits a legal and administrative response from the Gurkhas of justice? The answers can be found in the economic base of the Italian Republic, the historical parameters of the state and driving force of the postwar regime, and the normal operations of overlapping government branches.

Even when willing, the judiciary lacks the prerequisites for waging a serious attack. A partner in the linkages among the branches, the judiciary is an organic component of a material system of politics consisting of the management and arbitration of interests which are consolidated and imposed at the expense of civil society. From the outset, this paradox hampered the Milan Pool and dogged the investigators.

Prosecutors bearing down on top-level figures were stymied by their lack of autonomy vis-vis the executive — the executive in the broad sense of those political configurations emerging over time as the apex of the power triangle. This lack of autonomy is notably characteristic of the Minister of Mercy and Justice who was called the Keeper of the Seals under the monarchy. The merely apparent ambiguity of the role of the Minister — a representative of the executive to the judiciary or the guardian of the judiciary within the executive — has been definitively and systematically resolved in favor of the government. The government ruled, commanded, and lorded it over the judiciary. An appointee of the head of state, the First Magistrate, conforms to the rule that the judiciary must limit itself to applying laws approved by parliament and serve as an instrument of the government in office.

Yet, within this framework, a segment of the judiciary took its job seriously and didn't participate in the usual patronage networks. Well-equipped and organized into four groups, this vanguard took the initiative and went on the offensive in an attempt to carve out its own independent space. How was it able to do this? Where did it find the nerve?

The investigators benefited from conflicts within the regime and were able to insert themselves into the cracks of the state edifice. They cleverly exploited the vulnerabilities of a complex and crystallized system of power. Of course, the collective will of Clean Hands reasserting the rule of law was unique. On the other hand, the investigators could not generalize their findings or rise above the antique deontology or ethical standards in which they are also steeped. Integrated into the sacred division of labor, the investigative team remains a slave of the system to which it belongs.

Destabilizing events were required in order for the Pool to break into the political arena. Running the gamut from those warned that they were under investigation to potential defendants, they had to overstep generally accepted boundaries before the judges were able to launch a crusade against the "infi-

dels" of the state. They were also bolstered by the fact that the initial inquiries sparked popular support which, while vague, was relatively energetic, transcended party affiliations, and involved a broad spectrum of civil society.

These tremors are also explained by the crisis of bourgeois politics in its traditional forms. There can even be found a sneaking support for the judges within the interstices of the partyocracy. Going on the offensive, judges drew confidence and determination from the divisions among political factions and, more important, the growing discord between industry and the politicians, and the endless bickering between institutions. The judiciary had also been strengthened by partially successful battles against the Mafia, a unique underground sector of the state, and to some extent by inspiration drawn from the martyrdom of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, Italy's most prominent and respected judges murdered by the Mafia.

Meanwhile the most aggressive, dynamic, lucid, and avaricious bourgeois politicians umbilically tethered to the large monopolies had come to understand the gravity of the challenge facing them and its potentially far-reaching consequences. In response, they declared war on Clean Hands, a war for which the preparations had been made long before. The orchestrator of the offensive was Socialist Party chief, Bettino Craxi, the premier Italian politician of the early 1990s, behind whom was arrayed a broad range of Christian Democratic factions. However, by now, this bunch was far too weak and exhausted to impose its will unilaterally on civil society or serve the interests of big business effectively. Their bellicose response to the judges was an ill-considered venture. CAF was compelled to make concessions without actually being defeated in its attempt to undertake an efficiency-oriented transformation of the executive and, possibly, the state. CAF's sidelining was doubtlessly expedited by the judiciary's work because it had taken the form of settling scores within the framework of the system without being able to go an inch beyond. It comes as no surprise that the politicians' offensive against the judiciary would be resumed, and escalated into an all-out struggle with the accession of Silvio Berlusconi to power.

BERLUSCONI WAS A NEWCOMER TO PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS but an old buccaneer of industry and finance. He alternately tried to seduce and liquidate the Pool by resorting to everything, from offers of government access to delirious denunciations of alleged conspiracies. Beyond the showmanship, the results of all his efforts have been minimal because the economic causes of the crisis have remained unchanged and subsequently took a turn for the worse. The hard-line wing of the Milan judiciary gave a better account of itself during the confrontation and has racked up some valuable political points in the national and international media battles. Most important, the judges have obtained access to the mass media, including some television networks, thereby enhancing their prestige. They have learned how to use various political pulpits to respond to their adversaries and have begun to win allies and open supporters. As a result, the charismatic leader of Clean Hands -- Antonio Di Pietro -- has emerged as the exponent of a genuinely populist "simple and democratic" proud judicial tradition. Di Pietro has come to embody a healthy provincialism in speech and manner which goes down well in a thoroughly national-populist country.

The confrontation between Berlusconi and Di Pietro has acquired a more general political significance, as the protagonists themselves are the first to

admit. The bombastic cavalier, Berlusconi, who must rely on his speechwriters to feed him his lines, engaged in furious scatter-shot invective after the attack on his close friend and fellow cabinet member Craxi, by Public Minister Ielo which highlighted the long-standing relationship between Berlusconi and Craxi. The media tycoon responded to Ielo's attack:

The Milan prosecutors' office has an organic tie to the left. The judges share the left's political agenda of destroying *Forza Italia*, its leader, and all their political foes. Toward this end, as Goebbels teaches, a lie repeated seven times becomes the truth ... Italians should clearly understand what is going on. At the republican and Milan regional level, the prosecutors office is pursuing political objectives and engaging in a political struggle instead of pursuing the ends of justice. Any citizen who does not belong to the right party, i.e. to the left, has no chance of getting justice. (La Repubblica, October 1, 1995)

Thus, the prime suspect, with his customary crude logic, pretends to be the injured party and assumes the role of principal accuser. And his squires have been keeping up a steady drumbeat with the same tortured arguments, demands and allegations for the past two years.

The overall significance of the struggle underway has subsequently been clarified and reinforced by the Mancuso Affair. Mancuso was the overbearing and petulant Minister of "Mercy and Justice" in the Dini government who launched a new major offensive against various prosecutors with the obvious aim of taking the heat off Berlusconi and Fini [head of the neo-fascist National Alliance]. The inspectors appointed by Mancuso found no evidence to substantiate the Minister's charge that there were irregularities in the Pool and the Parliament finally succeeded in ousting him by passing a vote of no confidence.

THESE EVENTS ARE RELATED TO A POLITICAL CONFLICT between two sectors of the right or, more precisely, between the right and the statist radicals who are at loggerheads over significant differences. These differences are programmatic in the only sense that they can be within the ruling class: about conceptions of power, its branches and management.

The broad front of the foes of a specific wing of the judiciary has consolidated itself because it needs to preserve the connivance among the economic, political, and bureaucratic institutions which does not permit objections, obstacles, or controls. This triangle of complicity, with its inevitable repressive corollary, is the product of a postwar tendency, a typical symptom of capitalist and statist modernity that has become universal in our era but assumes different forms with increasingly intense contradictions. Recent developments in the Italian case are an intriguing example.

Berlusconi represents a new attempt to frame the classic capitalist triangle. He has begun to assemble a coalition around himself which is not just political but also encompasses more complex, even contradictory interest groups. He and his entourage have their fingers in both business and the public sector. Their singleminded strategy seeks to engineer from above a legislatively approved organic, systematic and surreptitious bonding of all branches of government. This would have dire consequences, leading to the legalization, de facto if not immediately de jure, of everything that has gone on for decades behind the facade of the liberal state and the pretense of the separation of powers.

This aberrant project is inscribed in Berlusconi's genetic code. After all, he created his own business empire by manipulating the law and trying to get rid of whatever and whoever he was unable to buy including judges and lawyers. Having benefited from repression of ordinary people, he was the first to react ferociously against the slightest hint of restrictions imposed on big business, taking advantage of "pluralism" to create a full-fledged monopoly.

There are some similarities and noteworthy differences between the Bonapartist tendencies of Craxi and Berlusconi. Craxian Bonapartism was engendered by the First Republic and its actual system of power and the Christian-Democratic axis. This system had a specific matrix which was intensely political, highly pragmatic, and flexible. Its conflicted attitude toward the judiciary made it impossible to fully stabilize the system leading to constant tactical maneuvers and adjustments, often clumsy and glaringly obvious.

Berlusconi's Bonapartist ambitions are more rigorously defined and based on more substantial social forces. He represents a faction of the leading strata of the bourgeoisie which promotes its own concerns in the guise of the national interest in order to advance them. Berlusconi's empire has the anonymous tentacles typical of modern ultra-capitalism. But the subterranean influence of the Berlusconi business machine was beyond political and judicial control, throwing its weight around and conducting its own systematic financial swindles in broad daylight. Berlusconi's method of doing business was aimed — particularly with respect to its intervention in politics — at maintaining its hold over the information field.

He could appeal directly to individualistic parvenu sentiments and bourgeois appetites which are widespread in a country like Italy, including the subordinate classes. At first, he was able to offer himself as an "alternative" to traditional politics by social origins and experience. He knew how to turn his media monopoly to political advantage. But the weakness of the Bonapartist multi-media project was that Berlusconi did not effectively or automatically represent the entire strata of the upper bourgeoisie. These other elements of the dominant class often found themselves in a state of rivalry with the knight. As a result, they could and did have a political perspective which diverged from that of the power triangle.

The populist demagoguery typical of a self-made captain of industry quickly became stale in a country as crisis-ridden and ill-tempered as late 20th century Italy. Berlusconi also lacked the requisite political skills. His situation was not improved by the fact that he surrounded himself with yes-men, dreary experts, and hordes of propagandists. In seeking to represent the common interests of the dominant class, he could not devote himself exclusively to feathering his own nest. In the end, he had to pretend to support media pluralism even if that was dictated more by market considerations than respect for "democracy."

These differences over the exact contours of the project fueled the uncertainties and problems of the alliances and movements gathered around the "Liberty Pole." These conflicts must be borne in mind if we are to understand the reluctance, if not outright opposition, of a segment of the other dominant class groups to the political ascendancy of the messiah of the airwaves.

We are referring here not just to important strata of the super-bourgeoisie which sometimes have more clout than Berlusconi but to segments of the state apparatus which are now coming into their own politically. This is also true of

the judiciary, especially its New Left elements, which have been working to preserve and eventually advance their own political agendas and prerogatives. These groups perceive themselves as an integral part of the Italian state which they expect to defend their interests. Among all the other state organs, this minor branch needs its own sphere and function. But in order to set itself on a specific collision course with the capitalist triangle and the political sphere it has to take an oppositionist stance toward the existing political system.

NOT ONLY SHOULD THE RIGHT AND CENTER-RIGHT BE PLACED in the docket by the new gowned wave but also the left and center-left because the entire political system in its ancient Italian version — i.e., partyocratic — is corrupt, beholden in different ways to economic potentates, and inextricably intermeshed with the state-bureaucratic moloch. In their roles as a permanent opposition, both the PCI/PDS and MSI/AN,[*] for different but occasionally coinciding reasons, have handled their relations with the state and their insertion into the triangle quite differently from the other parties. Both have, for the most part, been above the usual wheeling-and-dealing but in no way extraneous to it.

In the course of the conflict initiated by a part of the judiciary, there was a tenacious resistance by a segment of the bureaucratic political economy which provoked a radicalization of the Clean Hands Pool. The old system found its most militant proponents in Berlusconi and *Forza Italia* which sought to take advantage of the situation and build a new political coalition. Di Pietro and his team accepted the challenge because they have been able to take advantage of an authentic popular consensus. Initially, public opinion worked in favor of Berlusconi who later ran afoul of it. But the ace up the sleeves of the new judges was their ability to transform themselves into the guardians of the venerable principle of the liberal state which sought to maintain a rigorous separation between the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The judicial institution which had sanctioned the separation, and the distinction between the state and civil society, was now becoming, in an inverted form, the bridge between them.

It was precisely the latter aspect which brought about a changed attitude of the old political machines of the renovated left. Not without internal conflict and with specific limitations, the reformist leadership has chosen to support the judicial offensive. Much more than tactical considerations have propelled them down this path. The Milan Pool was actually doing what the dominant left, by its very nature, was never able to do. But there is also something deeper impelling the party machines to line up behind Clean Hands: their ideological affinity for the liberal state and its tripartite separation of powers.

In fact, the liberal state exists only in vague outline and has never been genuinely realized. Given their integral roots in Palmiro Togliatti's Communist Party, neither the PDS nor the PRC could coherently defend this concept. Their statism is atavistic and ancestral; their ideological creed completely compatible with the perpetuation of the existing bureaucratic political economy once it is touched up a bit. This would be an opportune time to converge with the right

[*] PCI is the defunct Italian Communist Party; PDS is Party of the Democratic Left which has its roots in the old PCI as does the further left Communist Refoundation Party (PRC); the MSI is the former fascist Italian Social Movement which in its transformed modern garb is the AN (National Alliance).

and they are doing so by going along with the establishment parties in defending the supreme autonomy of politics.

ALTHOUGH THE POOL'S INITIATIVE IS STILL STRICTLY LIMITED it will not dissipate soon because of the fall-out from the crisis of bourgeois politics. We can even expect other state bodies or their sub-organs to be emboldened and, for their own reasons, to challenge the establishment. There could be latent or open threats to the subordinate classes from these rebellions but, at the same time, they are serious sources of the state edifice's fragmentation.

Thus, a classic man of the right like Di Pietro who is far removed from the labor movement, has become Berlusconi's principal antagonist in the institutional sphere. He is capable of achieving what the gigantic electoral machines have not. There is currently a lot of talk about his possible entry into politics but, for all practical purposes, he has already taken the plunge. The question really boils down to how he will be able to continue his political activity. An unequivocal demonstration of the impotence of the Parliamentary left is that it is being forced to rely on Di Pietro, as yesterday and perhaps tomorrow on Umberto Bossi [leader of the conservative Lombard League], to defeat the right. But this also illustrates the critical juncture reached by the ruling class.

The pluralism of impotence deserves some comment. We are obliged to pay a visit to this last bastion of all the frustrations and defeats, the Alamo of all the misery of the Italian left.

The leftist parties have not made the slightest effort to keep their distance from the conflict or reject its terms. Instead, there has been a persistent attempt to find a common language with the other contenders based on the same premises and intentions. Certainly from the left of the political spectrum, one might have expected an emphasis more critical of the institutional order of our really-existing capitalism. Instead, those "anti-capitalists" of convenience who run the Communist Refoundation Party adopted positions fully consistent with the reality of the Italian capitalist state.

The national-populist Rossana Rossanda took every opportunity in the October 6, 1995 *Il Manifesto* [a daily newspaper close to the Communist Refoundation Party] to offer a passionate defense of the separation of powers of the old liberal bourgeois state and showcase her reactionary nostalgia for warmed-over Togliattiism without ever explaining what really happened. As a consistent and organic part of the republic "born of the Resistance," she asks sorrowfully:

Why doesn't a social-democracy operate in Italy as in other countries? Why has there been no space for a liberal or reformist dialectic? Why is the right fascistizing or Berlusconian, or is it? By refusing to confront these proper questions which are no concern of a court, a country loses all respect for itself and becomes an obscene self-caricature.

The theorist of all our defeats does not have the gall to defend the policy *tout court* without modifiers or qualifications:

The system went off the rails not because the judges have been doing too much but because politicians have been doing too little.

Taking a rod to the lot of them, the school teacher of the Resistance continues:

What are our ministers doing? ... Nobody is asking why everything is sliding inexorably to the right. In my opinion, the answer is because the right benefits from reducing the political sphere to a judicial matter. Why is it that for Rossanda's left, politics is a matter of the state and the bureaucracy?

We cannot advance our struggle while ignoring the nature of the state, the system of which it is a part, the regime which engenders it, and the crisis in each of these categories. The subordinate classes are confronting a crisis for which they could pay the price or, looking on the bright side, extract some contingent advantages. In short, it is impossible to remain on the sidelines but we also cannot associate ourselves with any of the parties in the field without, once again, becoming trapped within the fatal triangle.

THE OLDER KARL MARX NEVER LOST HIS FASCINATION for the Paris Commune and its attempts to transcend the separation of powers. But he did not have to deal with the concrete development of the advanced capitalist countries and their state systems, i.e., with the consolidation and material combination of branches.

Even during its republican phase, the historical development of the Italian state has revealed that it never served as a guarantor of social welfare or individual security as promised in the Constitution. On the contrary, we have witnessed a steady exacerbation of individual and social insecurity of the subordinate classes. The reality of the Italian state runs the gamut from unpunished slaughter to absurdly severe punishments for petty criminals or the wrongly accused, from the outrages of the Mafia and Camorra to class "justice" meted out against strikers and workers or young people fighting for their rights, from "natural" disasters to totally unjustified preventive detention, from the indiscriminate and often fatal use of police force to the criminalization of the socially marginalized as well as the attempts of the young to congregate, leaving no doubt about the total disparity between the Italian state's constitutional promises and justice.

For those who have been at the bottom, the half-century of the First Republic has often meant living without justice and sometimes even under the threat of injustice. Misfortune could strike people randomly and without warning. To the complete absence of social equity has to be added the almost certain lack of a reliable personal guarantee against the state, the boss, the police, the courts, and the banks. Naturally, there is an almost complete absence of protection against thieves and rapists. And the absence of social equity holds true in jail as well as outside prison walls, in factories and schools, on questions of health and housing, as well as practically any other area of our common existence.

That is why it is absolutely essential that we shatter the cruel and illusory myth of the "law-bound state." We should detail what transpires under the rule of law exercised with few restraints against the collectivity and the individual; the history of the uses and abuses perpetrated by the ruling classes through the different branches at the expense of civil society. Getting rich and enjoying ever greater privileges, the chance to cheat your neighbor on a daily basis and flout the law, the broadest possible margins for exploitation and oppression have been the governing principles of the state and, in fact, have become judicial principles defining the system and the physiology of power.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ARRIVE AT A SERIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF the question of judicial power, and power in general, if we neglect the development of the state and bourgeois politics during the half-century since World War II. We must view capitalist politics as a total political system, which implies an interweaving of powers that is indissoluble and complex, and predetermined by the overall context in which the policy conducted by imperialist states sets the standard. No longer reducible to the classic tripartite separation, the various organs of power are distinct entities because they have their own, often autonomous, internal dynamics. But they are still subordinate to interests within the triangulation of the bureaucratic political economy. There is not the slightest chance of the legal operation of these organs of power because, through daily practice, they have managed to establish an obviously clandestine and thieving code of behavior in relation to civil society. They are also totally unconstrained by the formal or moral strictures to which they pay homage.

These organs have given rise to covert means of which the public is unaware, that contemplate the use of repression and violence against civil society and for settling scores among themselves. It is scarcely conceivable that these organs of power could be dealt with simply through legal and direct means. This is creating mounting difficulties for the ruling classes themselves. The business- or efficiency-oriented campaigns seek to strengthen the executive which is tendentially Bonapartist. There are also significant fringes of the bourgeoisie seeking to rationalize the situation and, in the final reckoning, to restructure the state, possibly on the basis of a minimally cohesive social coalition. The architects of this campaign need but simultaneously fear the judiciary; the judiciary should set boundaries but not overstep them.

Despite all the institutional and constitutional squabbling, there has never existed an effective separation of powers in Italy. If the legislature has always appeared subordinate to or strongarmed by the executive, the executive had the judiciary totally under its thumb from the outset. Even formally, but especially in practice, the history of the last 50 years has seen the evaporation of judicial authority. In actuality, Italy has a judicial system under the aegis of a Parliament that has been dominated by the government in office. What is passed off as the separation of powers has sanctioned the virtual omnipotence of the monopolies through the medium of politics and, above all, of the executive. The debate and the struggle underway confirm the inevitably perverse and totalitarian nature of bourgeois politics in its decadent phase.

Thus a revolutionary Marxist critique of the current struggle must be critical of the state, its organs, the social forces which underpin it, and the modern bureaucratic political economy. Ours is an historically founded criticism but one which envisions a future society able to unify and distinguish the branches simultaneously into a dialectic of emancipation prefiguring the withering of the state, itself. In this sense, justice takes on a special importance. Its autonomy and independence against other branches cannot be guaranteed exclusively by eligibility (as this applies to some bourgeois systems) and by recall and rotation of functionaries. Full popular participation in the exercise and control of justice must be inspired by ethical principles, values of social welfare and individual well-being, and complete freedom of the collectivity and the individual.

Translated from the Italian by Patrick Flaherty.

Socialism and Christianity In the Work of Ignazio Silone

Michael Löwy

SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP between religion and politics are often based on an institutional approach to the subjects which brings out the similarities between the form of the party and the form of the church. Without minimizing the interest or relevance of choosing this course, there is something to be said for drawing public attention to another approach: one which underscores the non-institutional or even *anti-institutional* convergences between religion and utopia, and especially between socialism and Christianity. Defining himself as a "socialist without a party and a Christian without a church," the Italian writer — Ignazio Silone — is virtually a Weberian ideal type in this respect. In his world famous work, we can see a sort of fusion by *elective affinity* of a Christianity which draws its inspiration from the 12th century Calabrian chiliast, Gioacchino da Fiore, and a socialism of a libertarian hue. Within the confines of this brief article, we will try to follow the main stages of this political and spiritual alchemy which has been a source of the interest if not fascination of many generations of readers of his books.

Silone was born in 1900 at Pescina dei Marsi, a village in the Abruzzi Apennines. His true family name was Secondo Tranquilli. While still in secondary school, the young Silone became involved with the activity of the Peasant Leagues in his region. One image from this era remained permanently etched in his memory. Hanging on a wall of the local office of the Leagues was a portrait of Christ the Redeemer dressed in a long red gown and topped off with the inscription: "Blessed are those thirsting for justice." Next to it was a trumpet sounded to call farmers to meetings. His estrangement from the church can be traced back to these years. He found it an insufferable scandal that the bishops in their pastoral letters to the faithful were far less concerned about social poverty than such trivial matters as the immodest dress of women, promiscuous bathing at the beaches, or exotic new dances.¹

Taking up residence in Rome, Silone became the secretary of a group of young socialists. Most of the members of this organization would take part in the founding of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1921. Silone would later write that for him and many of his comrades during this period, joining the party had a significance akin to a religious conversion.² Silone was a close ally of Antonio Gramsci and he quickly became one of the principal leaders of the

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party. At first, he was secretary of the underground Center within Italy and later went into exile in Switzerland to escape persecution by the fascist regime. Silone along with Palmiro Togliatti became the representatives of the PCI to the Comintern. In the course of a 1927 Comintern session in Moscow, Silone dared to refuse to mechanically approve a proposal put forward by Stalin personally. The Soviet leader wanted the assembled delegates to issue a collective reprimand against a statement of Leon Trotsky without giving them a chance to read it in advance. This action would mark the beginning of Silone's dissidence. In 1930, three of his best friends in the party leadership — Pietro Tresso, Alfonso Leonetti, and Paolo Ravazzoli— were expelled from the PCI for failing to go along with the Comintern "line" and deciding to join the Left opposition led by Trotsky.³ While he did not agree with their decision, Silone refused to condemn them as "traitors" despite persistent importunings by Togliatti who came to visit him in Switzerland. Not long after, in 1931, he found himself expelled from the party. This was a traumatic experience for Silone which wounded him to the very core of his being.

DURING THE YEAR BEFORE HIS EXPULSION FROM THE PCI, Silone had been ill and confined to a sanatorium in Davos. He had taken a break from his political activity to edit his novel *Fontamara* which would not be published until 1933, and then in German, at first. The novel was an immediate success and hailed as a masterpiece by all the critics including Graham Greene and Bernard von Brentano. The book was translated into 27 languages and 1.5 million copies were published. Jakob Wasserman saw in it "a simplicity and grandiosity worthy of Homer." In an open letter to Silone, Trotsky saluted "the passion which wells up in this author and enables him to create a true work of art."

With biting irony, the novel describes life under the fascist regime in a village which was very similar to the one in which Silone grew up. His hero is a farm lad named Berardo Viola. Berardo is a spontaneous rebel who discovers socialism with the aid of a student and ends up sacrificing his life for the revolutionary cause. The inspiration driving Silone's work is entirely secular (and Marxist) but certain religious themes, always perceived from the point of view of a farmer, are also present. The religious sentiment of the poor — a sort of *cafoni* (poor peasant) gospel that Silone had encountered in his youth — is manifested in bitter and despairing commentaries such as those of Berardo Viola:

Today, the true god effectively ruling the world is money. Money is the master of all of us, including priests like Father Abbacchio who preach the message of god in Heaven.

Berardo concludes that perhaps the source of their collective misfortune has been to go on believing in the old god while a new one now rules this earth.⁴

This religious sensibility is also evident in ironic parables like the dream told by the old Michele Zompa. Christ and the Pope are discussing the kind of favors which will be bestowed upon the *cafoni* to ease their sad existence. The Saviour suggests that land be distributed to the farmers or they be exempted from paying taxes. But the Pope replies that this would not be acceptable to the princes, the government, and the rich who were all good Christians after all. Finally, the Pope came up with an idea for a gift which would not offend the powerful: a new species of lice which he spreads generously around the houses

of the poor. To the peasants, the Pope declares:

Take this, my dearly beloved children, Take it and scratch away. In moments of idleness, it will be something to take your mind off the temptation to sin.⁵

One of the central themes of the future work of Silone can be found in this naive and irreverent image: counterposing a Christ in solidarity with the poor to the institutional church.

SILONE'S REDISCOVERY OF CHRISTIANITY TOOK PLACE sometime around 1936. This was the period following the publication of a collection of short stories of an anti-fascist inspiration, *Voyage to Paris* (1935), and before the appearance of his book *Bread and Wine* in 1937 which contained Silone's new social/Christian perspective. There is no easy answer to the question of how this religious epiphany came about. One possible hypothesis would be the Moscow show trials which provoked his first public condemnation of the Stalinist USSR in 1936 and probably induced Silone to undertake a period of searching ethical reflection. During these years, he also made the acquaintance of religious socialists like Martin Buber and Leonhard Ragaz who were then living in Switzerland.⁶ Published in 1937, *Bread and Wine* is a work striking for the simple, calm, and direct way in which the author integrates, interweaves, and fuses the religious and the political, the Christian tradition and the socialist utopia, and the martyrdom of saints and revolutionaries. These profound internal harmonics, both moral and literary, are undoubtedly one of the reasons for the common chord which the book struck throughout Europe and the United States.

Bread and Wine was no less successful than *Fontamara* and hailed by Thomas Mann, Stephan Zweig, and Alfred Kazin. The Swiss critic, Rudolf Humm, compared the book to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Silone's hero, Pietro Spina (a largely autobiographical character) is a Communist militant who had been living in exile. Describing himself as a "follower of Mazzini, Lenin, and Trotsky," Spina returns to his native region in Italy to do educational work among the *cafoni* and organize an anti-fascist resistance within their ranks. Falling ill and dogged by the police, Spina is obliged to disguise himself as a priest to elude his pursuers. Spina soon discovers that the farmers are impervious to politics in the usual sense of the term and more open to Gioacchino da Fiore than Gramsci. In his new identity as a priest, "Father Paolo Spada" begins to preach the glad tidings to the *cafoni* by using examples drawn from the lives of the saints and martyrs:

The story of martyrs is always different and always the same. A time of tribulation and persecution. A dictatorship with a deified leader... An army of mercenaries to ensure that the rich never get indigestion. A population of slaves. The endless preparation of new wars of pillage to boost the prestige of the dictatorship. In the meantime, mysterious visitors arrive from abroad. They speak in a hush of the marvels being wrought in the East and proclaim the Glad Tidings: Liberation is near at hand. The most daring, the poor, and the hungry meet in the catacombs in order to hear the emissaries speak. The word spreads... The police raid the clandestine gatherings and make arrests. Prisoners are tortured and turned over to a special tribunal. There are some who refuse to pay homage to the idols of the state. They acknowledge no other God but the one in their own soul. They face punishment without flinching. The survivors keep faith with their dead and establish a secret cult to honor their memory. Times change and the ways in which we dress, live, work, and

... speak about things are also transformed in their turn. But at bottom, it is always the same story which continually unfolds over and over again.⁷

With the nobility and simplicity that characterizes Silone's style, this passage encapsulates the convergence through elective affinity of socialism and Christianity which serves as the inspiration of *Bread and Wine*. The stories of the sacred and a secular utopia each illuminate the other in a reciprocal exchange between the political and the religious. Both find their common source in a specific state of mind and moral posture which Paolo Spina describes by referring back to his own adolescent religiosity in the following terms: enthusiasm for the absolute, a rejection of the compromises and fictions of everyday life, and being ready to sacrifice oneself.

To his mind, neither the church nor the party were any match for this ethical imperative. If the young Pietro Spina left the church to devote himself to the socialist cause:

... this was not because he no longer believed in the validity of Catholic articles of faith or the efficacy of its sacraments. He left the church because the institution seemed to have identified itself with the same corrupt, shabby, and cruel society that it ought to have been fighting against.

As for the Communist party, its machiavellianism became increasingly unbearable to him. Finding himself confronted by party officials who demanded that he condemn Nikolai Bukharin as a "traitor" without even knowing what the former leader of the Bolshevik right stood for, Spina responded:

... Don't ask the impossible of me. I can't sacrifice to the party the very same motivations which compelled me to join it in the first place. That would be like putting the church before Christ.⁸

Only a few exceptional figures embodied the Christian and socialist message in its original purity. These were the old priest — Father Benedetto — and the young militant — Luigi Murica. Father Benedetto does not conceal his animosity toward the Vatican policy of conciliation with the fascist regime. For Pietro Spina, this makes the old priest the only member of the institutional church who has upheld the honor of Christianity. Opposed to the war in Abyssinia, Father Benedetto refuses to give his blessing to the fascist flag — an act which smacks to him of idolatry — and retires from public life. Detested by both church and civil authorities, he ends up an embittered man. As for the young revolutionary student — Luigi Murica — he is tortured to death by fascist thugs in a scene which willfully draws parallels with the Passion of Christ. The police detaining Murica kill their prisoner because they find a note on him which reads

... One day, truth and brotherhood will rule over human beings instead of lies and hate. Labor will reign in the place of money.

In the eyes of Father Benedetto, the socialism of Pietro Spina is "his way of serving God." Conversely, a skeptical friend named Uliva describes Spina's dream with a tinge of irony as the hope of "transforming the Fucino Valley into a place run by a Soviet-style Council of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies under the presidency of Jesus Christ." The growing interest of "Father Paolo Spada" in religion, the sacred texts, and the lives of the saints does not detract one iota

from the intensity of his social engagement or his faith in a revolution of the poor which abolishes private property.

BUT THIS SAME BALANCE IS NOT FOUND IN SILONE'S NEXT WORK which was intended to be a sequel. Published in 1941, *The Seed Beneath the Snow* also deals with the life of Pietro Spina, a refugee trying to evade the authorities. But in this novel, the social utopia is relativized in favor of a kind of mystique of poverty. Curiously enough, he wrote this "un-political" book at a time when he had decided to leave his political isolation and take over the leadership of the Foreign Center of the Italian Socialist Party in Zurich. The two dimensions so wonderfully conjoined in 1937 are now found to be dissociated, sundered, and uncoupled in a surprising duality between political engagement in revolutionary socialism without any Christian references and a literary work with an acosmic religious sensibility.

Despite a few moving passages, the literary quality of *The Seed Beneath the Snow* seems to show the effects of this contradiction. As the author of a preface to the recent Italian reissue of the novel emphasizes, the work is far too wordy, constipated, plodding, and lacking in narrative rhythm:

"Silone's imagination remained bogged down in a structure composed of values rather than events."⁹

The aim of the first Pietro Spina was to help the poor become conscious of their condition and free themselves. The object of his later incarnation was to help *one poor person*. The individual in question was the young deaf and mute Infante whom Spina had gotten to know while hiding in a stable with the company of a donkey and an ox. For Spina, his encounter with Infante has been:

the most important event of my life. Before my eyes in the stable, ... he has given a name and a face to poverty.

His brotherly love for the poor deaf-mute is intense and almost exclusive. When the latter kills his father in a fit of rage, Spina's affection for Infante leads the fugitive to take responsibility for the crime and turn himself into the fascist police who have been on his trail for a very long time. The revolutionary act is superseded in this novel by something which Pietro Spina calls a "benevolence free of all calculation ... [and] entirely gratuitous generous acts."¹⁰

What nevertheless remains common to both versions of the character is a refusal to enter into any form of compromise with the regime and an awareness of the continuity between Christian sensibility and revolutionary consciousness:

A revolutionary living outside of the law finds himself in the same ideal condition as a Christian living in a cloister. He has burned his bridges back to the enemy and their vulgar temptations [*allettamenti* in the original Italian]. He has openly declared war on their world and lives by his own law.¹¹

The reference to the *cloister* — a retreat from the world in which one can live "by one's own law" is typical of the religious atmospherics pervading the book. The difference between the Christianity of the Pietro Spina of *Bread and Wine* and the hero of *Seed Beneath the Snow* can be defined with the help of two concepts borrowed from Max Weber's sociology of religion. In the first case, Spina was driven by an active inner-worldly asceticism for whom the rejection of the

world along with its honors, power, and vanity leads him into an attempt to “remake the world” and rationalize it ethically.¹² In the second instance, we are instead witnessing a *contemplative asceticism* which is achieved through a mystical *flight from the world*.

Spina’s embrace of what Weber defines as a religion of *acosmic love* — i.e., at once hostile and indifferent to the real world — has been perceived by many readers of Silone as a disavowal of all political activity.¹³ Irving Howe was a great admirer of the Italian writer but even he arrived regretfully at the conclusion that Silone had “ceased to be a social revolutionary.”¹⁴ Howe wrongly determined that the disillusionment of Silone with every form of political party had robbed him of all confidence in anything larger than the ethical regeneration of the individual. Howe failed to consider that during this period, Silone had taken over the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party in exile between 1940 and 1944 which exposed him to some risk since such activity resulted in his arrest and internment by the Swiss authorities.

Fifteen years later, Silone would respond to Howe’s criticism by trying to explain this stark dichotomy. The novel which had been:

the *revenge of the poet against a contingent reality*, left the impression everywhere as the article in *Partisan Review* attests that I had definitively withdrawn from politics... But I began to write that book at exactly the same time that I accepted a political post and a clandestine one at that. During these years, the gulf between my pamphlets, articles, practical political work and that calm stoical atmosphere of *Seed Beneath the Snow* reveals just what sort of extreme tension I was operating under, ... [a tension] virtually inhuman and intolerable in the last analysis.”¹⁵

While this commentary does not provide the true explanation, Silone’s words still stand as a valuable testimony to the tormented state of mind of an artist and activist during this period.

SILONE COULD NOT INTEGRATE A CHRISTIAN DIMENSION into the documents that he edited for the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) during the war years. Particularly notable among these articles was an appeal for a socialist Europe without borders or colonies published during 1944 in the journal *Workers’ Future*. But Silone still tried to extract something out of this “intolerable” tension by insisting, during a 1942 Zurich conference, upon the indissoluble link between both sides of his personal engagement:

I believe the rediscovery of the Christian legacy amid the ferment of the liberation of modern society is our most important intellectual gain. I think this comes through clearly in both *Bread and Wine* and *Seed Beneath the Snow*.”¹⁶

In 1944, Silone returned to Italy and emerged as one of the main leaders of the PSI by becoming a deputy to the Constituent Assembly and taking over as editor of the socialist journal *Forward*. The unity found between his work and his life is well portrayed in the theater presentation of *Bread and Wine* entitled *And He Hid Himself* staged in 1944. The play is distinguished from the book by a far more optimistic ending than the 1937 version where the dispirited hero, Pietro Spina, is forced to set out on the lam once again. In the stage version, he continues to work with a group of peasant rebels and attempts to cultivate along with them “the conditions for common action.”¹⁷

During this period, Silone also hosted a famous conference in Rome where

he specified and spelled out his ideas on the "Christian legacy in socialism." He reaffirmed his deeply held conviction that:

faith in Kingdom Come is an essential element of the Christian legacy which under different guises continues to stir up human society even outside of the direct influence of the church.

Despite repression by ecclesiastical institutions, this primitive Christian faith has never disappeared:

If it has endured down through the centuries, this can only be because such a yearning is deeply rooted in the human condition. The lineage of this yearning can be traced from Gioacchino da Fiore up through the Spiritualist Franciscans, the Tabornites, the Anabaptists, the utopian socialists, and modern socialists. These all appear to be a series of discrete separate episodes but they are fed by the same source. The history of the expectation of Kingdom Come is the story of hope always disappointed but it still remains an immortal hope nonetheless."¹⁸

There is no use pointing out that Silone never sank into passive anticipation. In fact, he was motivated by the very same activist hope which inspired all modern attempts to overthrow the established social order whether these were called anarchist, socialist, or communist. It is no accident that this messianic/millennarian reading of the Christian message returns for its primary source to the biblical prophets of Isaiah and Daniel.¹⁹

The political itinerary of Silone in postwar Italy was that of a man who tried desperately to escape the Cold War but wound up trapped by it. In 1948, the Socialist party split into two factions. One, led by Pietro Nenni, allied itself with the PCI and the "socialist camp" while the other, led by Giuseppe Saragat, made common cause with the "free world." Along with some friends, Silone refused to choose between them and established an autonomous movement. Soon afterward, this organization merged with Saragat's Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI). Once again, Silone rejected this alternative and gravitated for a while (1951-1952) toward the Independent Socialist Union, a movement founded by left-wing socialists and dissident Communists (Aldo Cucchi, Lucio Libertini) who preached a revolutionary orientation opposed to both Stalinism and capitalism.

DURING THE 1950s, HOWEVER, SILONE DECIDED TO THROW HIMSELF body and soul into the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a Cold War machine run by a brilliant pleiades of pro-NATO ex-Communist intellectuals.²⁰ This decision left Silone open to fierce criticism from independent Italian socialists (Libertini) and their American friends (Hal Draper) who with good reason excoriated him for entering into this alliance.²¹ The only thing that can be said in defense of Silone is that *Present Time* (1956-1968), the Italian journal of the CCF which he edited, preserved some intellectual independence and never hesitated to denounce American McCarthyism, the Vietnam War, and American imperial policy in Latin America.²²

During this same period, he decided to settle accounts with the Communist movement. First he published a touching autobiographical study entitled "Emergency Exit" in which he explained his reasons for joining the PCI and then leaving it. The article was later included in *The God that Failed*, a renowned

collection of memoirs of former Communists, which drew a furious response against the "renegade" from the party and especially its General Secretary, Palmiro Togliatti. Soon after this, Silone published a new novel, *A Handful of Blackberries*, (1952) on the disillusionment which had followed the joy of liberation in 1945. One of the principal characters is Lazare, a Christian rebel peasant whose legendary trumpet enables him to summon his comrades to meetings. As we saw earlier, this imagery harkens back to Silone's youth in the first Peasant Leagues which gives the novel a dimension that is at once religious and social, eschatological and subversive.

Among the friends of Lazare are the dissident Communist, Rocco, who brought the animosity of the party apparatus down on his head and father Nicola, a priest with a social conscience, to whom he addresses the ironic rebuke:

Both of you are incorrigible... One never stops causing trouble for his party and the other outrages his church.

If Lazare, "a man of the soil and the church," stands aloof from the institution, this is because it is far too often represented by priests like Father Constantino. During the fascist invasion of Abyssinia, Father Constantino supported the "legitimacy and even the sanctity of the use of poison gas if it helped the right to conquer the world, eliminate Bolshevism, and compel the infidels to recognize the supremacy of the true church."²³

Silone was tempted for a brief period to go over to the social democratic camp during the elections of 1953. But he later gave up an option which was too much at odds with his libertarian sensibility. Corresponding in 1959 with Giovanna Berneri — the wife of a famous Italian anarchist killed in Spain — Silone was not shy about making known his sympathy for anarchism in contrast to what he called "regionalistic, provincialistic, and municipalistic parliamentary socialism." But Silone stopped short of identifying himself with the "historically determined meaning" of anarchism as a term. He preferred to define himself as a "libertarian socialist in the broadest sense of a movement of emancipation which placed its confidence solely in the direct action of workers in opposition to a socialism inspired by statolatry and paternalism." He also acknowledged that "many critics have judged all the protagonists of my novels to have been morally anarchists."²⁴

THE AFFINITY BETWEEN LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM and a Gioacchinite popular religion is the subject of the only book that Silone devoted to the history of Christianity, *The Story of a Humble Christian* which came out in 1969. This work was a play dealing with the life of Pietro Angelerio del Morrone who was a poor eremite elected Pope under the name of Celestine V in 1294. After six months in his lofty post, Celestine made the decision to step down as Pope rather than renounce his convictions.

An introduction to the book entitled "What Remains" describes the return of Silone to his native region in search of information on the life of the eremite. This is probably the most interesting part of the book. Now deeply rooted in the cultural and religious soil of Southern Italy which is the "land of the return of utopia," one finds the familiar reflections of the writer on the myth of Kingdom Come and the intellectual continuity between individuals who reject society by going into cloister and the people who make modern revolutions. According to

Silone, Celestine emerged from the currents of ascetic and monastic life which developed on the margins of the official church in the Abruzzi Mountains during the Middle Ages. Whether Spiritualist Franciscans or Friars, these milieux shared a common faith in the imminent dawning of the Kingdom of God on earth like that preached by Gioacchino da Fiore: The third age of humanity, "the age of the spirit without a church, without a state, without coercion, in an egalitarian, well-balanced, humble, and kind society founded upon the spontaneous charity of human beings."²⁵

In counterposing the history of Italian popular Christianity — to which he also relates Pope John XXIII — to that of the hierarchy, Silone believes that Christian reality has been bipolar and will remain so for a long time to come: "certified and eschatological, historicized and prophetic." Each Christian must make his or her own choice in accord with his or her conscience. As for Silone, what remained worthwhile to him after all the disappointments, were the Christian sense of fraternity and instinctive identification with the poor, faith in the Lord's Prayer, and loyalty to socialism.

In a very simple manner but still with a certain nobility, the play frames the radical incompatibility between a purity of faith and the compromises required by the exercise of power, the Christian conscience and the diabolical temptations of power. One could say that the spirituality of the work swings back and forth between the two Weberian ideal types previously discussed: the inner-worldly rejection of the world and the ascetic flight from the world.²⁶

Silone's last novel was left unfinished by the author at the time of his death in 1978 and later completed by his wife, Darina Silone. The work takes place in the modern Italy of the 1970s and is entitled *Severina*. The novel tells the story of a nun who, faced with a choice between truth and obedience, decides to leave the church. Sister Severina was a witness to a clash outside of the gates of her convent between some "subversives" and the forces of order in which the police brutally beat a young worker to death. Defying the orders of her Mother Superior, she insists on telling the truth to a court investigating the case and flatly contradicts the official version of events. After leaving the convent, she becomes involved with a group of young students who befriend Severina and ask her to join them in attending an upcoming demonstration against unemployment. In the course of the march, the police fire on the crowd and Severina falls mortally wounded.²⁷ Beyond the classic conflict in the work of Silone between the Christian conscience and the institution, the most striking aspect of this book is the radically critical vision of the modern state seen through the eyes of the young rebels as a mendacious and murderous repressive apparatus. The final literary message of Silone bears the imprint of his life-long libertarian commitment at least as strongly as his earlier works.²⁸

The elective affinity between messianic faith and libertarian utopia has shaped the work of many great central European Jewish thinkers: Martin Buber, Gustav Landauer, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and many others.²⁹ By way of hypothesis, can we not consider Ignazio Silone in the completely different cultural and historical context of Italian popular catholicism to be one of the most eminent Christian representatives of this dual configuration?

NOTES

1. See *Emergency Exit* (in Italian) Rimini: Riminesi Associates, 1994, p. 38. and *The Story of a Humble Christian* (in Italian), Milan: Mondadori, 1993, pp. 23-24. Unless otherwise specified, all references are taken from the Italian editions of the works of Silone and are translated by myself.

2. I. Silone, "Emergency Exit" 1949 in *Emergency Exit* (in Italian), Rimini: ERA, 1994, p. 70.

3. The Comintern based its strategy upon a catastrophic perception of historical events which designated social democracy as "social-fascism," the principal enemy of the Communist movement, a foe considered more dangerous than fascism and nazism.

4. Silone, *Fontamara*. Paris: Grasset, 1995, p. 239.

5. *Fontamara*, pp. 50-51.

6. On the subject of Buber, Silone would recall many years later in a letter to Richard W. B. Lewis that he had known Buber in Zurich in 1934 and read several of his books. Silone added: "In my conversations with Buber, we easily found a common understanding, especially on questions concerning socialism." Cf. Richard W. B. Lewis, *Introduction to the Work of Ignazio Silone* (in Italian), Rome: New Works, p. 86.

7. I. Silone, *Bread and Wine* (in Italian), Milan: Mondadori, 1993, pp. 357-358. This is the expanded 1955 version of the novel first published in 1937.

8. I. Silone, *Bread and Wine*, p. 249.

9. Claudio Marabini, "Introduction," *The Seed Beneath the Snow* (in Italian), Milan: Mondadori, 1993, p. ix.

10. *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, pp. 168, 380.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

12. M. Weber, "Theoretical Digression," *Archives of the Social Sciences of Religions* (in French) no. 60:1, January-March 1986, pp. 8-9.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

14. Howe's article appeared in the New York journal *Partisan Review* in 1942. A notable exception to this "anti-political" reading of the novel was that propounded by the libertarian Marxist Daniel Guérin who adapted a play, *The Seed Beneath the Snow* (in French), Paris: Del Duca, 1961) from the book while, to be sure, also incorporating some passages from *Bread and Wine*.

15. I. Silone, "My Political Faith: Second Round," *Labor Action*, Berkeley, April 1956.

16. I. Silone, "The Situation of Ex-Communists," 1942. *Emergency Exit* (in Italian), Rimini: ERA, 1994, p. 108. According to Silone, the harsh realities of the 20th century have obliged socialists like himself to "go beyond our own bourgeois limitations and the 19th century to rediscover our paleo-Christian filiations." (p. 110).

17. I. Silone, *And He Hid Himself* (in Italian), 1944. Milan: World Editions, 1966. p. 91.

18. I. Silone, "The Christian Legacy in Socialism," March 1945 in *Testimony of a Politician and a Story Teller* (in Italian), Rome: I. Silone Foundation, 1992, pp. 27-29.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

20. It would later come to light that the budget of the organization was subsidized by the CIA although this was probably done without the knowledge of people like Silone.

21. See the documents on this controversy in *The Politics of Ignazio Silone*, Berkeley: Independent Socialist Press, 1956.

22. On this subject, see the remarks of Luce d'Eramo, *The Works of Ignazio Silone* (in Italian), pp. 538-540. Some liberal commentators complained about Silone's attitude toward the "Western world" being far too critical. See Sante Morelli, *Silone: Intellectual of Freedom* (in Italian). Rimini: Panozzo Publishers, 1989, passim.

23. I. Silone, *A Handful of Blackberries* (in French), Paris: Grasset, 1970, pp. 107, 308.

24. A letter by Silone published in *New Humanity* (in Italian), March 15, 1959 cited in Richard W.B. Lewis, *Introduction to the Work of Ignazio Silone*, p. 112.

25. I. Silone, *The Story of a Humble Christian* (in Italian), Milan: Mondadori: 1992, p. 17.

26. See the criticism of J. Lecler, "The Story of a Humble Christian," *Studies* (in French), January 1969: "A curious and strange manner of simplifying ancient history from all vantages to justify, dare I say it, a personal religious choice!"

27. I. Silone, *Severina*, Milan: Mondadori, 1993.

28. In a television interview on April 3, 1968, Silone had previously demonstrated his sympathy for the rebellious young people who were being treated in the media as "extremist":

There is no reason to tar them with the label of extremists. Nowhere on earth does there exist a perfect government. Even less can the present parliamentary democracy be considered perfect. A political system is healthy when it permits the expression of ideals which go beyond it. Without this proviso, liberty or progress could not exist. Democracy has a duty to respect utopia.

Cited by Luce d'Eramo, Op. cit. p. 556.

29. See my work on the subject *Redemption and Utopia: Libertarian Judaism in Central Europe: A Study of Elective Affinity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990.

Translated from the French by Patrick Flaherty

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Meyer Schapiro: **The Presence of the Subject**

Marshall Berman

I FELL IN LOVE WITH MEYER SCHAPIRO the first time I saw him. As I write this, more than 30 years later, I am just about the age now — middle 50s — that he was then. I think it's important to reconstruct the feel of it — the shock, the rush — to give him the homage he deserves. My friends at Columbia were saying, You have to see this guy, he's a living legend. I was cynical about living legends, but at last I went, and jammed against the wall in an overheated, overcrowded room. Inside five minutes I was knocked out. He talked about Gauguin and Van Gogh — and Zola and Shakespeare and Augustine and Engels and William James and Tolstoy and Picasso and Non-Euclidean geometry; as he spoke, he projected an amazing flood of images, modern and medieval, paintings and newspaper photographs and blueprints and cartoons, representational and abstract, high and low, works thousands of years old and works that he said weren't finished yet. He made dazzling jumpcuts into the past, into radically different cultures, into visions of the future.

His talk reached a dramatic climax a couple of minutes before the bell, and finished exactly when it rang. But it sounded like he could go on forever. I sighed: did he have to stop? The friend who had brought me and some of the people around us said they were “regulars,” they had been going to his lectures for years, and they still felt the pull, the flood, the intensity, the desire. DON'T STOP! It was like sex, or music, or a few other peak experiences: he had shown us the richness of being. And every one of us seemed to feel he had done it for ourself alone. “So what did he say?” my girlfriend asked that night. I felt I could spend my whole life trying to explain, and never reach the end.

I DIDN'T GET TO KNOW MEYER RIGHT AWAY. For one thing, I was dazzled by his brilliance: could I offer a coda to Beethoven? For another, I was already in love with Columbia's other larger-than-life figure, Lionel Trilling. Trilling had a very different style and human touch: he appeared genteel (although shabbily genteel), where Meyer was proudly plebian; Meyer was open and expansive in a lecture room, while Lionel was uneasy, brooding, melancholy, full of Beckettesque hesitation about communication (it was in seminars, in small groups, in dialogue, that he opened up and soared); where Meyer bathed us in art that made us see the joy and beauty of modern life, Lionel forced us to read modern literature in ways that made us wonder whether we could live at all.

When I was 20, there seemed a great gulf between those titans; I felt I couldn't love both. As I got older, it became obvious how much of a world they

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shared. Both were children of the century — Meyer was born in 1904, Lionel in 1905 — products of Jewish immigrant culture and the New York public school system, brilliant upstarts in a university that still belonged to Anglo-Saxon gentlemen, granted tenure and recognition only grudgingly, when it turned out that lots of people in the rest of the world knew their worth. Both were intellectuals *engagés*, close to the Communist Party in their youth, liberal democrats in their mature years (in Meyer's case, through much of the '30s and '40s a militant left-wing socialist, later, a liberal *social* democrat, a founding editor of *Dissent*), dialectical in sensibility, oriented toward history and social development, always focused on the politics of culture. Both built their careers around the exploration of *Modernism*. They asserted the dignity of modern art and literature, and fought for recognition of its permanent value; they showed how this art and literature could help us — and also force us — to see into the heart of modern life. That life, they both believed, was animated by contradictory drives, both around and within us, and was at once a thrill and a horror. The writers and artists they loved most were radical critics of their culture, yet expressed its deepest values. In their feeling for cultural contradictions, Schapiro and Trilling both gave a new subtlety and depth to intellectual Marxism. Along with a few other children of the century — Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Harold Rosenberg, Paul Goodman — they were just the sort of “freethinking Jews” that T.S. Eliot warned his readers against: they expressed “the modern spirit” better than anyone, but were menaces to “the idea of a Christian society.”

Listening to Meyer, it seemed that all he said was, as Goethe said, “part of a great confession.” All those who had ever heard him looked forward to seeing the great work in print, the work that would tell the whole story of mankind through art. Yet it never seemed to appear. His writings were spread out, fragmentary, hard to get hold of. (I remember the thrill when I finally tracked down the 1937 *Marxist Quarterly*, which contained one of his most exciting pieces, “Nature of Abstract Art.”) He was rumored to hold back his best work, including some of what we had heard in lecture form on the grounds that it wasn't as full, as complete, as exhaustive as it could be. This reticence created an aura of mystery around him. Why couldn't he accept imperfection and let go, like the rest of us mortals?

It was a thrill to see that, in 1978, he finally did let go, and brought out a splendid collection, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries, Selected Papers*, published by George Braziller. More volumes were said to be coming soon.* *Modern Art*, whose contents span five decades, contains the 1937 “Nature of Abstract Art” essay, a *tour de force* that situated abstract art amid the conflicts of modern history, and highlighted the combative impulse that drives it: in leaving nature and society out, or distorting them drastically, the abstract painter “*disqualifies them from art*”; this essay explained, a decade in advance, why Abstract Expressionism would have to happen, and happen here. The book includes two shorter, more recent pieces on abstract painting; his brilliant 1941 essay, “Courbet and Popular Imagery”; fascinating studies of Van Gogh, Seurat,

*So far, they are (1)*Romanesque Art*, and (2)*Late Antique, Early Christian, and Medieval Art*, both published by Braziller in 1993.

Mondrian and Gorky; and my all-time favorite, published in 1956, "The Armory Show: The Introduction of Modern Art in America." Like Schapiro's lectures at their best, these essays were dense but intensely dramatic: he captured the subjectivity and inner life of modern artists, the totality of historical forces around them, the rivers that ran through them, the spiritual twists and leaps they experienced, the breakthroughs they finally achieved.

IN THE LATE 1950s, WHEN THE BEST OF SCHAPIRO'S "modern" essays were written, the idea of modernism was important in aesthetics. But the only concerns for a modernist painter were supposed to be the purely formal attributes of painting: the nature of the canvas and the nature of the paint. Those boundaries were proclaimed with dogmatic ferocity by Clement Greenberg and his followers, border guards along a cultural Berlin Wall. For a modern painter to transgress formalist boundaries — to explore his own feelings or fantasies, or the modern world itself — was condemned as a betrayal of the artist's calling, a reduction of art's dignity to "illustration," to "entertainment," to *kitsch*. This critical vocabulary was imprisoning art, constricting its imaginative power, narrowing it into a still point in a turning world. In the suffocating 1950s, Schapiro helped create breathing space, not (so far as I know) by entering into polemics with Greenberg, but by telling better stories. He situated modern art in the midst of the volatile, explosive atmosphere of *fin de siècle* European social life.

Actually, Schapiro presented several closely related but distinct visions of modern art and the society it came from:

1. Modern art is a liberator of human feeling from social and cultural repressions, a breakthrough to the self's deepest unconscious sources, and an ongoing force for transparency, gaiety and joy in modern life:

It affirmed the value of the feelings as essential human forces unwisely neglected or suppressed by a utilitarian or hypocritically puritanic society....This corrective simplicity and intensity seemed to revive a primitive layer of self, like the child's or the savage's...[and] gave a new vitality to art. The painters admitted to their canvases, with much wonder, gaiety and courage, uncensored fantasies and associations of thought akin to the world of dreams.....they joined hands with the moralists, philosophers and medical psychologists [Freud?] who were exploring hidden regions and resources of human nature....The artists' search for a more intense expression corresponded to new values of forthrightness, simplicity and openness, to a joyous vitality in everyday life.

2. Modern art generates intense pressure, in audiences as well as in artists, for metamorphosis and self-development. The endless succession of modern periods and styles makes people obsessed with history: they "seek history-making effort through continual self-transformation." They come to feel they must overcome tomorrow everything they are today.

...The modern movement has provoked a perpetual uneasiness from its followers. It is necessary...to keep up with history. The world-shaking art of the revolutionary period has become a norm; one expects a revolution every decade. This strenuous ideal breeds in the artist a straining for modernity and a concern with the historical position of his work; it often prevents him from maturing slowly and from seeking depth and fullness as much as freshness and impact.

3. Modern art, in both production and consumption, is intensely private

and individualized:

Formerly tied to institutions and fixed times and places, to religion, ceremony, state, school, palace, fair, festivity, the arts are now increasingly localized in private life and subject to individual choice; they are recreations and tastes entirely detached from collective occasions....[Every work is] offered to the spectator as one among many.

This opens up new possibilities for original creation:

This character of culture as a sphere of personal choices open to the individual who is conscious of his freedom...affects the creation of new art, stimulating inventive minds to a fresh searching of their experience, and of the resources of art which enter into the sensory delight of the spectator and touch his heart.

But it also constricts the scope of imaginative life and cuts artists off from other people and from society as a whole:

Artists today who would welcome the chance to paint works of broad human content for a large audience, works comparable in scope to those of antiquity and the Middle Ages, find no sustained opportunities; they have no alternative but to cultivate in their art the only or surest realms of freedom — the interior.

4. On the other hand, this very loneliness gives modern artists the power to see through their culture, a culture based on class and lies. In his 1957 lecture on "Recent Abstract Painting," Schapiro celebrates modern art in an Existential Marxist way, as a model of authenticity in a world built on bad faith:

Paintings and sculptures, let us observe, are the last hand-made objects within our culture. Almost everything else is produced industrially, in mass and through a high division of labor. Few people are fortunate enough to make something that represents themselves, that issues entirely from their hands and mind, and to which they can affix their names. . .

What is most important is that the practical activity by which we live is not satisfying; we cannot give it full loyalty, and its rewards do not compensate for the frustrations and emptiness that arise from the lack of spontaneity and personal identifications in work: the individual is deformed by it, only rarely does it permit him to grow.

. . . All these qualities of painting may be regarded as a means of affirming the individual in opposition to the contrary qualities of the ordinary experience of working and doing.

In his focus on work, identity and growth, Schapiro sounds a lot like the young Karl Marx — whose "Alienated Labor" and other early essays had just appeared in popular editions, with sensational impact — and like the young writers of the emerging New Left. This critical vision does not exactly contradict the earlier ones, but the tone color is harsher, the indictment of contemporary life is bitterer and angrier. Schapiro's earlier vision of modern art as a source of "joyous vitality in everyday life" seems to fade away. He believes, more ardently than ever, that we need modernism to make us authentic, but he may have given up hope that it can make us happy.

This new collection, *Theory and Philosophy of Art*,* lacks the focus and

*Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*. Selected Papers by Meyer Schapiro. New York, George Braziller, 1994. Illustrated. 253 pp. \$27.50.

dramatic power of the *Modern Art* volume. It is surprising, and disappointing, that it fails to reprint Schapiro's great 1936 lecture, "The Social Basis of Art," one of the all-time classic statements of Marxism. Still, it includes several splendid essays, some well-known, others obscure till now. The most striking pieces are a classic 1962 essay on "Style"; a meditation on Perfection and Completeness in art; a dispute with Freud's study of Leonardo; an argument with Martin Heidegger about Van Gogh; and, at the book's end, a passionate indictment of Bernard Berenson.

Now, it is always a thrill to feel Schapiro's mind at work; but people who have grown up on his work may feel something missing here. In his lectures, in the best pieces in *Modern Art*, and in his work on the Romanesque, his intellectual powers are like a sorcerer's: he spreads a whole world before us, with what seems like a magical fluency, so that we feel instantly at home there. We miss those magical expansive gestures here. These essays seem to be pointed strangely inward; they often read like parables, and we have to interpret. The luminosity is still there, but it is hidden, as if in eclipse, in a subtextual underworld; we have to work harder to make contact with the magic, to get the golden tripods back from the night.

Schapiro's argument with Heidegger, "The Still Life as a Personal Object" (1968, 1994), is about a Van Gogh painting of an old, worn-out pair of shoes. This painting plays a central heuristic role in Heidegger's celebrated 1935 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art." Van Gogh's painting, Heidegger argues, conveys one of the primal truths of life, "the equipmental being of equipment." The boots in this painting, the philosopher says, belong to a peasant, and moreover, he thinks, to a peasant woman. This premise generates an evocative picture of peasant life: "In the stiffly solid heaviness of her shoes," Heidegger says,

there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind....Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path....This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread....The equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world*....

Schapiro asks Heidegger what seems like an innocent art-historical question: Which Van Gogh painting of boots are you talking about? It turns out he wrote Heidegger about this in 1965, and Heidegger's reply was vague. Schapiro thinks he knows which painting it must have been (it is reproduced), but he also thinks Heidegger could have developed his peasant rhapsody without looking at the painting at all. But if he had tried to look, he would have had to see that Van Gogh represented boots in two sharply different ways: when they belonged to peasants, he painted them clear, smooth and unworn, as an unproblematic element in still-lives; when he painted them old, wrinkled and worn-out, in the way Heidegger describes, they were *his own*.

Heidegger ignores what those shoes meant to the painter Van Gogh himself....[They] are seen as if endowed with feelings and reverie about himself. In isolating his old, worn shoes on a canvas, he turns them to the spectator, he makes of them a piece from a self-portrait....a memorable piece of his own life, a sacred relic.

Reading Van Gogh's letters and diaries, and other people's accounts of conversation with him, Schapiro finds "the idea of the shoe as a symbol of his life-long practice of walking, and an ideal of life as a pilgrimage...." So the truth about

the shoes turns out to be a truth about “the artist’s presence in his work.” And Schapiro, in returning the boots to their owner, has acted as a sort of ontological detective.

WHAT IS THE SUBTEXT OF THIS DETECTIVE STORY? It may be about Modernism and Post-Modernism. Schapiro has been explicating and defending Modernism for — it’s incredible! — over 70 years. When he began, the consensus of art historians and museums in the USA and Western Europe was that art had ended long ago. The Stalinist USSR and Nazi Germany both stigmatized modern art as “degenerate,” though both enlisted it in selective ways. Against them all, Schapiro (and some others, though not so many) fought for modern art as the 20th century’s most authentic way of being alive. He knew he would win, knew sooner or later people would be forced to recognize modern art’s overwhelming brilliance, amazing variety and ongoing power.

He won — for about two minutes. Then, soon after 1968, the Post-Modern *Weltanschauung* was stridently proclaimed. It launched vicious attacks on everything and everyone associated with the Modern. But one of the pervasive post-modern themes is what the French critic Roland Barthes called “the death of the subject.” Thus the modern self, subject of declarations of rights, talking cures, and abstract art, was revealed as a bankrupt fraud; the individual was simply a sum of codes, an embodiment of rhetorical and cultural conventions, and these codes and conventions turn out to be the only subjects worth studying. Everybody connected with modernism was re-examined. In condemning their predecessors to the dustbin of history, the Post-Moderns were no different from any of the other innumerable modern *avant-gardes*. Decertifying one’s predecessors from history is one of the ways a movement certifies itself, and cultural life goes on. Schapiro has known this for at least half a century. (It was one of the themes of “Nature of Abstract Art.”) But many other intellectuals who should also have known it, whose education should have given them some perspective and sense of historical irony, instead went rushing to catch the *Concorde*.

Now, as it happens, the philosopher most venerated as the patron saint of this Post-Modernism is the (happily denazified) Martin Heidegger. How did this happen? It will puzzle readers who are used to thinking of *Being and Time* as a great modernist book (and one whose spiritual desperation recalls Van Gogh). Maybe the only explanation is that that was then and this is now. In any case, it was Heidegger who folded Van Gogh’s boots into markers of pure conventionality, “the equipmental being of equipment.” Schapiro wants to make it clear not only that the modern subject is alive, but that he’s *there*, at the core of the work of art. This short essay starts small, like many classic detective stories. But it expands fast, and by the time it ends, it has grown into a ringing affirmation of modernism: an art where “the artist’s presence in his art” is a primary source of truth and power.

This is not only an issue in art: Schapiro has helped us see how modern art is part of a whole world culture where “the individual, his freedom, his inner world, his dedication, become primary.” In 1956 (“The Armory Show”) he wrote that, thanks in part to modern art, individual self-fulfillment had become a “collective value,...a matter of common striving.” It was clear there that Schapiro affirmed that striving and that value. (His Marxism has always been in the

humanist tradition that strives, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, for a world where “the free development of each is the basis for the free development of all.” Yet only a year later, in “Recent Abstract Painting,” his vision was far darker and more pessimistic. Did he still think people were striving together for authenticity in 1968, or in 1994? He doesn’t say; but there is a melancholy undertow running through the Heidegger essay which suggests deep doubts. And once we notice his doubts, we can see an intensely personal dimension in the argument about “the artist’s presence in his work”: Schapiro is insisting on *his own* presence, claiming space for *his* subjectivity, for *his* pilgrimage, reminding us only last year (1994, the essay’s latest version) that, though his shoes may be worn, he’s still here.

“ON PERFECTION, COHERENCE, AND UNITY OF FORM AND CONTENT” (1966) takes some big steps not only in aesthetics, but in ethics and politics as well. It refutes the idea that a work of art — a poem, a painting, a film — should be “a well wrought urn,” self-sufficient, perfect, complete. This was aesthetic dogma when I was growing up: the New Critics (Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren and their friends) plugged it in literature, Erwin Panofsky and his followers in the visual arts. Schapiro argues that these “perfect” qualities “are more likely in small works than in large. The greatest artists — Homer, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Tolstoy — present us with works that are full of problematic features.” He mentions the incongruities of scale in the Chartres cathedral, in the Sistine ceiling, in *Anna Karenina*: “in the greatest works of all, incompleteness and inconsistency are evidences of the living process of the most serious and daring art....”

He compares the experience of a work of art as a whole to a mystic’s experience of oneness with God: both experiences may lead to ecstasy, but both leave a great deal out. “We do not see all of a work when we see it as a whole.” Instead of wholeness, he says, we should aspire to *fullness*; instead of zaps of ecstasy, we should aim for a sensibility that he calls “critical seeing”:

Critical seeing, aware of the incompleteness of perception, is explorative....It takes into account others’ seeing, it is a collective and cooperative seeing and welcome comparison of different perceptions and judgments.

Critical seeing does not exclude ecstasy — it “knows moments of sudden revelation” — but it situates those moments within a larger totality, as part of the psychic “fullness” that seems to form his aesthetic ideal.

Once more, Schapiro’s subtext is even more striking than his text. It should be clear from this diction that he is not only telling us what to do at the Museum; he is telling us how to live. It is fascinating to see that, as much as John Ruskin or William Morris or Walter Pater or Oscar Wilde or any other *hasid* of the Aesthetic Movement, he believes our responses to art should be the model for the way we live. But his “critical seeing” is aesthetically richer than theirs, and morally more complex. First of all, he wants the world of art to be “collective and cooperative,” not just the monopoly of a few smart guys at one another’s throats, but truly *public*, as art in modern times has rarely managed to be. Next, he wants a critical discourse “extending for generations.” Now this has conservative and traditionalist reverberations that might at first surprise us. But Schapiro’s art world must be an open society, ever receptive to “new points

of view," it must include the excluded, and must be aware that excluded groups have the capacity to renew art with "revelation." He wants art to be a channel for empathy, a parable of pluralism, a way for people (and peoples) to see each others' ways of seeing, so they can cooperate collectively, constitute a public, and strive together for a fuller future.

This is asking a lot from art, and why not? And yet, Schapiro knows better than virtually anyone how militant, combative, contentious, sectarian, tormented, extremist, perverse, how fruitfully narrow and intolerant modern art has always been. Knowledge of art can teach us knowledge and acceptance of others, can open us to empathy and pluralism, if, like Schapiro himself, we have seen so much art, and seen a long history in which so many artists and art movements evolve, and a world in which so many artists and art movements coexist with each other. But very few artists themselves have this largeness of vision and understanding. They are much more likely to strive for what Schapiro calls wholeness than for fullness, for ecstasy rather than empathy; they don't want the totality of vision, but rather the narrow revelatory *zap*. And if that's what they need to create what they can, in all its splendor and all its limitation, we can be pretty sure Schapiro wouldn't want it any other way. But there is a great gulf between the fullness of life and expression that Schapiro has always fought for, and the peace and healing and mutual acceptance and sense of community that he has often yearned for.

I'M SAD THAT MEYER SCHAPIRO HAS BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET for the last 30 years; that the public that loves him — and maybe even more, the public that's never had a chance to know him — hasn't been able to hear his voice. I'd have loved to hear him on Pop Art, on affirmative action, on Frank Gehry, on Tilted Arc, on the breakup of the USSR, on the homeless people on the streets, on Cindy Sherman, on Chinese cinema, on ethnic cleansing, on art and victimization (he, who knows Christian art so well, knows it goes back a long way), on so much of what we've had to live with and still haven't been able to figure out how, on how art can still help us be human. And yet, and yet: Look! there he is on the cover, 91 years old, his smile radiant enough to light up Grand Central. Open the book and there's that amazing flow, just as it was 30 years ago. Get into the flow, don't stop! What did we do to deserve him, a man of such brilliance, sweetness and integrity? We probably don't deserve him, but he's still here; like Van Gogh's shoes, he's worn but not worn out. The least we can do in his honor is to focus and concentrate our own minds, to grasp how the world holds together, to see how beautiful it can be, to feel how exciting, to work to keep the flow going on.

In the Shadow of the Resistance: Camus and the Paris Intellectuals

Stephen Eric Bronner

WORLD WAR II TRANSFORMED A GENERATION OF INTELLECTUALS. This was particularly the case with Albert Camus. The young essayist and novelist discovered a new sense of solidarity during this time when everyone, employing a phrase from his play, *State of Siege*, “was in the same boat.” The defeat of France created a short-lived unity between previously conflicting political tendencies ranging from conservatives like General Charles DeGaulle to Communists, as well as anarchists like Pascal Pia. Even many who were previously non-political found themselves drawn into some form of opposition to Hitler and his puppet rulers of Vichy. Intense, if often short-lived, friendships were forged in the cafés, underground cultural events, and countless meetings. The years of defeat were the ones in which Camus came to know André Gide, Andre Malraux, Arthur Koestler, and grew close to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Most of these friendships would sour after the war. It was the same with the great love of Camus’ life, the wonderful actress, Maria Casares, now best remembered for her minor part in the film *Children of Paradise*. The bitterness of defeat generated a new sense of community and a hope for the postwar renewal of France from which the legend of the “Resistance” was born.

Camus joined the Resistance late. But, he quickly made an exceptional contribution both as an activist and as the editor of *Combat*. He moved back to Paris where he lived first in a hotel and then in André Gide’s apartment. He performed underground work and saw enough friends like René Leynaud, chief of the Paris sector, fall into the hands of the Gestapo and wind up dead or in concentration camps. All of Paris spoke about his editorials and an aura surrounded him at the time of the Liberation. The now famous *Letters to a German Friend*, which were dedicated to René Leynaud, only enhanced his image.

These letters were written as propaganda pieces and the arguments are emotional rather than reasoned. Saying that France would emerge from the conflict with “clean hands” or that the Resistance killed without “hating,” for example, only made sense in the most polemical terms.

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But, for all that, they evoke stark images and a sense of how a defeated population was forced to live with “with humiliations and silences, with prison sentences, with executions at dawn, with desertions and separations, with daily pangs of hunger, with emaciated children, and, above all, with humiliation of our human dignity.”¹

The *Letters to a German Friend* do not simply justify taking up arms against the Nazis. They emphasize the moral cost to the victim of using violence to counter violence. Traces of his former pacifism subsequently remain as Camus wonders “if we had the right to kill men, if we were allowed to add to the frightful misery of this world.” Questions of this sort, of course, are answered in the affirmative. But, within the framework of propaganda, these letters meditate on the motivations for engagement and reflect the change a generation underwent. They admit the illusions of a time seemingly long past as Camus notes how:

We had to make a long detour, and we are far behind. It is a detour that regard for truth imposes on intelligence, that regard for friendship imposes on the heart. It is a detour that safeguarded justice and put truth on the side of those who questioned themselves. And, without a doubt, we paid very dearly for it.²

Two traditions are shown in conflict: fascism and humanism, irrationalism and enlightenment, force and what the French call *civilisation*. The ideological reasons for the war become clear in these letters along with what was culturally at stake. They provide a certain self-understanding for what drove young men and women into the Resistance. Indeed, they make plain the preoccupation with solidarity and conscience for which Camus would become known.

CAMUS WAS NEVER A GREAT POLITICAL REALIST. He had joined the Communist movement as a young man just prior to its endorsement of the anti-fascist Popular Front, which extended from 1936 to 1938,³ despite his support for the “appeasement” policy advocated by Neville Chamberlain. Even following the German attack on Poland, Camus believed the Allies should seek to negotiate with the Nazis.⁴ He never really grasped the dynamics of totalitarianism and, whatever his experiences as a poor youth in Algiers,⁵ of imperialism either. World War II was initially seen by him as essentially a product of human error and moral blindness.⁶

But, for all that, *The Plague* became one of the most important novels of the age. It soon sold over 100,000 copies. The novel was quickly translated into many languages, and made Camus an international celebrity. Ironically, however, it was written in the Massif Central where there was no fighting, by a man who had never seen tanks rolling. There, Camus felt the war as an absence,⁷ which is precisely why he deals neither with battles nor the singular acts of wartime heroism, but the everyday life of a populace under siege. And, from the very first, everyone understood what was at stake. *The Plague* crystallized the experience of a generation sick of war, guilty about its early defeat, and suspicious about the future.

Camus would never again portray as many multi-dimensional characters with diverse motivations for action. Written in five parts, reminiscent of the structure used in classical tragedy, this novel evidences a complex form of narration as well as a subtle mixture of direct and indirect forms of speech. Its

sober prose, its careful construction, its deliberate understatement, all contribute to its enduring success.

The Plague marks a shift of focus from the isolated individual of *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* to a situation calling for solidarity with others.⁸ It is the work in which Camus pulls together the various themes and images on which his career is built. *The Plague* most clearly evidences his critique of Christianity, his refusal to love a god who lets the innocent die, and who demands unconditional acceptance of the human condition. It exhibits his humanism and provides perhaps the best understanding of his political worldview. The novel reflects the values of the Popular Front and, like so many other works from the 1930s and 1940s, there is no protagonist. There are no grand words and no grand gestures. There is, in short, "no question of heroism in all of this. It's a matter of common decency. That's an idea which may make some people smile, but the only means of fighting the plague is — common decency."⁹

The Plague portrays the tension between private and public commitments. Each character has his own worldview. Each makes choices and, with the exception of a collaborator named Cottard, assumes responsibility for them. Each has, for this reason, a different version of the events initiated by the plague. According to Camus, however, a "chronicle" is being presented, which begins with rats dying in the town of Oran and leaving the plague as their legacy. People start becoming incurably ill and the authorities, after first attempting to downplay these developments, cling to habit and refuse to accept the evidence of an epidemic. Thus, ultimately, they find themselves without any plan for dealing with the emergency.

This is the point at which Tarrou unites a motley group of individuals with very different worldviews into a "sanitation corps" committed to fight the plague. Rieux is a doctor who can no longer heal; Grand is a clerk, who wishes to write a novel, but cannot get beyond the first sentence; Rambert is a journalist torn between love for his mistress, whom he wishes to join in another city, and the growing sense of solidarity with the inhabitants of Oran; Paneloux is a priest who, from the pulpit, calls the plague a punishment from God and then witnesses the death of an innocent child; and finally there is Tarrou, a humanist and opponent of the death penalty, who keeps a diary of the plague.

Which of the characters is most "like" the author is an irrelevant question. Rieux illustrates the militant who, like Camus, doesn't subscribe to any particular political creed and quietly engages in the unheralded day to day battle with tyranny; indeed, he is "the modern Sisyphus."¹⁰ Tarrou like Camus opposes capital punishment and seeks inner peace through his *morale de compréhension*. Joseph Grand who could never complete his perfect work of art, and reflects the writer's bloc often experienced by Camus himself, evidences his dignity by engaging in the humble task of keeping careful statistics of the plague. Rambert is separated from his lover, just as Camus was separated from his wife by the outbreak of war, and in staying to fight the plague makes perhaps the ultimate personal sacrifice in the name of solidarity.¹¹ For all his Catholic dogmatism, which Camus experienced while convalescing at a Dominican monastery in 1943, Father Paneloux reflects the courage of his convictions. There is subsequently something in each of these characters with which Camus identifies and, in the solidarity they exhibit as well as the sacrifices they make, he finds "more things in men to admire than to despise."

The novel offers no certainty, however, that the struggle against the epidemic was of any use. Resistance does not defeat the plague, but only bears witness against it. The plague seems to subside on its own and Rieux, who ultimately emerges as the narrator of the novel, ruefully acknowledges to himself:

"what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; ... and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city."¹²

THE PLAGUE IS A CAUTIONARY WORK. Even so, however, Roland Barthes called it a "refusal of history." And this is obviously the starting point for any criticism. Numerous critics have noted how the real nature of fascism is ignored and the battle against an inhuman plague oversimplifies the matter of commitment. There is no reason for anyone to identify with a disease, and violence carried out against a human enemy is very different from the tactics undertaken in fighting the plague. Sartre was correct, in this regard, when he noted that the conflicts of interest inherent within a concrete "situation" disappear.

But, in a way, this critique is external to the novel. It basically attacks Camus for not having written the "realist" or "naturalist" work these critics wanted to read. *The Plague* does not pretend to describe the horrors of totalitarianism in systematic fashion nor is there a reason why it should. Material and instrumental constraints on action are also less the province of a symbolic tale than the moral conflicts experienced by individuals. Even worse, however, the criticism by Barthes and others like Sartre also obscures what is sociologically important about the work. It ignores the manner in which the novel actually offers a self-understanding of the Resistance.

Participants in the Resistance saw themselves, after all, as engaged in the battle against absolute evil; indeed, men and women of very different creeds united in a common project. Camus glorifies them and perhaps, in this sense, *The Plague* helped foster what would become the "myth" of the Resistance. It offers "an idealized reconstruction of the Resistance movement such as Camus and others would have liked it to have been: the fight of a virtuous and oppressed minority against an anonymous and depersonalized aggressor."¹³

But there is also an element of truth in this idealized image. The manichean framework of good and evil employed by Camus, in fact, reflects the *moral* simplicity of choosing between fascism and anti-fascism. Philosophical excuses for collaborating with the Nazis, in this vein, fall apart. Also, in contrast to the carefully cultivated postwar image of an overwhelmingly popular anti-fascism, it is important to note how Camus depicts the majority of the populace as apathetic and falling back into a life of habit as the plague runs its course. Indeed, its Christian pessimism concerning the ineradicable character of the plague undercuts the revolutionary optimism in which France found itself enmeshed following the liberation.

Disease as the symbol of evil and as a basic element of the human condition has a long history. It extends from the Bible to the drawings of Albrecht Durer to the writings of Daniel Defoe to the avant-garde dramatic theory of Antonin Artaud.¹⁴ Symbolically identifying totalitarianism with a plague, of course, ob-

scures the character of a particular political system. Arguably, in fact, it even relativizes Nazism in relation to other forms of tyranny. Naturalizing totalitarianism, however, is a double-edged sword. There is nothing xenophobic about the book and this was important during a time in which anti-German sentiment was particularly strong. Evil has no name, no race, no sex, and no nationality. Camus may have considered it part of the human condition, but he also knew that it can take many forms. His intention was clear: he would refuse to identify any one form of evil "in order better to strike at them all... *The Plague* can apply to any resistance against tyranny."¹⁵

NO OTHER WORK OF CAMUS SO FUSES A SYMBOLIC RENDERING of the human condition with the self-understanding of a particular historical experience. *The Plague* reflects the values embodied in a set of articles written for *Combat* in 1946: *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*. These are the pieces in which Camus rejects not merely fascism, but Stalinism with its perverse belief that a utopian future justifies the use of systematic murder in the present. Such utopianism and lack of respect for the individual are precisely what this novel contests. Germaine Bree, in this vein, is correct in terming it a "cautionary tale."¹⁶ The infectious character of the disease raises the prospect of contamination and the doctors are warned about taking the necessary precautions in treating the victims lest they themselves become carriers.¹⁷ Thus, in the words of Tarrou, what Camus would consider the basic issue of the age becomes defined:

"As time went on I merely learned that even those who were better than the rest could not keep themselves nowadays from killing or letting others kill, because such is the logic by which they live; and that we can't stir a finger in this world without the risk of bringing death to somebody."¹⁸

This novel is simultaneously an evocation of the popular front and a definitive break with the Communist party. There is not a single Communist among the prominent figures in the novel. Rieux, Tarrou, Grand, and Rambert are all liberal humanists; Paneloux is a Catholic. Communists played a prominent role in the French Resistance and were part of the common fight against fascism. Camus' decision to omit them was surely purposeful. It was based on what had become a definitive ethical position: "There is no objection to the totalitarian attitude other than the religious or moral objection."¹⁹

Solidarity would have meaning only insofar as respect for the individual was preserved. Camus had become sick of his age. He was appalled at the thought of untold millions being cynically sacrificed for the utopian dreams of dictatorial regimes. His artistic identification with Tarrou, who wished never to increase the suffering of anyone, now began to take philosophical shape. The idea of a revolutionary transformation would surrender before a concern with "achieving a *rule of conduct in secular life*."²⁰ Rebelling against suffering while seeking to "correct existence" would now define his philosophy. Such was the message of *The Plague* when it appeared in 1947.

WITH AN IDEALIZED NOTION OF ANTI-FASCIST SOLIDARITY as its theme, however, *The Plague* was already consigned to an age gone by even before its publication. Three interconnected issues led to the dissolution of the "Resistance" following the defeat of its fascist enemy: the problem of the collaborators, the Communist

party, and the national liberation movement in Algeria. Each would have a profound impact on Albert Camus' career.

Writing in *Combat* about the collaborators, at first, he advocated a policy of "justice without mercy" as the prelude to a socialist transformation of French society. As the purges proceeded under the jurisdiction of "popular tribunals," however, their arbitrary character became ever more pronounced. Camus grew increasingly disgusted and ultimately agreed in public with the earlier criticisms of his radical position raised by the great Catholic novelist and Nobel Prize winner, François Mauriac.²¹ Camus learned his lesson. He became ever more concerned with the rule of law, the death penalty, and the sacrifice of individual lives for political purposes.

Camus was, of course, uninterested in "excusing" conservatives and remnants of the old right now gathered around General DeGaulle. He annoyed them by calling for an international boycott of Spain, which was still under the fascist yoke of Generalissimo Franco, and becoming a co-founder in 1948 of the *Groupe de Liaison Internationale*, which sought to give both moral and financial aid to political refugees regardless of ideological orientation. His opposition to the death penalty and commitment to the politically persecuted, however, also put him directly at odds with the Communists who were busily engaged in consolidating their power in Eastern Europe, marked by repression and purges, and renewed terror in Russia itself.

Understanding postwar Europe is possible only by recognizing the prestige enjoyed by the Soviet Union, particularly in many of the Western countries previously controlled by the Nazis. It was seen, rightly or wrongly, as having supported the Spanish loyalists and having opposed the "appeasement" of Hitler. Even the pact between Stalin and the German dictator, which unleashed World War II and resulted in the dismemberment of Poland in 1939, was perceived by many as a defensive action caused by the vacillation of the democracies. The Soviet Union gained much sympathy for its enormous losses during the war; its citizens symbolized anti-fascist heroism during the great battle of Stalingrad in 1943. Communists also played a valiant role in the European resistance movements and their organizations commanded the loyalty of a significant number of workers in France, Italy, and elsewhere in the aftermath of World War II. The Soviet Union was also considered the natural ally of all national liberation movements and the primary opponent of Western imperialism. The future of Communism appeared bright and the "inevitability" of revolution seemed assured.

EXILES AND VICTIMS OBVIOUSLY KNEW ABOUT THE MURDEROUS PURGES of opponents, the concentration camps, the censorship, the constant lying, the egregious policies of the Stalinist regime. There was a sense among many that a Communist utopia had become ever more divorced from the bureaucratic police state intent on economic modernization in the present. But the full horror of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and its sacrifice of millions was not fully grasped. Arthur Koestler, with whom Camus enjoyed a tempestuous friendship, vividly crystallized this reality for a broader public in *Darkness at Noon*.

This novel described a former Bolshevik official coming to terms with his beliefs and previous actions on behalf of the party while facing death in a Stalinist prison. It created a sensation and was instantly condemned by various Commu-

nist intellectuals including most notably, another acquaintance of Camus, the important philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His rejoinder to Koestler, *Humanism and Terror*, essentially justified the authoritarian brutality of Stalinism in terms of "historical necessity" and the difficulties encountered in the march to a Communist utopia. He viewed the individual as subordinate to the collective and intentions as irrelevant to the social consequences of actions. Thus, even if the "subjective" criticisms made by Koestler were true, Merleau-Ponty thought it necessary to oppose them since they "objectively" weakened the Soviet Union and strengthened its Western "imperialist" adversaries in a "cold war" whose potential for heating up could produce nuclear catastrophe.

Camus was caught in the middle. He supported neither the Western imperialist exploitation of colonies ranging from Algeria to Vietnam nor the brutal policies in Eastern Europe practiced by the Soviet Union. Just after the war, in fact, Camus had witnessed the bloody repression of the first Moslem uprising in Algeria against imperialist rule and his ensuing critical essays were so precise and clear in their demands that he was offered a government position. Camus refused, of course, especially since the army and various conservative cliques both in France and Algeria adamantly opposed liquidating the empire. Governmental cabinet after cabinet was paralyzed and the intransigence of the right claimed its first victim as the Socialist party gradually weakened in the face of the Algerian events and its own inability to overcome a mounting set of internal political squabbles. Thus, while the Resistance was fragmenting into Communist and Gaullist tendencies, Camus increasingly found himself supporting a form of liberal socialism whose mass base was both numerically and institutionally disintegrating.

Camus refused to make a dogmatic choice between the two sides. His concern about the authoritarian cliques surrounding General DeGaulle caused tensions between him and Malraux. The Communists, for their part, deplored his unwavering commitment to civil rights and republican principles. Camus essentially sought a Scandinavian form of democratic socialism. But this says very little. Camus was increasingly reminded in the post-war era that he had never really articulated a political theory let alone his fundamental criticisms of the Communist worldview and its philosophical foundations.

While working on *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which was an attempt to separate himself from the existentialists by dealing with the question of suicide, Camus began collecting notes for a volume concerning the philosophical legitimacy of murder. *The Just*, a fascinating play about Russian anarchists engaged in plotting an assassination while questioning whether it is ever moral to take a life, was quite successful when it opened in 1949. Nevertheless, Camus only started systematically working on the question of murder in the aftermath of the Koestler affair.

It proved difficult for him. He suffered from writer's bloc. He questioned his ability to write a treatise with the requisite philosophical, political, and literary depth. Perhaps he even had a presentiment of what would result from its publication. This new book would throw him into a windstorm of controversy, isolate him politically, and even cause the break-up of certain close friendships, as well. *The Rebel* would become his first, and last, work of political theory.

THE REBEL FUSED THE PERSONAL ETHIC OF LUCIDITY and resistance against the

inherent meaninglessness of life, which Camus had elaborated in *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, with the notion of solidarity developed in *The Plague*. He hoped this new treatise would place him in the pantheon of the most illustrious French men of letters.²² It proposed a positive political response to an absurd existence and a diagnosis of the "pathology" with which the age had come to view mass murder as an acceptable political option. Both aims are encompassed in the title, *L'Homme révolté*, which has a double meaning in French: the rebel and the outraged man.

The Rebel is essentially divided into three parts dealing respectively with revolutionary transformation, artistic rebellion, and a political ethics based on "mediterranean thinking." The logic and categories, however, follow directly from *The Myth of Sisyphus*. We live in an "absurd" universe defined by relativism and contingency. Just as suicide is an inadequate response to the human condition, however, so is rebellion opposed to the notion that "everything is possible and nothing has any importance."²³ For, if suicide is illegitimate, then human life must assume primary value. The killing of another person is subsequently always wrong unless, in keeping with the moral of *The Just*, the murderer is himself or herself prepared to die as well. Herein lies the "limit" to rebellion and the meaning behind the belief that: "murder and suicide are the same thing; one must either accept or reject them both."

Rebellion, for Camus, is a product of human nature. It is the practical expression of outrage in the face of injustice by a slave or anyone else who has experienced the transgression of an established limit by the master in any given social situation. The response is a revolt based on the desire to be treated as a person with dignity and certain basic universal rights. Solidarity is, in short, implicit in the notion of rebellion. Thus, Camus can make his famous claim: "I rebel, therefore, we exist."²⁴

Too often, however, this concern with reciprocity is forgotten. The legitimate goal of countering exploitation is used to justify tactics directly at odds with it.²⁵ The rebel must, using the phrase of Nietzsche, "transvalue values." He or she, for this reason, will contest the prejudices of the established order and traditional absolutes incarnated in religion. Particularly in Europe, however, history or "reason" have been turned into new absolutes harboring guarantees of a future utopia in order to compensate for the loss of otherworldly salvation.

Rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronting an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impulse is to demand order in the midst of chaos and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral. It cries out, it demands, it insists that the scandal cease and that what has, up to now, been built upon shifting sands should henceforth be founded upon rock.²⁶

The "absurd" thereby becomes mirrored in the actions of those seeking to abolish it. And so, in this way, a situation occurs in which the rebel can justify the murder of all those who stand in the way of constructing a just world. The end is seen as justifying the means. Therein, for Camus, lies the "pathology" of modern totalitarianism. Formerly "a life is paid for by a life. The reasoning is false but respectable. (A life taken is not worth a life given.) Today, murder by proxy. No one pays."²⁷ It is necessary to set limits. Thus, remembering a conversation with Koestler, Camus can write:

The end justifies the means only if the relative order of importance is reasonable — ex: I can send Saint-Exupéry [the famous aviator and author of *The Little Prince*] on a fatal mission to save a regiment. But I cannot deport millions of persons and suppress all liberty for an equivalent quantitative result and compute for three or four generations previously sacrificed.²⁸

The rebel must assume that life has an intrinsic worth. Otherwise, he or she would not contest injustice in the first place. Commitment to a perfect world subsequently becomes tempered with compassion. The genuine rebel, for this reason, continually strives to remember what motivated his or her undertaking in the face of political exigencies and the temptation of unethical action against others. “Memory,” building on *The Stranger*, becomes the enemy of all totalitarians who, in seeking to break with *all* of history, necessarily destroy any coherent relation between ends and means as they elevate a future utopia beyond the needs of real individuals living in the present. The revolutionary desire to transform the “totality,” in short, can only prove disastrous. This is why Camus can write: “It’s general ideas that hurt the most.”²⁹

Art supposedly makes this plain insofar as it seeks to create meaning in a meaningless world. Incoherence is denied precisely because art stamps its own form on the real world. But Camus is, of course, talking about a particular type of art. True art must face the absurd without surrendering to it. And, insofar as it does that, art mirrors the need for a progressive politics by constantly making reference to the happiness of the individual. When art ignores the conflicts experienced by people in reality, according to Camus, it results in little more than an empty formalism while the preoccupation with *engagement* generally leads to dogmatism and monotony. Art must take a third path between formalism and realism just as philosophy must reject both subjectivism and historical determinism.

A “moderation” born of what Camus calls “mediterranean thinking” is necessary. It rejects the “passion for divinity” behind all utopian experiments. It has no use for ambitious attempts to transform human nature, which turns revolutionaries into tyrants. It suggests instead the need for discourse, open-mindedness, and a recognition of human frailty. Mediterranean thinking considers physical life, happiness, and creativity as the purposes of every progressive political action.

Murder and suicide, for better or worse, now become conceptually linked. Denying the possibility for happiness to another through murder is legitimate only by denying it to oneself through suicide. “A principle of reasonable culpability” emerges and the subjective preference for life evident in Camus’ early work now surrenders to something more objective. The rebel knows himself in the limits he or she accepts or, in short, the degree of tolerance extended to others in pursuing his or her goals. The point is simple enough. Indeed, even as a young man, Camus could maintain that:

Politics are made for men, and not men for politics. We do not want to live on fables. In the world of violence and death around us, there is no place for hope. But perhaps there is room for civilization, for real civilization, which puts truth before fables and life before dreams. And this civilization has nothing to do with hope. In it, man lives on his truths.³⁰

BUT WHAT ARE THOSE TRUTHS? Camus could boldly state: “Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is.”³¹ But what does this inflated sentence really

mean? And is it, either practically or philosophically, the case that because: "I rebel, we exist?"

Circular reasoning underpins such claims, which appear all the more arbitrary precisely because Camus refuses to offer a general theory of human nature or society. His defenders might admire his philosophical modesty.³² But this doesn't change the questionable assertion on which his argument ultimately rests, namely, that "the first and only evidence that is supplied to me, within the terms of the absurdist experience, is rebellion."³³

Rebellion is an essential element of the human condition. It is seen by Camus as inherently worthy of respect. He knows, however, that not every form of rebellion is justifiable. His aim in linking murder with suicide — the willingness to exchange one life for another is to place a limit on rebellion, differentiate it from revolution, and "humanize" conflict in the face of the bureaucratic murder of faceless millions by totalitarian regimes.

There are, of course, numerous problems with all of this. Neo-fascists and skinheads also see themselves as engaging in rebellion, for example, but surely Camus cannot consider it necessary to legitimate their initial expression of outrage and, *only then*, condemn the exaggerated form their rebellion takes. There were Nazis and Communists who were also quite willing to risk dying in exchange for the murder of opponents in the brawls and street battles anticipating the rise of Hitler.

Rebellion is simply identified with those actions of which Camus approves. The arbitrary character of the argument, in fact, is reflected in the sprawling structure of the work and its high-flown, often pompous, style. There is no serious historical or political analysis, and ideas are never contextualized within traditions. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Sade share the stage with philosophers like Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Differing interpretations of these thinkers are simply ignored and, strangely, their views are dealt with in a completely uninspired fashion.

Camus said nothing new about totalitarianism or, for that matter, the importance of civil liberties and republican values. His criticisms of French intellectuals with Communist sympathies were also unoriginal. Political commentators like Raymond Aron had already attacked their theories with far more intellectual rigor while anti-fascist writers such as Arthur Koestler, or Manès Sperber in his magnificent trilogy *Like a Tear in the Ocean*, depicted the reality of Communism more dramatically. Indeed, making matters worse, *The Rebel*, lacks any practical referent for its metaphysical judgments.

No anti-authoritarian movement willing to engage in violence, which includes the anti-fascist resistance, can begin with the idea of equally exchanging the lives of its partisans for those of its enemies; it *must* attempt to maximize costs for the enemy and minimize its own losses. Camus is, of course correct in noting the effect of ideology on action and the manner in which revolutions of the past generated organs of terror. But he never deals with the constraints in which movements operated. He never makes any reference to institutions or interests or possible structural imbalances of power in defining "oppression" or "exploitation." He also never deals with the inherent differences between a theory of revolution and a theory of rule.

All this, however, generally got lost in the emotionally and politically charged climate in which discussion of *The Rebel* took place. Communist hacks blasted

it unmercifully. But, somewhat more ominously, conservatives and Catholics applauded Camus for showing how revolutions only produce new hangmen and creating a "breviary of anti-communism."³⁴ The extremes met in their understanding of the book. Surrealists like André Breton, who wished to explore the connection between the "real" and the fantastic,³⁵ attacked its interpretation of the artist along with its emphasis on moderation with the famous statement that: "at the centre of the most brilliant midday the night is lurking." Breton and his friends believed that Camus had betrayed the revolutionary ability of art to project a qualitatively different form of existence.

Camus surely dismissed the criticism of the Communists and deplored the "misunderstanding" of his work by the political right. He was also quite correct in distrusting the desire of the surrealists to free the unconscious from all social constraints. But even liberal critics, who supported his attack on utopianism and identification with democratic values, expressed skepticism about his philosophical claims like the absolute value of rebellion. Raymond Aron was snide in complementing Camus only for being less of a romantic than Jean-Paul Sartre.³⁶ Thus, there were already doubts about *The Rebel* before Camus engaged in his bitter debate with the virtual founder of modern French existentialism.

CAMUS AND SARTRE HAD BECOME FRIENDS DURING THE OCCUPATION. Both grew famous early in life. Sartre was eight years older than Camus who was born in 1913. Camus grew up in extreme poverty in Belcourt, a working class neighborhood in Algiers, while Sartre was part of an upper middle class family in Alsace and a cousin of Albert Schweitzer. Camus took his degree at the University of Algiers while Sartre studied philosophy at the famous *École Normale Supérieure*. Sartre was short, ugly, talkative, and a man of the city. He despised religion, liberalism, and everything connected with the bourgeoisie. He was, physically and psychologically, almost the mirror opposite of Camus. But, whatever the differences between them, their work dealt with similar themes: the individual, the absurd, freedom, and responsibility. Both were anti-fascists. They associated with the same circle and, following the liberation, contributed to giving the "left bank" of Paris its intellectual glitter.

Much has been written about the relations between these two leading intellectuals of their generation. Their admirers have, in fact, virtually created a competition between them. And, for this reason, it is necessary to say a word about their relative standing. Judging them is possible only by evaluating their contributions in different arenas of intellectual work. Camus never produced a philosophical treatise on the scale of *Being and Nothingness* and the much undervalued *Critique of Dialectical Reason* or a biography with the depth and grandeur of those Sartre wrote about Jean Genet, the famous playwright and novelist, or Gustav Flaubert. Even Camus' essays exhibited far less range and sheer brilliance than those of Sartre. Nevertheless, Camus was clearly more talented as a novelist than his rival.

And, by 1952, they had become rivals. Sartre and Camus competed for a similar audience, they chose different political paths following the fragmentation of the Resistance, and each became more suspicious about the ambitions of the other. Camus believed his friend was creating an uncritical "mystique" of the working class while Sartre saw the concern of Camus with democracy and limited revolt as ultimately justifying Western imperialism. Both were right in

part. Indeed, while Sartre never recognized any reactionary prejudices of the oppressed, Camus increasingly found himself cast into the despised role of a reactionary anti-Communist.

The burgeoning mistrust and misunderstanding broke into the open with a review of *The Rebel* by François Jeanson in the legendary journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, founded and edited by Sartre. Camus had apparently asked his colleague to arrange a review, without suggesting any reviewer in particular, and Jeanson volunteered. The result was not what Camus expected. Rather than treating *The Rebel* tactfully, as he had originally implied, Jeanson attacked Camus for his superficial philosophical interpretations of Hegel and Marx as well as his willingness to reject revolution without offering any positive or practical content for his vision of rebellion. Camus was furious. Suspecting that Jeanson was merely acting as the front-man for Sartre, he wrote a response to *Monsieur l'éditeur* entitled "Revolt and Servitude." Camus essentially dismissed Jeanson, implying he was "unworthy" of reviewing his book, and attacked Sartre as well as the rest of the editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes* as bourgeois intellectuals and Stalinists unwilling to condemn the concentration camp universe in the Soviet Union.

Sartre responded to Camus in a singularly biting and trenchant polemic.³⁷ He charged Camus with exchanging his earlier non-conformism and commitment to revolt for a fashionable anti-Communism. He presented the willingness of Camus to condemn the excesses of both sides in the Cold War as nothing more than a rejection of genuine political "engagement" and an inability to choose between the imperialists and their victims. But there was also a personal attack. And Sartre knew which buttons to push. He castigated Camus for his arrogant treatment of Jeanson, his sensitivity to criticism, his self-professed weariness with politics, and his moral posturing. Indeed, coming from someone who presumably knew Camus well, all this probably carried greater weight with the public than the political arguments.

Each exaggerated the position of the other. Sartre knew that Camus was not some reactionary anti-Communist.³⁸ And, for his part, Camus knew that Sartre had steadfastly refused to join the Communist party and had just recently failed in organizing an alternative movement of the left called the *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire* (RDR) for which Camus himself had campaigned. A *practical* question divided them, however, which has been consistently ignored. The issue was not simply whether to support the Communists or oppose them. It was rather how nonaligned intellectuals should act in order to foster a progressive politics when the Communist party tended to poll about 20% of the vote, received support from much of the working class, and a democratic socialist alternative was lacking. Each answered the question differently and, herein, lay the real source of the conflict between them.

Believing "engagement" within a situation always necessary, considering progressive politics impossible without the Communist party, Sartre felt impelled to give the actions of the Soviet Union a "revolutionary privilege" in the Cold War. Seeking to foster militancy among the working class, however, he never specified how an authoritarian Communist movement could further this goal. And so, ever more surely, he found himself rationalizing one "dictatorship of the proletariat" after another. The independence and political judgment of a great intellectual were thus increasingly rendered suspect.

Camus stood on principle. He protested against the bloody suppression of the 1953 uprising by workers in East Berlin as surely as he signed petitions calling for the release of the Rosenbergs who had been convicted as Soviet spies and sentenced to death in the United States. Supported by English and American intellectuals in his debate with Sartre, however, Camus was wrongly associated with a conservative anti-Communism. He actually longed for a genuinely republican front capable of opposing both Gaullism and Communism. But no mass base for such a project existed in France. Thus, while the "engaged" man ever more surely appeared to be an ideologue, the moralist found himself increasingly isolated.

Admirers of both Sartre and Camus still argue about who "won" the debate. But, in fact, there was no "winner." Sartre radically underestimated the need for a democratic theory of governmental rule just as Camus lacked a notion of rebellion under colonial conditions in which non-violence was impractical. Neither the revolutionary nor the rebel, more importantly, could offer a coherent theory of "engagement" or an adequate response for *the* practical political problem of their time — perhaps because none was available.

CAMUS GAVE SUSTAINED PUBLIC SUPPORT ONLY TO ONE POLITICIAN in postwar France: Pierre Mendès-France. A hero of the antifascist resistance and an intellectual, an anti-Communist and a neutralist in the Cold War, a liberal and a member of the Socialist Party, Mendès-France had — for a complicated set of reasons — become the leader of a liberal minority government in 1954.³⁹ He would remain in power less than a year, brought down by the combined effects of his Algeria policy and his call for withdrawal from another colony, Vietnam, following the humiliating defeat of French forces at the Battle of Dienbienphu. And there is a certain connection between these two events. The empire was the heart and soul of the French Republic. Indeed, the military defeat in Vietnam symbolically undercut the ability of any cabinet to extricate the country from the quagmire it had created for itself in North Africa.

The Algeria in which Camus grew to maturity was the jewel in the crown of the French Empire and, even without reference to economic matters or the problem of French nationals living in the colony, rightists as well as moderates believed its loss would destroy France as a major power. Mendès-France came under immediate pressure from the Gaullists to put down the 1954 mass uprisings. Thus, while holding out offers of economic reform, he sent in French troops to support the governor of the territory, Jacques Soustelle, who had declared martial law.

The mostly white European areas were gradually sequestered from the native and non-white areas by troops and barbed wire. The FLN meanwhile gained support in the impoverished Moslem countryside as it became apparent that the reforms were too little and had come too late. Mendès-France tried to negotiate and offered free elections but his government fell before any attempt was made to realize his promises. A vicious cycle then began in which increased repression brought new acts of terror.

Malraux stood with DeGaulle, Sartre identified himself with the FLN, and Camus associated himself unequivocally with the policy of Mendès-France.⁴⁰ He had experienced imperialism. But he had also experienced the violence of fanatics personally when his mother and uncle fled to France after an Arab

neighbor was stabbed. Camus was torn. He started writing a bi-weekly column on Algeria for *L'Express*, a liberal magazine owned by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, which supported Mendès-France. In its pages, Camus condemned the violence on both sides. He called for a cease-fire, negotiations leading to free elections, and the extension of French citizenship to Algerians. Although he opposed independence for Algeria, Camus supported immediate autonomy for the colony while keeping it within the French Empire.

Camus was now really betwixt and between. He was seeking, after all, to balance his experience of two cultures. His views were "measured," employing a term from *The Rebel*, and they appear particularly enlightened in retrospect given what would become the authoritarian fate of Algeria. With the fall of the Mendès-France government, however, implementing them became ever more difficult. French and Algerian liberals were invited to Algiers to create a new version of the popular front, but Camus kept his distance since it would necessarily have included Communists.⁴¹ He remained adamant in his hope for a non-Communist republican left, which underpinned his dispute with Sartre, even as he grew increasingly doubtful about the practical feasibility of his Algerian policy.

And for good reason. Camus approached the problem like a moralist rather than a political person aware of existing constraints.⁴² He never took account of the basic political issues at stake and, as a result, his stance proved internally inconsistent. He sought autonomy for Algeria within the confines of the French Empire, but the aims of the FLN were based on the vision of independence. In the same vein, while supporting the anti-colonial strivings of the Algerian people, he refused to recognize the FLN as its legitimate representative. He proposed a federal solution beneficial to both French settlers and Algerian natives. While such a policy would cost the colonizers their political privileges, however, it would leave existing economic imbalances of power intact and conflict with the obvious aspirations of the colonized for self-rule. Neither the French right nor the Algerian revolutionaries were sustained by democratic or cosmopolitan traditions.

Camus may have written that: "the only way of eliminating Algerian nationalism is to suppress the injustice of which it was born."⁴³ But he never specified the sources of injustice, the interests blocking change, or what it would take to deal with them. He wished to identify with the republican legacy of France and the longing for Algerian self-determination at the same time. In keeping with Mendès-France, who resigned in 1955 rather than sacrifice his Algerian policy or his vision of domestic socialist reform, Camus clung to his views. He had only contempt for those on the far right who were intent on keeping Algeria at any cost. But he also feared the authoritarian tendencies of the FLN, and stood apart from those, like Sartre, who unequivocally supported Algerian independence. Attitudes only hardened as the violence grew worse. Thus, he found himself advocating an ever more untenable and contradictory position in the political context of the time.

Algeria would only receive its independence in 1958 when General Charles DeGaulle was granted extraordinary presidential power, turned against his far right-wing supporters, and essentially purged the military of its arch-reactionary forces. Neither the intellectuals nor the practitioners of the left could have foreseen such a set of developments in 1954. Camus may have more to offer on

the question of solidarity and the articulation of the existential prerequisites for a liberal socialism than most of the intellectual luminaries dominant in the postwar era. But, in a sense, their failure was also his. An inability to connect principle and practice on the level of theory, whether directly or indirectly, reflected a more general failure to create a linkage on the level of practice. Its consequences are still felt even as a new century looms on the horizon. For, indeed, the legacy of Gaullism still haunts France even while its progressive forces remain incapable of connecting politics with a new vision of emancipation.

NOTES

1. Albert Camus, "Letters to a German Friend" in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, 1960), p.6.

2. *ibid.*

3. Cf. Stephen Eric Bronner, *Moments of Decision: Political History and the Crises of Radicalism* (New York, 1992), pp. 57ff.

4. "Politically, Camus' view was ridiculous. Despite his antifascist stand, he had not grasped the nature of the Hitler regime. Not until after the Fall of France did he realize that it was especially virulent. Moreover, he chose to ignore that France could not fight Hitler while parading its readiness to negotiate with him. While insisting that he was rejecting fatalism in the name of action, Camus was condemning himself to passivity." Patrick McCarthy, *Camus: A Critical Study of His Life and Works* (London, 1982), p. 125.

5. Note the remarkable evocation of those days in Albert Camus, "The Right Side and the Wrong Side" in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* ed. Philip Thody and trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York, 1968), p. 5ff.

6. Germaine Bree, *Camus* (New York, 1964) p. 35.

7. McCarthy, *Camus*, p. 174ff.

8. The novel, according to Camus, "represents the transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared. If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation." Albert Camus, "Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*" in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 338.

9. Albert Camus, *The Plague* trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1948), p. 150.

10. Brian Masters, *Camus* (New Jersey, 1974), p. 64.

11. Germaine Bree, *Camus* (New York, 1964), p. 121.

12. Camus, *The Plague*, p. 278

13. Philip Thody, *Albert Camus: 1913-1960* (London, 1961), p. 102.

14. Cf. Bree, *Camus*, pp. 116ff.

15. Camus, "Letter to Roland Barthes," p. 340.

16. Bree, *Camus*, pp. 86ff.

17. Emmett Parker, *Albert Camus: The Artist in the Arena* (Madison, 1965), p. 113.

18. Camus, *The Plague*, p. 226-8.

19. Albert Camus, *Notebooks* 2 vols. trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York, 1991) 2:97.

20. *ibid.*, 2:10.

21. Jean Yves Guerin, *Camus: portrait de l'artiste en citoyen* (Paris, 1993), pp. 43ff; Parker, *Albert Camus*, pp. 93ff; McCarthy, *Camus*, pp. 213ff.

22. David Sprintzen, *Camus: A Critical Examination* (Philadelphia, 1988), p. 123.

23. Albert Camus, *The Rebel* trans. Anthony Bower (New York, 1954), p. 5.

24. *ibid.*, p. 22.

25. *ibid.*, p. 103.

26. *ibid.*, p. 10.

27. Camus, *Notebooks* 2:156.

28. *ibid.*, 2:143.
29. *ibid.*, 1:27.
30. Camus, "The New Mediterranean Culture" (1937) in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, p. 197.
31. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 11.
32. Sprintzen, *Camus*, p. 121.
33. Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 10.
34. Cf. Albert Beguin, "Albert Camus, la révolte et le bonheur" in *Esprit* (April, 1952), p. 736.
35. Cf. André Breton, *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings* ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York, 1978).
36. Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* trans. Terence Kilmartin (London, 1957), pp. 58ff.
37. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Reply to Albert Camus" in *Situations* trans. Benita Eisler, (New York, 1965), pp. 54ff.
38. Guérin, *Camus*, p. 105.
39. Note the superb biography by Jean Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès-France* trans. George Holoch (New York, 1984), pp. 211ff.
40. Guérin, *Camus*, p. 163.
41. McCarthy, *Camus*, pp. 276ff.
42. See, for a different perspective, Michael Walzer, "Albert Camus' Algerian War" in *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1988), pp. 136ff.
43. Cf. Guérin, *Camus*, p. 21

Book



Reviews

Counterposing Reform to Revolution

SOCIALISM FOR A SCEPTICAL AGE by Ralph Miliband. London and New York: Verso, 1995. 211 pp.

Reviewed by Horst Brand

IN THIS BOOK, RALPH MILIBAND ARGUES FOR A SOCIAL ORDER of participatory democracy, equality, and distributive justice, values that would provide the basis for a degree of social harmony and for ensuring the civic virtues needed to perpetuate them. A fundamental requirement for bringing about and sustaining such a social order would be a strong, democratically controlled state, many of whose tasks, however, would of necessity be performed by a hierarchically structured bureaucracy of experts. It would be charged with planning and allocating resources for the benefit of society at large and in accordance with ecological principles. Large enterprises would be socially owned; yardsticks of efficiency would be applied, and managers would be held to them. Social ownership would ensure that the enterprise would be guided, not by the rationale of profit (which disregards social and human costs), but by the broader calculus of social benefit. To institute this calculus, guidelines would have to be developed, again requiring an elite of experts.

Miliband grapples with the problem of bureaucracy and oligarchy but cannot resolve it. I think he overstates the problem. Bureaucracies can usually be made amenable to democratic controls, just as they, along with their positive functions, can be destroyed by politically reactionary forces (as is happening in the United States).

The transformation of the social order for which Miliband argues would be revolutionary, a term which he eschews. He seeks, on essentially two grounds, to make the case for the majoritarian road to socialism, linking it to the desirability and necessity of socialism. First, that the collapse of the Soviet economy and polity, contrary to widespread belief, in no way proves the failure of socialism; and, second, that capitalism generates poverty and profound inequality, as well as incessant insecurity, and that it perpetuates repressive foreign policies which in turn give rise to wars. Moreover, he finds morally abhorrent the very fact (not merely the exploitation) of wage labor as license to dominate human beings. Let us briefly deal with those two themes of the book, and then return

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to his argument for the majoritarian road.

MILIBAND HAS VIRTUALLY NOTHING TO SAY ABOUT THE COLLAPSE of the Soviet economy, widely equated to the failure of a socialist system. In his view, the Soviet Union, whatever at least some of its leaders' aspirations, was not a socialist country. He argues correctly that, prior to the rise of Stalinism, western socialists and Communists were often advocates of extreme democracy and even anarchism. Russia and East European Communists claimed they were Marxists but since their policies and actions were authoritarian and enforced by police or, in an earlier period, by terror, they were unrelated to Marxism.

I do not think that Miliband has dealt adequately with this, the "Russian Question." If Soviet policies and actions bore no relation to the ideas and democratic traditions of Marxism, the Soviet leadership, nonetheless, developed its own version of what Herbert Marcuse called *Soviet Marxism* (the title of his 1958 book, with the subtitle, *A Critical Analysis*), an ideology that sought to legitimate the Soviet regime, however much its sources were distorted. Its validity was conditioned on the development of the country's "productive forces" but this development was increasingly stymied by profound structural rigidities. The legitimacy of the regime was, therefore, gradually invalidated, promoting its disintegration.

What were these rigidities? A sketch must do to deal with the question. As late as the mid-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev complained that the resources needed for expanding and updating such industries as chemicals, electronics, and consumer goods were insufficient, if available at all. This was due to unabated emphasis on continual large investments in heavy industry, such as steel, cement, machinery, coal, and the related infrastructures. As a result, the creation of more modern industries was, at best, retarded. The need to increase the output and range of consumer goods, fundamental to advances in labor productivity, was virtually disregarded.

The inability or unwillingness to shift resources — a shift which, in capitalist countries, is generally compelled by competition, superior financial strength, and attendant market power — was rooted, as Herbert Marcuse wrote, in "... the political setup defined [by the long-range trend of Soviet industrialization]." This trend in turn was embedded in "the Stalinist construction of Soviet society, [resting] on the sustained priority of heavy industry ..." Any marked shift in the balance of industrial priorities would spell "a fundamental shift in the structure itself — in the economic as well as the political system." This, the Soviet regime was evidently unable to countenance; to do so would have meant the dislocation of deeply implanted political forces and ideological predispositions.

These predispositions, like central planning, were a major source of integrating — i.e., of framing consensus and compromise among — the otherwise centrifugal interests of the bureaucracy, industry managers, the army, the party, and other sectors of Soviet society. As indicated, the integrative function of ideology lost force as the distance between its productivist content and the thwarted economic development of the Soviet Union widened. (See also Marcuse, pp. 98, 101-102, Vintage paperback edition, 1961. I have sought to adapt his analysis to the more recent historical context.)

The restructuring attempts made by Gorbachev beginning in the 1980s failed for analogous reasons; they lacked the integrative elements furnished in the

West by juridical, financial, and academic institutions, and by the authority of public policy. Hence, they lacked viability. Miliband apparently views the Gorbachev era as incipiently social democratic. Possibly such a case can be made. However, social democracy in Western Europe has been as deeply anchored in the institutions just mentioned as its rivals to the right of center. Its successes, however modest one may judge them to be, are largely due to this fact. In brief, if socialism spells a moral choice made in the interest of justice and of mitigating class oppression, and if it is to be part of an active electoral politics, as well, as Miliband proposes, then the question of Soviet Marxism cannot be dismissed as being virtually irrelevant. For that question has been fatefully linked to the history of the socialist movement since Rosa Luxemburg raised it in the early days of the Bolshevik revolution, and it will require elucidation for years to come.

MILIBAND'S CASE AGAINST CAPITALISM IS COGENT BUT WEAKENED by his failure to differentiate among the major capitalist countries on class struggle outcomes, the course of labor movements, and the pressures of Cold-War rivalries. The state is not uniformly a captive of capitalist interests. The New Deal, for example, has been said to have saved U.S. capitalism from the capitalists. But that means that it raised public policy to a dominant position, even though public policy had to take account of the economic forces which capitalism embodies. The German concept of a social market economy was moderately successful until very recently. It ensured job protection, safeguarded working conditions, seniority rights, and other personnel matters by works councils, provided high levels of income security in case of job loss, and public services which in effect raised the social wage. Like the Austrian and Swedish models, it advanced the de-commodification of labor (a trend which Miliband, of course, salutes) — by instituting long vacations, more holidays, earlier retirement, as well as retraining rights (which help loosen the fetters to given job routines). Whether these and other gains can be maintained under conditions of intensive global competition and heightened capital mobility is another question, a partial answer to which is the unwavering maintenance of a strong nation-state that protects and advances workers' interests. That is indeed Miliband's position, which in principle cannot be gainsaid.

It is evident that Miliband, like some of his illustrious predecessors on the socialist left, counterposes reform to revolution. (He does not explicitly deal with the theoretical or historical aspects of the relevant controversies.) Reforms cannot last; they are vitiated by capitalist crisis, the state's ultimate captivity to the interests of economic power, and the property rights of business that can create or destroy jobs. Miliband has in mind, and urges, "comprehensive social renewal," "a large-scale renewal of the social order." He views such renewal as a lengthy process, but one that can be initiated only by a government of the socialist left, supported by a majority of the electorate. He rejects the notion that such a process, and the regime that would guide it, would lead to dictatorship and loss of basic freedoms. Communism in Russia, he writes, was born in conditions of war, vast material destruction, foreign intervention, nearly unmasterable crises. It was, furthermore, shaped by Lenin's Jacobinism. A socialist revolution introduced and sustained by a majoritarian electorate would, Miliband implies, occur under relatively stable conditions, and would,

by definition, be intolerant of Jacobinism.

ON OCCASION, MARX, ENGELS AND THEIR DISCIPLES held that such a revolution was possible. But the belief that socialism could be instituted peacefully arose at a time when the industrial working class, having gained universal suffrage (however qualified at first), was ascendant, and dreams of emancipation were unclouded by the experience of totalitarianism, the historical defeat inflicted by fascism and Nazism, two world wars, and the more recent decimation of that class by swiftly advancing labor-saving technologies. The social cohesion and ideological conviction that constituted the political basis for the socialist project diminished. Miliband alludes to some of these matters but does not really evaluate them in terms of his argument.

The continual extension of democracy beyond the pattern of parliamentary representation as a means to attenuate inequalities is not the most radical step that Miliband proposes. Rather, it is his advocacy of public ownership of key industries (their expropriation to be compensated), and intervention in economic life as a prime responsibility of a socialist government. He insists that opposition to socialization, if successful, would *preclude* the necessary fundamental change. For to leave enterprise in private hands would simply sustain the power of capital. He dismisses arguments that point to the negative features of public ownership as ignoring the context in which nationalizations have taken place — declining and unprofitable industries have often been taken over by the state to cut shareowner losses and save jobs. Miliband cites successful operation of publicly owned industries in East Asian countries, and their interventionist policies. But this has the assent of business, and has never been challenged by the international financial institutions — thus increasing, rather than abolishing the power of capital, as action guided by socialist goals would do.

Miliband believes that in time a majority for a government proclaiming such goals will rally. “It is short-sighted to take for granted that the present predominance of neo-liberal orthodoxies will last into the indefinite future, and that labour, socialist and other left movements will not gain (or regain) much greater strength in many capitalist countries that they have at present.” His worry is that conservative forces and their allies in the police, the military, and the intelligence services will conspire to defeat any socialist government or stymie its efforts. He is not altogether optimistic about coping with or defeating such reaction. He notes the many “pathological deformations” — Christian fundamentalism, the degradation of cities, a growing underclass, tribal hatreds — increasingly escape the reach of the *present* social order, even as its own dynamics contribute to breeding them. Thus, there is the deeper truth conveyed by Miliband’s book, that the alternative to barbarism is socialism but it is not preordained that one will conquer the other.

Coping with Globalization

GLOBAL VILLAGE OR GLOBAL PILLAGE: ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION FROM THE BOTTOM UP by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello. South End Press, 1994. 237 pp. \$14.00 PB.

Reviewed by Louis F. Cooper

THE STRIKING CHANGES THAT HAVE OCCURRED IN THE WORLD ECONOMY in the last 20 or 25 years have been described with various labels: the "globalization of capital," the "global factory," the "transformation of sovereignty," the "new age of competition." The chief feature of this new age — capital's ability to move with ease from continent to continent in search of the lowest labor and social costs — has been troubling close observers for some time. In 1983, for example, Wolfgang Hager, an economist based in Brussels, warned that unrestricted trade between the developed countries and the newly industrializing states would eventually destroy the economies of the former, since there would never be enough new high-tech jobs to make up for the more traditional jobs that would be lost to low-wage competition. Hager proposed that the richer countries should protect their traditional industries but give the tariff revenues back to the poorer countries for use in needs-based development.

A few years later, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, in their book *Democracy and Capitalism* (1986), noted that the

logic of the global marketplace and the international mobility of capital can reduce the effective latitude for state action to such a degree that the nation-state — whether democratic or not — is sovereign in name alone. ... The result of a successful implementation of the global liberal model is a competition among dozens of nation-states, each seeking to maintain employment and promote economic growth, and each thus constrained to promote a favorable business climate in order to attract international capital.

What Bowles and Gintis called the "global liberal model" is now a reality. Rich and poor nations alike constantly compete to attract mobile capital by lowering labor, social, and environmental conditions, with predictably disastrous results for the welfare of their people. How to cope with and possibly alter this reality is the central concern of Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello's *Global Village or Global Pillage*. Their approach is necessarily less theoretical than that of Bowles and Gintis; they are more concerned with strengthening grassroots resistance to what they term the "race to the bottom" that economic globalization promotes.

Brecher and Costello begin by considering some of the effects of the competition for capital that lies at the heart of globalization. In the U.S., it has meant declining real wages, corporate downsizing, and an explosion of the "contingent" workforce of part-time and temporary employees; in the Third World it

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has led to deepening poverty, intense exploitation of workers in export processing zones, and rampant environmental degradation.

Only "a cumulative increase in both power and well-being for the poorest and least powerful" can stop this downward spiral, Brecher and Costello argue. They see the possibility of a "grand bargain" between the richer countries and the poorer ones in which the South would agree to raise environmental, labor, and social standards in return for various kinds of preferential treatment on trade and related matters from the North. This in turn could lead to a "world-wide social charter" to provide "both universal rights and rising minimum standards appropriate to countries at different levels of development."

In addition to their positive program, the authors offer an incisive critique of the terms in which international economic issues, particularly trade agreements, are generally debated. They have little trouble in showing that the new World Trade Organization (formerly GATT), along with the IMF and the World Bank, is at the center of a system which primarily serves the interests of global capital. The question, of course, is how best to challenge the system. Brecher and Costello advocate a coordinated assault by transnational citizens' movements of the kind that arose in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico during the battle over NAFTA. They call their approach the "Lilliput Strategy":

[F]acing powerful global forces and institutions, people can utilize the relatively modest sources of power available to them and combine them with often quite different sources of power available to other participants in other movements and locations. As the tiny Lilliputians captured Gulliver by tying him with many small pieces of thread, the Lilliput Strategy weaves many particular actions designed to prevent downward leveling into a system of rules and practices which together force upward leveling.

This strategy is appealing for obvious reasons. It is internationalist, and it stresses the common interests of diversely situated individuals and groups. It also takes advantage of the growing strength of non-governmental organizations of all kinds. The anti-NAFTA and anti-GATT coalitions were impressively broad, bringing together labor, environmental, consumer, human rights, religious, agricultural, and development interests. The opposition to NAFTA was able to produce a comprehensive alternative plan for a more just regional economic order.

THERE ARE, HOWEVER, QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STRATEGY lurking beneath the reference to *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver, although a giant to the Lilliputians, was a single physical entity who could be tied down and immobilized. It is more difficult to influence decisively an amorphous yet highly complex organism like the world economy, whose nervous system is composed of countless sophisticated computer links, and in which (to take an image the authors use) currency traders sitting in front of 200,000 monitors on different continents conduct a daily plebiscite on governments' monetary and fiscal policies.

Moreover, if the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO represent, as Brecher and Costello say in their opening chapter, "a sphere of decisionmaking largely beyond the influence of citizens and citizen movements in poor and rich countries alike," then it will be hard for transnational citizens' groups to counter them effectively. As the authors point out, there have been some successes

in getting the Bank to cancel environmentally destructive projects in the Amazon rainforest and elsewhere. That is quite different, however, from convincing or forcing the Bank to make basic changes in its operations and its current philosophy of development.

Another problem is that Brecher and Costello uncritically embrace certain ostensibly new ideas — such as commodity agreements to raise prices for Third World exports — that actually have been standard elements in North-South discussions for at least 30 years. The authors fail to note that there are difficulties with using trade to transfer resources to developing countries, even in the case of primary commodities which are still “national” products. First, commodity agreements have tended to fall short of expectations where they have been tried, as, for example, in the Lomé Convention between the European Union and certain African and Caribbean states. Second, where preferential tariffs for developing-country exports are written into law, as with the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), they are subject to political manipulation by corporate interests seeking, for example, to protect their intellectual property from “piracy” abroad. (The GSP is also supposed to be used to promote workers’ rights in developing countries, but in practice it has not been effective.) Finally, there is the question of who benefits from the sort of transfers that commodity agreements and tariff preferences involve. There is no guarantee that the benefits will flow to the small farmers and producers who need them, as opposed to private entrepreneurs or public officials.

Thus, some measures which appear at first glance to promote “upward leveling” may require closer scrutiny. As Brecher and Costello are well aware, the rich countries do not have a monopoly on elite forces with a vested interest in the current system; such forces exist in the poor countries as well. This point has relevance since the nation-based economy is not yet entirely a thing of the past. It is also directly relevant to the prospects for any progressive bargain, “grand” or otherwise, between North and South.

While no work on a subject this complex will be without shortcomings, Brecher and Costello have written a refreshingly optimistic and useful book. They clarify the stakes of the struggle over the shape of the world economy, and their strategy of transnational citizen action, despite its limits, should be an important part of the effort to bring global institutions under democratic control.

History à la Mode

TERRIBLE HONESTY: MONGREL MANHATTAN IN THE 1920's, by Ann Douglas. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. 606 pp., \$25.

Reviewed by Robert Bone

"ICH BIN AUCH EIN BERLINER," JFK DECLARED at a defining moment in Cold War history. A nervous titter swept through the crowd, for the young president, despite his good intentions, had committed a gaffe. The correct syntax is "Ich bin *auch* Berliner," without the indefinite article, *ein*. By retaining the article, Kennedy had proclaimed himself to be a jelly doughnut ("ein Berliner"). The moral of my tale? Pay attention to details, to those pesky particulars of language (or history) which are the foundation stones of truth. As Mark Twain has remarked, "the difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."

Strategies for presentation of the self are as needful to an author as a president, and are customarily disposed of in a preface or introduction. Following John Kennedy's rhetorical example, Ann Douglas, a professor of American literature at Columbia University, presents her credentials in the opening sentence of her new book: "I am by trade and calling an Americanist" She thus defines her field of expertise (American Studies), and designates a community of scholars to whom she claims allegiance by virtue of training and profession. At the same time, whether consciously or not, she assumes the burden of accountability implicit in such words as *trade* and *calling*. Like Kennedy's pledge of loyalty to the besieged Berliners, her first words amount to a solemn commitment.

Yet despite her invocation of professional standards, there is something elliptical about this book, something off-center, or not quite linguistically precise that subverts her best intentions. It may be traced, I would suggest, to the birth-pangs of the Kennedy generation, and more precisely to the Zeitgeist of the 1960s that shaped her evolution as a scholar. It was a time of great turmoil in our intellectual life, when ideological paradigms tended to supplant concrete historical analysis.

Born in 1942, Ann Douglas was eighteen when Kennedy squeaked past Richard Nixon, with the help of Mayor Daley's precinct captains. She was twenty-one when Martin Luther King spoke so movingly of his dream. Her mid-twenties were dominated by images of slaughtered innocents — mostly from Vietnam, but some, just as lacerating, from Kent State or Birmingham. Before she was thirty, the classics of contemporary feminism had appeared. The civil rights struggle, the Vietnam War, and the rise of women's liberation: these were the burning issues of the day, and in their collective impact they produced a schol-

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arship that was activist, relevant, *engagé*.

In her first book, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Douglas traces the evolution of nineteenth-century American literature from a patriarchal Calvinist phase, represented by such authors as Poe and Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville, to a matriarchal, sentimentalized, and thoroughly genteel phase, personified by such figures as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Mary Baker Eddy. These Victorian matriarchs, who liberated American letters from male hegemony, replaced it, according to Douglas, with a tyranny as stifling to the human spirit as the haunted Calvinism that preceded it. Titanesses of home and hearth, church and school, they in turn provoked a rebellion in the generation of the 1920s, who grew to maturity with matricide in their hearts. This psychological and cultural revolution is the subject of *Terrible Honesty*, which is in effect a sequel to the 19th-century study.

The new book is an ambitious, and perhaps a somewhat manic undertaking. Here is the bill of fare in the author's own words:

Part One opens *in medias res* with a sketch of Manhattan, black and white, in action in its heyday in the 1920s. I present the culture's self-advertisements,...and I detail the central ethos of the age, "terrible honesty".... In Part Two I have attempted to find the plot behind the publicity, to go deeper into the dynamics of American metropolitan modernism by laying bare its origins in the conflicts of the Great War, the emergence of the nation as a superpower, and the matricidal scenario that accompanied and furthered America's ascension. Part Three is a study of...the decade's major musical forms, ragtime, the blues, and jazz.... I close with an account of Manhattan's new skyscrapers, the supreme example of the elated and mongrel spirit of the age.¹

This is a toothsome meal if you like a smörgasbord. Whether the book holds its focus, or fulfills its Grand Design is something else again. I will say at this point only that to my sensibility the overall effect is rambling and disjointed. Limitations of space prevent a comprehensive treatment of these difficulties, and I have chosen to concentrate on what I take to be the main thrusts of the book: (1) a theory of matricide as a key to the collective psyche of the 1920s; and (2) the cultural exchange that took place across the color line during those years.

WHEN DOUGLAS FIRST INTRODUCED HER CONCEPT of a "terrible honesty," which displaced the sentimentalities of the Victorian age, I was prepared for a discussion of such works as Stephen Crane's *Maggie: a Girl of the Streets* (1893), Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), Jack London's *The Sea Wolf* (1904), and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). For novels of the naturalistic tradition are nothing if not specimens of terrible honesty, at least where the rise of cities and the crimes of robber barons are concerned.² But much to my surprise her point of reference was the modernist generation of the 1920s, described by Gertrude Stein as a "lost generation," and separated from the early naturalists by a quarter of a century.

Douglas negotiates this time-span at a single bound, and by her total silence on the subject, consigns literary naturalism to oblivion. In her novel version of American literary history, we move straight from tyrannical mothers of the Victorian age, like Grace Hemingway and Grace Crane, to the terrible honesty of their sons, Ernest Hemingway and Hart Crane.³ These authors of the 1920s are more to her liking because their books mark the entry-point of Freud-

ian theory into American letters. The naturalists, while they had much to do with subverting the pieties of the Victorian matriarchy, were essentially Darwinians, and not compatible with her psychoanalytic orientation. In effect, she abandons history-as-it-happened (first naturalists, then modernists) for history-as-myth.⁴

Counter-myth would be more to the point, since Douglas is impatient with Papa Freud and his patriarchal values. The central myth of psychoanalysis, which derives from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, features the ritual slaying of the father by the son, and is in need of drastic revision from a feminist perspective. Aeschylus, according to Douglas, provides an alternative scenario in the *Oresteia*, whose focal point is the ritual slaying of the mother. Agamemnon, you will recall, returns from the Trojan War and is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, and her lover, Aegisthus. Orestes and Electra then join forces in a plot to kill their mother. This shift from a patricidal to a matricidal focus is the burden of a long, convoluted chapter, called "The 'Dark Legend' of Matricide," which constitutes the theoretical core of *Terrible Honesty*.

I may as well confess at this point to a deep scepticism when Freudian paradigms, however revisionist, are imposed on the complexities of cultural history. Let's agree that Ernest Hemingway, Hart Crane, and Scott Fitzgerald hated their mums. But the matricidal thesis takes us only so far in comprehending the psyche of a generation. Douglas herself devotes an entire chapter to the proposition that the Great War decisively shaped the writers of the 1920s.⁵ If this be so, and I think it is, what role did her matriarchs play? Who bungled the diplomacy and ordered the troop mobilizations? Kaiser Wilhelm, Czar Nicholas, Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson: as rum a pirate crew as ever flew the skull and crossbones! Victorians, but emphatically not matriarchs, the arch-criminals of World War I were all whiskers and testosterone. It was a *male* establishment that angered and disgusted the lost generation.⁶

IF DOUGLAS' PRIME CONCERN IN *Terrible Honesty* is a re-visioning of the Jazz Age along fumigated Freudian lines, a strong secondary theme is the interplay of race and gender in black-and-white Manhattan during the decade of the 1920s. "My book," she explains at the outset, "is an attempt to describe, first, the larger American emancipation and, then, the African-American movement of liberation within it."⁷ This inclusive approach is entirely commendable, in view of countless lily-white studies of the '20s which do not so much as mention Afro-American contributions to the arts. But it's a challenging assignment to cross ethnic lines, and one had better do one's homework conscientiously. Unfortunately, Douglas' knowledge of the Harlem Renaissance is rudimentary; the result is an abstract discourse pitched at some remove from those pesky details of which history is made.

Take, as an index of familiarity, the matter of black periodicals. The two leading journals of the New Negro movement were the *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, house organs of the NAACP and National Urban League respectively.⁸ It was in their pages, for the most part, that authors of the Harlem Renaissance published their first poems and stories. Both magazines had institutional support, solid funding, and skillful editors: W.E.B. DuBois and his protégée Jessie Fauset at the *Crisis*, and Charles S. Johnson, future president of Fisk, at *Opportunity*.

Both publications achieved longevity, the *Crisis* appearing monthly from 1910 to the present; *Opportunity*, from 1923 to 1949.

Douglas offers a radically divergent map of the territory, speaking at one point of "the split between the DuBois-*Crisis* group and the Hughes-Thurman-Hurston *Fire!* party."⁹ This is a "split," to put it bluntly, that exists nowhere outside of Douglas' imagination. *Fire!* was a marginal publication, launched impulsively by certain of the younger writers who found *Crisis* and *Opportunity* too stodgy for their purposes, and set up in business to *épater le bourgeois*. The enterprise lasted for one issue and went broke. To compare *Fire!* with *Crisis* is to compare a flea with an elephant, and to portray *Fire!*, rather than *Opportunity*, as the main rival of the *Crisis*, is to misconstrue the nature of the Harlem Renaissance.

What was the motive for so flagrant a distortion? To make the Harlem Renaissance seem more radical, more "politically correct," than it actually was. But to understand what is at stake for Douglas will require a brief digression. Her interest in theology dates from her years at Harvard:

I would like to express my gratitude to my teachers Alan Heimert and the late Perry Miller, who imparted to me their belief in the centrality of religion in the American experience.¹⁰

In *Terrible Honesty* she makes short work of Calvinism and Christian Science, while lingering fondly over Neo-Orthodoxy. But she grew up, after all, with the liberation theology of the 1960s, and its central concern with the plight of oppressed peoples.

Douglas approaches the Harlem Renaissance from a theological perspective in which the revolt of oppressed peoples has been invested with divine sanction. To validate her cosmology, she needs a liberation movement, 1960s style. Hence the spotlight on *Fire!*, which for a brief moment in 1926 was the only revolutionary game in town. Never mind that it flashed across the literary sky with the brevity of a shooting star; never mind that Zora Neale Hurston, a member of the editorial board, was in her racial politics a conservative southern Negro; never mind, in short, any facts that might inconvenience her theory. The paradigm calls for revolutionaries, and Douglas does her best to supply them.¹¹

We now return for a moment to black Manhattan of the 1920s, in order to make amends for Douglas' neglect of *Opportunity Magazine*. This journal was the vortex of the Harlem Renaissance, and its editor, Charles S. Johnson, the prime mover who, from his office at the National Urban League, orchestrated the New Negro movement. Johnson scoured the nation in search of gifted blacks and persuaded them to come to New York; he arranged the famous Civic Club dinner of March 21, 1924, which brought them together with white editors and publishers; and he subsequently organized the annual literary contests which gave young writers their first public recognition. Yet Douglas scarcely mentions him in passing.¹²

Charles Johnson's favorite among the younger writers was Eric Walrond, a short-story writer of West Indian antecedents who served as Johnson's *liaison* with the under-thirty set.¹³ Business manager of *Opportunity*, Walrond was the author of *Tropic Death* (1926), the first and best volume of short stories to be published by the Renaissance generation. Walrond was Johnson's chief lieu-

tenant in matters organizational, serving for example as president of the Writers' Guild that sponsored the crucial Civic Club dinner. Douglas seems unaware of his existence; there is literally no mention of him in *Terrible Honesty*.

To sum up: self-discovery was the keynote of the New Negro movement. Robert Park, head of Chicago's distinguished sociology department during the 1920s, and America's foremost authority on race relations, called it an *Aufklärung*, or awakening, or enlightenment, and compared it to the nationalist movements that sprang up across Europe in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ This conceptual model is far more illuminating than the liberation theology of the mid-twentieth century, since the Harlem Renaissance was essentially a turning inward, toward a heightening of ethnic consciousness, rather than a turning outward, toward social transformation. Black writing in America became revolutionary in tone and content only in the mid-1930s, with the advent of Richard Wright and his more deeply alienated generation.

I WRITE LASTLY OF HONESTY IN SCHOLARSHIP, and the concept of truth on which it rests. Curiously enough, this six-hundred-page volume, by a self-styled Americanist, is totally devoid of footnotes. I find this curious because the author's first book, *The Feminization of American Culture*, has the customary scholarly apparatus. Why do you suppose Professor Douglas sent her new book out for public inspection naked and trembling, and without so much as a fig leaf to protect its claim to credibility? Was it an oversight, or some sort of studied informality, like jeans deliberately torn at the knees — a comment from the counter-culture on the stuffiness of academic life?

At all events, as a fellow-Americanist I wish to protest this practice, or rather non-practice, vehemently. Footnotes are what keep us honest, by permitting others to inspect our work. Without them we are free of all discipline. Everything is up for grabs; we are playing tennis without a net. I ask myself: is the academic world more, or perhaps less honest than in those remote times when I was a graduate student, learning the constraints of my trade and calling? Since to ask this question is to answer it, let us by all means preserve the footnote form.

In a recent interview at the fabled hotel Algonquin, Ann Douglas reveals a certain flair for self-advertisement: "I can't see doing a book that isn't all tied up with who you are."¹⁵ Such is the avowed solipsism of a generation that tends to view history as a mode of self-expression. Once this premise is granted, the next step is to take such liberties with history as the private self ordains. But history is not autobiography, and still less psychotherapy. Rather it is an effort to retrieve and articulate a public truth.

As for truth, I am aware that the very concept has become problematic, at least in some quarters. But while I am moderately attentive to postmodernist thought, I am not invariably overwhelmed by its conclusions. I therefore propose a simple credo for those engaged in historical pursuits: (1) Truth is not absolute, as William James instructed us a century ago; (2) But neither is it a projection of the self; (3) Rather it is a blend of subjective and objective elements, in which the latter must predominate. Without that clear preponderance, there would be as many versions of the past as there are individuals. There would be no social truth, and no common past.

Clio, the Muse of History, and one of nine goddesses who have governed

creativity since human time began, has not descended from her throne to accommodate Jacques Derrida. She remains a source of inspiration to all who value evidence more than their own egos. For the beauty of history is that it actually happened, and the dinosaur bones are there to prove it. But if there are no dinosaur bones, there is no history; only tribal myth. And in that event, there must be someone to reveal that the emperor has no clothes.

NOTES

1. "Mongrel" makes me uneasy, whether in the text or subtitle. The phrase "mongrel Manhattan" was coined by Dorothy Parker, but Douglas often uses the word, as here, in her own voice. At the literal level, it connotes animality; Webster defines it as "anything of mixed blood — often disparaging." The word has of course a long and infamous history in the rhetoric of white supremacy, as in "the mongrelization of the races." I must say that I find it offensive as applied to the black/white cultural collaboration of the 1920s.

2. For an account of naturalism, see Emory Elliott, et. al., *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 525-45.

3. For Douglas' treatment of Hemingway and Hart Crane, see *Terrible Honesty*, Chapter 6, "The 'Dark Legend' of Matricide," 217-32.

4. Anyone who has difficulty with my distinction between naturalism and modernism is invited to skim a few pages of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925), followed by a similar sampling of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). You will instantly understand which is which.

5. *Terrible Honesty*, Chapter 5, "The Culture of Momentum," 179-216.

6. Query: if leading members of the lost generation hated all mothers and mother-figures, why did they sit at the feet of Gertrude Stein in the rue des Fleurus?

7. *Terrible Honesty*, p.5.

8. Full files of the *Crisis* and *Opportunity* may be found at the Schomburg Research Center, while a reliable account of their roles in the Harlem Renaissance may be found in Abby Johnson and Ronald Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics: the Literary Politics of Afro-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 31-57.

9. An authoritative account of *Fire!* may be found in Johnson and Johnson, *op. cit.*, 77-84.

10. Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Acknowledgements, ix.

11. I do not seek to disparage liberation theology as such, but only to protest the manipulation of evidence, or "spin-doctor" scholarship, that it seems to inspire in Ann Douglas.

12. A balanced treatment of Charles S. Johnson's role in the Harlem Renaissance may be found in David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 89-98 and 125-9.

13. For a brief account of the Johnson-Walrond axis, see Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 128, 164-5, and 233-4. For a fuller treatment of Walrond's career, see Robert Bone, *Down Home: Origins of the Afro-American Short Story* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 171-203.

14. For Robert Park's theories of cultural nationalism, see "Racial Assimilation in Secondary Groups with Particular Reference to the Negro," (1914), "Negro Race Consciousness as Reflected in Race Literature" (1923) and "Behind Our Masks," (1926). All three papers may be found in Everett Hughes et al., eds., *Race and Culture*, Vol. I, *The Collected Papers of Robert E. Park* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950).

15. See Julie Salamon, "At Lunch with Ann Douglas," *New York Times*, May 17, 1995, C8.

Missed Opportunities

A DREAMER'S PARADISE LOST: LOUIS C. FRAINA/LEWIS COREY (1892-1953)
and THE DECLINE OF RADICALISM IN THE UNITED STATES by Paul Buhle.
New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995. 192 pp.

Reviewed by Staughton Lynd

PAUL BUHLE'S BACKGROUND AS A LABOR HISTORIAN AND PROLIFIC WRITER on the American left — including a Master's thesis on Louis Fraina — served him well in writing this unpretentious, deceptively slender and very important book.

Luigi, later Louis, Fraina was born in Italy in 1892 and came to the United States in 1898. He grew up in the slums of the Lower East Side. When Fraina's father died, his mother told the teen-age boy, "You are now the man in the house." Fraina quit high school and went to work at the Edison Company. A voracious reader and (when he could afford it) theater goer, Fraina was a young man during the 1910s, a decade that Buhle describes as "the brightest moment of a bitterly disappointing century."

Politically, the precocious Fraina appears to have joined and left the Socialist Party by 1909. He then joined Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party and became a writer for the SLP's *Daily People*, calling for a committee to aid the McKees Rocks strikers, covering the "bread and roses" strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912, and variously agitating for DeLeon's core conception of the self-organization of unskilled immigrant workers into industrial unions that would prefigure the new society within the shell of the old.

One of the many by-the-way insights in this book is the extent to which DeLeon's syndicalism was carried into the IWW by ex-SLPers such as Justus Ebert, Ben H. Williams, and Frank Bohn, as well as into the Amalgamated Clothing Workers by Joseph Schlossberg. Fraina carried DeLeonism into the Communist Party. Indeed he became, next to John Reed, the most prominent interpreter of Bolshevism to the radical movement in the United States. Fraina encountered Lenin at the one moment in Lenin's life when, in *State and Revolution*, Lenin espoused a quasi-anarchist strategy and presented the soviets as the road to power. When Fraina finally met Lenin in 1921, Lenin asked him to do further translating of Russian documents into English, and issued the directive: "Assemble *all* suitable translators and *assign* them every day and *hour* to Fraina to work with him."

Like Reed, like Bill Haywood, like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, Fraina failed to find his way in the Soviet Union or in the Comintern-dominated party in the United States. He extricated himself in a manner messy, ambiguous, but in any event, irreversible. The second half of Buhle's book describes Fraina's reemergence as Lewis Corey, a much-praised writer of Marxist economic books in the 1930s and a violently anti-Communist founder of Americans for Democratic Action.

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PAUL BUHLE NARRATES THE STORY OF FRAINA/COREY in loving detail, drawing on interviews dating back to 1966 and 1967, and utilizing a variety of obscure written sources. Buhle's real purpose is much more than biography, however. At each stage of his protagonist's unfolding story, Buhle pauses to assess the options for native American radicalism that seem to have existed, and the disastrous way in which radicals (very much including Fraina) failed to explore those possibilities.

Within this theme, Buhle concentrates on the similarity of the point of view espoused by the young Fraina, and the perspective developed by C.L.R. James.

Both Fraina and James believed that trade union bureaucrats, like Communist governments, represented the encrustation of a bureaucratic mentality "against the impulse of workers for industrial self-emancipation." Both men "foresaw the dissolution of the state in the process of uprising" and "sought to locate the roots of this development in the day-to-day factory lives of real workers."

The analogy went further. Fraina, the child of immigrant workers, saw in unskilled, foreign-born immigrants new recruits to the U.S. working class who would turn upside down the AFofL craft unionism of native-born skilled workers. Similarly for James, a black intellectual born in Trinidad, who had viewed the awakening of the colonial world as a major link in the total revolutionary process, the black community in America represented the weak link of capitalism's internal life. Not only in their industrial militance but in many manifestations of daily life, blacks showed their hatred for the system and their willingness to overthrow it. They were, like the immigrants of two generations earlier, the "outsiders" whose labor had become decisive.

Each group of not-yet-tamed-and-acculturated workers brought to factory life and to the labor movement a set of values nurtured in institutions of their own making, such as the benefit societies that flourished in communities of the foreign-born, or the black church. Each group, immigrants and blacks, thus came to the wage-labor setting, prepared to resist it three-dimensionally, as something oppressive to a whole valued way of life.

BUHLE WRITES THAT POST-WORLD WAR II DEVELOPMENTS such as "the Cold War, mass consumerism, racial divisions within the workforce, the utter decline of bureaucratized labor, and the final decline of the industrial workforce" rendered James' vision "out of date, just as the Americanization and upward mobility of European immigrants had done to Fraina's system." He concludes that James "unconsciously following Fraina, had updated Marxism, perhaps to its outer limits as a rational economic-based system."

But a final fact that Buhle narrates suggests that this stoic conclusion may be premature. At the time of his death in 1953 Fraina/Corey had nearly completed a study of Frances ("Fannie") Wright, about whom he had been gathering materials since the middle 1940s. He had been struck by the virtual absence of women from standard histories of the United States including Louis Hacker's *Shaping of the American Tradition* and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *Age of Jackson*. "Somewhere inside him lingered the shadow of the younger man," Buhle writes. This interest in Wright expressed "conscience or repressed memory."

Perhaps we can find a clue here, and discharge our responsibility to Fraina by making something out of it. May it not be hypothesized that what foreign-

born workers were (or potentially might have been) in the 1910s, what black workers were at least to a degree through the revolts of the late 1960s, women workers are or may become today. Like immigrants and blacks, women come to the work force as outsiders with distinct experiences and values. The research of Elizabeth Faue on organizing by women in Minneapolis in the 1930s, Barbara Kingsolver's account of womens' activity in supporting the Phelps Dodge strike in the early 1980s, the experience of university clerical workers in New Haven and Hispanic textile workers in El Paso, all suggest that women bring a third dimension to the formation of class consciousness, just as other marginalized groups have done. Tentatively, one might venture that in womens' organizing there is: (1) an aversion to violence, (2) a preference for horizontal to vertical organizational forms, and (3) an experiential approach to learning (as opposed to what Freire calls the filling of empty buckets with a predetermined content). I find these themes in female socialists of Fraina's period, like Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai. They are equally evident in women organizers of our own day like Ella Baker and Anna Walentynowicz.

In a review of Harvey O'Connor's *Revolution in Seattle*, written for *Radical America* in 1982, Paul Buhle wrote: "We must bring into any movement our whole selves, deliver as much as we can of the maximum message." Fraina did this, feeling even as an old man for "those bohemians of his youth and what he had called their 'passionate' lives and their inspiring enthusiasm for better ways of work and pleasure." Paul Buhle has done the same in this inspiring little book, and we are all greatly in his debt.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The Million Man March and its Aftermath by Reginald Wilson

An analysis of the march, its goals and its messenger, the Reverend Louis Farrakhan. What did the march accomplish and what has happened since?

The Obliteration of Hiroshima by Stephen Shalom

An extensive review of the profound political and moral issues involved in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 50 years ago.

The Soviet Union Is Dead, The "Russian Question" Remains - Part III by Julius Jacobson

A continuation of the discussion of the Soviet Union's role in World War II, (NP #18) and how it affected the character of the war.

Renaissance or Enlightenment, A Reply to Stephen Eric Bronner by Loren Goldner

While agreeing that the Enlightenment must be defended, the author feels that today one cannot defend the Enlightenment with the ideas of the Enlightenment alone. Stephen E. Bronner replies.

Cultism on the Left

THE PROPHET'S CHILDREN: TRAVELS ON THE AMERICAN LEFT by Tim Wohlforth. New Jersey, Humanities Press.

Reviewed by Arthur Maglin

TIM WOHLFORTH WAS ONE OF MY EARLY MENTORS in the radical movement. This was during the early 1960s when he was National Chairman of the Young Socialist Alliance, the then brand-new youth group of the Socialist Workers Party.

Those were the pre-feminist movement days when sexist language like "National Chairman" still remained an unconscious artifact even within the radical movement — something soon to change.

In any event, for me, reading Wohlforth's autobiographical book was often much like a stroll down memory lane. Which is not to say that his book is strictly for a narrow group of insiders. On the contrary, the book is a well written, sometimes amusing and sometimes horrifying, but always instructive account of one person's encounter with the history of the left across four decades.

The heart of the book centers around Wohlforth's years as principal leader of the Workers League, a grouping very much under the ideological domination of British cult leader, Gerry Healy of The Workers Revolutionary Party. While Healy's efforts on the left never really amounted to all that much, he did manage a certain claim to fame by recruiting as a public spokesperson the world-famous actress Vanessa Redgrave who remained faithful to him until his death. And in England and elsewhere several thousand people passed through the Healy cult, often leaving with the most negative impressions of what radical politics is all about.

What Wohlforth's book can most help us with then, is to understand the unfortunately too common phenomenon of cultism on the left. A cult in politics is, I think, best described as a grouping of people who develop an emotional dependency on a leader or leadership grouping such that they allow someone else to determine their thoughts and actions. It is the opposite of real democratic decision-making even when formal democratic trappings are preserved.

Let it be said at the outset of a discussion such as this that cultism has its origins in the alienation and authoritarianism of capitalist society. Throughout capitalist culture, cultism is produced and reproduced. Cults around political and religious leaderships are common. Think of Hitler, Roosevelt, and JFK, for example. Think of the Ayatollah, the Pope, and Reverend Moon.

But it goes beyond that. Cults around cultural icons such as singers, actors, and sports stars are a feature of everyday life. The advertising industry thrives on this tendency toward imitation of popular culture cult figures to sell us sneakers, perfume, automobiles, food, and movies. These cultist tendencies frequently go to extremes. Think of celebrity stalkers. Think of the assassination of singer-composer John Lennon by a fan.

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So, it should not be too surprising that radicals have too often reproduced this tendency among themselves even while trying to oppose it within the larger society. Working within capitalist societies, the influence of bourgeois ideology upon radical movements is virtually inevitable. With proper vigilance it need not be fatal.

In any case, *The Prophet's Children* recounts Tim Wohlforth's experiences within an internationally-based political cult following the lead of Gerry Healy and, in reporting his observations about himself and others, he gives the reader a real feel for what the psychological state of a loyal follower was like.

Wohlforth was aligned with Healy from 1961 until 1974. In making a summary statement about what allowed people to submit to a regime that involved frequent acts of public humiliation, blatantly undemocratic practices, sexual harassment, and personal violence, Wohlforth states:

Healy could *touch* you. He could make you feel almost *physically* the socialist dream. The only other left-wing politician I met who had that effect was Jim Cannon [the principle founder of Trotskyism in the U.S.]. Those of us who were Healy's followers for so many years did his bidding not because he terrorized us—certainly not at the beginning — but because he inspired us. [Emphasis in the original.]

WHAT WOHLFORTH IS DESCRIBING—THE PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE of the socialist dream — is not a Marxist materialist experience. It is the experience of religious ecstasy. And what can we make of such an experience? In society at large religious ecstasy is a fairly common occurrence. It has been described and analyzed by such diverse writers as William James and Wilhelm Reich. From a Marxist point of view, it can be described as a powerful unconscious attempt to overcome alienation in one's personal life. Through an act of total submission to the will of God and his earthly ministers one is granted the gift of certainty about life and the universe, "one is born again."

In its political version (left, right, or center), the act of submission is to an individual blessed with Truth. The emotional payoff is the false gift of certainty about political life and the social universe. Clearly, many of Rush Limbaugh's supporters are in this state of mind.

Unfortunately, the left has had its share of personalist misleaders along with the rest of the political spectrum. As Wohlforth comments, "There have been far too many Healys in the Trotskyist movement, not to mention humanity's bitter experience with Stalinism." I can only comment that Wohlforth's scope is too narrow since it is hardly just the Trotskyist segment of the radical movement that has been prone to blind adoration of one alleged political guru or other. To be fair, Wohlforth does also include Stalinism, but cultism has also appeared among social democrats, New Leftists, anarchists and sundry others.

In my opinion, there is a reason that Wohlforth seems blind to this supposedly more "loosely" organized part of the left. Wohlforth, in assessing his total experience on the left, has reached the conclusion that the organizational form of the democratic centralist party is fatally flawed and tends to promote cultism.

Wohlforth experienced years of work with two other organizations, aside from the Healyite Workers League, that claimed to have a democratic centralist character. These were the Independent Socialist League in the 1950s and the Socialist Workers Party in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and middle 1970s. His

experience of all three organizations he recounts as mixed but ultimately unhappy. He has come away with the conclusion that what he believes to be the Leninist party form is always and everywhere the incorrect choice.

Unfortunately, Wohlforth has bought into the historical distortion of democratic centralism prevalent on the left that has been propagated by both opponents and alleged practitioners of democratic centralism for many decades. This misconception of Leninism sees democratic centralist organizational forms as being inflexible, hierarchical, hostile to differences of opinion, and beholden to a more or less permanent leadership of professional revolutionaries.

This widespread notion of so-called democratic centralism coincides very little with the history and practice of the Bolsheviks under Lenin. Lenin was very flexible about organizational forms, adapting the party fairly readily to changing circumstances. At its least democratic and most centralist moments it was looser and more tolerant than any of its alleged imitators have managed to be. For example, during the revolutionary year 1917 there were many Bolshevik local organizations which were still merged with the rival Mensheviks. Can anyone think of any sort of American parallel to such democratic centralist "sloppiness"?

There is one way, of course, that Lenin's party provides us with one very bad example which has been well and truly emulated on the left, and that is the lack of term limits. Lenin was a leader-for-life — a concept with numerous negative implications, but for our purposes here let me just point out how easily permanent leadership converts to cult leadership. For it stands to reason that if one person or small group of persons is considered so indispensable that he/she is not replaceable, then followers should take everything such a person or group says and does very seriously indeed. This attitude is clearly not too far removed from personality worship. It's also a mighty big concession to the anti-Marxist Great Man theory of history.

So, to this extent Wohlforth would be correct to be wary of uncritical Leninism — the kind of Leninism that treats Lenin's writings in the manner of a Talmudic scholar. However, as I have already indicated, this tendency toward permanent leadership exists in all kinds of radical organizations. Some examples from 20th century American history are Daniel DeLeon of the Socialist Labor Party, Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party, and Michael Harrington of Democratic Socialists of America.

My point is that Wohlforth is going too far in rejecting Leninism in toto. What he should be rejecting is an uncritical pseudo-Leninism which features hostility to internal organized dissent, an overly centralized top down leadership style, an underemphasis on democratic rights within the group, an unwillingness to debate before the radical public, and the absence of leadership term limits as standardized and normal practice.

In closing this review, I want to underline the fact that I have deliberately selected certain aspects of this extraordinarily rich and entertaining autobiography for my scrutiny. Wohlforth writes well in an accessible, engaging style. He knows how to tell a story and how to make a political point. He writes without bitterness, although at times with a certain sadness. He also made me laugh.

Fresh Insights into the Labor Movement

TRADE UNION POLITICS: AMERICAN UNIONS AND ECONOMIC CHANGE, 1960s-1990s, Glenn Perusek and Kent Worcester, editors. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press. 252pp. \$17.95 paper.

Reviewed by Paul Buhle

THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARILY USEFUL VOLUME, BETTER BY FAR than the usual labor studies anthology, first of all because it brings the post-World War II era and the present together, and second because in offering a multidisciplinary approach it takes up key problems from instructively different angles. The editors themselves offer lucid methodological suggestions and keen insights into the sociology and political science of labor interpretation that labor historians, for instance, are not likely to find elsewhere.

The central problem is, naturally, the decline of the labor movement, most especially in the private sector. Most of the essays treat either the increasing bureaucratic distance of leaders from the rank-and-file, or the sweeping transformation of the economy which has left unions disoriented, their white members in particular all too often ready prey for right wing ideologies.

Each reader will find favorites among the essays, and will also find some methodologically distant and difficult. At times, one inevitably feels a bit overwhelmed by the critiques of unfamiliar scholarly paradigms which have risen and perhaps fallen without being much noticed by outsiders. But the struggle for understanding is almost always rewarding, even when the language and the references sometimes make the going rough.

A good example is the running commentary on "Fordism," a clump of interpretations centered around the idea of mass manufacture, government coordination and worker consumerism at capitalism's historic global centers. In "Political Economy After Reagan" by Chris Toulouse, we learn that the theory of a contemporary post-Fordist economy rests on the development of highly flexible production, with the familiar assembly lines superseded by computerized outfits meeting specialized markets. Toulouse suggests that the decentralization of production, a central feature of the supposed new economy, is actually an old strategy of capitalism, and that the adoption of robotics is less systemic than opportunistic, adopted mainly to cut the cost of existing production. Toulouse prefers to call the Reagan/Thatcher model "hyper-capitalist," redistributing wealth upward, eviscerating city neighborhoods for zones of rich and poor, and above all reducing the social mobility which has marked at least white America. On the negative side, there is no techno-utopia ahead. On the positive side, the author sees in the collapse of mobility myths the prospects of a class revival.

Aaron Brenner ("Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective") and Christopher Scherrer ("Surprising Resilience: The Steelworkers'

PAUL BUHLE's collection of his labor history essays, *From the Knights of Labor to the New World Order*, will be published in the Spring of 1996 by Garland Publishers.

Struggle to Hang On to the Fordist Bargain”) take a closer look at the undoing of Fordism and its consequences. As Scherrer says, Fordism “presupposed market control and steady productivity increases,” conditions steadily eroded by foreign competition and other changes during the 1960s-70s. The United Steel Workers, never a particularly democratic union, responded to the crisis of a once highly privileged sector by bargaining away these privileges, clinging to the diminishing pool of jobs. The 1973 challenge to U.S.W. President Lloyd McBride by Ed Sadlowski never reached much beyond Big Steel (a friend of mine prominently boosting Sadlowski in the little steel of Rhode Island got his machine painted pink and had to leave the job), in part because the reformers had no real program to meet the threat of shutdowns. Defense of working conditions, the old standard for militancy, had almost gone by the board, and defense of job security or job classification was undercut by fearful individualism. Even the heroic organization of broad community coalitions with strong clerical support, as in parts of Ohio, has come up against overwhelming odds. It will presumably continue to do so at least until the shape of class politics changes somehow.

Brenner comes back to more familiar ground of anti-bureaucratic struggles, reminding us of the ways in which UAW officials foreclosed on any systematic fight-back against declining conditions by physically assaulting wildcatters for upsetting the official bargaining strategy. The bureaucrats needed to do so because the militancy of 1966-74 posed responses to post-Fordist take-backs that the UAW could not adopt without destabilizing the historic compromise with automakers. The same was true in many other industrial sectors. By 1977 the resurgence had practically ended, a victim of recession, of generally lowered expectations and of sheer bureaucratic sabotage.

TDU AND THE TEAMSTERS MARKED THE OUTSTANDING EXCEPTION, in part because the trucking industry practically forced workers to choose between gangsterism and militancy, in part because the economically decentralized structure helped preserve a degree of democratic autonomy, but also without doubt because younger radicals (mostly connected with the International Socialists) made it their aim and dedication to stay with the struggles. TDU’s network of activists became something of a union within a union, the inevitable launching pad for Ron Carey’s successful run for president.

Brenner convincingly concludes that unique conditions (especially lack of centralization) allowed TDU to build up its strength gradually at the local base, a luxury denied to dissidents in most other unions. If the reformers’ victory is insecure at this writing, its momentum nevertheless propelled, as much as any other single factor, the reform wave that swept over the recent AFL-CIO convention.

But things will doubtless continue to be difficult. The neo-conservative bloc that backed Lane Kirkland and then Thomas Donohue has every motive for revenge, and apparently retains not only the control of many internationals but also its access to untold resources in open and secret Congressional budgets for international affairs. The larger lesson, as Andy Pollack argues, for the sorry decline of a once-militant airline unionism beset by sudden shifts of ownership and market, is the necessity for unions to respond to globalization and broad social questions with a philosophy of solidarity deeper and more meaningful

than any articulated so far. Even leaving aside the neocons like Al Shanker for whom this is pure leftwing heresy, many members, and more to the point many union leaders, probably don't want to hear anything about it. How far are we from a possible paradigm shift far more than academic in content?

KENT WORCESTER'S "REFLECTIONS ON THE 'EUROPEAN MODEL,'" and Staughton Lynd's "Conclusion" to the volume pose this question in a serious and open fashion. The social compromise throughout the industrialized West from 1945 to the early 1970s broke down under various stresses, not caused but heightened by the oil crisis. The relative success of Thatcherism foreshadowed an end to relative amity on the rest of the continent, eclipsing themes of social solidarity with tax-cutting and economic competition. The European Economic Community, with its socialists and Green blocs, opens new space thoroughly weighted, however, against grass-roots politics of any kind. Labor officials' apparent eagerness for the comforts of neo-corporatism (with protection for themselves included) will almost certainly alienate the mass of working people left out of the deal. In short, don't expect much from inside the system.

Lynd looks to the outside. Picking up some favorite hidden themes from labor history, he describes the rise of the CIO in the middle 1930s as both a consolidation and the liquidation of the local momentum toward democratic coordination of workers' own mobilization. This horizontal rather than vertical bonding of labor remains, for Lynd, the lesson of lessons, as true for the IWW and the 1960s anti-war movement as for the proto-CIO and the movement that is, at this moment, possibly beginning to take shape.

Perhaps it is impossible to carry the question any further, and particular examples drawn from the near-present are inevitably fragmentary if not instantly outdated. But I submit that anyone leafing, for instance, through *Labor Notes* over the last decade or so will find many hints to be investigated, local personalities and scenes to be understood, life-stories to be winnowed around many of the conflicts of our time. So many efforts have failed, but like the P-9 struggles around and in support of strikes at Austin, Minnesota or the agricultural workers in Watsonville, California, they fell short more because of the time than due to weaknesses inherent in the movements.

What we might conclude from *Trade Union Politics* is the necessity to put together the considerable academic knowledge available with the human story and go from there toward the vision of a different kind of global struggle and a different kind of society. Hardly anything else is so much worth trying.

Is the Working Class Passé?

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more for the basic necessities of life. The government also plans to reduce the role of unions in the administration of government pension and health systems.

Placed in charge of this cabal to reduce French living standards — primarily of the working class — was Chirac's friend and scandal-tainted Prime Minister Alain Juppé. Reactionary, arrogant and cynical (also corrupt), he had all the qualifications for this assignment. He had no hesitation about informing the masses that belt-tightening was a patriotic obligation, a momentary sacrifice for the future glory of France. Playing the anti-German card, Juppé made his patriotic pitch: "Either we will play in the first division or we will continue to be weighted down by deficits and we slip back to the second division." But the French working class could hardly be moved by this eloquent call for sacrifice for the sake of hoisting France into "the first division" (where it could match or displace Germany as Europe's major economic power) understanding full well that these heights were to be reached on the backs of the people. And Juppé's trite metaphors sounded particularly hollow when precisely elocuted by someone recently exposed for having used his political clout in some housing scam that netted him and others in his family choice living quarters in Paris at relatively bargain rates.

WHEN M. JUPPÉ FIRST ANNOUNCED HIS GOVERNMENT'S AUSTERITY PROGRAM it was not presented as a proposal for the citizenry and its elected representatives to consider, debate, negotiate and decide. It was a dictum, more fitting for the court of Louis Quatorze than for a parliamentary democracy. Operative here was the arrogant assumption that the government would be able to overcome with relative ease whatever resistance from below might develop. Perhaps Chirac and his Prime Messenger believed that the people could be manipulated, that the working class lacked the will and energy to offer effective resistance. It was as if they were misled by American neo-conservatives, French New Philosophers and post-Marxist theoreticians worldwide who, whatever may divide them politically, agree that the notion of a dynamic working class in a modern industrial society exists only as a sentiment and a memory. For them, the working class is passé. But whatever the source of their imperious self-confidence, Chirac, Juppé et. al. were in for a shock.

French wage-earners were distinctly unimpressed by assurances from academic scholars that the working class is incapable of engaging in massive, complex and creative forms of struggle; that the working class was not and, for some, had never been a potential agency for social transformation. Workers themselves set the theoretical record straight with an extraordinary display of resistance, class solidarity and social awareness in response to the Juppé plan.

On November 24, tens of thousands of transportation workers picked up the gauntlet and went on strike. The strike quickly spread in the public sector. The bulk of workers in the nationalized railroads, more than 40% of school teachers (against the advice of their largest union), postal workers, sanitation workers, Air France personnel and others joined the struggle. Rallying to the support of workers all over France were tens of thousands of students, among the most colorful participants in the demonstrations, protesting underfinancing,

understaffing and overcrowding of the universities. Actually, there were not many more than 200,000 workers on strike at any time, but with local transportation grinding to a halt in major cities, long distance passenger travel curtailed, freight not moving on the rails, mail piling up in postal depots and thousands of flights canceled, French economic life approached a standstill.

Initially, Juppé declared his austerity plan non-negotiable and was unavailable for discussion with the unions. President Chirac, clearly taken by surprise, left (or escaped) a chaotic Paris for a conference in West Africa. On his return, he stopped in Baden Baden for a tête à tête with Chancellor Kohl (and perhaps to find some needed relaxation in that famous spa town's curative waters).

The government's "strategy" was to wait it out, expecting that the workers' endurance would wear thin and that the general public, so painfully inconvenienced by the paralyzing strike, would explode in anger against the public workers who, isolated and beleaguered, would quickly surrender. Nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary, and what is so extraordinary and inspiring under the circumstances, all polls showed that the strikers had the sympathy of the majority of the population. Even though the three-week strike, which ended on December 16, severely disrupted the lives of all, the strikers retained the support of 60% of the people.

On December 7, with the strike already nearly two weeks old, French television estimated that 1.3 million people throughout the country took to the streets in support of the strikers. A second demonstration on December 12 was even larger. (*The New York Times* accepted the union estimate of 1.7 million demonstrators.)

One need not be possessed of special insights to realize that, given the disruptive nature of the walkout in a nation with such a sizeable conservative middle class, 60% public support was possible only on the basis of a virtually unanimous show of class solidarity in the private as well as public sectors despite the fact that less than ten percent in private enterprise are unionized.

As the strike progressed, the scope of the workers' demands moved beyond the immediate issues in dispute. Marc Blondel, head of the Force Ouvrière, insisted that the Prime Minister engage in "global negotiations" including a discussion of national economic social policies that go considerably beyond the narrower concerns associated with union struggles.

WHILE THE STRIKE DID NOT END IN VICTORY, neither did it end in ignominious defeat. Nor is there evidence that the strikers' spirit has been crushed. The government was forced to make significant concessions, retreating from its plan to cut pensions and jobs, and the formerly inflexible Juppé was obliged by the determined working class to discuss his plans with all union leaders. The workers suffered great hardships during the strike, not least of which was the loss of pay. The Christmas holidays compounded their problems. But as Roger Gaillard, a leader of Force Ouvrière pointed out: "...even people who go back to work haven't changed their minds — we're in for a winter of demonstrations."

Handicapping the strikers' cause was the absence of a mass political working-class party. Only by the loosest use of language can the Socialist Party be considered either socialist or representative of the working class. The SP shamefully maintained its distance from the strike, the normally loquacious and lucid Lionel Jospin was foggy and barely audible on the subject, and the role of So-

cialist leaders of the French Democratic Labor Confederation was disgraceful.

What is important about the lessons of the three tumultuous weeks in France is that the manifest level of class consciousness and solidarity *reinforces the Marxist view that the working class has the innate potential to serve as the major and indispensable agent for progressive social transformation.*

CELEBRATING FRENCH WORKING-CLASS MILITANCY AND SOLIDARITY is not to dismiss problematic aspects of the traditional Marxist analysis of the working class. There has not been a growing immiseration of the working class as Marx predicted. Nor has there been a continued growth of an industrial proletariat within the working class. Clearly, the working class has not served as the agency for raising communism from a specter to a global reality. And the temperament of the existing working class in advanced countries is hardly what Marx would have expected. Even in France where the working class was inspiring, the reactionary racist and anti-immigrant sentiments within it cannot be ignored. The same is true for the working class of most modern industrial states. But for all the backwardness, failures and structural changes of the international working class it is massive in numbers, in social weight, and remains a potent social force for liberatory change. It is the class, more than any other social category or movement, whose interests are inimical to those of capitalism. This cannot be accurately said of any other broadly defined social movement. In their very nature movements of feminists, minorities, gay people do not share the same degree of conflict that inheres in the antagonism between the seller and buyer of labor power for a profit, between wage-earner and capitalist.

A common criticism found in post-Marxist literature is that those who still believe in the revolutionary potential of the working class do so on the basis of faith and dogma. The working-class upheavals in France are only the most recent example proving that the charge of blind faith is false. And it is extraordinary that so many social theorists from right to left, who have buried the working class and socialism with it, fail to recognize that since the end of World War II the working class has been at the center of every powerful democratic movement in the advanced countries of Europe.

A quick rundown:

- In 1953, after 12 years of Nazi terror, followed by eight years of Stalinist repression, the entire East German *working class* rose up to wage a massive revolutionary democratic struggle.

- Three years later, the Hungarian revolution. A whole nation in revolt against its totalitarian oppressor. More than a national revolution, it was socialist in the purest sense. The intelligentsia rallied to the revolution as did students, peasants, even many in the military but its heart, blood and sinews was the Hungarian *working class* which took power while anti-Marxist sociologists were busy explaining to their readers and students why the working class was passé.

- In 1968, the Prague Spring. As in Hungary, students and intellectuals were deeply committed to a struggle for democracy. But also, as in Hungary, the chances for success would have been nil had it not been for the intervention of the Czechoslovakian *working class*.

- Two decades later, Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution could not have succeeded so decisively and painlessly after so many years of totalitarian repres-

sion and violence had it not been, again, for the intervention of the *working class*.

- Solidarnosc. At a time when ideologues and anti-Marxists of the academic left were laying out Marxism on the embalming table, the entire Polish *working class* rose up to assert its rights and to demonstrate its class power in the face of a vicious totalitarian state.

- It is no exaggeration to claim that without the cumulative effect of *working class* resistance to Communist tyranny in Eastern Europe, the Berlin Wall might still be standing and the internal and external Communist empires might not have crumbled. This is not to disparage the role of students, intellectuals and what there were of clandestine social movements, but it was the *working class* that was indeed the historic agent of social transformation in the Communist world.*

It was not only in Eastern Europe that the working class was a decisive force for democratic social change. That was the case on the Iberian Peninsula as well. After forty-some years of the brutal Salazar dictatorship in Portugal and more than three decades of fascism in Spain both dictatorships were overthrown. That would not have been possible without the militant intervention of the anti-fascist working class.

And it is not to minimize the courage, the spirit, the creativeness and massive involvement of the students who initiated the revolt in Paris and in the provinces, to acknowledge the key strategic role of the working class in the May 1968 events. Had it not been for the treachery of the French Communist Party there is every theoretical and historical reason to believe that the French working class in alliance with the students would have transformed a revolt that toppled DeGaulle into a social revolution that would have toppled the edifice of French capitalism and imperialism.

IN SUMMARY, THE LESSON OF RECENT EVENTS IN FRANCE, as in 1968, and throughout the European continent for the past 50 years, is that the working class is not passé. It remains a potential force for democratic struggle and social change.

December 16, 1995

*To be sure, when the Communist system finally disintegrated, the working class, which had been instrumental in undermining totalitarianism, did not come to power in any East European country. For example, neither the working class nor the conservative regime governing Hungary today is continuous with the socialist working class and its short-lived pre-eminence in 1956. This devolution is part of a much longer story and, in any case, does not invalidate the argument that the dynamism, militancy and courage of the working class in Communist countries was the prime element in the upheavals that led to the downfall of Communist totalitarianism.

NEW POLITICS

A Journal of Socialist Thought

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