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The 1996 Elections: Angry Voters with Nowhere to Go

Thomas Harrison

EVEN BY THE ABYSMALLY LOW STANDARDS OF AMERICAN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS, 1996 must have been one of the most empty and boring exercises ever. It was definitely the most expensive: \$800 million was spent on the presidential contest, three times the cost of the 1992 campaign. Otherwise, though, it was business as usual. Once again, millions of Americans voted for their enemies. Trade unionists, African-Americans, Latinos, feminists, gay rights activists voted to re-elect a President who has demonstrated over and over again that he is deeply hostile to their aspirations. More than half the electorate did not vote at all.

It need not have been so. During the past two decades, and especially over the last four years, conditions have ripened for a viable third party. Polls over a 30-year period show a sharp decline in citizens' basic trust in the political system. The slide has been almost continuous; trust is much lower today than even during the Vietnam War and Watergate. Simultaneously, Americans have been increasingly willing to consider something new. Even in 1982, respondents to an ABC/*Washington Post* poll were evenly divided over the desirability of a third party. In 1992, an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll indicated that as many as 55% of the population wanted a third party; two years later, a *Times Mirror* poll registered 53% in favor of a third party and 43% against. The Perot campaign showed the vast popular support for political independence, even before it was at all clear what Perot stood for. In fact, it was when the Texas billionaire began to reveal his positions that his poll numbers started to level off

The Myth of the Conservative Revolution

IN TERMS OF POPULAR CONSCIOUSNESS, THERE WAS NO "CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION" under Reagan. All the polls and surveys showed, instead, that most people remained loyal to a New Deal-style welfare state liberalism and to an ethic of egalitarianism and equity, rather than embracing a dog-eat-dog free marketeerism. Voting results are misleading. As the number of non-voters grew, voters tended to be more elite and therefore more conservative than the general population; but, even so, voters were less and less in agreement with the programs of those they elected. In 1980, when GOP voters were asked their opinion on specific items in the Reagan agenda — increased defense spending, cuts in domestic programs — most took a liberal line.

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In 1994, most of those who voted for the Republicans did so to repudiate Clinton and the Democrats, not because they endorsed the Contract With America, which most had never heard of. Even *The New York Times*, never prone to minimize the basic conservatism of the American voter, noted that the political mood in 1994 “seemed driven not by particular issues, so much as a nagging sense that both parties are equally paralyzed by the influence of wealthy special interests.” The issues most Americans really cared about simply were not, and still are not, part of the political debate at all.

Of course, people's consciousness is always complex and full of contradictions. White male workers, for example, typically have conservative attitudes on matters of culture, race, gender, and sexual orientation, as is well known — although these attitudes have changed considerably in recent decades and are continuing to change at an accelerating pace. Yet, racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on frequently coexist with more progressive opinions. In an era of “downsizing” and shredding the social safety net, the positive moral commitment of the “average” fairly non-political American to business values is swiftly declining, and this presents an opportunity for an anti-corporate left to bring her/him into common struggle with blacks, women, gays, etc., struggles which would foster mutual respect and therefore offer the possibility of overcoming prejudice through participants' recognition of their common humanity.

Right now there does seem to exist what Joel Rogers, a leader of the New Party (NP), has called “vast implicit demand for imposing some standards on corporate behavior, for making values matter in how we run our economy and distribute opportunity and reward. And there is vast demand for a more responsive and effective ‘government’ — public authority and institutions more truly by and for the people.”

Journalists, politicians and other opinion makers, however, persist in representing popular consciousness as overwhelmingly hostile to a progressive agenda. This is not just myopic. That conservatives and “moderates” have an interest in believing, or claiming, that they are swimming with the tide is obvious. But for liberals in retreat, it has also been necessary to believe that “the great unwashed” have moved to the right en masse. Thus Reagan was “too popular” to attack. To justify their flight from liberalism, to themselves as much as to others, liberals need to believe that they had no choice but to adapt to a great shift in the public mood.

But the retreat began long before the so-called Reagan Revolution. The real reason for it is that liberals have grown more proprietary toward the system, more fretful over its loss of credibility and respect from a volatile citizenry. Thus, for most liberal leaders, just as for conservatives, the significance of Watergate was not so much that it was a flagrant abuse of power, but that it was a “national trauma” that profoundly shook millions of Americans' faith in the system. Similarly, Vietnam had been, not a crime, but a “mistake,” because it eroded people's confidence in their rulers. Under these conditions, there is much less room for partisanship. Liberals increasingly feel the need to close ranks with conservatives against a feared and mistrusted population, too ignorant to appreciate the perfection — and fragility — of our Constitution. Even more than conservatives, they worry that the presidency itself might be discredited; thus, even before the facts of the Iran-Contra scandal had started to emerge, liberals were solemnly warning that “there must be no talk of im-

peachment.”

Everything that liberalism had once been proud to affirm — faith in the efficacy of public works, intransigent defense of civil liberties, rough and tumble let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may partisanship — is now seen as dangerously destabilizing. Liberalism’s militant past has become a source of confusion and shame. The more courageous continue to pay lip service to the old ideals, but without much conviction.

Thus, two parallel trends have emerged: the growth of “implicit demand” for a progressive politics and a new party on the one hand, and the withering of establishment liberalism, concentrated around the Democratic Party, on the other. The notion that the Democratic Party could be transformed into a real people’s party, except for a brief revival in the McGovern era, has been steadily losing credibility since the 1950s. Superficially, Jesse Jackson’s campaign lent new credence to this perspective in the 1980s. It coincided, however, with the Democrats’ capitulation to Reaganism and the Party’s capture by the ideology of the Democratic Leadership Conference: neo-liberal economics and neo-conservative foreign policy. Jackson spoke for a coalition of minorities, labor insurgents and the peace and anti-intervention movements. When it became clear that these constituencies were utterly marginalized within the Party, he might have led them into political independence; instead, the Rainbow, which proved to be merely a vehicle for Jackson’s personal ambitions, went nowhere. And so did Jackson, who has floundered alarmingly ever since. That the promise of the Jackson campaign came to nothing is surely one of the factors that has brought the left to such a low point today.

The Silence of the Liberal Lambs

AT THIS YEAR’S DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION, THE SILENCE of the Party’s left wing was eloquent testimony to liberalism’s current malaise. Not only was there no challenge to Clinton on any issue, but liberals did their best to pretend they weren’t even there. Interviewed by Margaret Warner on PBS’s News Hour, Robert Borosage, leader of the Campaign for America’s Future, steadfastly refused to criticize Clinton, despite repeated prodding from Warner, and absurdly insisted that the Party had become *more* “progressive” (the use of that last word was a reckless slip for which Warner did not fail to chastise the contrite Borosage). On the same program, meanwhile, Henry Cisneros assured viewers that Clinton shared the Republicans’ hostility to “big government,” and Nebraska’s Senator Kerrey warned that government could not be an ATM, hinting that after the election other entitlements like Medicare and Medicaid might go the way of Aid For Dependent Children.

During the convention, Tom Hayden argued that it was appropriate for the left to “submerge” itself until after the elections, and then reemerge to continue the fight for the Party’s “soul.” Evidently, this was the reason people like Borosage maintained such a discrete silence. But the idea that Clinton would be *more* rather than less likely to respond to pressure from the left after he had received its unconditional support is ridiculous. Instead, liberals who engage in such (self) deception are themselves more likely to minimize their differences with the President for fear of “embarrassing” him or weakening him vis-a-vis the Republicans.

The Reformist Left

FOR THE ORDINARY PROGRESSIVE-MINDED AMERICAN CITIZEN, voting for the Democrats as the "lesser evil" is a ritualized reflex, made inevitable by the absence of any alternative. For others, voting Democratic is part of a politics of "working within" the Democratic Party, based on the dogmatic conviction that nothing else is possible. A look at some of the people associated with *Dissent* — a magazine which long ago committed itself to an insider perspective but, for reasons of nostalgia evidently, maintains the quaint fiction of styling itself "socialist" — shows the deleterious effects of staring too long into the abyss of the Democratic Party.

Writing in praise of opportunism (literally) in *The New Republic* (Sept. 16-23, 1996), *Dissent* editor Michael Walzer confesses: "My sense of betrayal [over Clinton's signing of the welfare bill] was an act of moral self-indulgence — a way of blaming the president for doing what presidents do, what they *should* do [my emphasis]." The "real failure," he points out, was not Clinton's but the left's, which isn't strong enough to influence the Administration. Throughout, Walzer treats Clinton as someone who just responds to "public opinion," left or right, whichever is stronger (that public opinion is now overwhelmingly conservative is, of course, assumed) rather than corporate power and ideology.

In the same issue, Sean Wilentz actually seems encouraged by the liberals' passivity and "unruffled demeanor" at the Convention; it shows that they have begun to abandon their "rage for moral purity." He quotes Barney Frank — a cynical operator whom Wilentz dubs a "liberal paragon" — with evident approval: "Liberals realize that throwing a tantrum over the welfare bill isn't going to help any poor people." By keeping their mouths shut, Wilentz notes sagely, liberals were "winning points." And in *The New York Times* (Aug. 25, 1996), Paul Berman praises Clinton's "maneuverability," his ability "when the Republicans veer right, to veer one inch to their left." He's a "genuinely clever politician, the first on the Democratic side in a long time" — in short, a winner! All Berman can say about the welfare bill is that it was "unfortunate"; no "rage for moral purity" there!

Walzer, Wilentz and Berman want the left to grow up — to stop throwing tantrums and instead realize that getting the ear of the powerful is what counts. Writing in *Dissent* (Fall, 1996), Harold Meyerson treats Clinton like the good Czar whose ear, unfortunately, has been monopolized by bad advisers (Robert Rubin) instead of good advisers (Robert Reich and Donna Shalala). Grassroots mobilization, even mobilization within the Democratic Party to pressure Clinton, is easily ruled out because that's not what really interests them. Indeed, for all their talk of democracy, they fear the grassroots much more than they fear the powerful. (This is not the place to explore the highly interesting political history of the *Dissent* tendency and its roots in the academic climate of anti-populist reaction during the 1950s; interested readers are referred to an insightful article by Sheldon Wolin in the November 1985 *Atlantic*. Irving Howe and company also came in for some sharply critical analysis in the pages of this magazine during the 1960s.)

Not that Walzer et al really expect to acquire access and influence. In a brilliant and scathing attack on "lesser-evilism" published, as it happens, in

the same issue of *Dissent*, Christopher Hitchens characterizes the politics of this tendency as "masochism": "we" are weak, isolated and don't really deserve to be listened to. In fact, as Berman might say, it's a testimony to Clinton's skill that he ignores us. What may have begun as a tactic 40 or 50 years ago has become a rationalization for conservatism and defeatism. As Nietzsche warned about such cases, the abyss has stared into *them*.

BUT IF TENURED "RADICALS" HAVE GIVEN UP, ORDINARY PEOPLE CANNOT afford to. The crisis of American society only deepens and the extreme right is gathering strength. The right has nothing like majority support, but it operates in what is essentially a political vacuum. The few organized alternatives to the rightwing agenda — labor, environmental organizations, NOW, the NAACP — are hamstrung by their commitment to the Democratic Party, which is itself not accountable to any organized base but to the corporate world. The propaganda onslaught in favor of "freeing" business has been enormously successful in capturing the political discourse, but this is largely an elite phenomenon. Most people do not actually believe that business just wants to provide the good life for everyone, but they have a hard time believing that anything can be done to curb the corporations; consequently they are resigned, fatalistic. *Anti*-business, egalitarian politics, the politics of solidarity and cooperation, have no credibility because those who might promote them and promise to put them into practice can't — because they are trapped inside a pro-business political party. So the notion, as Walzer argues, that the left is to blame for Clinton's conservatism is true, but not in the sense that he means it; the weakness of the left is precisely a result of its subordination to the Democratic Party.

This subordination means that the right has a clear field on which to advance. In response to its assaults, the Democrats have cast themselves as defenders of the status quo against "radicals" and "extremists," while at the same time helping the right dismantle those few parts of the status quo that help working people and the poor. As American society is looted by big business and becomes more violent and insecure, millions will increasingly turn toward politicians like Buchanan who scapegoat minorities, immigrants and gays and demagogically denounce the status quo. The Democrats, in response, will move further to the right in order to stay in power, but they will be less and less able to convince people that they can solve society's problems. In the short run, Clinton in the late 1990s, like Carter in the late 1970s, is almost certainly preparing the ground for another great surge forward by the Republicans. As Barbara Ehrenreich commented, his administration has been a "growth medium" for the right (*Nation*, Nov. 25, 1996). It has also been, she adds, a "powerful sedative" for the left. Protest has withered since 1992; what we've had has been strangely empty, or deeply disoriented. Hundreds of thousands of black men rallied to a call for "atonement" (more masochism) by a raving, anti-Semitic authoritarian. Thousands of others joined Children's Defense Fund's Marian Wright Edelman's virtually non-political demonstration "for children." The eerie silence at the 1996 Democratic Convention has already been noted.

No Lesser Evil

THERE REALLY IS NO LESSER EVIL, THEN, because continued support to the Democrats allows the country to move further to the right: vote for the “lesser” evil and you are certain to get the greater evil. One could invoke analogies like the difference between a gun and slow poison, but in the election just past, it was actually hard to detect any significant differences between the two deadly options. In an article arguing in favor of voting for Ralph Nader (*Nation*, Oct. 14, 1996), Marc Cooper and Micah Sifry made an extensive list of the things on which Clinton and Dole agreed: government assistance for the poor should no longer be a federal guarantee, military spending should be increased, Medicare and Medicaid should be cut, civil liberties should be sacrificed to fight “terrorism,” gays should be denied equal rights with heterosexuals, a paltry \$5.15 minimum wage is enough, etc., etc.

Even when the Democrats do propose reforms, their bondage to big business (Hitchens calls Clinton both “patron” and “serf” of the corporations) ends up discrediting the very idea of reform and reinforcing the popular belief that there is no alternative to Gingrichism. This was demonstrated in the health care debacle, which also showed the ineffectuality of the Party’s more liberal lights. Ellen Willis (*The Village Voice*, Oct. 11, 1994) noted how supporters of single-payer plans played the role of “respectable utopian dreamers,” refusing to threaten to vote against the Administration’s proposal and not even seriously taking their case to the public. The Clinton bill was essentially a gift to the insurance industry. It was argued on the basis of cost containment, rather than the idea that medical care is a public good that should be publicly financed — thus framing the whole debate in the language of the free marketeers. Had there been a movement for national health insurance that did not rely on Kennedy, Wellstone and Gephardt, it would probably, at the very least, have forced Congress to pass Clinton’s plan as a compromise, instead of allowing it to be portrayed as far-out.

The fact that no prominent Democrat talks of significantly cutting the defense budget (Clinton actually increased it) is by itself fatal to any prospects for reform. *Half* of discretionary spending still goes to the military, and this is a direct reason for so much poverty, malnutrition, infant mortality, functional illiteracy and ignorance.

Steps Toward Independence

VOTER INSURGENCY TODAY IS PROBABLY DEEPER than anything this country has seen since the 1920s. But at the moment, it has nowhere to go. Much of it will inevitably go to the right unless a serious vehicle for progressive politics is created soon, one that contends for power — that is, runs candidates for office at every level — *against* the Democrats as well as the Republicans. Fortunately, some progressives are finally attempting to build independent political alternatives to the Democrats. The New Party, founded in 1992, and the Labor Party, launched at a national convention this past summer, are the most promising initiatives in more than 50 years. Unfortunately, these attempts have been badly undermined by compromises over, precisely, the issue of independence itself. For now, they are only semi-independent semi-alternatives.

New Party leader Joel Rogers (*Dissent*, Spring 1996) has said that by creating an independent organization the NP is mounting a “credible threat of exit” from the Democratic Party. But they want to do this in a way that somehow “does no harm” to the Democrats — by putting up candidates only in Democratic primaries and nonpartisan races, and only where NP candidates have a very good chance of winning. The Party is fighting in court to remove legal obstacles that exist in some states to “fusion,” nominating the candidates of one party on the ballot line of another; this would permit NP voters to register their independence in the voting booth without endangering the election of Democrats. Rogers argues that right now corporations have veto power over any attempt to transform the Democratic Party, but he does not want to abandon the strategy of reform from within — perhaps it will become feasible after the NP has built up enough support to make its exit threat “credible.” Above all, he insists that the two strategies of building a third party and trying to change the Democratic Party are not incompatible. The fear of electing Republicans is certainly understandable. The trouble is, however, there is no way of building a real third party without “harming” the Democrats — unless, that is, you are only interested in creating another pressure group. Rogers’ two strategies are incompatible. And in fact, it is only a really independent progressive party that can exert any real *pressure* on the Democrats from the left. Competition is the only truly “credible threat.”

Fusion is, of course, a democratic right; Ralph Nader has pointed out, too, that it could be used by progressive parties to support each other. But the NP’s fusion strategy stands in stark contradiction to the radicalism and independence of the party’s self-conception. Here and there liberal Democrats may welcome the NP’s endorsement (many have spurned it, however), but they cannot reciprocate by endorsing what the NP supposedly stands for — independence. Of course, those who are taking the first tentative steps away from the Democrats fear being divided from their liberal friends and allies in Congress, state government, City Hall, etc. — or being blamed for their defeat. But these “friendships” needs closer scrutiny.

Trade unionists, feminists, environmentalists, gay rights activists, rely heavily on key supporters in government, most of whom are unreliable, though, mainly because they are not really accountable to *them*. Democrats, even the most liberal, are accountable to their party, which is fundamentally accountable to corporate power. They may denounce Clinton, denounce big business, but when push comes to shove — and certainly on election day — they rally around the president and the party of big business and urge everybody else to do so.

Moreover, progressives’ focus on winning favors from “friends” in power is a major factor inhibiting the formation of alliances with *each other*. The lines are mostly vertical, rarely horizontal. The most logical and effective kind of alliance among unions and social movements would be a political party, but this is the very thing our liberal Democratic “friends” do not want us to venture because they perceive it as a threat to *themselves*. And in fact, to the extent that an independent party *were* truly independent and *did* pose a threat to these Democrats, activists would be much more effective in wringing concessions from them. Our “friends” would become much “friendlier,” in other words, if they knew they had to work hard to win the support of

progressives, instead of assuming that they could just go on record with a few good votes.

Running candidates in Democratic primaries is a disaster for the New Party. How can this do anything but reinforce loyalty to the Democratic Party, to the established prejudice that the Democrats *are* the only alternative? The NP needs to start running candidates under its own banner, and not just for low-visibility local office or in nonpartisan contests. Putting this off only means postponing the job of challenging the defeatism of popular consciousness and the deadlock of American politics.

The NP emphasizes, rightly, the importance of building a party from the grassroots up. But a grassroots strategy should not become an excuse for political timidity. If a policy of running candidates *mainly* for school boards, city councils and county office is a substitute for bidding for higher office, then it's simply another compromise on the issue of political independence — because higher offices are invariably partisan. Even the idea that focusing on local office first is better for party-building doesn't make much sense. For better or worse, most people don't pay much attention to politics at this level. If the NP wants to build on present consciousness, to reach voters where they are now, it cannot postpone making itself known where most people's attention is already directed, and especially at the level of national government. Otherwise, it will remain more or less invisible.

The Labor Party (LP), on the other hand, has renounced (for the time being) running candidates at all — which makes it even more questionable than with the NP whether its leaders want a pressure group or a real party. The Labor Party proposes “non-candidate,” “non-electoral” political action; but what is that? How can the LP's potential base understand a “party” that doesn't have enough confidence in its program to seek power? Unfortunately, as with the NP, the priority seems to be the leadership's reluctance to antagonize powerful friends — Democratic politicians and pro-Democratic union officials — rather than building a base for independent politics. The LP declares that it will run candidates only when it is able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of workers and massive financial resources. But that day will keep receding ever further into the future until the party starts mobilizing workers and others *for* power through the ballot box.

The Labor Party's program, like that New Party's, stresses social control of the economy and empowering ordinary citizens. But it is marred by inconsistencies and narrow compromises that seem to reflect the parochialism of some of the unions involved; these problems of program drastically weaken the party's ability to appeal beyond its own ranks. The plank on reproductive rights was watered down by pressure from the heavily Catholic farm workers union, and it does not include the word “abortion.” This may have been good for party unity, but it damages the party's ability to reach out to feminists and women generally. There are proposals for public works, job training, child care and other programs that are absolutely crucial if any serious challenge is to be mounted against poverty, racism and urban decay. Yet nothing is said about cutting the defense budget, the obvious place from which the resources for such a challenge must be derived.

A Missed Opportunity

SO, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE NEW PARTY AND LABOR PARTY will move toward real independence or not. Indefinite survival as a kind of half-way house seems unlikely. On the other hand, the parties' current strategies effectively bar the road to independence. It doesn't help that both groups missed a great opportunity to capitalize on the massive voter disenchantment with the 1996 elections. At the very least, they should have endorsed and worked for Ralph Nader, who ran an honorable but weak campaign, weak mainly because he had so little organized support apart from the Green Party.

An independent presidential ticket, headed by Nader or someone else, might have begun the process of channeling anti-Clinton progressive sentiment away from the Democratic Party. A broad united front, not only with the Labor Party, New Party and Greens, but also with a host of activist groups — civil rights, peace, civil liberties, gay rights — would have received national attention and could have laid the groundwork for a much broader third party than any of the existing parties. One can speculate about whether there was an objective basis for an effort of this magnitude — I think there was — and it certainly would have required enormous pressure and relentless campaigning to break the mass-membership advocacy organizations from their traditional reliance on the Democrats; but there was clearly no *will* to initiate it among those who could have done so: the NP endorsed Clinton and the LP abstained in order to avoid endorsing candidates at all.

The tactic of "waiting out" the 1996 elections was a terrible mistake. Elections are moments when critical issues are brought forward, important choices are made and consciousness is shaped. The absence of an alternative strengthens people's tendency to believe, however reluctantly, that the Democrats are the only alternative to the right. It makes the *eventual* creation of a real alternative just that much more difficult. The argument that there aren't yet enough of us, that if we strike out now from the Democratic swamp we will face defeat and further isolation, is partly unanswerable; no one has a crystal ball and victory is never guaranteed. On the other hand, one doesn't need a crystal ball to foresee the bleak prospects before us if a progressive political party is *not* created. And we have *some* numbers now, more than we've had in many decades: a solid core of people committed, with various degrees of consistency and intensity, to independent politics. The question is what those numbers are *for*: to move toward independence and thereby attract greater numbers, or to remain half in, half out, until the old pressure tactics once again prove futile and our numbers are thoroughly demoralized?

Jesse Jackson, writing in the *Nation* (Sept. 23, 1996), argued that only those with "a sense of immunity" to the threat posed by the Republican right to "the most vulnerable in our society" could even consider *not* voting for Clinton; refusing to support the Democrats, he insisted, was a "callous luxury that people of conscience cannot afford." I would argue that Jackson has it reversed. The most vulnerable are nothing but the victims of the two-party system. Had Dole won, their suffering would have worsened; with Clinton in the White House their suffering will *also* worsen. Their hope, the hope of most Americans, lies in a new politics that ends our enslavement to lesser-evilism. It is up to people of conscience to seize the initiative. We cannot afford to wait.

The 1996 Elections in Perspective

Paul Buhle

IN A YEAR WHEN THE LEFT'S MAJOR VICTORY COULD BE DESCRIBED as the three-to-two majority for Greens on the Arcata, California City Council, we have special reasons to distance ourselves from the endless analysis about shifts within the two-party oligarchy. Neither the Democrats nor Republicans represent, or ever have represented in any significant way, the interests of the working class, minorities, women, the poor, the environment or any other worthy end. Ideological claims notwithstanding, Republicans are as eager as Democrats to sustain the central forces of big government, namely the armed forces, the security state, natural resources exploitation and the highway system; and Democrats for their part are just as eager as Republicans to promote the interests of big business above all other possible concerns.

And yet: politics remains the major way that the ruling ideas of an age serve as the public face of the ruling elites. Differences, even dubious ideological differences, can matter because of historic divisions among the elites and the constant jockeying for advantage. Crises of one kind or another, always around the corner, bring the divisions into sharp perspective. Thus it was old news by mid-November's election wrap-ups that the center had held, due to the President's own strategic reorientation. It was odd news, almost a historic replay, to read that the AFL-CIO had at least temporarily pumped some life back into a fading Democratic machine by running left of center. Hardly news at all, at least from the mainstream outlets, was the non-election of congressional, state and local Democrats pressing Clinton from the right. Behind all the news, and despite the re-election of the President, the party had become a sort of political hoax, a collection of monied barons without the requisite peasants to fight their wars for them.

Since the various crises of the 1970s, Democrats have notoriously lost touch with their historical constituencies. Union members and non-whites along with liberals and progressives have stubbornly continued to vote Democratic in many places. But they lack the will, even more than the numbers (in the case of union members), to hold or now to win back Congress from the Republicans. The local, district and ward organizations which for generations formed the party's basis have long since disappeared, replaced by media campaigns and personality followings. This time, as local union staffers flooded the phone banks with get-out-the-vote messages, conservative Democrats feverishly and foolishly disowned AFL-CIO support. All in all, large portions of Democratic performance evoked painful memories of Lane Kirkland's own late and unlamented labor leadership: overstuffed hacks altogether too hackish for even their own good.

PAUL BUHLE's *collection of labor history essays* From the Knights of Labor to the New World Order was published by Garland in January 1997.

Pundits also rarely mentioned that the center had moved so far in a generation that Bill Clinton was considerably to the right of candidate Gerald Ford on any number of important issues, from entitlements and welfare to the protection of wetlands and vanishing species. Apart from White House-engineered media events (e.g., fanfare about new parklands, a maneuver hiding massive concessions to polluters and developers; bold promises to women, opposed to the reality of welfare slashing), only the dimming memories of Vietnam War opposition reminded anyone that Clinton had claims on a liberal tradition. Republicans in Congress, softening their own message in the last months before elections, wanted badly to meet him half-way, delivering the various "reforms" that business demanded.

Large questions for the future, meanwhile, had only begun to be posed in this election. A *New York Times* editorialist called the apparent calm of the campaign and its outcome the "eye of the storm" which might break out at any time, in any direction.¹ A recession, more than possible for a half dozen reasons including the maxxed-out credit levels of consumers and a stock market overheated with pension funds, would certainly throw mainstream politics into a panic. Not only would the inner vacuity of the Democratic party be exposed, but so would the bankruptcy of AFL-CIO strategists turning once more to the political GOD (Grand Old Democrats) of Walter Reuther and George Meany, substituting money and phonecalls for a sense of purpose now nowhere in sight.

Looking just a little way ahead: might not the heightened participation of Chicanos and Latinos (beyond the monied, conservative Cuban community) possibly prove a key element in a trend bringing the terms "ethnic" and "progressive" back together again, alongside the coalition partners of environmentalists, feminists, gays, lesbians, the African-American community and a progressive section of labor moving away from the Democrats? Could these elements supply the basis for a new social movement and a political party? Can Republicans continue to hold onto their own cross-class alliance as the fundamentalists feel sold out by Gingrich's Congress, and the blue collar right grows weary of its descending standard of living? These are all imponderables, but their explosive possibilities are by no means unforeseeable in the anxious years nearing the new millennium.

THE VOTING PATTERNS OF 1996 AND THE CONTINUING ECHOES of preceding decades reminded political historians more than a little of the era following the Civil War. For just a moment, veteran Abolitionists seemed poised to join freed slaves, women, and the emerging working class in a grand radical coalition. By 1872, such hopes had badly faded, due mostly to the money and the power of the two-party system. Among the potential partners, black male suffrage was chosen instead of women's suffrage as a congressional priority, craft unions determinedly excluded women from membership, and assorted ex-radicals lost their zeal for a racially reconstructed South. Only a reconstruction of the North, with a defeat of the emerging capitalism, could have made that goal realizable — and that was something as unacceptable to one party as the other. Republicans as the confirmed party of business, Democrats as the supposed party of labor, each swallowed its respective reformers. Leaders of women, African Americans and labor, now resolving to go their own separate ways and to work in ad hoc coalitions with the mainstream, got precious little in return.

Reconstruction ended when the two parties essentially agreed to return the South to undisputed white control and to focus all attention upon economic expansion. The "issues" that set in motion great social movements of the previous era were successfully replaced in political life by the construction of political machines based on the increasingly lavish patronage of capitalism's (and the state's) rapid expansion. At the local and state level, the supposed national distinctions between Republicans and Democrats often vanished. Ethnic politics, what might be called the "identity politics" of the WASPs, Irish and Germans, offered a most convenient avenue for burying class and race. In electoral themes typical of that age or this one, arguments over control of public schools (i.e., for or against the local Germans, Catholics, etc.) became an especially good way to get angry or frightened men to the polls. The real dispossessed, women and non-whites, could with few exceptions not vote at all.

But soon, the rise of third-party radicalism (the Populists), a major depression and a series of spectacular strikes seemed likely to reorient politics at large. The two-party system, even under these extreme conditions, held firm in ways that should continue to be instructive today. Republican William McKinley emerged the outright champion of economic and territorial empire, while William Jennings Bryan made himself the defender of the (white) oppressed, in actuality southern agrarians and Western silver barons looking for higher prices. By World War I, Woodrow Wilson had successfully merged empire and the internal security state with a program of limited reforms. Public disillusionment with the war and the sour memory of Wilsonian blather proved enough to keep the more cautious Republicans in the White House during the prosperous 1920s. Once established, the mechanisms of internal security (the FBI, "criminal syndicalism" laws, harassment and persecution of black nationalists, etc.) became the guardians of both parties in or out of power.

It took another depression and a series of early failures for Franklin D. Roosevelt to place himself at the head of a popular wave demanding unions, Social Security, and the rest of the New Deal package. No matter that Roosevelt had set out to defend capitalism against its own excesses. The new temporary ruling coalition capitalized on the legitimacy and organizing skills of its leftward edge, drawing many an erstwhile revolutionary to its bosom. Like the support of radical crusaders for Abraham Lincoln's wartime Administration, industrial unionists' support of FDR kept the New Deal alive. But like the support of Radical Reconstruction by more mainstream Republicans during the Civil War and shortly after, this conjuncture offered a one-time-only tilt toward what appeared (to the optimistic) to be a structural transformation.

The reform wave ebbed definitively with war and the early benefits of military Keynesianism. Remarkably (and in ways forecasting the urgency of liberal Clinton supporters' warning of Republican threats), enthusiasm for Roosevelt and grandiose hopes for a happy, peaceful and prosperous postwar world actually increased as a bipartisan coalition shut down the federal agencies where radicals had gathered only a few years earlier. The Cold War ended the illusion. Like the Republican party earlier, the Democratic Party had not only been the wrong vehicle for the needed democratic transformation; its hold over popular loyalties made real change impossible. By the time Harry Truman had installed his own henchmen, the impulse for a third party (or Labor Party) twenty years in gestation had passed.²

THE 1996 ELECTION PUNDITS, LISTENING TO CLINTON'S VICTORY SPEECH and looking for a tag line, returned not surprisingly to a memorable phrase of the Truman era: the "vital center." According to the original phrasing, that "center" had excluded both the vision of socialism and the memory of post-World War I sentiment that America could not afford to maintain a world empire. Hereafter, according to the optimistic plan, government experts and their corporate partners would faithfully work in harness, from economic planning to attending the security state's various needs.

Extraordinary moral cynicism, unalloyed with Rooseveltian noblesse oblige, underlined this program and still does today. The so-called crusading Democratic liberals of the 1950s spoke often about civil rights but did nothing to slow the loss of precious land-holdings by southern blacks to government-sponsored agribusiness. Nor did the same liberals demand that the postwar suburban boom of subsidized housing include the poor and nonwhites of the cities. Quite the contrary: an eventual guarantee of meritocracy, along with some welfare programs, far more modest than ongoing subsidies to the white middle class, were substituted by 1930s-style egalitarian promises. Unionists, themselves trapped inside institutions that had lost their dynamic or democratic qualities, were offered a similar message: vote Democratic, get a mortgage in Levittown, and send your kids to college.

Sooner or later such things catch up. Politicians of both parties certainly did their best to ignore the growing misery of the ghettos, the deterioration of factory life, and the impossibility of manipulating all the world's miseries to American business advantage. Very soon, in fact, they learned to capitalize on the misery at home through "urban renewal," mainly tear-downs of existing neighborhoods and creation of vastly funded new housing developments, making fortunes for political patrons. Meanwhile, they had in many moments of happy bipartisanship created a vast Western economy of defense-production, with a new suburban white working class beholden to mechanical death and altogether likely to turn Republican. They showed no interest in warnings that exploitation of natural resources and empire-building at home and abroad had any limits at all.

Just as parties facing the reform apex of the 1860s or 1930s had chosen not to push further to serious structural reform, so the political and constitutional crises of the 1960s-80s inspired no compulsion to get at the real sources of the difficulties. While the 1960s exploded, there was a remarkable degree of bipartisan silence on crucial issues, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the day: no one threatened to reduce either the military budget or the welfare state. The Voting Rights Act indeed marked the outward limit of political experimentation, until the waves of protest and uprising pushed the limits further. Richard Nixon's sudden conversions on welfare, the environment, and detente demonstrated that development from one side; the division of erstwhile solid Truman Democrats into Democratic and Republican camps equally devoted to war proved it from the other. Meanwhile, the distant Right began to amass its war chests and its constituencies from the new rich and the newly frightened, respectively.

Two completely unanticipated developments in political life might have stemmed the rise of the rightwing preachers and heavily monied neocons. They also illustrate the workings of power amid widely-perceived crisis in how the

nation sees itself. The first, of course, was Watergate. Its importance minimized before the election, the scandal and the resulting hearings exposed the conspiracy originating from the White House. No one in a position of authority chose to make the connection beyond Nixon to war crimes and war criminals at the heart of government and corporate decision-making.

Republicans suffered and Democrats flourished, but only for a little while. Jimmy Carter was not one to push the temporary advantage home, and most of his competitors for the nominations of 1976 and 1980 (like Hubert Humphrey and Henry Jackson) had even worse records as hawks and defense-dollar pimps. Rallying bi-partisan support for a new arms race after the Russians invaded Afghanistan, Carter opened the door wide to Reaganism.³

Only a few years later, circumstances presented the Democrats one more golden opportunity which they also treated gingerly: Contragate. Never, not even in Nixon's day, had constitutional violations been so numerous or clearer. A determined campaign to bring down Ronald Reagan, through impeachment or something close to it, would have wrecked the Republicans for an era. Scarcely anyone in Congress seemed willing to go that far.

The reasons are not difficult to discern. Just imagine, for a moment, who might have gone down with Colonel North and officials at the CIA facilitating the "privatization" of foreign policy. Any CIA official facing a prison term could, for instance, have turned state's evidence against the AFL-CIO establishment, whose pet international agencies had been knee-deep in the blood of "low intensity" anti-civilian wars since Vietnam. It is an interesting thought, if not a realistic one, to imagine Lane Kirkland and the late Irving Brown spending their last years behind bars, with Albert Shanker pensioned off in embarrassment for having done so much harm to so many. But to bring down indictments on revelations as widely reported as the CIA/Contra/Cocaine connection or the various population massacres and starvation campaigns conducted with U.S. funds and CIA assistance was simply unthinkable.

To rock the larger boat of the Democratic establishment, its diminishing sources of popular support and its survivalist Trumanesque center, was also out of the question. To have made the most of Watergate or Contragate would have demanded domestication of the security state, a dreaded prospect which rallied bipartisan indignation even as the failure to do so cost the Democrats political control for a generation.

AND SO THE DRIFT CONTINUED. William Greider, in his *Who Will Tell the People?*, put his finger on an underlying element of evolving party politics.⁴ Not so long ago, the CIO's Political Action Committee — the mother of all PACs as mass-based organizations — had rolled up the vote through the kind of ward work that historic vote-buying Tammany or Chicago's Daley machine could only envy. Greider estimated that the 100,000 Democratic "regulars" remaining by 1990 or so averaged age 70. Time and disillusionment had taken their toll on the rest.

For that matter, the surviving CIO-PAC neighborhood cadre hadn't lived in the old get-out-the-votes neighborhood since the 1960s, shifting with their families to the property-conscious and mostly Republican suburbs. The new urban residents, more likely black, Asian or Latin American, understandably did not see the Democratic Party as any kind of savior. Younger reformers struggled,

especially at the local level, to find a place for themselves within the liberal lobbying groups around the Democratic Party. In the end, they generally gave up trying to find or make better Democrats. According to Greider, it didn't matter much anyway: the decisions that counted were made at the top by big-money lawyers whose clients' list included more corporations than unions.

The limited response that Democratic leaders made to rightwing challenges of the 1970s-90s, so often blamed on their constituents as an effect of the media-saturated postmodern condition, was actually a clear consequence of what their predecessors had accomplished. Life is indeed more privatistic when the regulated atmosphere of the shopping malls fostered by suburban life has replaced the inclusive chaos of city streets, and when the accelerated rush to make a living (or to raise the money for future college education of the kids) amidst spiraling expenses on all sides, finds adults exhausted and impatient. A world which once seemed so wide open, beyond the ghettos and blue collar neighborhoods of blue collar Democratic voters, has now closed in; all that's left is promises of security.

The political optimism of previous generations had been based in no small part on a certain personal optimism. During the 1930s, Americans dreamed of getting out of the Depression. During the 1940s, they dreamed of getting through the war. By the 1950s, the more far-sighted (or naive) could at least imagine a world society of former colonial states living in greater equality and in the shared development that world peace might bring. No one today, liberal or conservative, really believes that the problems raised during the 1930s and renewed during the 1960s have been solved or can be solved. In the 1990s, only arrogant Cold War veterans and their successor ideologues still pronounced the fall of Communism as harbinger for anything like the liberal, global promise of 1945. Too much of the planet's resources, too many of the dreams of progress, had been used up: the great and convenient myth of "development" had been exposed once and for all, leaving very little behind.

Post-New Deal, post-1972 politics has nevertheless had a curious rebirth around the Democratic Party. Black Democrats at various levels, mostly local, took office on the crest of liberal/Left coalitions, defining themselves by the often ferocious racist politics of their opponents. Their own modicum of interracialism was, as might be expected, largely within the rule of elites, but with at least a different rhetoric. New political lobbies of the environmental movement meanwhile rallied voters, sharing with peaceniks, gay and lesbian organizations and assorted other reformers, the capacity to marshal small armies of election workers. It looked, to many, like real or at least realizable progress.

These tendencies shared urban power with or without the Democratic Party proper in the Left-tinged communities like Madison or Berkeley or Santa Cruz of the 1970s-80s, and along with generating a great deal of hope, they managed to defeat some of the worst business plans for pseudo-development. Had American politics gone differently, they would surely have been the seedbed of the difference. In the end, their faithful learned, about the best that they could do was to promote greater race/gender/orientation fairness among the business wolves, to open some space for some public discussion and to hold onto some fragments of urban life otherwise increasingly decimated by strip malls and traffic jams. They watched the national scene with sadness, as potential coali-

tion partners seemed to lose track of each other, mirroring in ways that late 19th century drift from mass mobilization to elite pressure group tactics and from broad vision to limited goals.

Hard-pressed to be enthusiastic about most Democratic candidates and hardly appreciated by the Democratic National Committee, these forces can still make a difference in individual races. Along with the AFL-CIO's appeals, they certainly did in November.⁵ But the larger the stakes, the harder the task of overcoming the financial deficit. Outgunned by conservative interests, major state environmental measures have repeatedly lost (as five did in 1996). Exceptional liberal candidates like Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, Dennis Kucinich of Ohio or Bernie Sanders of Vermont (the only independent of the three) can turn out sufficient numbers of volunteers to overcome the hate campaigns against them; no one predicts many more candidates like these, and usually it takes an overwhelmingly repugnant Republican just to mobilize the lesser-evil vote.

Looking at the current line-up in Congress and looking ahead to future elections, identifying political thugs to defeat should present no problem. But rallying Democrats to stand up for anything decent is a different proposition, and a far more difficult one. At the moment, all eyes seem pointed toward the gender gap, and especially at the suburban women who have come, more and more, to doubt the reality of the secure and happy life that escape from urban problems once promised. Republicans threaten them on all sides, but Democrats (at least as a national party) only come out marginally better. It would be difficult, in many instances, to say what party's politicians turned a blinder eye to the company dumping toxic wastes, or who set up the worse deal to have a private hospital take over non-profits and cut care while raising costs, or who really put NAFTA in place and wants to take out that last slice of green space/wildlife reserve for a luxury housing development with golf course. Given the Clinton/Republican cabinet to come, telling the difference will likely get even harder.

THAT'S ABOUT WHERE WE ARE IN HOMETOWN, USA while Congressmen (and a few Congresswomen) trade the usual charges. Perhaps, despite everything said here, a 1998 constituency will be coalesced around the idea of stopping the Republicans from doing more harm, and doing it faster than sensible people can accept. John Sweeney, publicly enthusiastic and privately uneasy about stirring from the ranks, would certainly like to be able to point to victories (although he has only one so far, the minimum wage bill, and that seems likely to be the last of consequence) not apparently forthcoming in organizing the unorganized. Barring some kind of social crisis, the odds are badly against the kind of mobilization that this degree of effort would require.

Or perhaps something else will happen. Two years is probably too short a span for the political shifts required to launch a major new movement, but a sudden disillusionment with Clinton and the Congressional Republicans could certainly coalesce trends in that direction. As for the moment, we can't say.

Rumor has it, meanwhile, that the Georgetown millionaires who put the Vice-President in place would just as soon plan on a permanently Republican Congress and pin their hopes on "Gore 2000." This balance suits their neo-liberal economics, and gives their client-writers an endless potential for op-ed arguments against the Right's views on everything under the sun except who makes

the real decisions while so many things keep getting worse. It also suits their vision of a proper president.

This plan could easily go awry. While the Vice-President closes in on his goal, the political system and much else in American life give the distinct impression of teetering on the edge. Still, a man with more changes of color than a chameleon, a born-again environmentalist (who never actually does anything to defend the environment), born-again anti-smoker (whose family dynasty would never have made Congress without the tobacco lobby), a Southerner/Northerner sophisticate/antiporn crusader, etc. etc., perfectly suits an age when corporate planetary ravagers give each other "environmental" awards for good behavior. Gore has the consummate insincerity to out-clinton Clinton in the waning years of the century, and out-kemp Kemp in the presidential contest to follow. If things hold together that long, he has been dubbed to preside over the further disappearance of the Democratic Party as anything more than a money-machine and influence peddler designed for powerful men to get other powerful men into office. Maybe he won't even notice.

NOTES

1. Robin Toner, "Coming Home from the Revolution," *New York Times*, Nov.10, 1966.

2. The notion that Republicans staged a "revolution" in 1980 or 1994 is probably not taken seriously by readers of *New Politics*. Lincoln and Roosevelt, while fructifying one sector of capital, warned another sector very seriously that stubbornness would cost dearly, and took them on when they refused. The Republicans of recent years merely wished to update Trumanism by jettisoning social programs no longer required for sections of the white vote.

3. Novelist Joseph Heller, in *Picture This* (New York: Random House, 1988), remarked acutely that every other Democratic president in the century had actually plunged the nation into a major war; and Carter was the only one not re-elected.

4. William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), especially Ch.11, "Who Owns the Democrats." Unfortunately, Greider has a way of undercutting his argument by lionizing old fashioned Truman Democrats who cut the deals in the first place.

5. It is too early to speak intelligently about the experiment, urged by New Party leaders, of progressive groups endorsing specific candidates, for the most part, individual Democrats. And it is a bit too depressing to speak about 1996 third party results as such, at least beyond the local level. Ralph Nader got half a million votes without really trying, and (according to an estimate by Norman Solomon) by spending less than a penny per vote cast. By contrast, Dole and Clinton spent well over a dollar each, and Perot laid out \$3.67.

The Labor Party — Pressure On to Act Like One

Jane Slaughter

WHEN 1,367 DELEGATES GATHERED FOR THE LABOR PARTY'S FOUNDING CONVENTION in Cleveland in June 1996, they took a step toward transforming the political agenda of the U.S. trade union movement. It was the first serious attempt to build a labor party in the U.S. since the late 1940s. For some delegates, the gathering represented the culmination of a political lifetime of effort. Dan Kelley, a member of the United Electrical Workers (UE) and a public employee in Ames, Iowa, said, "I've been involved actively in politics at least since 1960 during the John Kennedy campaign, and it's an absolute dead end. Workers have to develop their own party. I've developed that over 35 years' experience. I'm very proud that I brought a 15-passenger van stuffed with UE members from Iowa."

After five years of organizing efforts by its predecessor, Labor Party Advocates (LPA), the new party is off the ground. Deep disenchantment with the Democratic Party in some sectors of the union movement has helped to bring the idea of class political independence from the margins to the edges of the mainstream.

But this is a decidedly odd kind of party. The second point in its new recruitment brochure asks: "Is the Labor Party running candidates?" And answers, "No." This has led some to wonder whether the Labor Party's leaders intend it to be anything more than a party on paper.

At the convention, some speakers on the floor called for the Labor Party to "break with the Democrats. Now!" At a regional LPA conference in Detroit in 1993, members of various small leftist groups repeated this phrase over and over, clearly implying that anything less was a sell-out. One got the idea that this "immediate break with the Democrats" was supposed to look like John L. Lewis's break with the AFL: a dramatic walk-out. One day you're in; the next day you've "broken." But as Ellen David Friedman, a leader of the Progressive Alliance party in Vermont, pointed out in Detroit, "breaking with the Democrats is something you do over and over and over."

For socialists who were never interested in the Democrats in the first place, "breaking" with them is easy. For other people, it's not a Saul-on-the-road-to-Damascus experience. It's a ragged tear, not a clean break,

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a learning experience, where people are once bitten, then twice, maybe thrice bitten before they are finally shy. So far as they are concerned, the question of breaking with the Democrats is a pragmatic one — how can we best reach our goals? — not one of class principle. For example, one of the endorsing railroad unions, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE) has seen its strikes broken by Democratic Presidents and Congresses many times. That's why its officers want a labor party.

Those who "broke with the Democrats" before they were ever with the Democrats should understand the ragged nature of this process. Many, including those *in* the Labor Party, will be like the smoker who quits over and over again until finally the "break with cigarettes" takes and lasts.

The question now is what the new party will do with its momentum. As could be expected, debate has raged on the left. But before taking up these arguments and criticisms, let us be clear that the existence of a Labor Party — even if thus far mostly in name only — is indeed a momentous opportunity. This is the first time that unionists and socialists have been able to discuss an independent, working class-based party in a relatively concrete way since 1948. With no real forces in the labor movement doing anything about it, such independence had been an abstraction for decades. Tony Mazzocchi — the activist who spearheaded passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, who was at one time a dissident within the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), and later became a top officer of that union — was one of the few in the labor movement who raised the question at all, promoting the idea with increasing vigor since the early 1980s. But without the support of major unions it was not actionable.

Once Mazzocchi and others founded Labor Party Advocates in 1991, the notion moved out of the realm of Trotskyist canon and into the light of day. Today, locals and national unions with hundreds of thousands of members officially support a labor party. And although this labor party is quite peculiar in some respects, it says most of the right things about why working people need class independence. The majority of its members want it to become a party that gives workers their own voice in politics. For that reason alone, it has the potential — no guarantee, but the potential — to foster class awareness and organization.

THERE ARE ACRES OF TERRAIN TO CONTEST, BOTH IN THIS PARTY'S SELF-DEFINITION and in what it does on the ground. Those who write it off because it is not the electoral equivalent of the CIO are missing the point. If activists boycotted organizations that are beset with conflicting impulses or whose leaders' strategies they question, they would not be involved in unions either. That said, let's look at the problems the new Labor Party faces.

The party's "chapters" — local citywide bodies made up of members of various unions — are somewhat segregated from the main endorsing unions. Local unions and internationals affiliate with the party directly, and, although the unions may encourage their activists to join the Labor Party, those activists are not required to join, much less be active in, the chapters.

The founding convention was called by four national unions — OCAW, United Electrical Workers (UE), BMWE and the West Coast International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU). (Shortly before the convention, the United Mine Work-

ers and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) also endorsed, but brought few delegates.) Members of an endorsing union are not very likely to be members of one of the chapters, and not much is asked of them beyond their dues. Many or most of the delegates from the main endorsing unions had never attended an LPA meeting before the founding convention.

One OCAW delegate, asked why he had come to Cleveland, said, "Because my district council is having its meeting here." The UE and OCAW both enhanced their members' attendance by scheduling regular conferences to coincide with the Labor Party meeting.

What is more, integration of the two types of members, chapter and endorsing union, appears difficult on a practical level: in large areas of the country the four relatively small core unions do not exist at all, or only barely.

At the convention, some votes showed a division between the "front of the hall" — the union delegates — and the "back of the hall" — chapters and at-largers. The original draft of the party constitution contained no provision for chapters, which were added by amendment. Chapters will hold their own separate convention in 1997, with no decision-making power and only one vote on the party's Interim National Council for all the chapters combined. The other votes are held by representatives of the main participating unions and by members added to promote diversity.

Add to this the fact that many chapters are not particularly habitable for non-leftists, and the party has a problem. In many locations, chapters consist nearly exclusively of leftists, and sometimes sectarian leftists play a big role. As a result, many other progressives have decided that such a soapbox/sandbox is not worth their time. In some chapters, mainstream union leaders have preferred to forego party activity and have the chapter do nothing, rather than give their opponents on the left an opening. In others, chapter members who want to reach out have not succeeded thus far in recruiting and retaining many non-leftist workers.

Given these problems, it is difficult to see how the chapters in many cities can be transformed, unless they develop projects that attract workers as members. And there's the rub, because the party has no cohesive action plan.

A Non-Electoral Strategy

AS JUST ABOUT EVERYONE KNOWS BY NOW, THE CLEVELAND CONVENTION voted not to run or — equally important — not to endorse candidates now. Instead, the group adopted "a new organizing approach to politics" to "promote a new agenda by recruiting and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of working people to engage in common non-electoral political activities throughout the year, not just on election day."

Party members know what they are *not* supposed to do — run candidates — but not very much about what they *are* supposed to do. Before the convention, some predicted that the leaders of the party wanted to change little in the group's behavior or self-conception as it made the transition from LPA to LP. The first edition of the group's newspaper, the *Labor Party Press*, seemed to confirm that prediction. In a relatively short section titled "What's next for the Labor Party?" we read:

Now that we finally have a program, a Constitution, and a Labor Party, what should

local unions and chapters be doing?

Members need to read and talk about our program and our Constitution. They should be talking to their fellow union members and community activists about our program. And they should develop a strategy for recruiting many more members and local unions into our Labor Party based on the program: Our first priority should still be recruitment.

The National Council's first meeting on August 15 discussed how to get more local unions to affiliate — the endorsing unions alone have 2,000 locals — and a campaign for a constitutional amendment that would guarantee the right to a job at a living wage, defined today as \$10.00 an hour. This amendment campaign is Tony Mazzocchi's pet project. At first glance, such a campaign seems perfect for the Labor Party. In this era of downsizing, the notion of the right to a job directly challenges corporate prerogatives.

But the campaign also seems to be at odds with Mazzocchi's maxims that you have to walk before you can run, and that defeats are bad for morale (see below). A constitutional amendment is enormously difficult to achieve. Remember the fate of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was raised in a far less conservative time and was far less threatening to corporate interests. Clearly, this is a propaganda campaign that has no chance of passage. Whether it will consist of more than brochures and petition forms to flesh out the Labor Party literature table remains to be seen.

This campaign will be promoted by the Labor Party national office, but chapters are also free to devise their own campaigns, in line with the party platform, as long as they do not back candidates.

The problem is that it is unclear why anyone should join a new organization calling itself a "party," though it does not act like what anyone thinks of as a party, in order to work on such local campaigns. There are other organizations that do that. Jobs with Justice, a coalition of labor and community organizations, for instance, is an already-existing national organization with chapters in many cities, that works on local campaigns of various sorts. Why would anyone not already convinced that a labor party is an important idea join the Labor Party to do non-electoral work, rather than Jobs with Justice, which has a track record?

In Detroit, for example, the Labor Party chapter has given a great deal of support to the unions in the interminable newspaper strike. That work has won some recruits among strikers and a good name for some Labor Party members. But there are other organizations involved in strike support; the Labor Party was not needed to fill a hole.

Living wage campaigns have been mentioned as possible projects for local Labor Party chapters. Those campaigns, which put measures on the ballot this year in many cities and states from Missouri to Oregon, consist of pressuring the city council, or the state legislature, or getting an initiative on the ballot, to set a minimum wage in the \$6.50- \$8.00 range. The wage would apply to employers who have city contracts or have received city subsidies; in some cases the measure would raise the minimum wage for everyone. The New Party, working with local unions, has launched such campaigns in many places, and in others the local AFL-CIO is the main initiator.

A living wage campaign would indicate that the Labor Party is not merely a "special interest" seeking to benefit only its own members who, by many non-

union workers' standards, are already privileged. Rather, the Labor Party is working to make gains for the whole working class. But for the local activist who wants to achieve a living wage, the question again arises: why use the Labor Party as the vehicle, rather than the local AFL-CIO, with its far greater resources, or the New Party, which has more experience?

It may be possible in some places for a local Labor Party to play the role of a cross-union group that will undertake actions the local Central Labor Council will not, whether that's strike support or simply holding forums. In other places, though, activists will feel, "Why do I need another hat to wear to do the things I'm already doing?" In California, for example, the Labor Party supported the Patient Protection Act to rein in managed care corporations, but one didn't need to be part of the Labor Party to work on that campaign.

Those who are totally committed to the Labor Party as a long-term goal will want to channel whatever work they can into the Labor Party, while others will be indifferent. The challenge is to find projects that are not simply meant to keep Labor Party members busy or visible, but to attract people who are not already Labor Party supporters. The obvious choice is running candidates, but the party leadership, at this point, is firmly opposed to this step.

Elections: Pitfalls and Opportunities

THE APPROACH ADOPTED IN CLEVELAND SAYS THE PARTY WILL RELY on "building a movement that...force[s] elected officials and candidates to speak to our issues as we define them."

In other words, rather than electing candidates of our own, we will build a movement so strong that existing politicians will be obliged to do our will. Mazzocchi often gives the example of the success of the anti-abortion movement and of the right, in general, in changing the context of American politics. In a pre-convention interview, he said, "I'm best informed by the success of the right in reshaping the whole national debate just by the use of language. They have reframed the entire national debate. You create a climate." (Of course, the right *has* engaged aggressively in electoral politics, both locally and nationally, as well as "creating a climate.") Mazzocchi argues that the only outcome of running candidates is either defeat and demoralization, or victory followed by sell-out followed by demoralization.

At the convention, we witnessed the rather odd spectacle of members of the revolutionary left arguing passionately that the party should engage in bourgeois electoral politics in 1996, and higher-ups in the union bureaucracy arguing, at least ostensibly, for building a movement in the streets. However, it was not only the hard left that wanted the Labor Party to run candidates in the foreseeable future. The UE and the ILWU both backed electoral action, although at the convention the UE decided to go along with the compromise formulation, backed by the OCAW, that the political strategy would be rediscussed in two years. And many local officers from the first four endorsing internationals also say that they want to run candidates. Liz Bettinger, president of an OCAW local in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, said during the convention, "We aren't going to run candidates this time, but hopefully in the near future we will have somebody that could get these deadbeats out of office."

Given the party's fledgling condition, the convention was right to decide not

to run candidates this year. Nowhere was a chapter in good enough shape to do so. However, endorsing New Party or Green candidates in some places could have been a good first practical step toward political independence, and a sign that the Labor Party is not simply a bluff.

Since the convention, some delegates have said that the party should have endorsed Nader's candidacy for President although that idea was not raised at the convention itself. That would have run directly counter to the Party leadership's strategy, which is based on not alienating union leaders, at least until more unions have come aboard. But a Nader endorsement could have produced some real benefits by building bridges to non-labor progressive constituencies and showing union members in a concrete way that there is an alternative to the Democrats.

If the party is to grow, it will have to run in elections, because of the identity problem discussed above. The party has to determine when and where to do so. *New Politics* readers are well aware that running candidates says something that no other type of political work does. It says, "Our class should take power." When the Labor Party runs candidates for Congress and President on its (mostly excellent and class conscious) platform, it will be saying, in effect, "We don't buy corporate competitiveness as the organizing principle of society. Working people should take the wealth from the fat cats; we should take power." Merely pressuring existing politicians and candidates does not say that. It says, "We're just another pressure group on the professional politicians who will always be in charge."

It is unlikely that simply by engaging in creative grass roots actions the Labor Party can replicate the civil rights movement (a model some have mentioned in the *Labor Party Press*) and develop a crusade that progresses in a straight line until it includes "hundreds of thousands of members." In the best of all possible labor parties, action in the streets will interact with the more top-down activity of an election campaign. The party will try not to sow illusions about individual candidates, about the nature of power, and about what a few individuals in office can do when the power of the corporate state is arrayed against them. But it cannot be denied that elections bring up the big picture, that candidates can get publicity, and that running them says that you are putting your money where your mouth is. Also, many people will become involved in electoral politics who will not be active otherwise.

So why isn't the Labor Party acting like a party? Because, for the time being, at least, the party leaders' growth strategy is to do nothing that would deter any international or local union president from getting his or her union to endorse and commit funds. That means that the Labor Party should not compete with the Democrats, with whom most union leaders, at the national and the local level, are thoroughly entwined. For many Labor Party members who are typical local union officials, raising money for and asking favors of Democratic politicians is part of a well-established way of life, and they are not inclined to risk changing it.

This is particularly true for public sector unions and in cities and states where a union is large enough to have some influence in internal party workings. The UAW in Michigan is a good example — and UAW local leaders have stayed away from the Labor Party in droves. AFGE's Political Director says he sees no contradiction in the AFGE president's being on the Democratic National

Committee and also endorsing the Labor Party. “The point where I’ll see a contradiction is if they decide to run candidates,” he says.

Thus the Labor Party leaders’ reason for refusing to run candidates is not that they fear annoying the Democratic Party bigwigs, as some critics have claimed; these leaders are pretty clear on the worthlessness of the Democrats. What they fear is alienating potential Labor Party recruits.

The Holding Tank

UNDER THIS APPROACH, THE LABOR PARTY IS TO BE A HOLDING TANK of progressive political sentiment. The leadership’s strategy is to recruit unions into a larger and larger holding tank, based on the notion that you can be in the Labor Party and still do your regular Committee for Political Education (COPE) work, until there is a critical mass large enough to actually act like a party — that is, to run candidates. Party leaders may well be looking toward the ascension of Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka to the AFL-CIO presidency in not too many years, and aiming to recruit as many locals, intermediate bodies, and internationals as they can to pressure Trumka to start an official, AFL-CIO-backed labor party once he takes office.

This seems to be the reasoning behind Mazzocchi’s argument that the party should never run candidates. That argument is a proxy for the real argument, which is that you do not run candidates until the holding tank has grown full enough. Now, it is hard to argue with the notion that a party should not take bold action until it is strong enough. The question is: how does it get strong enough? Under the Labor Party leaders’ strategy, based on unions in a holding tank, the rank and file of those unions is likely to be passive. When, suddenly, someone opens the floodgates of the holding tank are the ranks supposed to rush out and give their all for the Labor Party? Over the last 20 years union members have been markedly resistant to their leaders’ recommendations about how to vote. Without significant groundwork — and action — they won’t be automatic converts to the Labor Party either.

The holding tank strategy presents other problems:

There are no additional international union endorsers on the immediate horizon. The endorsing unions (which also include the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), the California Nurses Association, and the California Carpenters) represent a small minority in the labor movement — more than a drop in the holding tank, but not big enough to drag the rest of labor in after them.

Pointing out their smallness is not a criticism of those unions; nor is this movement insignificant because it starts on the margins of the labor movement rather than in the mainstream. That is to be expected. Therefore, during the next stage, Labor Party leaders are concentrating on recruiting local union endorsements, a positive step since it is work that is closer to the ground and which can involve union members, unlike top-level negotiations at union headquarters.

What is the Labor Party likely to do that would change the many non-endorsing union leaders’ minds? The strategy has been “the less we do, the more likely they are to join” — and there is or was some truth in that, as the AFGE affiliation demonstrates. But what will persuade more unions to join

now? The campaign for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing jobs? One convention at-large delegate called this idea "either too woolly, pie-in-the-sky, or like a commitment to massive leaf-raking," Mazzocchi says, "Our best recruiting is going to come after the [1996] election and subsequent disappointments that are going to grow." In other words, we can simply wait for worse treatment from Clinton and the Democrats in Congress to cause more union presidents to give up on the Democrats in disgust.

For many current members, moreover, the holding tank conception has little appeal. They are likely to want more. We have already seen this in action. In LPA's first years, restive members were not satisfied with LPA as a mailing list/club. They transgressed leaders' wishes by forming local chapters whose de facto existence forced the leadership to accept and then encourage them. In late 1993, Mazzocchi noted, "It's difficult to recruit people, as many of our activists have pointed out, when there's really nothing for them to do." And that is what prodded leaders into holding a founding convention of a Labor Party when they had no intention of allowing it to act like a party. But thereby expectations were raised. Now that it is a party, the pressure is on to act like one.

The leaders who share this view may be able to maintain the holding tank strategy (and, as noted above, it is not unanimous among leaders of the four main unions). They may continue to win votes against running candidates at Labor Party conventions but there will be greater pressure and fractiousness than ever within the party. Many, not just leftists but members of the endorsing unions, will want the party to run candidates at some intermediate stage, before the leaders decide that the holding tank is full enough.

Instead of concentrating solely on filling the holding tank, Labor Party leaders ought to be doing some serious research and sounding out this year, investigating areas where the endorsing unions, both local and international, might have the combined capacity to run credible local campaigns -- for school board, city council, county executive, perhaps even Congress. Local unions or chapters that think they could run a worthwhile campaign should be pressing the leadership to let them try. The 1998 Labor Party convention could adopt such campaigns and prepare to go all out to win them. Given the weaknesses of the chapters, this would be a sounder approach than allowing any chapter anywhere to jump into the electoral arena.

It should be noted, by the way, that the holding tank strategy should not be equated with "holding back the workers." The union rank and file were not and are not straining at the bit for a militant new party, with the leadership of the Labor Party the only impediment to such a welcome development. On the contrary, Mazzocchi et al. were out in front and especially because they started with the relatively weak forces described above, they deserve praise for their boldness in birthing the project and bringing it this far.

Breaking with the Democrats

BECAUSE THE LABOR PARTY'S STATED POSITION IS THAT IT WILL PRESSURE existing politicians rather than electing its own, many observers have understandably concluded that Labor Party leaders do not want an independent party at all. *The Progressive*, for example, quoted a delegate from Pittsburgh: "I think some of [the internationals] would be entirely satisfied if LPA just became a pressure

group within the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party.” Alexander Cockburn and Joanne Wypijewski speculated, in *The Nation*, that “what was founded in Cleveland may wind up as a faction of the Democratic Party.” I would argue that the Labor Party’s leaders do want an independent party — even though their strategy for becoming one is to conciliate those who do not yet want to be independent.

In its literature, LPA has consistently denounced the Democratic Party as an institution — if not everyone in it — in the strongest terms. If all they wanted was to pressure the Democrats, they could have signed on to John Sweeney’s \$35 million election advertising campaign. They could have lobbied Sweeney to demand more of labor’s “friends,” rather than giving the no-strings-attached endorsements the AFL-CIO handed out this year. Why go to all this trouble for the modest goal of “pressuring the Democrats?”

Social Issues

MANY DELEGATES PREDICTED THAT THE LONG-AWAITED LABOR PARTY PLATFORM would remain silent on social issues, focusing instead on bread-and-butter economic planks. But the draft presented in Cleveland backed affirmative action, opposed “bigotry,” and took stands on women’s issues ranging from childcare to reproductive rights. When Clinton signed the welfare bill later in the summer, the party put out a detailed statement calling the bill an “attack on all working people.”

Nonetheless, it is clear that the new party intends to distance itself, to a degree, from automatic acceptance of the left’s full agenda. The platform takes positions and uses language meant to attract — or at least not put off — non-leftists. For example, the environment plank says the party will support steps to protect the environment “if and only if the livelihoods of working people endangered by environmental change are fully protected.” There is no call for open borders, as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee had proposed in pre-convention discussions. The anti-bigotry plank opposes discrimination, injustice, and hate crimes — but does not mention racism. The words “African American” made it in only because the Black Caucus proposed an amendment opposing the torching of African-American churches. The reproductive rights plank does not use the word “abortion.”

This omission evoked one of the longer and more emotional debates at the convention. The California Nurses Association offered an amendment to support “safe, legal abortion.” Speakers pointed out that the original language called for “a full range of family planning and reproductive services” under a single-payer health system — in effect the left’s old call for “free abortion on demand.” They proposed to include the substance but omit the trigger-word, in hopes of mollifying anti-choice party members and potential members. Supporters of the amendment argued that, with abortion rights under attack, this was no time to appear to waver. They pointed out that feminists would not be attracted to a party that refused to openly support abortion rights. The amendment failed.

It is healthy that the new party needed to have this debate. If the platform committee had called for abortion rights and everyone in the room had automatically raised their hands, it would have indicated that the new party was basically made up of the usual suspects. As it was, the platform committee made

an attempt to recognize that the working class (like the middle class) is divided on abortion. The pro-choice majority, in effect, held out an olive branch to the less-enlightened, saying, "We want you *in* our organization since we agree on most things, so we'll make a major concession on language. At the same time, we won't modify our politics."

Convention delegate Marilyn Clements, who is executive director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, said she voted for the original language because "Building a party is not about thinking up the most radical language. We've been there, done that." Although powerful arguments were made on both sides of this debate, perhaps the outcome signifies that the new party will reject the seductive but sterile "witnessing" model of activism in favor of one that says politics is about finding a way to work with people who do not already agree with you.

The Labor Party and the AFL-CIO

INTERESTINGLY, CRITICISM FROM THE NEW LABOR PARTY'S NEAR-RIGHT — defenders of the Democratic Party — has been relatively muted.

The "new AFL-CIO" of John Sweeney has not tried to thwart the Labor Party's organizing efforts. Mazzocchi reports that when asked directly by the Cleveland AFL-CIO if it was okay to endorse LPA, Washington headquarters gave the green light. "[Former President Lane] Kirkland would have crushed us, the way he did the Central Labor Councils (CLC's) that wanted to support McGovern," Mazzocchi said. Even the Mine Workers, Rich Trumka's old union, has endorsed the party.

Sweeney was also somewhat positive about the Labor Party in an article in the Summer 1996 issue of *Labor Research Review*:

While I'm personally dissatisfied with the Democratic Party, I'm a bit chary about the chances for a Labor Party. I would be the last person, however, to discourage the dedicated brothers and sisters who are organizing the Labor Party movement from taking their best shot and I hope the progress they are making sends a clear signal to [the] Democratic Party ...

Sweeney goes on to refer to the Labor Party as "the progressive forces in the labor movement."

Indeed, leaders were hopeful that Sweeney would address the founding convention, since he was in Cleveland for another meeting at the same time. Sweeney failed to show, instead telling the local press that labor activists should not be distracted from re-electing Clinton. Even then, however, Sweeney refrained from condemning the Labor Party idea in principle; instead, he said "we should save the creation of a labor party to a non-presidential year."

But if anyone was inclined to hope that Sweeney's neutrality might turn to support, such illusions should be dispelled by reading further in the *Labor Research Review* article. Sweeney describes the AFL-CIO's get-out-the-vote effort, and writes,

Will these candidates be Democrats, Republicans, or something else? Frankly, we don't care . . . Right now, we hope to regain control of the House of Representatives by the only practical means available, and that's by electing a Democratic majority.

But, as everyone now realizes, our new approach to politics has already split

the conservative and moderate wings of the Republican party and we look forward to a day when we can once again support politicians like Nelson Rockefeller, Mark Hatfield, and Jacob Javits.

In other words, labor's ancient strategy of "reward your friends, punish your enemies," or Gompers warmed over.

The Prospects

DAN CANTOR OF THE NEW PARTY IS FOND OF SAYING that "there will be either one or zero progressive political parties in the United States." There are no guarantees on how this labor party effort will turn out, certainly no guarantee that it will be *the* party that realigns politics and contests for power.

Certainly it is arguable that a new party should have at least a broader name, broader at least than "labor," as well as broader forces involved from the outset.

It is important to have a realistic assessment of the balance of forces within the Labor Party. Many leftists spend a great deal of time on Kremlinology and criticizing the actions of leaders. Yes, the leaders have great influence, but members are part of the equation too. That means that members need not be paralyzed by policies with which they do not agree, because those policies can be changed; they have been changed before. Labor Party members can:

- work to make their local Labor Parties visible by taking actions that get publicity.
- make them organizations that people will want to join — habitable for nonleftists, welcoming, interesting.
- recruit official backing, that is, local unions with resources.
- engage in local campaigns that attract members: living wage or other ballot initiatives; nonelectoral, cross-union work as appropriate; unofficial support for candidates in nonpartisan races or independent candidates.
- build support within the party for running a certain number of local Labor Party candidates in 1998. Help to identify likely races and pressure leaders to adopt this perspective.
- Many of us have been active in the labor movement for decades, pushing and prodding it to reform, to become more militant, to shape up. We should not forget that this Labor Party has the potential to help change the labor movement too.

Downsizing the Welfare State

Betty Reid Mandell

THE NEWT-LED REPUBLICANS, WITH THE AID OF THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY of the Democrats, got at least one thing they wanted from their Contract With America — an end to the federal Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) program that fed, clothed, and sheltered over nine million children and their parents, mostly single mothers. They also deprived millions of legal immigrants of almost all government help, and took away the food stamps of the long-term unemployed.

If ever there were a classic example of the evil of lesser evilism it was the 1996 presidential election, the culmination of more than two decades of liberal and left inaction. Reflecting on the Democratic candidates in the last four elections, it is abundantly clear that having been designated the “lesser evil” in those elections by liberals and, sad to say, even radicals, each one, from Carter to Dukakis to Clinton, assured of the liberal/left vote, moved inexorably further to the right than his predecessor. The “lesser evil” crowd, blindly wed to the Democratic Party, bears a large share of the responsibility for this move to the right which culminated in 1996 in the reactionary assault on welfare, immigrants and affirmative action. If the differences continue to narrow at the same rate, by the next national election the nation will be saddled with two Republican parties. No wonder Wall Street surged almost 100 points the day after the election. It didn't lose. It couldn't.

In what *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert described as “officially sanctioned brutality,”¹ Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, a welfare law that ends entitlement to AFDC and gives the states block grants to run the program. Ironically named the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” the law cuts funding for low-income programs by about \$55 billion over the next six years, the heaviest in food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), (the federal program for the elderly and the disabled poor), and assistance to *legal* immigrants. (Illegal immigrants were already ineligible for most programs.) Legal immigrants are cut off of most assis-

BETTY REID MANDELL, a welfare rights activist since the 1960s, founded and co-edits *Survival News* written by and about poor people. Professor Emerita from Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts, she is the author of several books on social welfare issues, most recently *An Introduction to Human Service Policy and Practice*, co-authored with Barbara Schram.

tance programs, including food stamps and SSI, and other types of assistance. And other bills target Medicaid and low-income housing programs. The Republicans had hoped to eliminate entitlement to both Medicaid and food stamps, but the political stakes were too high. Food stamps were protected by agri-business, and Medicaid was protected by doctors, hospitals, and nursing homes. As Jim Rowan, a law professor at Northeastern University said, "Welfare is the stalking horse for the real budget buster, which is caused by doctors taking their wheelbarrows to the bank full of Medicaid money."

The law replaced AFDC, emergency assistance, and the JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) program with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. It gives federal money to the states to run their own programs, but the amount of money is essentially fixed. The amount of federal money that will go to the states every year from 1997 through 2002 is based, in general, on how much money states spent in 1994. Because national AFDC rolls have fallen since 1994, federal and state spending levels in 1994 were higher than in 1996. Therefore, most states will actually get more money than they previously got for the first year or so of TANF, provided there is no recession. This sweetener to the states helped to assure its passage. However, there is no provision for increasing the amount for inflation or a recession, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that funding will fall \$1.2 billion short of expenditures under previous law over the next six years. Under the previous law, state spending was matched by the federal government. That is no longer the case. States can spend more than their federal allotment, but it won't be matched by federal dollars.

In the past, states had to get a waiver from the federal government if they wanted to do something contrary to federal regulations. Now, however, states can set their own standards. They can define "needy" any way they like, and can even use different definitions for different areas of the state. They can set tighter time limits and establish new requirements such as denying aid to children born while the family is on assistance (the family cap), denying aid to two-parent families, or denying aid to parents who fail to immunize their children or fail to keep them in school. Some other features of the TANF portion of the law include:

- Unmarried parents under the age of 18 are required to live with an adult and stay in school in order to receive benefits.
- There is a lifetime "drop dead" time limit of five years on cash assistance. States may exempt 20% of their caseload from the five year limit. (About *half* of the AFDC population currently consists of recipients who have passed the five-year mark, and the average length of stay over a lifetime is six years.) States may set shorter time limits, regardless of whether the parents in the family can find employment.
- Recipients whose youngest child is more than one year old are required to do some form of paid or unpaid work after 24 months of receiving benefits, or lose their benefits.² States are required to have a growing portion of their caseloads in work activities over the next several years. By 2002, states are required to have 50% of single-parents receiving cash assistance in work programs. The rate for two-parent families reaches 90% by 1999. Single-parent recipients will be required to work at least 30 hours per week by 2000 (20 hours per week for single parents with a child under age six.) Two-parent families

must work 35 hours per week.

These percentages give states a perverse incentive to cut the rolls, since they will be able to meet work quotas more easily if there are fewer people to put to work. States can therefore meet their quotas by knocking people off the rolls.

- Recipients who are subject to work requirements must participate in community service employment ("workfare") if they haven't found a job after two months of receiving assistance.

- The law has a narrower definition of work and training than the previous program. It does not allow higher education, and allows only 12 months of vocational training. Officials prefer *really* short training programs; in Massachusetts, the Bay State Skills agency says that they are urged to complete training in six weeks.

- Parents will no longer be *entitled* to child care assistance which is placed in a block grant. Although the law increases the need for child care because of expanded work requirements, according to a Congressional Budget Office estimate, child care funding will fall \$1.8 billion short of what will be needed by 2002. The law also does not provide for transportation costs. The previous 1988 law required work for women whose children were over three, but it provided day care and transportation.

While the law prohibits states from punishing families with children under the age of six if they can't participate in work or training programs because they are unable to find affordable child care, nevertheless a parent who reaches a time limit and is cut off aid could be cut off without having had access to work preparation assistance.

- People convicted of drug felonies are prohibited from receiving a TANF block grant or food stamps *for life*.

- The law requires states to impose harsher sanctions than allowed under current law on families where the parent does not "cooperate fully" in establishing paternity and collecting child support. States must reduce by at least 25% the payments made to any family not "cooperating fully," as well as eliminate assistance for an entire family if the head of the family declines to assign support rights to the state. The definition of "cooperating fully" is subject to various interpretations. For a time, Massachusetts was dropping families from the rolls if the mother was unable to provide such information as the father's Social Security number, his whereabouts, and place of employment, even when the mother did not have this information. A class action suit brought by legal services against Governor Weld and the Department of Transitional Assistance (the new name for the welfare department) stopped the practice.

- Unemployed childless adults between the ages of 18 and 50 will generally be limited to just *three* months of food stamp receipt in any *three-year* period. Many of these people qualify for no other government benefit except food stamps. Denying them food stamps will leave them with no safety net at all.³

Millions Will Be Thrown into Poverty

THIS LAW WILL THROW MILLIONS OF PEOPLE INTO DESPERATE POVERTY. A study by the Urban Institute estimated that the cuts in food stamps and SSI to legal immigrants and the changes to AFDC will push 2.6 million more people into poverty

by 2002 — a 9% increase in poverty. The incomes of over 20% of all families with children will fall by an average of \$1,300 a year. And, giving the lie to all the rhetoric about “reducing dependency,” half of the families affected by this law already have at least one family member in the labor market.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that between 2.5 million and 3.5 million children could be affected by the law’s five year time limit. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that if all states were to adopt a two year time limit, 5.5 million children would be denied aid by 2006. Food stamp cuts, amounting to \$27.7 billion over six years, will reduce the average food stamp benefit from its current level of 80 cents to 66 cents per person per meal. Children and very poor families will be hit the hardest. About two-thirds of food stamp reductions will be borne by families with children. By 1998, nearly seven million families with children who receive food stamps will lose an average of \$435 in food stamp benefits.

Many women trying to escape abusive relationships will have no alternative but to return to those relationships when the new welfare law takes effect. Some studies show that over 60% of mothers on welfare have been battered. The Nevada Network Against Violence says: “As strict time limits are imposed on recipients, batterers will have yet another tool by which to control the victim. If she can be prevented from getting to school, to interviews, to the job, or following through on any other requirement of the program she will lose her benefits.”

Beefed up paternity determination and child support enforcement may also prove dangerous to battered women. For those women who are forced to flee violent partners, having to reveal their location to comply with child support enforcement guidelines will jeopardize their safety.

We can get some idea of what will happen to teenage parents under this law by looking at what has already happened to them in Massachusetts, where a similar law has been in effect since November 1, 1995. That law, which requires teenage parents to live with a parent or guardian or in a group home, has forced dozens of young women into inadequate and sometimes dangerous living situations. Jordana Hart, writing in *The Boston Globe*, reports that out of 668 mothers under the age of 18 who were on the welfare rolls November 1, more than half — 350 teen-agers, plus their children — were dropped as a result of the new law. Under pressure, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services last February hired two private agencies to find missing families.

The two private agencies say they can’t find 124 of the 350 teen-age families. Investigators say the missing girls may have left no forwarding address or telephone numbers. But they also suspect that some girls remain underground because they don’t understand the law and fear, mistakenly, that the state will take their children.

State officials don’t care what happened to the mothers. Their only goal is to bring the welfare rolls down, regardless of the suffering caused by the law. Gov. William F. Weld, who has been furthering his political career by being “tough on welfare,” points with pride to the fact that welfare law changes have helped to bring down the state’s overall caseload, which has fallen from 114,000 in May 1993 to about 83,000 now.

“You don’t need a doctorate in statistics to figure out what these numbers mean,” Weld said recently. “They mean welfare reform is working.”

Immigrants Panicked by New Law

THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE IN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IS CHARGED WITH PANIC AND CONFUSION. Ever since Clinton signed the new law, the number of immigrants and refugees seeking naturalization has jumped sharply, straining the services of immigrant organizations. "Rumors have swirled around the new law, sending some immigrants into community centers in tears. Others have spent their days in denial, refusing to believe that changes will take place at all. Advocates say some desperate elderly immigrants even talk of suicide."⁴

Advocacy groups are expanding hours and staffing to meet the rising demand for help in seeking naturalization. Grass-roots organizations are trying to find money to distribute food and clothing to immigrants whose benefits are cut off. And still others are passing out fliers, planning forums and taping spots for television and radio to educate immigrants about the complicated changes.

While denying federal help to legal immigrants in the SSI, food stamp, and TANF programs, states will be allowed either to give or deny noncitizens cash welfare, Medicaid, block grant benefits and other state and local public assistance. New Jersey officials have said the state will try to pick up the cost of benefits for the 20,000 immigrant families now receiving AFDC.

The immigration part of the welfare law was the most controversial. Some Congresspeople voted for the law even while disagreeing with some of the provisions regarding immigrants. President Clinton, who had criticized the legislation's restrictions on immigrants as having nothing to do with welfare reform, has said he will try to change them soon, but change may be difficult because the provisions represent major budget savings. Since the law doesn't include money for enforcing sanctions against employers who hire immigrants, the Republicans aren't really serious about restricting immigration. High-tech sectors of the economy are eager to get immigrants, as are the agri-business, construction, hospitality, and garment sectors; these employers may put pressure on Congress to change the law.

It is far less likely that the TANF portion of the law will be changed, since there are no powerful constituencies that are pressuring for change. Clinton says that he will work to make sure there are enough jobs for welfare recipients, but has made no concrete proposals. Yet we can probably expect a flood of litigation from social service advocates in the states when the law is put into effect, since many features of the law conflict with the U.S. and state constitutions.

The National Conference of State Legislatures expressed concern that the federal welfare law contains mandates that may potentially put states at risk of litigation. States that comply with the federal law are likely to be sued, and states that flout it may suffer financial penalties.

The Clinton Administration also expressed doubts about whether the Michigan plan meets constitutional requirements for due process because welfare benefits could be reduced or ended before the recipients were given an opportunity to challenge such actions at hearings. Yet, like Pontius Pilate, the Clinton Administration washes its hands of any responsibility for insuring that either the federal law or state plans are constitutional. Henry A. Freedman, executive director of the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, said the administration was taking a "very limited" view of its role, just as Republicans in Congress

had intended. Michael Kharfen, a spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, said the secretary's role was limited to certifying whether state plans had all the elements specified by Congress, like child support and foster care programs. "It's not our role to make judgments on the substance of state programs," Kharfen said.

Although Clinton had previously vetoed two repressive welfare bills (which contained some features better than this bill as well as a few worse ones), in his eagerness to be re-elected he signed this bill in an opportunistic move to the right.

States' Welfare Plans Prefigured Federal Law

CLINTON ENDED "WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT" EVEN BEFORE THE FEDERAL LAW was passed. Many of the features of the federal welfare law were brought in through the back door by the Clinton Administration, through waivers to the states. In his March message to Congress, Clinton bragged that, despite the fact that national reform legislation had yet to be signed into law, about 10 million public assistance clients, or three-fourths of the nation's welfare population, were "benefiting" from local and state innovation approved by his administration. But he added: "I want out of the waiver business." By 1995, 42 states had been granted waivers. Most were punitive, but a few provided positive incentives such as allowing recipients to keep more assets and a larger portion of their wages when they work.

Clinton tried to steal the welfare issue from the Republicans during the 1992 campaign when he advocated setting a two-year time limit and requiring work. Since then, the president, Congress, and the governors have vied for the position of being the toughest on welfare. Even before the federal cutbacks were implemented, the welfare rolls were dropping rapidly in the states. Douglas Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute described this as "welfare reform on the cheap."

While it is not a new practice for states to get people off the rolls by intimidating and harassing them, those tactics have been stepped up. According to the *Welfare Bulletin* of the Welfare Law Center, the "Eligibility Verification Review" ("EVR") process of New York City's welfare department not only requires recipients to submit to one eligibility review at the local welfare centers, but they have to go for a *second* eligibility review at a central location in Brooklyn. It requires travel of over an hour each way from many parts of the city. At the review in Brooklyn, applicants and recertifying recipients are grilled by people wearing badges who often try to persuade them to withdraw their applications or close their cases voluntarily. Afterward, teams of two investigators conduct unscheduled visits to the home of every applicant and recertifying recipient. People are often not at home because they are participating in a mandatory work program. Often, eligible people are denied aid based on findings that they do not live at their addresses because investigators have not found them home when conducting these unscheduled home visits. These practices are being challenged by a class action lawsuit.

The "midnight raids" that were so frequently used against African-American women in the 1940s and 1950s and which were declared illegal by the Supreme Court seem to be coming back. According to the newsletter *Welfare to*

Work, in Hartford, Connecticut, city police are conducting early morning raids on the homes of recipients in a sweep to catch "deadbeat dads."

The project had been a closely held secret between the state attorney general and local authorities. Considering how hard it is for women to get officials to pay attention through the routine bureaucratic channels when they report the whereabouts of non-supporting fathers to officials, it is hard to believe that these terrorist tactics are necessary in order to track down "deadbeat dads."

Fingerprinting recipients has become a popular method of harassment by officials in many states. EMPOWER, a welfare rights group in Rochester, New York, responded by putting their fingerprints, in blue paint, all over the welfare office walls.

Seventeen states have requested waivers of federal regulations to allow them to set "drop dead" time limits on welfare. Massachusetts, for example, has already implemented a two-year time limit and a requirement that welfare recipients find work after 60 days of receiving assistance, and take workfare jobs if they can't find paid work. The new law also cut the grants, already 40% below the poverty level, by 2.75%.

Wisconsin (the home of the tough-on-welfare Governor Tommy Thompson) sought a waiver to implement a workfare program called "W2," which would require single mothers to be forced to work for minimum wages or for workfare when children reached **12 weeks** of age. It would deny education and training, even English as a Second Language (ESL) and GED, to family heads. Wisconsin also made the unprecedented request to eliminate the federal and state guarantee of Medicaid coverage for all nondisabled children, low-income families and pregnant women.

States have also received waivers to enforce certain behaviors on welfare recipients. These rules reveal a profound distrust of the poor and their parenting abilities and sexual behavior. By November 1995, thirteen states had received waivers to exclude from the grant children born after the family was on assistance (family cap), and more states had applied. There is an "illegitimacy" bonus in the federal law which gives extra federal money for states that lower their nonmarital birth *and* abortion rates. Mimi Abramovitz says that anti-abortion groups, fearing that the child provision would lead pregnant women to seek abortions, insisted that the bonus be based on nonmarital births *and* abortions as a percentage of births to all women in the state, instead of just within the AFDC caseload. Control of reproduction among AFDC women is thus linked to control of all women in the state.⁵

Abramovitz lists other state efforts to control reproductive behavior:

- Florida and Ohio have proposed a cash bonus for mothers who agree to use Norplant (the long-lasting but controversial contraceptive implant), along with a separate plan to reward fathers who have vasectomies.

- Colorado has considered penalizing women on welfare who refuse family planning counseling.

- Utah has reviewed a plan to pay \$3,000 to unwed pregnant women who carry their babies to term and put them up for adoption.

And many states have imposed laws to control parenting behavior, including "Learnfare," which reduces the grant if a child truants from school and "Shotfare," which reduces the grant if a parent does not get her children immunized.

The Corporations Circling Like Buzzards

UNABLE TO BREAK THEIR DEPENDENCY ON GOVERNMENT HANDOUTS, corporations are lusting for profits from the new welfare law. The delegitimization of the public sector reached its climax in the recent bid of global corporations to take over the administration of public welfare.

Small corporations are already in the welfare business. Curtis & Associates "supplements its successful welfare-to-work jobs clubs with accessories like 'motivational fortune cookies' at \$3.99 a dozen. A sample message is, 'The way to control your future is to work hard today.'"⁶ Maximus Inc., a consulting company in McLean, Va., did \$100 million in business this year, including \$7 million in welfare-to-work programs in Boston, two California counties and Fairfax, Va.

But now giant corporations are in on the take. The *New York Times* reports that Lockheed Martin, the \$30 billion giant of the weapons industry, is bidding against Electronic Data Systems (Ross Perot's company) and Andersen Consulting to take over \$563 million in welfare operations in Texas.

"And that is only the beginning," Lockheed executives say. Having hired two longtime Federal welfare employees and top officials from Texas, Oregon and Alabama, the corporation plans to market even more comprehensive welfare contracts to states and counties in what is potentially a new multibillion-dollar industry to overhaul and run welfare programs.

This so-called "privatization" of welfare is the height of corporate-government hypocrisy. The very corporations bidding for welfare contracts aren't "free market enterprises" at all, but were *built* on government contracts. The September 15, 1996 *New York Times* gives the details:

The line where Lockheed's resources end and those of the United States Treasury begin sometimes blurs. The corporation, which the Government bailed out in the 1970s and 80s, has a backlog of more than \$50 billion in contracts, mostly with the Defense Department, and it is lobbying for \$1.6 billion in subsidies for mergers with two former competitors, Martin Marietta and Loral. Members of a bipartisan Congressional coalition opposed to the subsidies have called them corporate welfare at its worst and payoffs for layoffs, because the mergers are tied to 30,000 layoffs and \$92 million in executive bonuses. . . .

An opponent of the subsidy, Representative Christopher H. Smith, Republican of New Jersey, has a Lockheed plant scheduled to close in his district . . . Mr. Smith's staff director, Andrew Napoli, said the prospect of Lockheed's winning major welfare contracts gave new meaning to the phrase double dipping.

They would be getting a subsidy to lay off these folks and then could be getting additional money from the Government to help these people get jobs.

The corporations have left a trail of corruption, scandal, kickbacks, and mismanagement in their wake. Electronic Data Systems, which has contracts in 30 states, was the target of an unsuccessful attempt by Florida's Attorney General to bar them from doing business in the state last year in a dispute over what officials called a "grossly inefficient" \$240 million computer-management system for welfare eligibility, benefits and child-support enforcement. The same *New York Times* article reports that America Works "has been embraced by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York and former Gov. Mario M. Cuomo. But it left a trail of unhappy officials in Ohio, Massachusetts and Erie County, NY." In West

Virginia, a state employee was indicted for kickbacks on a Maximus contract and Maximus lost the contract to Lockheed. Lockheed forfeited the chance to bid on contracts in New York City for four years because Mayor David Dinkins had shown favoritism in awarding the company a \$150 million contract to run the Parking Violations Bureau in 1993.

Union leaders fear that privatization opens the door to big campaign contributors and their cronies, and they also fear losing jobs as a result of privatization. One longtime worker in social services commented that the new systems seem like a bad dream: "For us old bleeding-heart liberals who were on the streets in the 60s, the idea that Lockheed, or the military-industrial complex, would be in charge of welfare is out of somebody's nightmare fantasy," said the director of the JOBS program in a Northeastern state.

Then he begged not to be identified, saying, "We may end up working with them."

Wages Will Fall; Workers Will Lose Jobs

CUTTING WELFARE RESULTS IN CUTTING WAGES. Welfare has always been the base-level of the wage structure, and now that welfare recipients are working for less than minimum wage, the entire wage structure is going down. One reason that business leaders and public officials want welfare recipients in the waged labor market is to reduce wages for those already working for wages. An Economic Policy Institute study, "Cutting Wages by Cutting Welfare: The Impact of Reform on the Low-Wage Labor Market," found that if the low-wage labor market were to give jobs to former welfare recipients without displacing current workers, pay would fall by nearly 12% for the bottom 30% of workers — the 30 million earning less than \$7.19 an hour. To put it another way, AFDC may have bolstered wages by at least 12%.⁷ Pay for low-wage workers in states with relatively large welfare populations would fall even more. For example, in California, wages would decline 17.8% and in New York, 17.1%.

Robert Haynes, secretary-treasurer of the Massachusetts AFL/CIO, commented on the study, "It's what we've been talking about all along. You can't just flood the labor market with all kinds of low-wage, unskilled people. It's going to have a major impact on the people who are out there."

New competition from former welfare recipients would cost low-wage workers about \$36 billion a year in income — about \$8.5 billion more than last year's state and federal expenditure on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, the report said.

The National Association of Manufacturers has said that welfare recipients are a good source of labor. No doubt they see the advantages of lowering everyone's wages, and of getting a source of cheap labor, particularly in the low-paid service sector. Workfare will also provide cheap labor to private social agencies and to government agencies, and will displace higher paid workers.

New York City gives us a preview of what will happen to welfare recipients and workers under workfare. There are 30,000 workfare laborers in New York City. Participants work at least 26 hours each week in return for benefits that can be as low as \$68.50 in cash and \$60 in food stamps every two weeks (less than \$2.30 hourly). They sweep streets, transport corpses at city hospitals, or perform other chores in the city's Work Experience Program (WEP). The bulk of

these WEP workers are single, childless recipients of Home Relief, who under a two-year-old state law are required to work for their benefit checks. But the numbers will climb now that the city has begun to enlist tens of thousands of mothers receiving TANF (formerly AFDC). Mayor Giuliani has estimated that by late 1997 the city will be "employing" 50,000 men and women on Home Relief and another 35,000 TANF moms.⁸

Some recipients working at Bellevue Hospital transporting patients or changing beds say there are so many workfare workers now at the hospital that they are "falling over each other," with virtually none obtaining full-time jobs. "Why should they actually hire anyone?" asked Pat Simmons, a 49-year-old woman who said she had worked 26 hours a week at Bellevue for nearly two years without gaining a real job. "We all but work for free."

Luis Fernandez, a former automobile mechanic who has spent recent months cleaning streets in Brooklyn, said there were no uniforms for him to wear, often no boots or gloves. Mostly, he said, he is given orders. "We are the garbage," he said. And they are treated as garbage at many work sites. According to the *New York Times* of September 27, 1996 there is a sign on a Sanitation Department restroom that says, "No WEP Workers Allowed."

While city officials have insisted that welfare workers have not taken jobs formerly performed by union workers, participants in the program are convinced that they are doing the jobs that were formerly done by some of the 17,000 city employees who have retired or accepted buy-outs since 1994. There are recipients working in clerical jobs in welfare offices, and in many other agencies. One even worked as an aide to a senior official at the Human Resources Administration, the city agency that carries out the workfare program. Kevin Anderson, a 22-year-old welfare recipient picking up trash in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem, said, "Those union workers should be worried about their jobs. Shoot, we have been doing their jobs for months. I don't even see the city workers around here much. Except when they come to watch us do their jobs."

Public officials have demonized and scapegoated welfare recipients, criminals, and immigrants. We now see that all of those groups are being forced into poor working conditions. Whether or not the demonizing was part of a grand scheme to get cheap labor, it has had the effect of making it seem more acceptable to the public to force welfare recipients into low-paid jobs with demeaning working conditions.

Where Are the Breadwinner's Wages; Where Are the Jobs?

WORKFARE PROGRAMS MAKE NO PRETENSE OF PAYING A WAGE THAT CAN SUPPORT a family. They simply force welfare recipients to work off their grants at a wage that is far below the legal minimum wage. Workers have no hope of a raise, promotion or overtime. They cannot unionize or strike. They have no vacation, sick leave, or fringe benefits. No matter how hard they work, they have almost no chance of being hired as permanent employees, yet they still have to report to the job faithfully. Even one unexcused absence is grounds for losing weeks of "wages" — that is, the welfare check and food stamps.

In some states, welfare departments used to be concerned about finding jobs for welfare recipients that paid a decent wage. Now, under the new federal law and under most state plans, the best that recipients can hope for is a job

that pays the minimum wage. Randy Albelda points out that:

The work requirements are structured in such a way to discourage states from providing education and training that would allow at least some women to move into decent paying jobs. States can provide education and training if they want, but most of the programs cannot count toward the work participation requirement. For states to hit their "quotas" they will want to place women into the labor market immediately.

The bottom line? The new law is designed to encourage states to reduce funding and welfare rolls by pushing women into an unrelenting low-wage labor market without the vital supports that make employment possible.⁹

And where are the paying jobs for over 2 million welfare moms, even jobs that pay a minimum wage? There are simply not enough jobs available to employ the majority of adult welfare recipients, and the available jobs pay very poorly. A study done by the Office of Social Policy Research at Northern Illinois University found six workers needing an entry level job for every opening in Chicago.

This report also examined the job readiness of assistance recipients and noted that they are generally handicapped by limited education and little work experience.

At least half of the AFDC population does not have a high school education. They are mostly women, and disproportionately minority and younger — all factors that make it harder to get a job. Being poor, they and their children have more health problems. Although people with severe disabilities are exempted from the work requirement, there is no provision in the law for the extra time needed to care for a disabled child. Many recipients live in the inner city and are needed at home to protect their children against the violence of the streets. Most of them are single parents, with the staggering job of juggling work and child care by themselves.

Fighting Back

HORRENDOUS AS IT IS, THE NEW WELFARE LAW CREATES THE CONDITIONS for resistance against it. It is forcing millions of people into the waged labor force (many of whom are already in the unwaged labor force as mothers). As those people face poor conditions of work, they will be impelled to fight for dignity and justice. In fact, there already is a good deal of resistance. In the spring of this year, City University of New York administrators reported that the WEP work requirements had forced thousands of college students out of school and into make-work sanitation and parks jobs. Republicans and Democrats alike took to the students' defense, submitting state legislation to allow on-campus work sites for students and lobbying the mayor to be more sensitive.¹⁰ In Massachusetts, a group called the Welfare Education and Training Access Coalition (WETAC) and an organization that I founded, Survivors, Inc., went to bat for AFDC students, who would be prevented by the new Massachusetts law from attending a four-year college program. The state legislature passed an amendment to the budget that would have allowed four-year programs, but Governor Weld vetoed it and the legislature fell just two votes short of overriding the veto. We will try again in the next legislative session.

WEP workers are organizing in New York City, and have formed a coalition

with Local 1180 of the Communication Workers of America which represents about 6,500 clerical supervisors throughout city government. CWA has been meeting with community organizers from the Fifth Avenue Committee and the Urban Justice Center as well as with a battery of public service lawyers to come up with an effective strategy for reshaping the hours, wages and training provisions of the program. CWA has also initiated private talks to bring other unions on board.

District Council 37 of AFSCME has 125,000 city nurses' aides, custodial assistants, sewer cleaners, caseworkers, accountants and other workers, and their future bargaining power could be seriously threatened by WEP workers. Yet the union's executive director, Stanley Hill, has disclaimed any responsibility for organizing WEP workers. In response to criticisms of his inaction, Hill counters that he did talk about the WEP issue during labor negotiations earlier this year, pressing the mayor to make more workfare participants legitimate city employees, but Giuliani wouldn't budge. DC 37 has instituted a pilot program with WEP workers in the school cafeterias. There, after training, workers are brought onto the city payroll as unionized employees. Between 30 and 40 people have obtained jobs this way, Hill says. The only thing that Hill has won for WEP workers during negotiations was a sentence saying, "It is not the city's intention to use WEP workers to displace active city employees."

Hill speaks of the difficulty of organizing WEP workers. "We cannot go out and get these people to sign a card," he says. "The simple fact is, we don't represent these workers." But Bill Henning, vice president of Local 1180 of the Communication Workers of America, says that's no excuse for ducking the fight. He concedes that although federal labor relations law protects workers from being capriciously fired for organizing, there is no similar statute protecting welfare recipients from losing their benefit checks if the city finds fault with a worker's attendance or performance.

"It is scary," Henning says, "But when people started building the trade union movement in the thirties, those protections didn't exist for workers. It was by engaging in the struggle that they made those protections apply."¹¹

Welfare activists have also been courting the women's movement for many years, and the National Organization for Women's recent protests against welfare "reform" have been exemplary. In the days leading up to President Clinton's signing of the welfare "reform" law, protests broke out across the country and the National Organization for Women launched a "Hungry for Justice" Campaign. National leaders of the 250,000-member NOW, including president Patricia Ireland and vice-president-membership Karen Johnson, went on a hunger strike to try to persuade President Clinton to veto the welfare bill.

Johnson fasted for 15 days. In a recent interview, she explained that she grew up on welfare and can remember stuffing the holes in the wall with steel wool to keep out the rats. She deplored the fact that while Congress is talking about cutting welfare by \$10 billion in the first year, the Department of Defense received \$11 billion more than it asked for, and that the government spent \$167 billion on corporate welfare, or eight times more than was spent on women and children and immigrants.

For more than a week before Clinton signed the bill, members of NOW, the National Welfare Rights Union, and other groups participated in daily demonstrations outside the White House. Several members of both groups were ar-

rested during the protests. Demonstrations were also held in Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Chicago, New York, Michigan and many other states. As President Clinton traversed Michigan during his whistle-stop tour, members of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization met the train to demonstrate against him, then joined the Labor Party in a rally at the Federal Building in Detroit as a symbol of their unity.¹²

Despite the courageous actions of NOW's leadership, the ranks have not been massively involved in the welfare issue. In Massachusetts at least, the president of NOW usually speaks at welfare rallies, but NOW members are not much in evidence. The women's movement is split on the issue of mother's work as caretakers. The Wages for Housework (or caretaking, as I prefer to call it) movement is a small segment of the feminist movement and it has allied with the welfare rights movement because it sees AFDC mothers as being in the vanguard of the movement; AFDC (before the new welfare law) was, after all, a form of wages for caretaking. But most of NOW's members are middle class professionals and they have been more concerned with equality in the work place than with winning the right to stay home to care for their children. They did not actively espouse the principle of caretaking as a full-time job. Many of them opposed the principle; in fact many of them think it's a good idea to force welfare mothers to go to work at low-paid jobs.

There is a crisis of caretaking in the nation. About 70% of mothers are in the paid labor force, and many of them are stressed-out by juggling child care and paid work. Many would rather be home full-time caring for their children. This is one reason that the public is so eager to force AFDC mothers into the paid labor force. Rather than demanding the supports that would make it possible for one parent to stay at home — a family allowance, wages for caretaking, a Guaranteed Annual Income, or a "family wage" for one of two parents — they turn on the AFDC mothers who are getting paid, meager though the pay is, for caring for their children and demand that they too juggle the demands of a job and caretaking. The economist Randy Albelda sums up this dilemma:

Our economy depends on women for free care of children and for doing low-wage jobs, yet there is an increasing expectation that every adult earn wages sufficient to support a family. For mothers, this is virtually impossible — you can't both provide free care and work enough hours to earn a family wage.

While many families fare poorly under society's new work expectations for women, single-mother families fare the worst for three simple reasons. First, like all women, single mothers earn less, on average, than men do when they work. Second, raising children is time-consuming work, and children increase the cost of family life. . . Finally, in single-mother families, there is only one adult to both earn income and take care of children.

The difficulties single mothers face are borne out in the poverty statistics. In 1994, half of single-mother families were poor, compared to one out of every 20 married couples with no children. While only 8% of all people in the United States live in single-mother families, they make up 28% of all poor persons.¹³

But the political and corporate elites don't care about caretaking. They have declared war on poor and working people. The most effective symbolic weapon in their arsenal has been welfare bashing. Punitive welfare reform became their chief policy of social division, while they glorify an outmoded, frantic, and exploitative work and family ethic. By these divisive tactics, they have tried to

divert attention from the inhumanity and moral bankruptcy of the system itself.

Activists know that we need a powerful movement to reverse these assaults on the poor, the elderly and the homeless. They are seeking common ground for coalitions linking workfare mothers with union members concerned about their jobs and wages; single mothers with senior citizens worried about their Social Security and Medicare; middle-class feminists with low-income women; and immigrant groups with welfare moms. They are building coalitions with African-American, Latino and Asian-American groups and community organizations working to get child care, health care, and housing for poor people; an alliance of all progressive forces to organize movements of popular resistance, the first step on the road to independent political action.

NOTES

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2. Randy Albelda, "Farewell to Welfare But not to Poverty," *Dollars and Sense*, Nov./Dec. 1996.

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4. Charisse Jones, "U.S. Assault on Welfare Panics N.Y. Immigrants," *International Herald Tribune*, August 27, 1996.

5. *Under Attack, Fighting Back*, Monthly Review Press, 1996.

6. Nina Bernstein, "Giant Companies Entering Race to Run State Welfare Programs," *The New York Times*, September 15, 1996.

7. Theresa Arnott, "Will the Economy Be Less Stable?," *Dollars and Sense*, Nov./Dec. 1996.

8. Joe Sexton, "Discontented Workfare Laborers Murmur 'Union,'" *The New York Times*, September 27, 1996.

9. "Farewell to Welfare," *Dollars and Sense*, Nov./Dec. 1996.

10. Kim Nauer, "Slavin' for the City: Making Rudy Pay," *Village Voice*, August/September 1996.

11. *Ibid*.

12. Jackie Dee King, "'Hungry for Justice' Campaign inspires millions, but fails to move the President," *Survival News*, Fall 1996.

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Providence, Patriarchy, Pathology: Louis Farrakhan's Rise & Decline

Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang

ON OCTOBER 16, 1995, MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WATCHED IN AWE as more than a million black men gathered in Washington, D.C. The Million Man March keynote speaker, Minister Louis Farrakhan, the controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, delivered more than the anxious public could have imagined. On that day, he articulated a new philosophy and program for black America, or more accurately, he recast an old agenda in more militant tones. Clearly, his address reflected a sea change in black politics.

The Million Man March and Louis Farrakhan's address signaled the ascension of the nationalist development strategy and the eclipse of the integrationist strategy. In his "Challenge to Black Men," Farrakhan announced a strategic retreat from substance to symbolism, from contestation to entrepreneurship, from transformative struggles to parallel development, and from demands to obligations. Accordingly, a chief goal of the march was proving to white America that one million black men could gather without incident, as if the essential problem confronting black men was a poor public image. Ironically, Farrakhan's address came exactly 100 years and nearly one month after Booker T. Washington rose to national prominence pronouncing a similar shift in ideology, strategy and tactics. On September 18, 1895 in "The Atlanta Exposition Address," Washington articulated the main themes of the politics of retreat. In suitably accommodating, but dissimulating, language acceptable to the agrarian barons in the South, the emerging Northern industrial capitalist elite, and an evolving Southern-based conservative black elite, Washington announced the shift in African-American strategy and tactics "from politics to economics, from protest to self-help, and from rights to responsibilities."¹

This project surveys the historical continuities and discontinuities between Washington's rise in the 1890s and Farrakhan's ascendancy in the 1990s. Four key understandings shape this analysis: (1) the 1890s and the 1990s transitions to newer systems of racial domination occurred during major restructuring of the American political economy (from commercial to industrial capitalism, and later to multinational corporate

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capitalism) and accelerating monopolization; (2) both occasioned the rise of white redemptionist movements that shattered previous liberal racial rapprochements and plunged African Americans into a nadir; (3) both revealed the rising black elite's ambivalence toward the more degraded classes of blacks; and (4) during both moments, the black elite created an historic bloc in the black community by uniting the nascent black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie around the doctrine of "self-help."

History does not repeat itself, nor is history an endless series of recurring cycles, but it is true that similar conditions often produce similar responses. Both Minister Farrakhan's "Challenge to Black Men" and Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" were delivered at critical historical moments, during transitions from one stage to another. The "First Redemption," 1868-1900 and the "Second Redemption," 1968-present, have much in common; both periods experienced economic downturns and witnessed unprecedented monopolization of the U. S. economy. Both eras also represented the apex of racist assaults on African Americans and their newly won civil rights.

African-American historian Rayford Logan termed the 1890s the "nadir" of the African-American experience. The origins of the "old nadir" are located in the multidimensional struggle between freed people and former masters, blacks and whites, landlords and tenants, yeomen and barons, and freed people and free people over the meaning of freedom during the Civil War and Emancipation era. Slavery was abolished, but *economic* exploitation and *social discrimination* were recast, rationalized, and black people were incorporated directly into market relations via a new system of racial domination.

The "Black Codes" reconstituted white domination, but resistance by African Americans and their anti-racist white allies generated tenancy, the Reconstruction Acts, the Enforcement Acts of 1870-71, and the Civil Rights Acts of 1867 and 1875, thereby eliminating the material conditions for the reinstitutionalization of slave-based social relations. Consequently, Southern economic and political elites sought to nullify the civil rights won by African Americans, especially the Fifteenth Amendment. To this end they initiated a coherent strategy involving two tactics. The first, extralegal violence by white terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, was designed to frighten African Americans into political apathy. The second tactic involved the use of nonviolent political and legal means to repeal African Americans' civil rights.

President Andrew Johnson inaugurated the political counter-reform movement when he vetoed the Reconstruction and Civil Rights Acts of 1866. Johnson considered these acts unconstitutional because they "threatened to do more for negroes than the government had ever done for whites." The radical Republican Congress overrode Johnson's veto of the Reconstruction Act, but between 1876 and 1896 the United States Supreme Court legalized his logic by undermining the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments and nullifying the Enforcement Acts of 1870-71 (which safeguarded black people's right to register and vote free of white intimidation and deceit) and the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Significantly, the Court erroneously equated protection of African-Americans' equal rights with "special treatment." This logic recalled President Andrew Johnson's opposition to the Reconstruction and Civil Rights Acts of 1866, and presaged President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988.

Booker T. Washington and the Politics of Defeat

REELING FROM THE COMBINED ONSLAUGHT OF TERRORISM AND THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL REVERSAL of their constitutional rights, African Americans responded with a variety of strategies. The exodus of 1879 and the black town movement represented one response; the formation of the National Afro-American League and its merger of self-help and protest was another; and accommodation to the new racial rapprochement was a third. African Americans debated the relative merits of these strategic approaches in the black press and at local, state and national conventions.

In the end, those who were willing to exchange constitutional rights for "peace" ascended to preeminence in the black community. Isaiah T. Montgomery, the founder, mayor and wealthiest citizen in the fledgling black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, and other black conservatives such as Joseph C. Price and William Hooper Council, paved the way for Booker T. Washington. Montgomery, the only black delegate to Mississippi's 1890 Constitutional Convention, was the first to hoist the white flag. He endorsed a bill to disfranchise black voters. Montgomery's action reflected his belief that he could best protect his embryonic separate community by conceding politics to white men. Mayor Montgomery counterposed business ownership to politics, arguing that after blacks *proved* themselves in business whites would welcome them into the polity. Montgomery's action prompted the venerable Frederick Douglass to comment that unlike Daniel, men like Isaiah T. Montgomery would make peace with the lion by allowing it to swallow them.

Racist politicians immediately began adopting the "Mississippi Plan" throughout the South. The 1890s also represented an upsurge in racially motivated violence; for instance, during the three-year period between 1892 and 1894 an average 148 African Americans were lynched annually. Building on the foundation laid by Montgomery, Washington ascended to the leadership of black America. In "The Atlanta Exposition Address" Washington, like Montgomery, advocated accommodation and separate, though subordinate development, and economics over politics. He attempted to construct a "parallel economy" from a conservative alliance between an emerging black entrepreneurial elite, resurgent white Southern planters, and rising white Northern industrial monopoly capitalists. Despite Washington's deliberately vague language, his renunciation of politics resounds:

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges.

After declaring that blacks were the most "patient, faithful, law-abiding and unresentful people the world had seen" Washington, in a brilliant, but insidious, metaphor stated, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."²

Within a year of Washington's strategic retreat, the Supreme Court transformed his perspective into policy, and in *Plessey V. Ferguson* enshrined segre-

gation as the law of the land. From the “old nadir” until the “Second Reconstruction” black nationalism was trapped within the conservative philosophical prison constructed by Montgomery and Washington.

Black Nationalism: From Booker T. Washington to Malcolm X

EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THE BLACK MASSES HAD REJECTED WASHINGTON'S PROGRAM by his death in 1915. African Americans fled the South in massive numbers for industrial jobs in Northern cities. In part they were pushed from the South by racial repression and economic exploitation, but primarily they were pulled to teeming Northern industrial centers by the prospect of better jobs, housing, education and municipal services. Urbanization, proletarianization, racial confrontations, and the war experience established the material conditions for the militant struggles of the black masses. Though dominated by legal gradualism, protest came to dominate black politics.

In these new conditions, Marcus Garvey attempted to revive Washington's program, but had to adapt it to the 1920s. Garvey made two significant ideological innovations in Washington's program: first, he enveloped it in militant rhetoric, thus masking its essentially conservative character; second, he elevated the submerged nationalist sentiment embedded in the self-help doctrine to prominence. Despite these cosmetic changes, Garvey, like his ideological predecessor, restricted his concept of “self-help” to parallel capitalist development. Therefore, he too opposed the struggle for civil rights and social equality. Garvey declared:

The professional Negro leader and the class who are agitating for social equality feel that it is too much work for them to settle down and to build up a civilization of their own. They feel that it is easier to seize onto the civilization of the white man and under the guise of constitutional rights fight for those things the white man has created. Natural reason suggests that the white man will not yield them to them, hence such leaders are but fools for their pains. Teach the Negro to do for himself, help him the best way possible in that direction.

Blinded by his accommodationist outlook and racialism, Garvey could not conceive of African Americans leading a movement that transformed the United States into an anti-racist political and economic democracy. Through the lens of Garvey's racist world outlook, “whites” appeared a monolithic bloc without class, ethnic, or gender fissures, united by race and a coherent white supremacist ideology. Unable to conceive of social change in the United States, Garvey substituted the farfetched notion of an African return. This “African Dream” served to mask his accommodation to contemporary racial oppression.³

The Garvey Movement conveyed Washington's emphasis on economic development and opposition to political protest to Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad incorporated Garvey's innovations to Washington's program, but whereas African repatriation was clearly articulated by Garvey, Muhammad left the specific land base vague. Wilson Moses noted that for Muhammad, “Hostility toward whites became an emotional substitute for political activism and a perfect excuse for avoiding confrontation with segregation forces.” Further, Muhammad brilliantly wed his capitalist development scheme to a millenarian religion. Whereas Garvey rationalized accommodationist politics via emigrationist fan-

tasies, Muhammad partly justified his apolitical stance via theology. He wrote:

The so-called Negroes will be taken away from the white Christians — it is binding upon Allah, to fulfill his promise to Abraham that He would return them to their own people . . . Allah has warned us of how He would destroy the world . . . Allah has pointed out to us a dreadful looking plane in the sky that is made like a wheel . . . built for the purpose of destroying the present world.

Muhammad, like all millenarians, believed supernatural forces would bring freedom, and substituted divine intervention for a liberation movement. Shawna Maglanbayan maintained that this apolitical bias characterized black nationalism until Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X) intervened during the last year of his life.⁴

Shabazz broke with the Nation of Islam because he had outgrown Elijah Muhammad's mystical pseudo-scientific theology in favor of a political ideology and program. His break with Muhammad freed him to instill progressive nationalist concerns into the civil rights movement. In seeking to restore a political dimension to post-slavery African-American nationalist theory and praxis, Shabazz articulated a dialectical approach that blended and transcended traditional nationalism and integrationism. He advocated supplementing the integrationist-led civil rights movement and mass direct action tactics with a human rights struggle using the nationalist strategy of independent institution-building. In essence, Shabazz sought to integrate his nationalist strategy and embryonic anti-capitalist notions with Martin Luther King's strategy of inclusion and quest for economic justice. The program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, then, was a transitional program that advocated organizing black people to seize political, economic, social and cultural control of the cities and counties where they were the majority, and to fight for proportional power where they were a minority. Unfortunately, Shabazz's project was derailed by his assassination, and the program he had projected as a unified strategy was adopted piecemeal by the liberal and conservative wings of the Black Power movement. The liberals used his new found emphasis on electoral politics to deliver the movement into the hands of conventional politicians, while the conservatives embraced his emphasis on independent economic development to promote franchise capitalism.

Civil Rights, Black Power and The Second Redemption

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE REEMERGENCE OF BLACK NATIONALISM and the ascendancy of Louis Farrakhan is found in the transformation of black politics from civil rights to Black Power. Hanes Walton, Jr. suggests that the historical precedent for the Million Man March was the 1966 "March Against Fear," or the Black Power March, because it deftly shifted the black liberation movement's goals, strategies and tactics from transforming local and federal policy toward black self-help. Therefore, as a proto-ideology, Black Power represented another sea change, shifting the focus from integration to black institutional development. Black Power had long-term implications, but it was a transitional stage between the civil rights movement and the current dominance of electoral politics, rather than a definitive period. More than an expression of black national consciousness, unity and independent institution-building, Black

Power derived from a complex composite of these conflicting elements. Consequently, like nationalism overall, it had no inherent political character; the political programs advocated by its adherents were shaped by their more fundamental ideological beliefs. So, for example, theorists like James Boggs, and radical collectives as diverse as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Black Panther Party, attempted to maximize Black Power's revolutionary tendencies; while theorists, such as Maulana Ron Karenga, Haki Maddhubuti, and adherents of Kawaïda, provided an alternative culturalist interpretation of Black Power that can best be described as reformist. And CORE leader Roy Innis and Rev. Nathan Wright expressed a reactionary pro-capitalist version of Black Power. Ultimately, Black Power's lack of specificity allowed President Richard M. Nixon and foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, to bolster the position of its most conservative proponents and coopt the movement.⁵

Facilitated by an expanding economy during the 1960s-1970s, America's ruling class instituted a combined strategy of *corporate liberalism* and *judicious repression* to eliminate the radical challenges and generate a "new" black elite. Through its policy of "contain and crush" (contain the urban rebellions and crush the radicals), the government decimated the radical tendency. Samuel F. Yette and Robert Allen have provided the best analyses of this strategy. In *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, Allen acknowledged the role of political repression, but contended that corporate liberalism was the Euro-American elites' dominant strategy for eliminating black insurgency. In 1970, he alleged that government and corporate transformation of the black middle class facilitated the rise of moderate black politicians and the creation of a new strata of managers, technicians and dependent entrepreneurs. The social transformations brought about by the civil rights and Black Power movements meant that the corporate liberal strategists could not simply recast the old "Negro" middle class or empower the small strata of traditional "Negro" conservatives. Instead, they had to generate a new "black" (petty) bourgeoisie.

In 1967 the Small Business Administration (SBA) enacted Section 8 (a), which authorized the SBA to establish a separate pool for some contracts for which only "disadvantaged" companies could bid. The Nixon Administration established the Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) and low-cost loans for minority entrepreneurial ventures. Section 8 (a) was augmented in 1977 by the Public Works Employment Act. This legislation mandated federal contractors set aside 10% of all contracts for minority subcontractors. John Sibley Butler reports that in 1987, 47% of African American enterprises listed in *Black Enterprise's* top 100 black businesses were started in the 1970s and 21% during the 1980s. Lila Ammons considered the period 1970-1979 an era of "remarkable achievement" for black-owned banks. The 34 banks established during this period was greater than during any period except 1888-1928 when 57 black-owned banks were initiated. New opportunities to invest in federal government and municipal bonds was one reason black-owned banks were more prosperous during those years. Federal support was critical in the development of the new black business class, yet black initiative cannot be neglected in its creation. For this strategy to be successful, not only did new businesses have to be created, but the new black elite had to use militant Black Power rhetoric while subscribing to its most *moderate and conservative* aspects.⁶

By equating "community control" with "black control," the militant mem-

bers of the elite maneuvered the masses into waging direct action campaigns to facilitate their schemes of capital formation. Having used "old-style" civil rights tactics to accumulate capital for their enterprises, the elite then espoused nationalist-style rhetoric, such as "buy black" campaigns, to generate ideological pressure on black consumers to support their capitalist aspirations. Of course, Black Power could not have resounded throughout the black community had it been just a stratagem of the black elite. Black Power also articulated the demands of the black working class for equal employment, quality housing, health care, and education, and also expressed their desire for community control of the police, and the building of independent black institutions. As a result, African Americans' quality of life improved dramatically between 1960 and 1970. For example, the unemployment rate of black men decreased from 9.6% in 1960 to 5.6% in 1970. In 1959 black family median income was 52% of that of white families; by 1969 it had risen to 61%. The black middle and upper classes benefitted disproportionately from the new opportunities, but some tangible gains, at least temporarily, did accrue to the black working class.⁷

Richard Child Hill concluded that the Black Power era ushered in three important transformations in black-white relations. First, the number of black elected officials exploded, from 280 in 1965 to 3,503 by 1975, which led to the establishment of black-led administrations in several major urban centers. Second, class stratification among African Americans accelerated. Third, black elected officials helped effect an alliance between the new black political-professional-entrepreneurial class and the liberal pragmatic wing of the corporate structure, premised on their facilitation of corporate redevelopment plans for inner cities. For these reasons, Harold Cruse termed Black Power "neo-Booker Tism." The cultural nationalists, perhaps unwittingly, aided the corporate liberal strategy and new black elite ideologically and politically; their simplistic race unity thesis ensured that they would be reduced to junior partners providing rationalizations for the political-professional-entrepreneurial class' acquisition of political power and capital. Contradictorily, the nationalists' "politicization" of black culture implicitly, if not explicitly, accelerated their retreat from electoral and protest politics. As they slid ever more into "traditional" African culture and pan-Africanism, support for African liberation movements became the only political activity in which they engaged. Consequently, Shabazz's effort to return black nationalism to its pre-Booker T strategy of simultaneously working for internal self-development and fighting all manifestations of racial restrictions both succeeded and failed. Nationalism was politicized, but according to Harold Baron, the dominant wings of the Black Power movement "did not pose racial issues clearly in terms of the conditions of advanced capitalism."⁸

The Revocation of Civil Rights

IN THE 1960s, AN EXPANDING ECONOMY ENCOURAGED AMERICA'S CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENTAL elite to emphasize incorporation in response to the civil rights and Black Power movements, but since the mid-1970s' "stagflation" and the multinational extension of corporate capitalism, they have retrenched. According to Robert Reich, current Secretary of Labor, economic growth nearly came to a screeching halt between 1973 and 1983. He calculated that from 1960 to 1973, growth in real gross national product (GNP) per worker averaged 1.8%, but

plummeted to only .8% between 1974-1978. Rodney D. Green and Joseph P. Reidy contend corporate leaders transformed the U.S. economy in response to the economic downturn:

The financial elite thus undertook a systematic policy of reorganizing the capital accumulation process in the U.S. During its first phase, the 1970s and early 1980s, they increased the pace of relocating manufacturing facilities from urban centers (and even from the older suburban centers) of the Northeast and the Midwest to rural areas of the South and Southwest, and to maquiladoras in Mexico and sweatshops in East Asia, largely in order to undermine and/or avoid the wage structure in areas where workers had succeeded in unionizing, and hence to stimulate profit rates and the pace of capital accumulation.

African American and other communities of color bore the brunt of these changes. Whereas in 1970 African American male unemployment had dropped to 5.6%, by 1975 it had surged past its 1960 level to 11.7%. According to Reich, the real human cost of a 1% increase in unemployment translated into "920 more suicides, 650 more homicides, 500 more deaths from cirrhosis of the liver, heart, and kidney disease, 4,000 more admissions to state mental hospitals, and 3,300 more people sent to prisons."⁹

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, symbolized a paradigm shift in American politics and ideology, representing conservative elites' reaction to the United States' economic decline and the white working class' abandonment of the Democratic Party. Reagan's skillful manipulation of racially coded images spurred a political and ideological realignment that propelled the Republicans from the minority to the majority party, and shifted U.S. political ideology toward neo-conservatism. He masked the structural economic basis of declining living standards by scapegoating welfare, crime, and affirmative action programs. Republican conservatives and Democratic neo-liberals responded to the structural crisis of transnational corporate capitalism with deregulation, increased subsidies and tax cuts for the "truly rich," and attempts to dismantle the remaining Great Society programs. That is, their economic policies intensified unemployment, poverty, and homelessness among working people. However, these general deleterious processes and policies have had racially differential effects.

From 1975 to 1993 African-American median real earnings declined 12%, while Euro-Americans' dropped 7%. In 1984, the median white household net worth was \$39,135 compared with \$3,397 for blacks; by 1990 the gap in median household wealth had increased another \$5,584 to \$45,740 for whites and \$4,418 for blacks. During the recession of 1990-1991, whites, Latinos and Asians gained 186,000 jobs with corporations that held federal government contracts, but African Americans lost 60,000 jobs with those same firms. By refracting their anti-labor and anti-poor policies through the prism of race, the Republicans have managed to cloud their class war policies by coloring them.¹⁰

As the income and wealth gap separating blacks and whites enlarged, the Reagan-Bush administrations ravaged all areas of social welfare programs, including Aid for Families with Dependent Children, Medicare, Medicaid, school nutrition programs and housing subsidies. With this attack, the conservatives launched an executive, judicial and legislative assault on African-Americans' civil rights. Reagan mirrored Andrew Johnson in stigmatizing remedies and mechanisms for ending racial discrimination as reverse discrimination. Subse-

quently, he gutted civil rights enforcement agencies. The U.S. Supreme Court, packed with conservative Reagan appointees, in a series of decisions, between 1977 and 1989, including *Regents of the University of California V. Bakke*, *City of Mobile V. Bolden*, *Grove City College V. Bell*, *Croson V. City of Richmond*, *Wards Cove Packing Company, V. Antonio*, *Martin V. Wilks*, *Patterson V. Credit Union*, *Jett V. Dallas Independent School District*, consistently issued rulings that diluted civil rights protections. During the spring and summer of 1995, the court intensified its attack, issuing four decisions that cut at the heart of the rapprochement reached by the black political-professional-entrepreneurial elite and the corporate liberal establishment.

In May, the high court upheld a lower court's decision ruling race-based scholarships at the University of Maryland unconstitutional. Three June rulings (*Adarand Constructors V. Pena*, *Missouri V. Jenkins* and *Miller V. Johnson*) directly attacked minority set asides, school integration and black political representation. In the first, the Supreme Court reversed a lower court's ruling claiming that ethnic/racial preference had denied Rany Pech, a white contractor, a contract with the Transportation Department. It determined that federal affirmative action programs should be subjected to the same constitutional standards as state programs. In the second, the Court voided a magnet program promoting desegregation. Finally, the Court in *Miller V. Johnson* invalidated Georgia's 11th Congressional district, drawn to provide a third majority district in that state. In a related action in July, the University of California Regents arbitrarily abolished race-based affirmative action in admissions and employment. Collectively, the Court's decisions, and the ones made since the 1977 Bakke ruling, herald the abolition of the legal accomplishments of the civil rights and Black Power movements, and replicate the nullification of black rights during the "First Redemption." Similarly, the judicial and executive campaigns against African American people have been punctuated by extralegal terror ("hate crimes" committed by modern white supremacists) and police brutality, of which the Rodney King beating is but one celebrated example. The Anti-Defamation League recently reported the increase of hate crimes from a little more than 2,000 in 1991 to nearly 9,000 in 1995. Church burning has emerged as the most visible manifestation of contemporary white terrorism. From January of 1995 until August 7, 1996 there were 74 predominately African-American churches burned, 48 in 1996 alone.

The political and legal assault on African Americans and the multiracial working class intensified after the Republican conquest of Congress in the November 1994 midterm elections. The new majority conservative forces led by House Speaker Newt Gingrich slashed \$20 billion from the earned income tax credit for the working poor and attempted to gut the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 by exempting nearly 88% of the banking industry from its provisions.¹¹ The act requires federal regulators to consider a bank's lending record in poor and racial minority communities when determining whether a lender can open new branches, purchase other banks, and participate in interstate commerce. The act also permits community groups to protest a bank's record and receive remuneration.

The black political-professional-entrepreneurial establishment's inability to cope theoretically and politically with this "Second Redemption" created the conditions for the ascendancy of black nationalism. By 1980, the movement was

attempting to awaken from a lull that had been partly imposed by governmental repression and partly by the new black elites' acceptance of corporate liberalism. That year, nationalists and progressive forces formed two vehicles to reenergize the black community: the National Black United Front (NBUF) and the National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP). Neither NBUF nor NBIPP managed to galvanize the African-American community, but they did succeed in contesting the moderates' and conservatives' hegemony over Malik Shabazz's nationalist-integrationist synthesis. Collectively, they revitalized the strategy of independent development and the tactics of mass direct action and independent politics. Ironically, NBUF and NBIPP's successes in diffusing nationalist thought and militant action helped create a favorable climate for the emergence of the conservative Louis Farrakhan.

Dilemmas of Black Ideology, Strategy and Tactics

IN THE MID-1980s, AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH DEVASTATED BY REAGANOMICS, pulverized by police repression, and disillusioned by vacillating accommodationist leaders, resurrected Malcolm X, although their idealization of Malcolm froze him in his Nation of Islam period. In Malcolm, the preeminent symbol of black militancy, the "hip-hop" generation sought a symbolic figure of resistance. After he broke with the World Community of Al-Islam in the West, Louis Farrakhan renewed his bid for Malcolm's mantle. From 1978 until Jesse Jackson's run for the presidency in 1984, the new "Nation," like the old NOI before Malcolm's release from prison, proselytized at the center of the black community, yet remained on its fringes. However, the Jackson campaign catapulted Farrakhan from the wings onto center stage.

The Jackson-Farrakhan "alliance" was immediately burdened with the weight of history. Black history is brimming with oppositional dyads which embody the major strategic differences of their age: Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany; W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington; and Ida B. Wells and Margaret Murray Washington. Because of this history and African Americans' belief that the road to freedom is labeled "UNITY," it is understandable that many saw the Jackson-Farrakhan alliance as the belated coming together of Dr. Martin Luther King and Malik Shabazz. What began with extraordinary hope soon crashed, derailed by the historic burden of black unity and the calculated assault on *both* Jackson and Farrakhan by Jewish organizations and America's Euro-American corporate and political elites. The Jewish/African-American question is as important as it is difficult, and though it has unique features it also has similar characteristics to other ethnic/national conflicts. Jackson distanced himself from Farrakhan in part because he recognized how he had collapsed class and ethnicity, that is, like Farrakhan he had failed to distinguish the structural-based roles of some Jewish entrepreneurs and landlords from the actions of Jewish people, and in part because he recognized the political strength of Jewish organizations. One result of the Jackson-Farrakhan rupture was that after the 1984 presidential campaign they came to embody the "nationalist-integrationist dialectic" for the "hip-hop" generation, just as Malik and Martin had for the previous generation. Perhaps invoking Karl Marx's famous characterization of tragedy and farce concerning the historic link between great personalities and their imitators is too harsh, but it is closer, rather

than further, from the truth. Jackson, at best, has been a dynamic but an inconsistent follower of King's dream of transforming the United States into a multi-racial social democracy, while Farrakhan has been a devout disciple of Elijah Muhammad's vision of parallel black capitalist development. Neither is an adherent to the vision of Malik Shabazz.

Perhaps the best illustration of the phenomenal realignment in black ideology and politics marked by the Million Man March is the symbolic reversal of positions between Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan between the 1983 March on Washington and the 1995 Million Man March. In 1983 Jackson was on the threshold of his first run for the presidency, which launched him into the stratosphere of popularity and political influence; in 1984, he was third on the annual Gallup poll of people Americans most admired. In 1983, Farrakhan, barely known outside black America, was one of the few nationalists permitted to speak at the event commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, but by 1995, black men attending the Million Man March preferred him to Jackson 44.6% to 28.3%.

Further, the genesis of the Million Man March may be found in Farrakhan's exclusion from the 30th anniversary march in 1993. In the midst of the Republican "counter reformation" a beleaguered civil rights establishment sought to rekindle the movement by calling for a march on Washington for "Jobs, Justice and Peace." Congressman Walter Fauntroy and many conveners, who had invited Minister Farrakhan a decade before, capitulated to white liberal pressure and rescinded their decision to invite him. By the fall of 1994, Euro-American elites had made rejection of Farrakhan the litmus test for responsible black leaders. On December 10, 1994, Farrakhan announced plans for a million black men to converge on Washington to atone for letting black women shoulder the burden of leadership and to rededicate themselves to "take control of their families, homes and communities." The dominance of the atonement theme and the exclusion of women from the "Million Man March" suggests that Farrakhan's ideas parallel those of the Promise Keepers, a conservative Christian men's movement, rather than those of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters or the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

During the Great Depression dispossessed Americans made marching on Washington a tactic in their fight for jobs and justice. Beginning with National Unemployment Day in 1930, and the Bonus and National Hunger Day marches of 1932, marches on Washington were used to protest governmental policy and to extract concessions from the federal government. This tradition, especially African-American-led marches, forms the historic background in which we must evaluate the Million Man March. In the hunger marches, the Communist Party, USA-sponsored Unemployment Councils led multiracial protesters in demanding unemployment insurance and federal relief from joblessness during the Depression. Tens of thousands of African Americans not only demonstrated but played leading roles in those militant protests. In 1941 the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters responded to pervasive black unemployment, particularly the continuing exclusion from employment in the defense industry, by building the March on Washington Movement. The actual march was canceled but it became the inspiration for the 1963 March on Washington for "Jobs and Freedom." In 1972 and 1973, pan-African nationalists under the leadership of the African Liberation Support Committee sponsored marches on Washington to protest

U.S. corporate investment in, and political support for, colonialism, and to build support for Southern African liberation movements. Since the 1960s and early 1970s, the tradition of social protest at the nation's capital has continued. In 1983, approximately 300,000 multiracial civil rights, nationalist, women, radical, labor and peace activists prodded by the ravages of Reaganism traveled to Washington to commemorate and revitalize the struggle for "jobs, peace and freedom." A decade later, spurred by ever declining economic conditions and a crisis in black-police relations, between 75,000 and 200,000 demonstrators journeyed to Washington to demand full employment, a single-payer national health care program and an end to other injustices. According to radical scholar-activist Manning Marable, protesters especially wanted to chasten Bill Clinton, the first Democratic president in 12 years, for his retreat from civil rights and progressive initiatives. Offering a trenchant critique of this tactic Marable argued that the "progressive petty bourgeoisie" had used its dominance to cancel the 1941 march and to curtail the "full militant possibilities" of the 1963, 1983, and 1993 marches. He identified three particular weaknesses: (1) authoritarian tendencies among the leader(ship); (2) lack of an integrated radical program; and (3) reliance on the mainstream bourgeois parties for implementation of their demands. Marable deemed the 1983 mobilization the most progressive because of key organizers' stated intention of building "a permanent anti-racist, anti-corporate popular front." Inspired by the 1983 march, Marable speculated that the next march might link the struggle for black liberation with opposition to monopoly capitalism.¹²

Despite the enormous theoretical and political limitations of these mobilizations, marches on Washington were protest vehicles mobilizing African Americans and others to demand governmental responsibility. The Million Man March represented a repudiation of this tradition. Instead of radicalizing this tactic to realize its "full militant possibilities," it presented a decorous display of middle class black men. Contrary to Marable's expectations the Farrakhan-led proceeding not only failed to connect black liberation with anti-capitalism, but actually articulated a procapitalist strategy.

The Class Character of the Million Man March

MOST COMMENTATORS HAVE IDENTIFIED MINISTER FARRAKHAN'S CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY as the explanation for why the Million Man March was a march to Washington rather than a march on Washington. This is true, yet, the class character of the marchers offers a more comprehensive explanation for the apolitical, conservative nature of the million-man gathering. According to the Wellington Group and Howard University 80% of the men who attended the gathering had household incomes above \$25,000, 43% made more than \$50,000 and 18% more than \$75,000. Farrakhan's message of atonement, male supremacy, personal responsibility, voluntarism, and black capitalism was largely successful because it appealed to the black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, the African-American strata best situated to come to Washington and to benefit from his plans. The Republican assault on affirmative action during the spring and summer generated a crisis that many elite blacks were willing to mobilize around, although not on the terms of traditional black political mobilizations.¹³

Ellis Cose recently warned of the anger raging among privileged blacks.

Some of it is directed toward whites for continuing racial discrimination and stigmatizing them as "incompetent" affirmative action hires. Some of their rage is focused on less fortunate blacks whom they despise for their alleged "dependency" on affirmative action programs and governmental subsidies. Many observers have located Farrakhan's appeal to the black elite in his racist rhetoric and entertaining style. However, his appeal to the angry black elite transcends style and is ultimately located in an ensemble of ideological preferences. For example, 34% of the marchers identified themselves as either moderate or conservative, 31% as liberal, 4% as socialist, 11% as nationalist and 21% listed "something else." What is more significant are the reasons marchers gave as "very important" for attending the gathering. Seventy-five percent cited "support for independent economic programs" as a significant motivation for their coming to Washington. Since only 4% of the respondents claimed to be socialists, we can surmise that most respondents advocated capitalist entrepreneurship. Undoubtedly, much of the resurgence of interest in independent economic development among the elite results from the current wave of corporate downsizing and their recognition that the future of franchise capitalism is precarious. The narrowing of the layoff gap between white-collar and blue-collar workers has threatened the black technical and managerial sector. Lacking seniority, and especially vulnerable due to racial discrimination, they have been particularly hard hit as corporate restructuring has reached into middle-management. As corporations were severing their traditional contracts with the technical-managerial strata, judicial decisions were nullifying government legislation for minority set asides. For instance, before *Richmond V. Croson*, minority contractors garnered 40% of the city's total construction dollars; within a year of the decision, the share of city construction contract monies received by minorities plunged to 3%. Steven A. Holmes reported that \$4.5 billion in contracts were let to minority-owned firms in 1995. The conservative and neo-liberal repeal of this Black Power rapprochement threatens to cost the black elite dearly. Due to this new environment, the black elite finds Farrakhan's strategy of "taxing" the African-American community to generate capital formation appealing.¹⁴

The Gender Politics of the March

THE MARCH'S GENDER POLITICS WERE RELATED TO ITS CLASS BASIS. Andrea G. Hunter and James Earl Davis found that black men considered their role as patriarch central to their conception of manhood. Another study discovered that conceptions of masculinity were not uniform, but reflected class differences. Working-class black men valued the role of provider most. In contrast, middle class African American men valued most the role of husband. Being the patriarch was significant, and 77% of the marchers responded that the "placement of black men in the forefront of black progress" was "very important" in their decision to join the march. Consequently, the MMM reflected the patriarchal aspirations of black men and the idea of the "endangered black male." The problem with the latter notion is *not* that black men are not endangered, but that overemphasis on this theme masks the equivalent predicament of black women. Theorists of the "endangered black male" seize on the convergence of incomes between black and white women to construct the myth that black women are doing well, at

least, relative to black men. Nevertheless, the “endangered black male” thesis ignores the following facts: in 1992, black women’s median income was \$19,819, compared to \$22,369 for black men; black men 20 and over had an unemployment rate of 12.2%, but black women were unemployed at a comparable rate of 11.5%. Black men composed 48% of all incarcerated men, but black women made up 52% of incarcerated women. The point is, black men and black women are oppressed equally, but differently.¹⁵

Farrakhan characterized his call for black male supremacy as relieving black women of the burden of “carrying” black men. He stated, “We do not feel that we should any longer burden our women with ourselves, but we should accept the responsibility that God himself has imposed on us as heads of families and heads of communities.” According to Farrakhan, gender roles have been preordained by a male deity. Despite his attempt to interpret it positively, Farrakhan’s patriarchal world view represents an attempt to revive the obsolete “cult of domesticity.” Farrakhan’s reactionary gender politics appeal to many African-American men because he offers a “socially respectable” way to “put women in their place.” Unfortunately, many African-American women also find it appealing because they believe Farrakhan is encouraging black men “finally” to carry their share. In Farrakhan’s nation, women would be “respected” — as mothers and wives — but not as equal partners in the home, the movement, or civil society.¹⁶

A Coalition of Diverse Nationalist Forces

MINISTER FARRAKHAN ISSUED THE CALL, BUT A MILLION-PLUS BLACK MEN could not have been brought to Washington without the involvement of a broader base of nationalist activist-intellectuals. The National Million Man March and Day of Absence Organizing Committee’s executive council represented an array of nationalist thought. Some advocated a partnership with black women; others promoted patriarchy. Some championed capitalism, others opposed it; some practiced an open democratic style of leadership, while others displayed an authoritarian approach. The “Mission Statement,” written by Dr. Maulana Karenga, and Minister Farrakhan’s keynote address embody many of these differences and contradictions. The mission statement reflects a “rounded view,” it challenges individual African-American men and women, black organizations and institutions, and governmental agencies and corporations to change current social conditions. In the “mission statement” Karenga provided both a philosophical position and a specific agenda. He called on the state to cease attempts to privatize public wealth, to enact policies protecting the environment, and to reinvest in social development. Specifically, he demanded passage of H. R. 891, the Conyers Reparations Bill, implementation of universal health care, initiation of programs providing decent affordable housing, and the repeal of the Omnibus Crime Bill. Karenga also criticized corporations for “divestment in social structure, deindustrialization and corporate relocation.” He challenged them to adopt humane policies that create safe working conditions, encourage “meaningful” worker participation in corporate decision-making, and abolish racial and gender discrimination. According to Hanes Walton, Jr., a group chaired by Dr. Robert T. Starks, a Chicago-based political scientist and activist, had prepared an even sharper policy manifesto, “The Million Man March Manifesto.”

Walton said that the report of this document was “bumped” from the MMM/DOA’s program. Though often imprecise and moralistic, especially in its challenge to the corporations, the political perspective expressed by Karenga contrasts sharply with Farrakhan’s vague, apolitical, request for the United States government to “repent” and his utter silence on corporate responsibility.¹⁷

Farrakhan’s Challenge to Black Men

WHEREAS KARENGA STRUGGLED IN THE MISSION STATEMENT to “put some teeth” in an otherwise apolitical theme — atonement — Farrakhan in his keynote address unabashedly articulated the most irrational ideas. His coherent, but lengthy jeremiad was idealist, patriarchal, and reactionary. It was rooted in the antebellum doctrine of “Providential Design” and enunciated a pathological view of African Americans.

The “challenge to black men” expressed Farrakhan’s metaphysical idealism in four ways. First, it was enveloped in religious mysticism, especially the idea of divine intervention. According to Farrakhan, a male deity, who he variously calls “Allah” or “God,” actively guides human affairs. Articulating Nation of Islam orthodoxy, he thanked “Allah” for intervening “in our affairs in the person of Master Fard Muhammad, the Great Mahdi” and for bequeathing “a divine leader,” Elijah Muhammad, to African Americans. Second, presenting himself as Muhammad’s rightful successor, Farrakhan shrouded himself in messianism. Wilson Moses defined messianism as “the perception of a person or group, by itself or by others, as having a manifest destiny or a God-given role to assert the providential goals of history and to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.” Asserting his messianic vision Farrakhan shrewdly stated, “You came not at the call of Louis Farrakhan, but you gathered here at the call of God. . . . Although the call was made through me, many have tried to distance the beauty of this idea from the person through whom the idea and the call was made.” After alluding to himself as a prophet, he boldly proclaimed, “So today, whether you like it or not, God brought the idea through me . . .” The speech is littered with similar statements, but messianic visions and religious mysticism are not the only idealist notions expressed by Farrakhan.¹⁸

Third, he articulated a belief in numerology, “the study of the magic meaning of numbers.” In a bizarre exegesis, Farrakhan attempted to derive real meaning from the 555-foot height of the Washington Monument by adding a one to make it 1555, the year he erroneously stated as when the first African captives were sold in Jamestown. Of course, Jamestown was not founded until 1607, and the first 20 Africans purchased there were probably indentured servants, rather than slaves. Farrakhan was referring to the aborted Spanish colony destroyed by a combined Indian attack and African revolt. This minor historical error could be dismissed if Farrakhan had not compounded it by quoting the mythical Willie Lynch, who is said to have delivered a speech in 1712 on slave control. William Lynch was not born until 1801. And Charles Lynch, whose name was used for the term lynching, was not born until 1736. The “Willie Lynch” discussed by Farrakhan is probably fiction, though like conspiracy rumors in the black community the Willie Lynch story embodies a symbolic truth. Farrakhan’s explication of the Lynch myth preceded his explanation that the heights of the Jefferson and Lincoln memorials, 19 feet each, and the number of

their presidencies, three and sixteen (which also add up to 19) holds the secret of African influence on the conception of the mall. The African influence on early U.S. symbolism is undeniable, but Farrakhan makes this point in a strange and sterile way. Farrakhan presented mythology as history by substituting superstitious assertions for historical analysis.¹⁹

Farrakhan's selection of "atonement" as the theme guiding the Million Man March has confused and dismayed many, but this motif makes sense considering his belief in "Providential Design," the fourth example of his metaphysical idealism. This doctrine first emerged during slavery as antebellum black writers pondered the question of why Africans had been enslaved. "Providential Design" has both Afrocentric and Eurocentric expressions; that is, it may present either Africans or Europeans as the primary instruments of God's will. For example, a slave era black minister offered an African-centered version of this idealist doctrine. He stated, "God in his inscrutable way, had allowed Africans to be carried off into slavery so that they could be Christianized and civilized and return to uplift their kinsmen in Africa." Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, the nadir era emigrationist, provided a European-centered perspective of Providential Design. Turner claimed, "God seeing the African standing in need of civilization, sanctioned for a while the slave trade . . . as a test of the white man's obedience, and elevation of the Negro." Farrakhan provides both Eurocentric and Afrocentric interpretations.²⁰

Some commentators have interpreted Farrakhan's use of the concept white supremacy rather than the racist epithet "white devil" as evidence of a progressive transformation. They are terribly mistaken. Farrakhan conceptualized white supremacy in idealist terms as a *racially specific* "sickness." Regarding behavior, especially white racist behavior, African Americans commonly use the phrase "sickness" to connote mental disturbance or evil. Because Farrakhan also contended that white supremacy was the "fulfillment of prophesy" it appears that he is using it in the latter sense. The religious prophesy to which Farrakhan alluded is the Myth of Yacub. According to Farrakhan's mentor, Elijah Muhammad, blacks were "born righteous and turned to unrighteousness," while the white race was "made unrighteous by the god who made them (Mr. Yacub)." The Nation of Islam (NOI) locates the origin of white supremacy in Allah's decision to punish the "Asiatic" black man by granting Yacub's "grafted white devils" six millennia of world domination. Farrakhan uses the ambiguous phrases "white supremacy" and "sickness" to repackage his message, to make it appear compatible with liberal beliefs, but in reality he remains committed to genetic-based racist dogma. On the surface, there appears to be an affinity between his views and certain liberal *misconceptions* of racism. For instance, Cornel West's claim that "racism is a fundamental form of human evil" shares some epistemological foundations with Farrakhan's beliefs. Though idealist, West's interpretation is part of an ensemble of beliefs that advocate human agency and point toward progressive social change; whereas Farrakhan derives his understanding of white supremacy from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and it is part of an ideological constellation that believes in divine retribution and envisions the construction of a theocratic world government.²¹

Farrakhan can probably mask the distinctions between his views and certain liberal conceptions of white supremacy, but his biological and religious concept of racism is antithetical to radical conceptions. Radicals view white su-

premacy as a relationship of domination that includes *institutional* mechanisms and corresponding *ideological* beliefs that justify the oppression of people whose physical features and cultural patterns differ from those of the dominant racial group. For radicals, racism or white supremacy is more than the belief that other people are inherently inferior, it is the power to structure the basic institutions of a society so that the rules, policies, and social relations give preference to the privileged "race" and discriminate against the oppressed "race." Farrakhan conceives of white supremacy in idealist, rather than in materialist terms. He locates the origin of racial oppression in prophesy; instead of human history, consequently, his conception of white supremacy remains rooted in the doctrine of "Providential Design."

In his Eurocentric account Farrakhan emphasizes whites as the instruments of God's punishment. In his Afrocentric version he blames blacks for their oppression. Speaking for his god, Farrakhan said: "And so, my children, I caused you to suffer in the furnace of affliction so that I might purify you and resurrect you from a grave of death and ignorance." Undergirding this explanation is the Nation of Islam's belief that the average black person is pathological and immoral — thus, in need of spiritual "rebirth" and "atonement." Making this explicit Farrakhan admonished, "Clean up, black man, and the world will respect and honor you. But, you have fallen down like the prodigal son and you're husking corn and feeding swine . . . with the filth of degenerate culture." This statement came after a similar pronouncement: "[I]f we start dotting the black community with businesses, opening up factories, challenging ourselves to be better than we are, white folk, instead of driving by, using the 'N' word, they'll say . . . we can't say they're inferior anymore." Here Farrakhan, like Washington, suggested that black people are oppressed because they have yet to prove themselves worthy of respect. Later he declared, "Brothers and sisters, look at the afflictions that have come upon the black community. Do you know why we're being afflicted? God wants us to humble ourselves to the message that will make us atone and come back to Him and make ourselves whole again." Fusing his voice with that of Allah's, he claimed, "We've had enough distress, enough affliction. We're ready to bow down now. If my people who are called by my name would just humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land." In this vein, he stated, "Freedom can't come from staying here and petitioning this great government. We're here to make a statement to the great government, but not to beg them. Freedom cannot come from no one but the god who can liberate the soul from the burden of sin." A brilliant orator, Minister Farrakhan succeeded in creating the illusion of a new departure while serving up refried NOI conservative orthodoxy.

Like his ideological great-grandfather, Booker T. Washington, Farrakhan is a master at obscuring his meaning by manipulating language. In three short sentences, he slyly managed to advocate emigrationism, apparently praise the U.S. government, and reject political struggle for collective liberation in favor of personal salvation. Later, he specifically proposed establishing an "Exodus Economic Fund." Thus, Farrakhan's retreat from struggle leads straight back to the repatriation fantasies of Marcus Garvey. According to him, the road to liberation does not come from struggle but from divine intervention. Meanwhile, African Americans are asked to raise money for immediate business develop-

ment and, eventually, repatriation.

At the end of his sermon, Farrakhan proposed “real” actions. First, he recommended the marchers join religious congregations, and traditional black organizations like the NAACP, SCLC and the Urban League. Second, he proposed registering eight million new voters as either Independents, Democrats or Republicans. He even eschewed condemning the Republican Party; in fact, he placed the Republicans on par with the Democrats (“If you’re a Democrat, that’s fine. If you’re a Republican, that’s OK.”). Using the donkey, the Democratic Party’s symbol, he metaphorically demeaned blacks as “asses” being ridden by their liberal masters. Traditional democratic liberals and the neo-liberal new Democrats have politically abused black people, but Farrakhan failed to mention that blacks were also being trampled by a herd of rampaging G.O.P. elephants. Black people should not have allegiance to either capitalist party, since both have historically led racist, reactionary movements against blacks, however, at this historic moment it is the Republican Party that is leading the assault on our *very existence*. Farrakhan’s token criticism of Newt Gingrich or Bob Dole cannot mask his failure to mobilize African Americans against the Republican Party as a political entity. Third, he called on African Americans to adopt black children and black prisoners; yet, he did not encourage his audience to challenge the concrete conditions and policies that produced increasing black incarceration and orphanage.

Fourth, Farrakhan specifically rejected the formation of a black political party, arguing, “What we want is not necessarily a third party, but a third force.” Again, Farrakhan revealed his lack of faith in black self-activity. His major interest is in fundraising. Are the economic development fund and the Exodus fund the same thing? Further, it appears this fund would serve as seed capital for private enterprises. This of course explains why the black (petty) bourgeoisie flocked to Farrakhan; his economic development scheme offers a vehicle for them to acquire capital now that the strategy of franchise capitalism is being rescinded. The passage of California Proposition 209 confirms that their fears were real. Why should African Americans collectively contribute to the creation of private capitalist enterprises? By emphasizing private enterprise, Farrakhan, in the tradition of Washington, ignores that “black self-help” has always required struggling against the state. That is, economic progress is dependent on political struggle. In *A Torchlight for America* Farrakhan acknowledges this when he asks for a 15% income tax deduction for funds contributed to the NOI’s economic development fund. Dorothy Height, a veteran civil rights activist, asserted “black self-help” includes pressuring the government to respect African-Americans’ constitutional rights and humanity. In contradiction to Farrakhan, she contended the government has never given black people anything, arguing that the advances black people have made were a result of struggle. In the end, Farrakhan represents a militant racist version of the conservatism of Clarence Thomas, Robert Woodson, Gwen Richardson and Armstrong Williams.²²

The March Aftermath

ON THE EVE OF THE MILLION MAN MARCH GEORGE CURRY, editor of *Emerge*, was an enthusiastic supporter of the “message and the messenger.” However, by February of 1996 Curry had become skeptical and wondered whether Farrakhan would

use his newly achieved influence to “cement his position as the No. 1 leader in black America?”; “use his clout to make other civil rights leaders more responsive?”; or “squander a golden opportunity to unify African Americans?” By the MMM anniversary Curry had concluded, “He will not expand his base and has undermined all the progress achieved by the Million Man March.” What happened during the past year to turn George Curry, and middle class black men like him, into critics of “the new black leader?”

The apparent success of the Million Man March stimulated Farrakhan's messianic convictions. Unfortunately, it seems Farrakhan, like much of white and black America, also views black leadership through the prism of the “highlander complex” — “there can be only one” — consequently, in the wake of the MMM he pursued Curry's first option and sought to become *the* African-American national leader. The so-called World Friendship Tour, the Convention of the Oppressed, and the International Day of Atonement were all attempts to secure his position. Immediately after the march differences over strategy, organizational structure, gender equality, the amount of monies collected, and the organizational entity controlling their disbursement began to unravel the nationalist coalition essential in organizing the MMM and any subsequent political movement. Whereas before the MMM Farrakhan was cooperative, after the march, his messianic behavior alienated most of the National Million Man March and Day of Absence Organizing Committee's executive council from the post-MMM process. By the Convention of the Oppressed and the International Day of Atonement the nationalist coalition was in shambles. The nationalist coalition was destroyed by two factors: the previously described differences over strategy, ideology, and money, and opposition to Farrakhan's statements during the World Friendship Tour.

The summit strategy of bringing together leaders to outline a “Black Agenda” has always been a flawed elitist strategy, but for it to work, even symbolically, the participants must treat each other as equals. This, of course, is impossible since Farrakhan considers himself a prophet, and his acolytes in the Nation of Islam, the elect. Questions of financial impropriety combined with Farrakhan's narcissism and the Nation of Islam's political underdevelopment and opportunism to doom the National African American Leadership Summit and the Convention of the Oppressed.

Farrakhan on the World Stage

IN THE SPRING OF 1996 FARRAKHAN EMBARKED ON A WORLD TOUR designed to win him international recognition as the preeminent African-American leader. It is also likely that Malcolm's successful trips through Africa and the Middle East in 1964 served as a negative inspiration. These trips were signal events for both men. Malcolm's trips confirmed his movement away from mystical racist assertions toward a leftist political analysis. Farrakhan's trip not only revealed his inability to grow beyond his NOI mysticism, but more important, it confirmed his reactionary politics. The geopolitical worlds in which they traveled were very different. Malcolm went to Africa and the Middle East during the early days of anti-imperialist post-colonial governments. He met with revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Ben Bella, Sekou Touré, Abdul Babu, and representatives of national liberation movements who were trying to construct so-

cialist societies. By the time of Farrakhan's tour these leaders and others like them had been overthrown by reactionaries aligned with the U.S. and multinational corporations. However, the rightward trend in international politics does not totally explain the differences between the positions articulated by Malcolm in 1964 and Farrakhan in 1996.

The trips illuminate the contradictions between Malcolm and Farrakhan. While in Africa Malcolm began to reassess his views on gender, reconsider the causes of racial oppression, and to criticize international capitalism. For instance, after his return to the U.S. Malcolm located white supremacy in structural factors, rather than in mythology, or genetics. In contrast, Farrakhan defended dictators and theocrats, praised the junior partners of international capitalism, and denied the existence of slavery.

For African-American activist-intellectuals perhaps the most troubling of Farrakhan's many controversial positions were his defense of the Nigerian regime of General Sani Abacha and his denial of slavery in the Sudan and Mauritania. The Abacha regime turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to Royal Dutch Shell's devastation of Ogoniland, but viciously repressed Ogoni activism against their joint venture partners. Nigeria accounts for 14% of the giant multinational oil corporations' global profits and controls 47% of Nigeria's oil industry. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) estimates that over the last 40 years Shell has made more than \$30 billion dollars from oil extracted from Ogoni territory. The situation in Ogoniland represents the usual combination of capitalist exploitation and racist degradation characteristic of multinational corporations' practices in the third world at home and abroad. British journalist David Wheeler suggests the economic and environmental ravages in Ogoniland have been so acute because Shell does not perform the same environmental, economic and social "impact assessments" they do in western nations. In defending the Abacha dictatorship against charges of human rights violations in their murder of Ogoni nationalist and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others, Farrakhan is objectively supporting Royal Dutch Shell's and other oil corporations' exploitation of the Ogoni people and the despoliation of their farmland and fishing waters. Farrakhan's insensitivity to the brutality inflicted on the Ogoni by a military dictatorship in the service of international capital provides a glimpse into his economic philosophy and how dissidents would fare under a Farrakhan regime. Nevertheless, as revealing as his position on Nigeria, is his defense of the slaveholding Islamic theocracy led by General Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir and Sheik Hassan al-Turabi that best exposes his hypocrisy.²³

Amazingly, the "prophet of truth" who claims to make "blind people see, deaf people hear, and dumb people speak" could not see slaves in the Sudan, nor hear their cries. Perhaps, his silence was purchased by Moammar Qaddafi's promise of \$100 million to \$1 billion? Maybe he applies the concept of Providential Design to the Sudan and Mauritania and also views slavery in these countries as the fulfillment of prophecies? Or perhaps, Farrakhan sees slavery as an acceptable vehicle for converting Africans to Islam? Yet, in contrast to the Sudan Farrakhan had no trouble finding "slaves" at the National Black Journalists Convention.

Repressing a National Convention

AFTER FARRAKHAN'S INTERNATIONAL TOUR, the National African American Leadership Summit and the Million Man March, Inc., sponsored what his junior partner, Rev. Benjamin Chavis, called a "political convention of the oppressed" in St. Louis, Missouri. During late summer Farrakhan and Chavis's supporters predicted that 70,000 people would flood St. Louis. By late September Chavis was variably predicting 30,000 or 15-20,000 delegates. News sources and participants estimated approximately 400 delegates and observers participated in the convention's opening on September 27. What went wrong? The event was poorly organized. As late as the middle of September local activists in St. Louis knew few specifics about the plans and had not been engaged in mobilization activities. Publicity did not appear until a few weeks before the convention. Jamala Rogers, chairperson of the Organization for Black Struggle, a grassroots revolutionary nationalist collective in St. Louis, expressed concern that "the organizing process was elitist and undemocratic." Before the convention, Rogers, a veteran activist warned, "We must be careful that we don't duplicate a media event similar to the Republican and Democratic Conventions — all fluff and no substance." Another troubling concern for Rogers was the process of delegate selection. Amazingly, anyone who paid a \$100 fee could become a voting delegate! This provision privileged the financially secure, and those willing to trust Farrakhan and Chavis with their money. Finally, Rogers worried about the failure to distribute a draft of the Action Agenda before the convention. Makin Hamzah, a student at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE), claimed he never received nor heard the Action Agenda discussed while at the convention. Hamzah argued "the NPC resembled a rally more than it did a convention."

These problems seriously diminished community participation. According to James Guthrie, another student at SIUE, he attended Farrakhan's closing convention address only after learning that the \$10 admission fee had been waived. The decision to waive this fee explains why "convention attendance" rose tenfold from 400 at the start to 4,000 at the end. Embedded in this story is the truth about the Farrakhan phenomena. Large numbers of black people will go hear him speak, but very few will follow him.

The "Action Agenda" produced by the convention was a contradictory document that contained a bizarre array of specific recommendations and vague suggestions, progressive demands and reactionary goals. For instance, it called for an end to sanctions against Cuba and the reactionary dictatorships in Nigeria, Libya, and the Sudan. The convention endorsed reparations, but its main demand was to obliterate the distinction between church and state. Indeed, the convention of the oppressed demanded the creation of "a God-centered government."

In the end, the failure of the Convention of the Oppressed revealed that the Million Man March promised far less than its advocates believed. The MMM mainly attracted a moderate group of middle class black men who believed in private enterprise, male supremacy, and voluntarism. It was always more an historic event than the launching of a movement. Through their narrow authoritarian approach and questionable financial management Farrakhan and

Chavis drove many liberal, progressive, and revolutionary activists and intellectuals away from the process. As a result they had no base upon which to build for the convention. Nevertheless, Farrakhan's misreading of his support was also a major factor in the MMM's failure to realize, even, its meager potential. Farrakhan's messianic vision convinced him that he led a nation of millions, rather than several thousand zealots. Consequently, he became comfortable and began to say on national television things he had previously reserved for the mosque, or friendly audiences. For instance, during an appearance on *Nightline*, on the eve of the anniversary of the Million Man March, Farrakhan admitted to Ted Koppel his belief that a giant wheel, a heavily armed spaceship, was poised to destroy white Americans and blacks who had not joined the Nation of Islam. He said, "This is that wheel that was spoken of by Ezekiel, it is over our heads in North America and soon you will see these wheels over the major cities of America. . . . It is what that movie was about. And if it were gibberish, they made a lot of money, Mr. Koppel, on that movie called Independence Day." The public expression of this and similar views undermined Farrakhan's remaining support among the men who attended and supported the Million Man March.

Militant Black Conservatism

FARRAKHAN IS A MILITANT BLACK CONSERVATIVE. Militant black Conservatism is an idealist theory, and like all idealist philosophies holds that social consciousness precedes social existence. It uses racial essentialism in two ways: to promote black unity and assert intrinsic white evil. The concept of *providential design*, or God's plan for the purification and deliverance of the "black man," functions as a magnetic force binding Muslims, African spiritualists and Christians in a shared prophetic racial destiny. In this sense, racial essentialism is foundational to militant black conservatism; from this perspective, "races" have fixed traits impervious to social intervention. Accordingly, ideological and political differences rooted in different social experiences, due to class and gender differences, are insignificant when compared with the commonality of blackness. Also, militant black conservatives' essentialist view of race, especially their belief in whites' genetic predisposition for evil, enables them to mask their fundamental conservatism behind vociferous condemnations of white supremacy, something their "moderate" conservative counterparts, such as Clarence Thomas, Gwen Richardson and Alan Keyes, cannot do.

Patriarchy is another essential element in the constellation of ideas composing militant black conservatism. Calls for black men to "take responsibility as men" refer to Islamic, Christian, and capitalist conceptions of manhood that are essentially antiquated. At the core of militant black conservatism is a *pathological* view of the masses of African Americans. Militant and moderate black conservatives, believe that the masses of black people are "sick" and in need of moral regeneration — thus, the burden of the black elite. Related to this is the traditional preference for limited government that they share with moderate blacks, and white conservatives. Consequently, militant black conservatives are philosophically opposed to social reproductive expenditures and emphasize individual moral responsibility, entrepreneurship and voluntarism.

Elitism, if not authoritarianism, characterizes their leadership style and

approach to decision-making. Militant black conservatism also has proto-fascist elements. It combines racial chauvinism, mysticism, anti-working class petty bourgeois ideology, and idolatry of leaders with an inclination toward intimidation and violence. These embryonic fascist tendencies, coupled with Farrakhan's messianism, the NOI's penchant for cynical moneymaking ventures, and questionable economic management practices, combined to alienate Farrakhan from the nationalist coalition in the period following the march. Criticism of Farrakhan by Haki Madhubuti, Kalamu ya Salaam, Ron Daniels and Conrad Worrill represent this development. Even a few of the black public intellectuals began to distance themselves from their new "brother."

Though he obscures his retreat in militant, mystical language, Farrakhan, like Washington, has capitulated to the current "nadir." Farrakhan is poised to play a similar debilitating role in contemporary black politics. In the 1890s, Washington's deemphasis of political agitation helped to facilitate the revocation of gains made during the First Reconstruction. Today, explaining the present assault on black America as the result of "Providential Design" is equally insidious. Moreover, Farrakhan's failure to condemn the Republican Party, the major vehicle for this retrenchment, implies his tacit philosophical agreement with them. Even more troubling is the specter of an emerging alliance between Farrakhan and Lyndon LaRouche.

The black liberation movement will only be rebuilt through strategies and tactics that mobilize the broadest numbers in the black community. A resurgent movement will require principled ideological debate, collective leadership, and democratic decision-making. A new movement must adopt strategies and tactics that mobilize African Americans around quality-of-life issues, promote multiracial coalition-building, emphasize work-site as well as community-based struggles, and independent institution-building. Finally, while fighting for specific reforms that relieve racial, gender and class oppression, the black liberation movement must advocate multiracial democracy, gender equality and scientific socialism. The Nation of Islam's dogmatic messianism, racialism, male supremacy and bourgeois capitalist approaches are antithetical to such aims. Further, the black liberation movement must break the pattern of authoritarianism characterizing black politics and expand the realm of political activity beyond electoralism. The black liberation movement finds itself at another fork in the road; it can follow either Farrakhan backward, toward the ideas of Elijah Muhammad, Marcus Garvey, and Booker T. Washington, or it can take the Malik Shabazz-Martin Luther King road forward. The evolving ideas of Malik Shabazz suggest combining revolutionary socialist ideology and revolutionary nationalist institution-building with the civil rights tactics of mass mobilization, confrontation, and electoral politics.

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17. Dr. Maulana Karenga, "The Million Man March, Day of Atonement, Reconciliation and Responsibility, Day of Absence, Mission Statement": 9; Hanes Walton Jr., "Public Policy": 19 and Minister Louis Farrakhan, "Challenges Black Men": 27. We would like to thank Dr. James Stewart, Vice Provost for Equal Opportunity at Penn State University, for sending us a copy of the unpublished "final draft" of the MMM/DOA Mission Statement and Antonio Sardino, assistant professor of Social Work at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville for the text of Minister Farrakhan's address from the Worldwide Web.

18. Much of Farrakhan's MMM keynote is a restatement of "A Vision for America" the concluding chapter in his *A Torchlight for America* (Chicago: FCN Publishing Co., 1993): 151-60. This work is the clearest statement of Farrakhan's socio-politico-economic philosophy. Unless otherwise indicated all subsequent quotes from Minister Farrakhan are from his MMM keynote address. Wilson Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*: 4.

19. Dumas Malone (ed.), "Charles Lynch" and "William F. Lynch" *Dictionary of American Biography* Vol. 6, (Charles Scribner and Sons, 1993): 519-20 and 524-25.

20. St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1977): 41; and Clarence E. Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essay and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991): 91-92.

21. Elijah Muhammad, "The Mother Plane," p. 18. West's comment was made during a "conversation" on affirmative action among a group of African-American public intellectuals moderated by Henry L. Gates. See "Dialogue on Affirmative Action," *Emerge*, March 1996: 27.

22. Farrakhan, *A Torchlight for America*: 87; and Dorothy Height, "Self-Help — A Black Tradition," *Nation* (July 24/31, 1989): 136-138.

23. David Wheeler, "Blood on British Hands," *New Statesman & Society* (17 November 1995): 14-15; Eghosa E. Osaghae, *African Affairs* (Vol. 94, No. 376, July 1995): 325-44; and Paul Lewis, "After Nigeria Represses, Shell Defends Its Record," *New York Times*, February 13, 1996, p. A1.

Science and Politics in the Work of William Julius Wilson

Stephen Steinberg

THE AUTUMN 1995 ISSUE OF THE *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* included an article on "The High Priests of the Black Academic Right." Along with such conservative acolytes as Glenn Lowry, Thomas Sowell, and Shelby Steele appeared the name of William Julius Wilson. I assume that the author of this article, Mark Megalli, a student at Yale Law School, had his tongue bulging in his cheek when he included Wilson in this conservative pantheon. Wilson promptly whisked off a letter to the editor declaring that he was "shocked and dismayed," adding: "I can say without equivocation that nearly all the positions he [Megalli] associates with black conservatives . . . are anathema to me."

I know Bill Wilson (his work, that is), and although he is no friend of mine, I can vouch for the fact that Bill Wilson is no conservative. On occasion Wilson has come out of the academic closet and declared himself a social democrat. He has consistently argued for governmental programs, including an expansion of the welfare state, to assist the "truly disadvantaged." In his new book, *When Work Disappears*, Wilson advocates a WPA-style jobs program to combat the chronic unemployment that he sees as the root of the tangle of problems that beset black America. This alone would prompt Wilson's excommunication from Megalli's priesthood of the black academic right.

Nevertheless, there are strains of conservatism in his writing that Wilson has been unwilling to confront. His 1979 book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, gave credence to the idea that this nation solved its "race problem" with the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in the 1960s, and that today blacks with the requisite education and skills confront few obstacles on the road to success. Then in *The Truly Disadvantaged*, published in 1987, Wilson explicitly rejected race-based public policies, including affirmative action, opting instead for class-based approaches that attack structural unemployment and provide improved welfare and social services, including job training, for those who need it.

STEPHEN STEINBERG's most recent book *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* received the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for Distinguished Anti-Racist Scholarship by the Race and Ethnicity Section of the American Sociological Association.

Although many leftists were mesmerized by his emphasis on "class," Wilson's class analysis never amounted to more than a contention that blacks lacked the education and skills to survive in a postindustrial economy. His position is indistinguishable from that of human capital economists who insist that black underrepresentation in the higher occupations is due to deficiencies in their "productive capacities." It is true that Wilson ends up in the liberal camp, arguing for an expansion of the welfare state and the creation of job programs, but as his critics on the right point out, his praxis is logically at odds with some of his core assumptions.

No doubt Megalli's high priests would *like* to welcome Wilson into their sacred order. After all, he has embraced two key tenets of their conservative faith: 1) that blacks need to stop blaming "racism" for their problems, and 2) that blacks need to acquire the education and job training that will permit them to climb the ladder of success. It is principally Wilson's insistence on governmental interventions that defines him as a liberal.

Of course, it does not really matter what political label we pin on Wilson. What matters is whether his writing advances the cause of racial justice, or whether, as I argued in *Turning Back*, it provides intellectual fodder and legitimation for those who have taken race off the national agenda. But then again, Wilson would probably reject these decidedly unscientific terms of debate. He might well insist that he is not crusading for even so noble a cause as racial justice, but playing out his role of scholar: which is to ferret out the facts and to speak the truth, no matter how discordant it might be to someone else's political ears. His faith is not with the right or the left, but with positivism. The chief article of this faith is that a truthful reckoning with the facts, however unpleasant that might be, is the indispensable first step to social amelioration.

So let us put politics aside and examine *When Work Disappears* on its own terms, as a work of scholarship. This requires us, as a first step, to skip over the acknowledgements which list no fewer than 12 foundations that pooled their largess to subsidize the research that Wilson and his colleagues conducted on Chicago's South Side. Presumably these foundations, too, are above politics, so much so that they have been willing to disregard Wilson's disclosure that he is a social democrat, and to place their confidence in his credentials as a scholar.

TROUBLE BEGINS WITH THE TITLE AND SUBTITLE OF WILSON'S BOOK. *When Work Disappears* is seriously misleading. At a time when Chicago's urban economy is booming, it is hardly accurate to say that *work* has disappeared. Of course, Wilson means to highlight the fact that blacks who inhabit Chicago's South Side neighborhoods suffer from inordinately high rates of joblessness, and this is certainly the case. Why this is so, however, remains the key unresolved question. As in his previous books, Wilson argues that deindustrialization wiped out the blue-collar jobs that inner-city blacks depended on to escape poverty. This makes intuitive sense, but on closer examination, it does not carry the weight that Wilson assigns to it. In the first place, it has been demonstrated — most recently, by Roger Waldinger in *Still the Promised City* — that blacks were never heavily concentrated in the smokestack industries that have gone asunder — as a result of pervasive racism on the part of employers and unions alike. Second, deindustrialization cannot explain why so few blacks have been absorbed in those sectors of the service economy which involve low wages and few skills.

Third, there are many blue-collar jobs in light industries that still flourish around Chicago's black neighborhoods, but as Wilson found, they rely mostly on immigrant workers. More on this later.

Wilson's subtitle, "The World of the New Urban Poor," is even more problematic. What is "new" about life in Chicago's Black Belt? The world that Wilson describes is little different from the world that St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton describe in their classic study of Chicago, *Black Metropolis*, published in 1945. Not only did they find that the rate of unemployment for Chicago's blacks was three times that of whites, but they also devoted an entire chapter to documenting the "job ceiling," the entrenched racism that denied blacks access to skilled jobs in major industries. The single exception was in the foundry, where blacks were readily employed in the sweltering, arduous, and dangerous job tending the cauldrons of molten steel. Otherwise, blacks were relegated to "Negro jobs"—those low-paying and usually servile jobs that nobody else wanted. It takes some hairsplitting to contend, as Wilson does, that there is anything "new" about the condition of blacks on Chicago's South Side.

Wilson makes two points in this regard: 1) that the rate of unemployment has reached an all-time high, surpassing the magical 50% in certain neighborhoods, and 2) that the black middle-class has fled for greener (though not necessarily whiter) neighborhoods elsewhere. But it is one thing to say that unemployment has gotten *worse* or *more concentrated*, and another to suggest this amounts to a "new" phenomenon, implying a new or different dynamic and requiring a new or different remedy. When Wilson unveiled his construct at a 1993 symposium at the University of Michigan, Roger Wilkins retorted: "I say that the new American poverty has to be viewed as part of the old American racism."

We can thank this seasoned civil-rights warrior for resurrecting a hoary and forgotten concept: racism. This is the R-word that Wilson has expunged from his lexicon. Not unlike Booker Washington who was catapulted to fame and power when he counseled blacks to stop agitating for political rights, Wilson emerged from obscurity to become arguably the nation's most celebrated sociologist, and a pet of foundations, on the basis of his pronouncement that race was of "declining significance." In saying this, I do not mean to impugn Wilson who was only echoing positions advanced earlier by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Bayard Rustin. His ascent was not his doing, but that of the foundations, editors, and academic elites who amplified his voice and showered him with awards and grants, making an icon of this reputedly unassuming man. Nevertheless, the contraction of racism into an R-word is the hallmark of his work, and Wilson has had to perform some amazing rhetorical feats to plunge into years of research on Chicago's South Side, and to emerge still convinced that racism is not central to the plight of the African American inhabitants of this, the most segregated city in America.

More puzzling than Wilson's personal ascent is the fact that so few of Wilson's readers have recognized the mainly regressive thrust of his work. One reason is that even in its conservatism, Wilson's writing has never smacked of the mean spiritedness and ideological fervor that is typical of the other "high priests of the academic right," black or white. I have heard Wilson speak on television with passion concerning the plight of African Americans, and it was always transparent that the ulterior purpose of his "hidden agenda" was to provide

political cover for programs that would reach blacks on the margins. What is at issue, however, is not Wilson the man, his motives or politics, but the theoretical underpinnings of his work which are anything but liberal. Indeed, as I show below, *When Work Disappears* shares much common ground with Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism*.

NO DOUBT THIS CLAIM WILL STRIKE MOST READERS AS PREPOSTEROUS, and before Wilson whisks off another letter protesting that D'Souza's positions are anathema to him, let me state the obvious. D'Souza is a right-wing ideologue who has no interest in race except to use it to tweak the noses of his ideological enemies, and he takes positions in his book that are mind-boggling in their mischief. For example, D'Souza rejects the equation of slavery with racism as facile, on the grounds that a small number of free blacks and Indians owned slaves, and most whites did not. D'Souza scoffs at the idea of reparations, on the premise that but for slavery, blacks would be worse off in Africa (this, remember, was a common refrain during slavery). D'Souza stops short of calling for a repeal of the Thirteenth Amendment, but he would repeal those sections of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that curtail the right of individuals to freely discriminate against people whom they find objectionable. The presumption is that if blacks underwent a "civilizational renewal" and developed the moral and cultural virtues that are prized in American society, they would suffer no ill from whites. Thus, he ends *The End of Racism* with an exhortation to blacks to become "the truest and noblest exemplars of Western civilization."

Without doubt, all of this right-wing blather is anathema to Wilson, as well as the many liberals who have had a field day trashing *The End of Racism* while heaping praise on *When Work Disappears*. My point, to repeat, is that the two works share similar *theoretical underpinnings*, even though the authors end up in different places in terms of politics and public policy. Specifically, the D'Souza/Wilson axis revolves around three critical concepts:

1) *Institutionalized Racism*. D'Souza dismisses institutionalized racism as "a nonsense phrase," accusing civil rights activists of "radicalizing the definition of racism to locate it in the very structures of the American workplace." His premise is not wrong. "Institutionalized racism," coined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in *Black Power*, was the most important conceptual innovation to emerge from the cross-fertilization of racial militancy and radical politics during the 1960s. It challenged the prevailing paradigm within social science that reduced racism to the racial beliefs and practices of individuals, instead focussing on the *systemic* basis of racism and the imperative for attacking racism systematically. Indeed, affirmative action policy is predicated on the argument that the exclusion of blacks from coveted job sectors was ipso facto proof of institutionalized racism. By implication, racism was to be measured by results, not attitudes.

It is only D'Souza's rejection of institutionalized racism that allows him to reach the conclusion that "the end of racism" is at hand. But the same can be said of Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*. The very fact that they struck the same theme — waning racism — reflects the fact that they both define racism not in terms of unequal outcomes, but in terms of beliefs and practices based on racial animus. When one looks up "racism" in the index of *The Declining Significance of Race*, one is referred to the entry on "racial belief systems."

Nor does the term "institutionalized racism" appear in the index of *When Work Disappears* or, for that matter, receive so much as passing mention in the text. This is why Wilson can immerse himself in years of research on Chicago's South Side, and fail to see racism. It is a startling failure of sociological imagination, an inability to see the forest for the trees.

The point is that Chicago's South Side *as a whole* is racist, in its sheer existence and in its social constitution. Ghettos have become so familiar a part of the American landscape that they are accepted as normal. But ghettos are the ecological embodiment of racism, and this is true no matter what the attitudes, and no matter what the melanin, of the politicians, bankers, police, social workers, teachers, and employers who are implicated in their production and reproduction. As any scholar trained in the tradition of Durkheim should know, racism is a social fact, not reducible to the attributes of discrete actors.

2) *Oppositional Culture*. Long before notions of biological inferiority came on stream at the end of the 19th century, it was argued that Africans were heathen and uncivilized, and this was used to give moral legitimacy to slavery. The repudiation of scientific racism — the idea that blacks were innately inferior — has paradoxically given new life to the theory that culture, not genes, explains black subordination. This theory has gone through a series of iterations, beginning with the "cultural deprivation" school in the 1950s, the "culture of poverty" theorists in the 1960s and 70s, and the enormous "underclass" discourse in the 1980s. In recent years yet another cultural theory has come on stream, this time with a left twist. Influenced by such theorists as Pierre Bourdieu and Paul Willis, it is now argued that the poor develop an "oppositional culture," born out of "resistance" to their oppression. Like Oscar Lewis, another self-identified progressive, these cultural theorists hold that oppositional culture has its origins in political economy. But like Lewis, they go on to argue that oppositional culture assumes "a life of its own," both exacerbating and perpetuating marginality. In this way the poor become implicated in the reproduction of inequality.

The dangers of this theoretical position become apparent when it is appropriated by the likes of Dinesh D'Souza, who concedes that "black culture emerged out of the crucible of racism and historical oppression directed specifically at blacks." Like Lewis and other cultural theorists, D'Souza goes on to argue that the adaptations of one generation become the entrenched culture of the next, and "what we have now is a downward spiral produced by dysfunctional cultural orientations and destructive social policies." According to D'Souza, most of the problems that confront black America can be traced to the cultural pathology that has reached the stage of "a civilizational crisis." The remedy, as was trumpeted by the Million Man March as well, is for blacks to get their own cultural house in order.

WILSON, TOO, HOLDS THAT THE PROBLEM BEGINS WITH SUCH EXTERNAL FACTORS as joblessness that prevent blacks from living according to the canons of middle-class culture. However, like these other theorists, Wilson sees prolonged and concentrated poverty as setting cultural forces into motion, resulting in cultural patterns and trends that assume a dynamic all their own. Quoting Ulf Hannerz's 1969 study (a clear throwback to the culture-of-poverty literature), Wilson writes that this ghetto-related behavior becomes "not only convenient

but also morally appropriate." Finally, in an echo of Oscar Lewis, Wilson argues that this culture is reproduced through the normal processes of cultural transmission:

Individuals in the inner-city ghetto can hardly avoid exposure to many kinds of recurrent and open ghetto-related behavior in the daily interactions and contacts with the people of their community. . . . Through cultural transmission, individuals develop a cultural repertoire that includes discrete elements that are relevant to a variety of respective situations.

Thus do the adaptive responses of one generation become the inherited culture of the next.

For Wilson, the culturally regenerative effects of poverty play themselves out most critically in the realm of work. What happens to the work ethic in "the world of the new urban poor"? Wilson reasons as follows:

. . . where jobs are scarce, where people rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to help their friends and neighbors find jobs. . . many people eventually lose their feeling of connectedness to work in the formal economy; they no longer expect work to be a regular, and regulating, force in their lives. In the case of young people, they may grow up in an environment that lacks the idea of work as a central experience of adult life — they have little or no labor force attachment.

Strip away the academese and what we are left with is the stereotypical image of ghetto men hanging out on the stoop, with no expectation or need to engage in that exotic behavior known in the rest of the world as "work."

Yet later in the same chapter Wilson reports contradictory evidence from a large survey of blacks living in ghetto poverty census tracks: "nearly all the black respondents felt that plain hard work is either very important or somewhat important for getting ahead." Wilson is not the first social scientist to discover that even blacks down and out in Los Angeles and Chicago subscribe to ordinary societal values regarding work. Instead of questioning their assumptions, however, these men and women of science have contrived some rhetorical flimflam to explain away these unexpected and inconvenient facts. Culture, they now argue, consists of more than the values that people espouse. Here Wilson draws on a 1986 article by Ann Swidler entitled "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies":

Students of culture keep looking for cultural values that will explain what is distinctive about the behavior of groups or societies, and neglect other distinctively *cultural* phenomena which offer greater promise of explaining patterns of action. These factors are better described as culturally shaped skills, habits, and styles than as values or preferences.

So, now culture consists not of values or preferences, but of actions. But how are the unemployed supposed to *act* on their values regarding work? In effect, joblessness is defined as culture, and then this so-called culture is posited as the cause of joblessness! With this circular reasoning, blaming-of-the-victim is carried to a new height of rhetorical guile.

Here we arrive at a major methodological shortcoming in Wilson's research. Although the surveys and ethnographies conducted by Wilson and his colleagues included questions concerning work experiences, Wilson presents the reader with only a superficial and threadbare account of their actual experiences in

the job market. As an illuminating counterexample, consider Jay MacLeod's book, *Ain't No Making It*, published in its first edition in 1987 and passed over by Wilson as he reached back to the culture-of-poverty literature of the 1960s.

As a doctoral student at the University of Chicago (to repeat: Chicago!), MacLeod studied two groups of young men — one white, the other black — who lived in a notorious housing project. The whites — dubbed the Hallway Hangers came from disorganized families, messed up in school, got in trouble with the police, engaged in a lot of self-destructive behavior, and by the age of 18, were resigned to defeat. Like Wilson, MacLeod traces their problems to the job market; the difference is that MacLeod provides this detailed account of his subjects' experience in the job market:

The occupational histories of the Hallway Hangers between 1984 and 1991 reflect the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy. They have been employed as janitors, garbage collectors, cooks, caterers, couriers, cleaners, carpet layers, landscapers, inventory keepers, movers, packers, plumbers' assistants, groundsmen, soldiers, and store clerks. They have worked at car washes, junkyards, hotels, and restaurants. Although the Hallways Hangers have labored in the construction industry, most of these jobs were "off the books" and approximated service work rather than traditional blue-collar employment in terms of earnings, job security, and working conditions.

As MacLeod's study makes clear, it is not work that has disappeared in the so-called "jobless ghetto," but rather jobs that pay a living wage. Like Wilson, MacLeod builds on the work of resistance theorists to explore the cultural responses to this situation. However, MacLeod does not stop with Wilson's bald disclaimer that so-called "ghetto-related behavior" must be discussed "not in isolation but in relation to the constraints and opportunities that shape and provide the context for this action." Rather, MacLeod offers a textured ethnographic account that establishes the linkages between those remote structures and the culture and behavior that is so much in evidence.

Compared to the Hallway Hangers, the black youth in MacLeod's study — the Brothers — are like choir boys. Because their families recently moved up from the South, and because they believe that racism is on the wane, they are more hopeful about their futures, more respectful of their teachers, and more likely to stay out of trouble. Yet all this cultural capital counted for little when the Brothers confronted the perils of the job market. Here is MacLeod's summary of their work experience:

Even more so than the Hallway Hangers, the Brothers have been employed in the service sector of the economy. They have bagged groceries, stocked shelves, flipped hamburgers, delivered pizzas, repaired cars, serviced airplanes, cleaned buildings, moved furniture, driven tow trucks, pumped gas, delivered auto parts, and washed dishes. They have also worked as mail carriers, cooks, clerks, computer operators, bank tellers, busboys, models, office photocopiers, laborers, soldiers, baggage handlers, security guards, and customer service agents.

Again we see that even "jobless" people work. Typically they work at a wide range of jobs that have one thing in common: low wages. Why then dissect the cultural "values" and the "skills, habits, and styles" of people who have no other resort than to work at these jobs? What do we really learn by turning up some individuals, so battered by their experiences in the job market, that they have

lost all hope and, like the men on *Tally's Corner*, pretend to live by a cultural code that salvages a few shreds of their tattered egos? And finally, what is the rationale of a WPA-style jobs program that would, by Wilson's own reckoning, produce jobs that pay *less* than a minimum wage?

IT IS WILSON'S FAILURE, DESPITE HIS STATED INTENTIONS, to anchor the cultural responses of his subjects in the reality of job structures, as well as his embrace of the culture-of-poverty axiom that culture assumes "a life of its own," that leave him open to attack from critics on the right. In his review of *When Work Disappears* in the *New Republic* (October 28, 1996), Joe Klein derides Wilson's use of such terms as "concentration effects" and "ghetto-related behavior." To quote Klein: "These, of course, are desperate euphemisms for the 'culture of poverty' that Wilson considers a neoconservative slur." Klein goes on to assail Wilson on the grounds that his "ideology is at war with his data." He is not wrong here. Wilson goes to great lengths to show that there are deep cultural pathologies in the ghetto that assume a life all their own, and then he proposes a massive government jobs program to remedy the problem. He has left himself wide open to Klein's rejoinder:

. . . it would be a fantasy to believe that even a rigorous, lavishly funded jobs program would have much impact on the doom and devastation of the inner cities. The cultural forces pulling in the opposite direction are simply too powerful."

3) *Rational discrimination*. Having implicitly denied the existence of "institutionalized racism," and having given credence to the idea that a culture-of-poverty (by whatever name) exists in the ghettos across America, Wilson is positioned to embrace another of D'Souza's theoretical assumptions: rational discrimination. According to D'Souza, taxi drivers who refuse to pick up a black patron (for example, a black male with a hooded sweatshirt) are not acting out of irrational bigotry, but are responding to a reality based on hard experience. The same is true of employers who are unwilling to hire black youth, based on their negative perceptions and experiences. In other words, it is not because of "racism" that blacks are not employed, but because they are unproductive workers.

In a survey of employers in the Chicago area, Wilson found that most were unwilling to hire blacks. Perhaps because these employers felt a need to justify their actions, they spewed forth their negative views of black workers. Here is Wilson's summary:

Employers' comments about inner-city black males revealed a wide range of complaints, including assertions that they procrastinate, are lazy, belligerent, and dangerous, and have high rates of tardiness and absenteeism, carry employment histories with many job turnovers, and frequently fail to pass drug screening tests.

Wilson admonishes the reader not to jump to any conclusions: "many readers will interpret the negative comments of the employers as indicative of the larger problem of racism and racial discrimination in American society." But, he avers: "the degree to which this perception is based on racial bias or represents an objective assessment of worker qualifications is not easy to determine."

Note that Wilson's many studies provide no empirical basis for testing the "objectivity" of the employers' assessment of black workers. He has not observed

workers on the job in particular work sites or industries. Nor does he query his black subjects about *their* attitudes toward employers or their experiences with racism. Nevertheless, Wilson reaches the startling conclusion that “the issues are complex and cannot be reduced to the simple notion of employer racism.”

This statement prompted me to retrieve Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* from a dusty bookshelf. On page 8 one encounters the following definition of prejudice:

An avertive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group.

Allport allows that real differences exist among groups in the frequency of particular attributes. Indeed, this is the stuff of social science. But the nature of prejudice is when preconceived judgments about groups are applied to particular individuals so as “to place the object of prejudice at some disadvantage not merited by his own misconduct.” In effect, Wilson has had to define prejudice out of existence in order to reach the conclusion that the patently discriminatory behavior of employers is not racist. Once again, he has engaged in a rhetorical skill game in order to defend his paradigm from the discrepant facts churned up in his own research.

The clincher to Wilson's argument is his finding that 12 of the 15 African-American employers who turned up in his sample expressed negative views of inner-city blacks. Asked on the *Charlie Rose Show* whether employer racism might not be a problem, Wilson triumphantly cited his finding about his 12 black employers. When I reported this same finding to my class at Queens College, a black student sitting in the front-row-center broke into a cynical smile. “They're just on the same side as the white employers,” he commented. Indeed, if we learned anything from the Million Man March, it is that the perceptions and judgments of the black middle class represent no benchmark of truth.

WHILE WILSON'S EMPLOYERS DISPARAGED BLACK WORKERS, THEY EXTOLLED THE VIRTUES of immigrant workers. Wilson also takes these claims at face value, repeating the familiar argument that immigrants are willing to work harder for less money because the wages, however low, compare favorably to wages in their countries of origin. Once again, Wilson's data are not so accommodating. His survey of inner-city residents found that “jobless black men have a *lower* ‘reservation wage’ than the jobless men in the other ethnic groups.” Unemployed black men were willing to settle for less than \$6.00 an hour, whereas their Mexican and Puerto Rican counterparts demanded \$6.20 and \$7.20, respectively. Unemployed whites demanded over \$9.00 an hour. Thus, Wilson's data do not support the conventional wisdom that blacks are unwilling to work at the same paltry wages as immigrants. This calls again for some artful hairsplitting.

“But,” cautions Wilson, “surveys are not the best way to get at underlying attitudes and values.” To gain a better grasp at the “cultural issues,” he turns to Richard Taub's ethnographic study that found that black men are more “hostile” than Mexican men, less compliant, and less hard-working. In other words, it is not enough that these ghetto blacks, tenth-generation Americans, are willing to work for less money than Third World immigrants. The problem, it would seem, is that they have forgotten how to shuffle and smile the way their fore-

bears did during slavery and Jim Crow.

Wilson's "findings" on immigrants and blacks have been seized upon by reviewers. Joe Klein comments: "Don't the Mexican immigrants — and all the other immigrants, including West Indian blacks — demonstrate that there are decisive differences of belief and behavior within the same low-end labor force? And doesn't this mean that underclass poverty is more a normative problem than an economic one?" In her review in *Commentary* (November 1996), Leslie Lenkowsky, president of the Hudson Institute, also noted with undisguised glee that Wilson found that Mexicans have more positive attitudes toward family and work than did blacks. Her conclusion: "This suggests that curing the inner-city culture of its ills is the *sine qua non* for economic and social mobility, and not the other way around." Wilson may protest that he is being misread, and that his position gives primacy to jobs. However, he has advanced a weak and contradictory case, and provided his ideological adversaries with the ammunition that they need to jettison his WPA-style jobs program.

FINALLY, LET US EXAMINE WILSON'S PRAXIS. Here we confront the policy repercussions of his theoretical axioms. Wilson has no basis in theory for advocating anti-racist public policy, either in the form of more vigorous enforcement of Title V barring employment discrimination or in the form of affirmative action mandates that would pry open the doors that are currently shut. He is silent about the open and pervasive discrimination by local employers since he does not believe that they can fairly be accused of racism. He proposes a system of car pools to ferry ghetto blacks to jobs in the distant suburbs, without explaining why suburban employers would be any more willing to employ these racial pariahs than their urban counterparts.

We come now to the centerpiece of Wilson's policy agenda: a WPA-style jobs program originally proposed by Mickey Kaus in his neoconservative tract, *The End of Equality*. Wilson likes the "universal" aspect of the proposal: that *anyone* (yes, folks, no restrictions whatsoever) can sign up for work on the government payroll. To help rebuild the crumbling infrastructure, compensate for government cutbacks in library services and garbage collection, clean parks and playgrounds, and otherwise contribute to the common weal. There is only one hitch: the pay would be pegged at less than minimum wage. Otherwise too many people would flock into the program, and workers would have no incentive to enter the more lucrative jobs that await them in the private sector.

Though Wilson would like to supplement these low-wage jobs with universal health insurance, a child care program, and earned income tax credits, he knows that such programs have no realistic chance of being implemented in the present political climate. Nevertheless, he insists that these jobs, precisely because they are low-wage, would not only reach the poorest of the poor, but would also put ghetto neighborhoods on the road to reconstruction. Here it is best to let Wilson speak for himself:

As more people become employed, crime, including violent crime, and drug use will subside; families will be strengthened and welfare receipt will decline significantly; ghetto-related culture and behavior, no longer sustained and nourished by persistent joblessness, will gradually fade. As more people become employed and gain work experience, they will have a better chance of finding jobs in the private sector when they become available. The attitudes of employers toward inner-city workers will undergo

change, in part because they would be dealing with job applicants who have steady work experience and would furnish references from previous supervisors.

Here Wilson commits that archetypal liberal fallacy of failing to distinguish between a palliative and a remedy. It is not that the creation of even minimum-wage jobs might not bring welcome relief to people who have no better options. But to pretend that this will "break the cycle of joblessness" and place these communities on the road to reconstruction is sheer delusion. Small wonder that when liberal programs fail to deliver on their inflated promises that reaction sets in, as people conclude that "liberalism has failed" and that we need to "try something else," like abolishing entitlements and chucking welfare mothers and their children out into the cold to fend for themselves.

There is another grievous flaw in Wilson's proposal for a public-sector jobs program, and it is clearly spelled out in a 1974 book by Arthur Fletcher, *The Silent Sellout*. As Assistant Secretary of Labor, Fletcher was the moving force behind the affirmative action initiatives that were implemented during Nixon's first term. The context was 1969, a year when memories were still fresh of the ghetto uprisings that followed King's assassination a year earlier, when black militancy reached fervid heights, and when grass-roots groups angrily challenged the lily-white buildings trades in such cities as Chicago, Cleveland, and Philadelphia. Fletcher, along with Labor Secretary George Shultz, convinced Nixon to resurrect the Philadelphia Plan that had been formulated during the Johnson Administration, but shelved soon after Humphrey's defeat in 1968.

A slight digression is in order here. The argument has been put forth, most prominently by Hugh Davis Graham, author of the influential *The Civil Rights Era*, that Nixon revived the Philadelphia Plan in order to drive a wedge between labor unions, blacks, and Jews, thereby fragmenting the liberal coalition that elected Democrats to the White House. In my view, this is a myth spun by liberals to provide ideological cover for their retreat from affirmative action. A different story emerges from a recent history by John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*. Shultz and Nixon saw the Philadelphia Plan as a useful way to manage the crisis that was brewing in ghettos across America, while one-upping the Democrats with a distinctively Republican civil rights initiative that opened up jobs for blacks in the private sector. Obviously, the fact that Democratic unions were targeted for what came to be known as affirmative action meant that the political risks were minimal (of course, the opposite was true for Democrats). Nixon expended a great deal of political capital fighting off an attempt by Congressional Democrats, responding to pressure from labor unions, to nip the Philadelphia Plan in the bud, and later John Mitchell's Department of Justice successfully defended the Plan before the Supreme Court. However, once the popular backlash against "quotas" became explosive politically, Nixon flip-flopped and demagogically attacked the very "quotas" that he had put into place.

THE "SILENT SELLOUT" THAT FLETCHER ALLUDED TO IN HIS BOOK was the failure in the Johnson Administration to enforce Title V of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and to make headway in attacking the pervasive racism in job markets. In arguing for the Philadelphia Plan, Fletcher presents a forceful and eloquent case against precisely the kind of government jobs program that Wilson has proposed. It is worth quoting at length:

Work opportunities can be provided within the existing institutions of the American economic, social and political system. All of us are skeptical and suspicious of "make work" programs, or "special employment projects" which do not play a part in the basic economic system of the nation. These are usually failures. They produce "training programs" which do not lead to jobs. Worse than that, they are viewed by many blacks as attempts by the white man to buy the black man off cheaply. Thus, they are not taken seriously as work opportunities. The failure of most of such programs is testimony to the fact that a solution to the civil rights problem is the opening up of the existing institutions to minorities. Devising special "preserves" or "reserves" for blacks appears only as a sop to a noisy political minority, not as a recognition of the right and dignity of each as an American citizen. Only our massive economic system can supply the employment opportunities necessary to establish the individual equality which the civil rights concept requires.

Fletcher's vigorous defense of integrating black workers into *existing* job structures and his advocacy of affirmative action to drive a wedge into the wall of occupational segregation have been vindicated by history. More than any other policy, affirmative action has led to the desegregation of major labor markets, in blue-collar occupations as well as the professions and corporate management, and in the public sector where over one-quarter of blacks are employed. Indeed, affirmative action is the major factor behind the significant economic gains that blacks have reaped during the post-civil-rights era.

There is of course sobering irony in the fact that affirmative action was advanced by a Republican administration over the heated opposition of most liberals and without notable support of the civil rights establishment. And there is the other sobering irony that the policy that has done the most to advance the cause of racial and economic justice is the one that has received only equivocal support from the man who is the personification of racial liberalism.

Despite the conceptual muddle, Wilson is right in his central argument that there is a job crisis in black America, and that it is at the root of the manifold problems that beset black communities. He is fatally wrong, however, in portraying this job crisis as the result of colorblind economic forces that can be remedied through colorblind public policy. This is a message that appeals to a nation that craves to get "beyond race," not through an honest reckoning with the legacy of slavery, but by pretending that it acquitted itself of political and moral responsibility with the grudging passage of civil rights laws. Crucial as this legislation was, it did little or nothing to alter the racial division of labor that is the quintessence of institutionalized racism, past and present. Indeed, it was the failure of Title V to significantly curb employment discrimination that led, a decade later to the gradual implementation of affirmative action policy.

Although engulfed in controversy since its inception, affirmative action achieved its principal policy objective: the rapid integration of blacks into major occupational sectors where they had been historically excluded. Ironically, this is precisely the race-specific approach that Wilson has opposed in his last three books. Instead of criticizing affirmative action for primarily helping the middle class (as though they do not need and deserve such help), Wilson could have argued for broadening affirmative action to reach precisely the workers, like those on Chicago's South Side, who have been excluded from industrial and service jobs in the local economy. Now that affirmative action has been virtually gutted, Wilson will have to live with the consequences of his triumphant crusade against race-specific public policy.

Identity Politics & Class Struggle

Robin D. G. Kelley

CLASS POLITICS IS BACK! AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON. Income inequality is staggering. Sweatshops and the slave labor conditions that accompany them are on the rise again. Corporate profits are reaching record highs while “downsizing” and capital flight have left millions unemployed. None of this surprises us. For the past 16 years, at least, we’ve witnessed a greater concentration of wealth while the living conditions of working people have deteriorated — textbook laissez-faire capitalism, to be sure. Certainly the Reagan/Bush revolution ushered in a new era of corporate wealth and callous disregard for the poor. But President Bill Clinton — with the help of a right-wing Congress and rightward-leaning Democratic Party — contributed mightily to the process with the passage of NAFTA, GATT, and the most recent welfare reform bill.

There is a silver lining, perhaps. During the past couple of years, at least, we’ve witnessed an intensification of class-based opposition to inequality, falling wages, and the overall erosion of working-class life in the United States. Of course, we’re far from the intense labor struggles of, say, 1877 or 1935 or 1946, but there are hopeful signs of movement — from the resurrection of the old AFL-CIO under John Sweeney, Linda Chavez-Thompson, and Richard Trumka, the response to union summer, to the founding of the Labor Party, the New Party, and other progressive Third Party formations. In fact, even the language of populism now permeating much of American political discourse shows flashes of class analysis, if not an outright embrace of class struggle: it’s “us against them”; time to end “corporate welfare as we know it”; we are engaged in nothing less than a “class war.”

I find it ironic that at the very moment when radical renewal might actually be on the horizon, a handful of self-proclaimed spokespersons on the Left have practically written the “Left’s” epitaph. The most vocal and visible of the bunch are Todd Gitlin (*Twilight of Our Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars*) and Michael Tomasky (*Left for Dead: The Life, Death and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America*), but some of their ideas have been echoed by the likes of Richard Rorty, Sean Wilentz, Robert McChesney, and Jim Sleeper, to name a few. (I suppose Robert Hughes’ *Culture of Complaint* might qualify since he writes about the absence of class analysis, but it is so polemical and so anti-Marxist that his passing suggestions for a renewed “Left” seem gratuitous.) Tomasky and Gitlin, in particular, set out to explain

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why the Left failed to mobilize a mass-based response to the rise of the Right, why it remains small, divided, and parochial, entrenched for better or worse in the groves of academe. Their explanation: "The Left" has lost touch with its Enlightenment roots, the source of its universalism and radical humanism, and instead has been hijacked by a "multicultural left" wedded to "identity politics" which has led us all into a cul-de-sac of ethnic particularism, race consciousness, sexual politics, and radical feminism.

Much of the blame is assigned to women, gays and lesbians, and colored people for fracturing the American Left, abandoning honest class struggle, and alienating white men who could be allies but aren't because of the terrible treatment meted out to them by the Loud Minority. Universal categories such as class have fallen before the narrow, particularistic mantras of radical chic: race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Indeed, in their view class is not just another identity, it transcends identity. If the "Left" wants to save itself, we must abandon our ever shrinking identity niches for the realm of majoritarian thinking. After all, we're told, the majority of Americans are white and heterosexual and have little interest in radical feminism, minority discourse, and struggles centered on sexual identity.

In some ways, I can sympathize with these people about the limitations of "identity politics." While the growing interest in the politics of identity has extended our analytical scope to overlooked or trivialized cultural spheres and expanded our understanding of intellectual history, in some circles it has also tended to limit discussions of power to cultural politics. And while so-called "identity politics" has always profoundly shaped labor movements and — even more than vague, abstract notions of class unity — has been the glue for class solidarity, by the same token it has also become a noose around the necks of oppressed people, as in the case of white racism or certain variants of black nationalism.

ON THE OTHER HAND, WHATEVER CUL-DE-SACS WE MIGHT HAVE ENTERED, the "Enlightenment train" will not lead us out. These people assume that the universal humanism they find so endearing and radical can be easily separated from the historical context of its making; indeed, that it is precisely what can undo the racism and modern imperialism it helped to justify. The racialism of the West, slavery, imperialism, the destruction of indigenous cultures in the name of "progress," are treated as aberrations, coincidences, or not treated at all. They insist that these historical developments do not render the Enlightenment's radical universalism any less "radical," and those who take up this critique are simply rejecting Enlightenment philosophers because they're "dead white males." Their uncritical defense of the Enlightenment (which includes a strange tendency to collapse Marx, Locke and Jefferson into the same category), betrays an unwillingness to take ideas, let alone history, seriously. Gitlin certainly acknowledges these contradictions inherent in Enlightenment philosophy, as well as the historical context of slavery, racism, and colonialism. But in an intellectual sleight of hand he brackets these contradictions, reduces a huge body of complex, historically specific ideas to transhistorical abstractions (which he uses selectively to make his case against "identity politics"), and then presumes that Enlightenment thought constitutes the central reservoir of ideas for the very identity movements he criticizes. Says Gitlin:

The Enlightenment is not to be discarded because Voltaire was anti-Semitic or Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Jefferson racist, but rather further enlightened — for it equips us with the tools with which to refute the anti-Semitism of a Voltaire and the racism of the others. . . . In none of these cases was bigotry at the core of the man's intellectual system; it reflected the routine white prejudice of the time. The Enlightenment is self-correcting. The corrective to darkness is more light." (p. 215).

Good liberalism, to be sure, but its analytical insight leaves much to be desired. To pose the question as pro or con, keep the Enlightenment or discard it, sidesteps fundamental questions such as the legacy of 18th century social thought for modern conceptions of race or the philosophical underpinnings of racial slavery in an age when free labor and free market ideology triumphed. For example, while racist ideas can be traced to ancient thought and forms of domination internal to Europe, the Enlightenment also ushered in a transformation in Western thinking about race. How could it not? After all, as many commentators since the French Revolution have observed, the expansion of slavery and genocidal wars against non-European peoples took place alongside, and by some accounts made possible bourgeois democratic revolutions that gave birth (in the West) to the concept that liberty and freedom are inalienable rights. This contradiction is fundamental to Enlightenment philosophy, notions of progress, and developments in scientific thinking.

As the work of George Mosse, David Theo Goldberg, Cedric Robinson, and many others has demonstrated, modern racism is one of the "gifts" of the Enlightenment. It is not an accident that during the 18th century modern science moves toward classification as one of its primary endeavors, turning to aesthetic criteria derived from ancient Greece as the source of measurement. These Enlightenment scientists — in some respects, the founders of modern anthropology — begin to associate outward, physical signs of "beauty" with inner rationality, piety, intelligence and harmony. Thus a century before social Darwinism we see scientific justifications for racial hierarchy and domination. Christian Meiners' influential book, *Outline of the History of Mankind* (1785) put it bluntly: "One of the chief characteristics of tribes and peoples is the beauty or ugliness of the whole body or of the face." At the same time, the idealization of the so-called "primitive" (the "noble savage idea") espoused by several 17th century travel writers, as well as in flashes of Rousseau, began to give way to notions of European superiority vis-a-vis Africans and Native Americans. Non-Europeans were unambiguously classified as representing a lower stage of human development. The primitive mind was constructed as the very opposite of Reason: atavistic, regressive, barbaric. Again, science provided a rationale for racial hierarchies. Climatic theories explaining the origins of racial difference were called into question by Enlightenment thinkers who proposed the radical idea that Africans, Asians, and "Indians" originated from different species. Voltaire certainly made this claim, as did Scottish Jurist Lord Kames in his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), and Charles White in his celebrated *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* (1799). Enlightenment thought not only opened the door for future arguments about the inherent inferiority of different "races," but it sharply limited the definition of "humanity."

Thus, at the very moment when a discourse of universal humanism is finding voice in the bourgeois democratic revolutions of the era, colored people and Europeans rendered marginal to civilization (Jews, Irish, etc.) are being writ-

ten out of the family of "Man." (Is this why the Haitian Revolution is still not considered one of the most important revolutions of the bourgeois democratic era?)

Besides assuming that the "universal" is truly "self-evident," the neo-Enlightenment Left cannot conceive of movements led by African Americans, women, Latinos, gays and lesbians, speaking for the whole or even embracing radical humanism. The implications are frightening: the only people who can speak the language of universalism are white men (since they have no investment in identity politics beyond renewed ethnic movements arising here and there) and women and colored people who have transcended or rejected the politics of identity. Moreover, they either don't understand or refuse to acknowledge that class is lived through race and gender. There is no universal class identity, just as there is no universal racial or gender or sexual identity. The idea that race, gender, and sexuality are particular whereas class is universal not only presumes that class struggle is some sort of race and gender-neutral terrain but takes for granted that movements focused on race, gender, or sexuality necessarily undermine class unity and, by definition, cannot be emancipatory for the whole.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not giving priority to "identity politics" over the struggle to dismantle capitalism and to build a world we've never seen before — a world free of market forces and all the terrible things that go with it. Rather, I have trouble with their characterization of race, gender, and sexuality as narrow identity politics while "class" is regarded as some transcendent, universal category that rises above these other identities. Indeed, Gitlin calls the first three, "birthrights," and despite an obligatory nod to Anthony Appiah, he fails to treat these categories as social constructs that have enormous consequences for how class is lived. Along with these so-called "identities" come regimes of oppression. Are churches being burned because black people are alienating white folks? Is that why the Justice Department focuses much of its investigation on black congregations rather than white supremacist groups? Is pro-Prop 187 sentiment and callousness toward immigrants the result of Mexican and Central American immigrants' refusal to be "inclusive?"

I FIND THE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT POSITION INCREDIBLY PROBLEMATIC GIVEN WHAT WE KNOW of the history of class struggle in the U.S. It rests, not on a serious analysis of the social movements lumped together under the heading "identity politics," but on caricature, stereotypes, omissions, innuendo, and historical analysis that borders on the comical at times. Indeed, these movements are rarely ever named and their positions never spelled out in any detail. Yet, despite the lack of depth and scholarly rigor, as well as an over-reliance on personal impressions, these arguments seem to be winning over a broad section of high profile liberals/leftists who believe the time has come for us to "transcend" all this race and gender stuff and get to the matter at hand: class warfare against the bosses. During the recent labor teach-in at Columbia University, for example, both Betty Friedan and Richard Rorty, taking a page from Gitlin's book, told the audience that the time had come to graduate from narrow identity movements to the bigger picture. It was as if antiracist and antisexist struggles were not fundamental to the struggles of working people across race and gender lines, or worse, that they had been essentially resolved and were no longer press-

ing problems.

Although their books have been widely reviewed, we have yet to subject the neo-Enlightenment position to a serious political critique. I don't know how many times I've been told, "Don't attack them, they're on our side!" Besides the obvious analogy to the issue of the Left's stance toward Clinton, I'm always inclined to repeat Tonto's response to the Lone Ranger: "What do you mean 'we'?" Of course, to say "we" invites accusations of "identity politics," of identifying with colored people at the expense of the poor Lone Ranger, who is merely low-level manager of capital rather than an owner. But this is precisely the problem: the "we" I'm speaking of includes all oppressed people, including Mr. Ranger if he chooses to join. The Gitlin/Tomasky group makes the grave error of rendering movements struggling around issues of race, gender, and sexuality as inherently narrow and particularistic. The failure to conceive of these social movements as essential to the emancipation of the whole remains the fundamental stumbling block to building a deep and lasting class-based politics.

Part of their problem has to do with their failure to take seriously the ideas coming out of these "identity movements." Their arguments rest less on what these movements espouse than on their racial, ethnic or gender make-up or their sexual orientation. "Choose a nonwhite ethnicity," Tomasky sneers, "combine it with a sexual practice or a physical condition, and there probably exists a movement to match." (p. 89) Let us take one of their favorite whipping girls: the "black feminist," particularly of the lesbian variety. In a bizarre tautology, black feminists are narrowly concerned with their race and sex because they are black feminists. In fact, aside from Alice Walker and the statement issued by the Combahee River Collective (a radical black feminist group founded in the mid-1970s), black feminists in their texts have no names or organizations — they function as little more than signifiers (or, to put them in a more traditional context, as scapegoats). Tomasky was kind enough to quote one line from the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, though the line he quotes is intended to demonstrate how narrow identity politics can get. For him, the principles of black feminism are succinctly expressed in the following sentence: "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity." What he neglected to mention, however, is that the same statement proposed a clear socialist agenda, arguing that emancipation for everyone could not take place until racism, homophobia, sexism, and capitalism are annihilated, and criticized mainstream feminist organizations for not being inclusive enough — for not dealing adequately with the needs of the poor or with racist oppression of men and women. Nor did Tomasky acknowledge the important line in the statement that "as Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic."

In other words, had Tomasky and Gitlin taken the time to read the material written by black feminists instead of simply reducing them to caricatures of their own imagination, they might have discovered some of the most sophisticated statements of the kind of radical humanism they claim to embrace. Anna Julia Cooper, whose writings continue to have a profound impact on Black feminism, wrote in 1893:

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country or con-

dition. . . . The colored woman feels that woman's cause in one and universal; and that. . . not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won — not the white woman's nor the black woman's, not the red woman's but the cause of every man and every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.

This radical humanism, as theorist Patricia Hill Collins points out, has been a consistent principle of black feminist thought. Alice Walker insists that a “womanist” is “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female,” and is “not a separatist” but “traditionally a universalist.” Pauli Murray is even more explicit:

The lesson of history that all human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardizes the rights of all is particularly applicable here. A built-in hazard of an aggressive ethnocentric movement which disregards the interests of other disadvantaged groups is that it will become parochial and ultimately self-defeating in the face of hostile reactions, dwindling allies, and mounting frustrations.

One could see this vision in the writings of many black feminists, including June Jordan, Barbara Christian, Angela Davis, Elsa Barkley Brown, Pearl Cleage, Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Julianne Malveaux, bell hooks, Margaret Simms, and Filomina Steady, to name a few.

Of course, had Tomasky and Gitlin actually read this stuff, they might jump up in agreement and dismiss these statements as exceptions to the rule. (Whatever the rule is, however, always goes unnamed.) But a close reading reveals that they are not saying the same thing. “If all human rights are indivisible,” then why privilege majoritarian concerns over all others and ridicule movements organized around sex, race, and gender? Why presume that such movements are necessarily narrow simply because black women and their concerns are central to them? Nothing could be further from the truth. One vital outgrowth of radical black feminism has been the black women's healthcare movement, its most notable manifestation being the National Black Women's Health Project. Among other things, they have sought to create a healthier environment for poor and working-class women and reduce women's dependence on a health care system structured by capitalism and run primarily by men. If they succeed, imagine how such a transformation might benefit all of us, irrespective of race or gender?

UNFORTUNATELY, THESE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT LEFTISTS ARE BLIND to the radical humanist traditions that have undergirded black feminist movements, and this blindness has kept them from seeing how black feminism could contribute to their own emancipation. Similarly, they don't see how gay and lesbian movements might also contribute to our collective emancipation — a criticism made eloquently by Martin Duberman in his review of Tomasky's book in *The Nation*. Some things are obvious: the continuing struggle of gays and lesbians against discrimination in public and private life have important implications for national civil rights law; the work of ACT UP and other movements have made AIDS visible — a disease that's killing many heterosexual people, especially poor black women. Less obvious is the role of scholarship coming out of Gay and Lesbian Studies programs as well as Women's Studies programs — grist for the

anti-identity politics mill. Queer theory, for example, begins with the premise that sexuality is a vital part of human existence, and that the way sexual identities are defined (and policed) has to do with social relations of power, the role of the state, public institutions, and social movements. The best work understands that sexual identities and practices are lived through race and class and can only be understood historically. What does this scholarship have to do with the rest of us? What are the implications for the “universal”? For one, we know now that there is no universal masculinity or femininity. The idea of “normal” behavior is a social construction, which means that there is nothing natural or inevitable about male dominance, the overrepresentation of men in positions of power, or the tendency of men to use violence to resolve conflict. These are all obvious points, to be sure. But how many heterosexual men and women stop to think about the emancipatory potential of a more flexible sexual and gender identity for all of us? Besides reducing homophobic anxieties, freeing up self-expression, and enabling us to reconstruct our relationships to one another (isn't that what revolution is all about?), I believe a less rigid definition of masculinity may actually reduce violence — from police brutality to domestic abuse.

While Gitlin tends to be slightly more sympathetic to feminism and gay and lesbian movements than Tomasky, they both view them as prime examples of dead-end identity politics. On the other hand, when they proclaim a movement or issue “universal,” they don't stop to analyze how race and gender shape various responses to issues. For example, Tomasky believes he hit on a common value/agenda when he writes: “Working people in this country need a movement that will put their interests and livelihoods first.” Fair enough. But without an analysis that takes racism, sexism, and homophobia seriously, or considers deep historical differences, we won't know what “interests” mean. Let's take crime and the issue of neighborhood safety, an issue on which many people across race, gender, and even class lines can find common ground. Yet, racism — not narrow identity politics — persuaded many African Americans to oppose Clinton's \$22 billion Crime Bill, and the majority of white voters to support it. For many black people, the issue of neighborhood safety is not just about more police but the kind of police — where they live, how they relate to the community. Indeed, no matter what we might think of the Nation of Islam (NOI), many non-Muslims see its fight against drug dealers in black communities as more effective than the police.

It is precisely this kind of economism that enables these people to claim, without evidence, that declining wages is universally more important to most black people than police brutality or having to wait an hour for a seat at Denny's. One is hard economics that unites people; the other is just narrow identity politics. Thus, when black gays and lesbians take to the streets to protest violence against them, that's “identity politics.” When angry white males claim that affirmative action is taking jobs from them, that's class politics muffled beneath a racial blanket they themselves don't understand. When white people vote for David Duke and Pat Buchanan, that's class politics, not identity politics. Something's wrong with this picture.

Whose Left?

CENTRAL TO THE NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT LEFT'S CASE AGAINST SO-CALLED identity

politics is a nostalgia for the Old Left, back in the days before the 60s when everyone who joined checked their race and gender identities at the door and embraced a radical universalism that transcended skin color, ethnic affiliations, and sex. Intense debates over the Negro Question or the Woman Question, not to mention charges of "chauvinism," simply vanish from this romantic narrative. Those were the days of "real" class struggle, the days of the CIO, the Knights, Labor, the IWW, the Reds, the rugged and manly Republican artisans in the Age of Jackson (Andrew, not Michael), the days before identity politics eroded the class struggle and we knew what the working class looked like. Then, around 1970 according to Tomasky, everything fell apart "when the American left cashiered traditional class-based politics for a new variant in which race and gender were preeminent. . . . For black activists, racism became more important than the exploitation of workers by capitalists; for women, sexism."

Who is he talking about? Black Power and feminism had radical and conservative tendencies, and neither uniformly privileged race or sex, or ignored class, for that matter. And what about the black Left? If these activists and the New Left more broadly abandoned "the exploitation of workers by capitalists," why did so many of these folks join Marxist-Leninist organizations in the early 1970s and begin working in factories to organize industrial workers? Workers became very important for the New Left, particularly for African-American radicals. In 1968 and 1969, a fairly large contingent of black, radical students at Duke and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill helped organize key strikes of maintenance and dining hall workers. Former Wayne State students such as General Baker, Marion Kramer, Ken Cockerel, Ken Hamblin, Luke Tripp, Charles Johnson, and others organized the Revolutionary Union Movement in Detroit's auto plants, which culminated in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). Some of the organizers who split from the League joined former SNCC leader James Forman and founded the Black Workers Congress.

Not surprisingly, in his book Gitlin dismisses the industrial concentration movement coming out of the New Left in a sentence, probably because it contradicts his central thesis that the late 60s witnessed the flight from universal class struggle. Yet, some of these same people contributed substantially to labor struggles during the "dark ages," and can take some credit for the current regeneration of the movement — from Eric Mann, who led the campaign to keep GM Van Nuys open in the 1980s, to labor militants like Joe Alvarez, currently the political director for the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). Alvarez's presence is no small matter, for UNITE is one of the biggest unions in the country, formed in July of 1995 through a merger of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). UNITE has also taken the lead in the fight against sweatshops throughout the Western hemisphere, building cross-border alliances from Latin America and the Caribbean to Canada.

On the other hand, those white construction workers in the 1960s who battled antiwar protesters and supported Nixon — the folks Gitlin calls "the Common men" — were also notorious for having the most racist, exclusionary unions. Now, compare their unions to the local, state, and federal employees unions that supported black struggles for justice. Or compare them to, say, District 1199 of the hospital workers or some locals of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) — unions that embraced the spirit (and the people) of

the civil rights movement. Multiracial public sector unions were able to survive, even thrive, while construction workers belong to some of the most devastated unions in the country. Indeed, when unionization was on the decline, public sector unions increased their membership by 37%.

In other words, given black workers' commitment to organized labor, despite being overrepresented in the unemployment rolls and in occupations that have historically been difficult to unionize, it is ironic that African Americans bear so much of the burden for the decline of "class politics." Black workers, after all, have the highest union participation rate — in 1994, 21% of the African-American work force was unionized compared to 15% of whites. Furthermore, a 1989 AP/Media survey revealed that people of color had stronger union sympathies than whites. When nonunion workers were asked: "Would you join a union at your place of work?" 56% of African Americans answered yes, as did 46% of Latinos. Among white workers, only 35% responded affirmatively.

If rebuilding class politics is the goal of the neo-Enlightenment left, and the labor movement is one of the vehicles for doing so, I don't understand why they would invoke Enlightenment universalism to promote a version of American nationalism and support for "majoritarian" values which — it seems to me — is the very opposite of the cosmopolitanism they claim to be embracing.

Gitlin deplores the fact that the Republicans have seized the symbols of patriotism and that progressives have failed to promote "Democratic Americanism, an Americanism of constitutional faith strong enough to override the racism of American history. . . ." What an incredibly naive statement; it ignores actual historical context and presumes one can miraculously disentangle the language of "Americanism" from its roots in white supremacy, conquest, and xenophobia. Tomasky's chauvinism is even more strident:

The United States alone, simply because its power and wealth are still so vast, can set the direction for the rest of the advanced world to follow. . . . An America that rises above its own particularisms and ethnic rivalries might be able to posit itself as an example for others, in Bosnia, in Macedonia, in Russia, in the Middle East and, with some credibility, lead a Western coalition that lays down principles that factions there must adhere to. And for the Third World, especially for those people making six dollars a day weaving those designer garments, an America devoted once again to working people will surely bear fruit.

Can labor really afford to rally behind this sort of nationalist rhetoric in the age of global capital? Imagine if the AFL-CIO had been supporting progressive unions across the world rather than U.S. foreign policy driven by Cold War imperialism? It took NAFTA to spur the AFL-CIO to take cross-border organizing more seriously, and though some campaigns are succeeding, labor leaders now have to break through a wall of suspicion and distrust following decades of AFL-CIO-supported Cold War policy. And yet Gitlin lampoons all Third World solidarity movements. The fact is, the South African divestment campaign as well as Central American solidarity movements opened doors to labor that might otherwise have been shut.

RATHER THAN WORRY ABOUT OFFENDING "MAJORITARIAN SENSIBILITIES," the labor movement must make antiracism, antisexism, and homophobia foundational. The absurd argument that minority aggressiveness is responsible for white male backlash at the tail end of the 1960s masks the fact that it has been white

racism that has tragically inhibited the growth of most progressive movements in the U.S. As W.E.B. DuBois, Dave Roediger, Alexander Saxton, Ted Allen, Noel Ignatiev, Michael Goldfield, Eric Lott, David Wellman and others have demonstrated, racism has been a noose around white workers' necks since the American Revolution. In the South during Reconstruction, a misguided white majority sided with the wrong class and rejected the black workers and sharecroppers who proposed a Democratic South with massive land redistribution. Despite the fact that the black freedom struggle, in alliance with the radical wing of the Republican Party, enfranchised poor whites who didn't have the right to vote before the 15th Amendment, the vast majority of exploited white labor still chose color over class. And in California, it was precisely anti-Chinese sentiment that galvanized the multi-ethnic "white" working class and forged a dynamic union movement on the West Coast during the late 19th century. Of course, white workers were never uniformly racist and there are enough stories of interracial working-class solidarity to fill volumes. But we also must recognize the price these men and women had to pay: white workers willing to commit "race suicide" often faced the worst of state repression, ostracism, and sometimes hostility within their own ranks. It's not an accident, for example, that the most militantly anti-racist unions emerging out of the CIO campaigns of the 1930s and 40s were the main targets of McCarthyite witch hunts.

I can't stress enough the importance of the fight against racism right now, especially with a growing backlash against affirmative action under the guise of supporting a "color blind" society. Anyone seriously concerned about the labor movement and building multiracial unity must recognize the fundamental role racism has played in destroying internationalism. Anti-immigrant sentiment, for instance, is not just about class anger, because there really is no mobilization against Canadians or European immigrants taking what are essentially skilled jobs. It's about dark people, whether some invisible Pacific Rim empire run by "sneaky Orientals" or "wetbacks." The history of conquest and, later, repatriation in the Southwest is fundamental to understanding anti-immigrant sentiment, the English-only movement, and pro-Prop 187. Blanket support for "majoritarian" positions simply plays into American nationalism and chauvinism.

So, how might people build class solidarity without suppressing or ignoring differences? How can we build on differences — by which I mean different kinds of oppression as well as different identities — rather than in spite of them? One way to conceive of alliances across race and gender is as a set of "affiliations," of building unity by supporting and perhaps even participating in other peoples' struggles for social justice. Basically, that old fashioned IWW slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all!" After all, contrary to the neo-Enlightenment narratives, African-American social movements have been practicing the principle of "an injury to one is an injury to all" for a very long time: black male abolitionists supported women's suffrage when few white men would; black radicals throughout the early part of the century supported the Irish struggle for self-determination; black soldiers and journalists shed tears at the sight of Nazi death camps; and since Roosevelt, we have been mainstays in the Democratic Party even to our own detriment. Black trade unions were never exclusionary; black labor leaders did not implement Jim Crow locals. And when the Chinese Exclusion Act seemed to have universal support among non-Asian workers, it

was a black man, James Ferrell of the Knights of Labor, who told his comrades that they ought to organize the Chinese rather than attack them.

The good news is that most elements of the labor movement understand this, unlike many academics who apparently find the idea of multiple identities too complicated to deal with. Despite their uncritical support of the Democratic Party, the current leadership of the AFL-CIO seems to understand that the labor movement is not about transcending these other social movements derisively labelled "identity politics," but about building alliances and affiliations and learning from them. Across the country, for example, unions have embraced cultural diversity education to reduce white racism, ethnic conflicts, sexism, and homophobia. They've sought assistance from dozens of university-based programs, including those at Indiana University, Division of Labor; University of Iowa's, Labor Center; University of Michigan, Labor Studies Center; University of Minnesota, Labor Education Service.

THE MOST DYNAMIC UNIONS ARE ALSO TURNING INCREASINGLY TO COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZING. In Los Angeles, where Latino and Asian-American garment workers are spread across many small plants and shops, organizing shop by shop would prove costly and time-consuming. The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) adopted a community-based strategy that has been quite successful.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, UNITE's ability to build a strong base in the black community ensured the success of its boycott of K-Mart last year. Essentially, UNITE launched a campaign to protest racial inequities in wages: K-Mart workers at the nearly all-black facility were making a mere \$4.60 an hour. In addition to filing a complaint with the EEOC, the union enlisted all the key local black community leaders and were able to get over 10,000 signatures on a petition to K-Mart's chairman demanding an end to discrimination. In other words, rather than simply appealing to black workers as "workers," they appealed to the black community and tapped a deep tradition of resistance to racism and injustice.

Similarly, members of the Labor Party Advocates steering committee recognized that in order to have substantial representation of women and workers of color at the Labor Party's founding convention, they could not rely solely on established union contacts. So they made provisions in the convention rules for "designated workers' organizations — of women, workers of color and other workers' groups including those facing special discrimination" to have voting power if they endorsed the Labor Party. As a result, groups like the Coalition of Labor Union Women, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and Black Workers for Justice were able to participate and represent the interests of workers irrespective of union affiliation. Finally, there are organizations, often products of the best elements of Third World, feminist and black Liberation movements, that don't see race, gender, and sexuality as "problems" and are, instead, moving working-class politics in new directions: we can point to the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic Justice, the Labor/Community Strategy Center, New Directions, *Labor Notes*, Solidarity, etc., many of which are led by white radicals (Ann Braden, Jerry Tucker, Eric Mann) who understand that antiracism and antisexism are fundamental to class struggle.

THERE ARE CERTAINLY MANY ISSUES AROUND WHICH PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCES CAN BE BUILT — a renewed labor movement, environmental justice, racial justice, immigrant rights, anti-poverty, etc. Public transit is a site of struggle that literally touches all these issues — a lesson Labor/Community Strategy Center organizers understand well. They have consistently made connections between civil rights, environmental justice, labor struggles, privatization, and the problems created by capitalism. Bus Riders Union (BRU) organizers see their constituency in all of its “identities” — as workers, consumers, largely people of color, and city dwellers tired of toxic living. The Union’s demands — more resources devoted to buses, a moratorium on overpriced rail service, lower fares, better service, safety, no-emissions electric buses, MTA policies that create jobs in inner city communities — genuinely reflect a range of issues beyond the problem of transportation. The BRU is forging a new social movement, not by appeals to color blindness but by re-thinking class politics in a multicultural context.

BRU organizers also recognize the fundamental importance of culture and identity for mobilizing working people. The cultural work of the Strategy Center, from its creative use of graphics to attract members to its “dance-a-thons” and related cultural events, sets an example for political movements that understand that “cultural politics” is more than an analytical category or “political escapism” under a different name. It is a practice. Liann Hurst Mann, founding member of the Strategy Center and editor of its new bi-lingual publication *Ahora Now!*, is an architect and designer who has drawn on her experience as a political organizer to develop new ways to “visualize” multiracial, working class struggles. *Ahora Now!* consistently carries articles and interviews exploring cultural work, language, and identity that offer important lessons about “art making” in a political context. In collaboration with the L.A.-based Cornerstone Theater, the BRU plans to transform the interiors of buses into spaces for “guerrilla theater.” As an extension of the BRU’s longstanding and successful organizing campaign, its bilingual performances will address complicated issues of race and ethnic identity, citizenship, gender, immigration, language, and capitalism more broadly, while building a multiracial, multiethnic social movement. What is more, the BRU recently wrested a settlement from the MTA that resulted in a victory for all riders, including transit dependent white workers, the disabled, the elderly, and students.

It’s ludicrous to blame so-called identity politics of the 1960s for the collapse of the Left, the derailment of progressive social movements, or our inability to roll back poverty and unbridled corporate wealth. We have others to thank for that: Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, Cointelpro, white flight, red squads, red-lining, Contra-backed crack dealers, economic restructuring, the NRA, right-wing think tanks, complacent labor leaders. . . and the list goes on. Of course, the Left — whatever that means now — is not blameless. The scars of sectarianism run deep and trace their roots to the glorious days when the Old Marxists were supposedly more “universal.” Street fights erupted between socialists and anarchists; battles raged between the Trotskyists and Stalinists and a variety of sects claiming to be the true heirs of Lenin. And then China entered the picture, along with Albania. These battles within the Marxist world contributed more to the internal implosion and proliferation of left-wing parties than feminism and black nationalism.

Although identity politics sometimes act as a fetter on genuine multiracial/multicultural alliances, I believe it has also enriched our conception of class. Indeed, there are many serious scholars — I count myself among them — trying to understand how various forms of fellowship, racial solidarity, communion, the creation of sexual communities, and nationalism shape class politics and cross-racial alliances. We are grappling with how self-love and solidarity in a hostile context of white supremacy, the embrace of certain vernaculars, can be expressions of racial and class solidarity, and the way class and racial solidarity are gendered. Not to recognize this is to wonder why more West Indian workers participate in Carnival than in the Labor Day Parade, or why District 1199 had the foresight and vision to maintain an 1199 float and/or banner in the West Indian Day parade. Those who pine for the good old days before identity politics, when class struggle meant rough guys who understood that simply fighting the bosses united us, forget that Yiddish was a source of solidarity within the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, to the point where union leaders were offering courses in Yiddish for black and Puerto Rican workers in the late 1950s, to their dismay. Identity politics, in other words, has always been central to working class movements, from minstrelsy on up.

More important, a careful examination of the movements dismissed as particularistic are often “radical humanist” at their core and potentially emancipatory for all of us. We need to seriously re-think some of these movements, shifting our perspective from the margins to the center. We must look beyond wedge issues or “minority issues” and begin to pay attention to what these movements are advocating, imagining, building. After all, the analyses, theories, visions emerging from the black liberation movements, the Chicano and Asian American movements, the gay and lesbian movements, the women’s movements, may just free us all. We simply can’t afford to abandon the subway, with all of its multicultural messiness to jump on board the Enlightenment train of pure, simple, color- and gender-blind class struggle. Neither Locke nor Jefferson offer a truly emancipatory vision — not then and certainly not now. Attempts to “transcend” (read: outgrow) our race and sex does not make for a unified working class. What does is recognition of the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives and a willingness to struggle on all fronts — irrespective of what “the majority” thinks. Recognizing the importance of environmental justice for the inner city; the critical role of antiracism for white workers’ own survival; the necessity for men to fight for women’s rights and heterosexuals to raise their voices against homophobia. It’s in struggle that one learns about power and how it operates, and that one can imagine a different world. And it’s in struggle, not in the resurrection of ideas that have also provided the intellectual justification for modern racism, imperialism, and the traffic of human beings, that we must begin to develop a new vision.

Angry White Men on the Left

Jesse Lemisch

THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE TOOK PLACE at Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York, April 12-14, 1996. This version of the SSC is quite different from the locus for left scholarly debate that some older readers may remember from the '60s and '70s, and it is valuable in different ways. Now it is more oriented toward contemporary analysis and activism. Sessions included:

"The Million Man March," "Immigrant and Labor Rights," "Is There Such a Thing as Post-Modernity?" "The Assault on Public Higher Education," "Direct Workers' Democracy," "Feminism, Post-Modernism and Global Capital," "Sartre's Flaubert," "The Left and the Job Agenda in the U.S.," "Gender and Politics," "The Politics of European Integration," "Clinton or a Left Vote?" "Ralph Nader for President," "The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," "World Bank Myths of Development," "Orientation to the 1996 New York Socialist International Meeting," "Marx's Method," "Pornography Under Siege," "From the Funeral Pyres of Stalinism and Social Democracy, Marxism Returns!"

The Socialist Scholars Conference (SSC) is a project of the City University of New York (CUNY) branch of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and the usual suspects appear on the program year after year: Bogdan Denitch (who is conference chair), Stanley Aronowitz, Ellen Willis, Barbara Ehrenreich, Cornel West, as well as many non-DSA-ers like Daniel Singer, European correspondent of *The Nation*. The SSC is quite open. There are many DSA-organized sessions but there are also sessions set up by such groups as *Monthly Review*, the Radical Philosophy Association, The Haiti Anti-Intervention Committee, Committee for the Study of Leon Trotsky's Legacy, NACLA, and *Social Text*.

A great gathering place for the left, the SSC is a place to talk with old friends (including a good number from outside the New York metropolitan area), at a time when there are fewer and fewer such events. There didn't seem to be as many sessions this year as in the past, but there was a good crowd — Stanley Aronowitz claimed an advance

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registration of 1500 — and the exhibit area appeared more crowded than it was last year. The SSC had been supported in the past by CUNY, particularly when Joseph Murphy was chancellor. Now CUNY is under assault by Governor Pataki, as well as by CUNY's downsizing chancellor, and its future is unclear.¹

As always, there was considerable diversity within the SSC's left universe this year. But — also as always — there was nonetheless a clear center of gravity in plenaries and major sessions reflecting the politics of the DSA. The opening plenary and the conference as a whole focused on the theme, "Two Cheers for Utopia!" At registration, my alert friend Joanne Landy, Director of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, refused to wear the conference button which bore that slogan. And, as it turned out, the passivity and retreat from radicalism evident in the title (Why are we holding back on the third cheer for utopia? asked Landy) was very much on display. As I experienced the SSC — others who attended other sessions might have experienced it differently — two especially problematic themes emerged: angry white men on the left; and "no exit."

Angry white men on the left. Todd Gitlin played a major role, participating in three sessions: "Is the Radical and Marxist Tradition Hostile to Politics?" "Divisions, Identity and the Left in the U.S.," and "Politics of Solidarity." Gitlin, who became President of Students for a Democratic Society in 1963, has had second thoughts about radicalism, expressed in his earlier book, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987), and more recently in his new book, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (1995). In this book and in the SSC session on divisions, identity and the left, Gitlin attacked "identity politics... groups overly concerned with protecting and purifying what they imagine to be their identities... a very bad turn, a venture into quicksand."

OF COURSE, MUCH OF THE LEFT RIGHTLY REJECTS the kind of "identity politics" that argues for exclusive concern with one's own group, denies universal values and contends that one's particular group can solve its problems in isolation. And, we can all see extremes of this kind of politics in the solipsistic and often conservative thought that idolatrizes monarchy and male hierarchy in an invented African past; or, among some feminists, in the analogous obsession with matriarchies and goddesses.

Gitlin's method of arguing — reminiscent of an approach frequently taken by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (another anti-multiculturalist) — is to find a fringe element of a broad group he disapproves of, and then, using a couple of qualifiers, to tar the entire group.² For instance, we know that feminism and some of the other movements have been racked by internal disagreement about essentialism, "the belief in a uniquely feminine essence, existing above and beyond cultural conditioning."³ But Gitlin chooses to see the entire movement through the lens of essentialism and damns it all: from the '70s on, he says,

The emphasis in the new movements veers towards a conception that men and women, gay and straight, were fundamentally, irreducibly different — a tendency so common as to be outfitted with the academic shorthand, "essentialism."

Of course the truth is that many radical feminists have argued an anti-essentialist position, saying that the allegedly "irreducible" differences might

very well vanish if power were equalized. As feminist psychologist Naomi Weisstein wrote in 1968,

I don't know what immutable differences exist between men and women apart from differences in their genitals; perhaps there are some other unchangeable differences; probably there are a number of irrelevant differences.⁴

It is hardly justified to leap from a few dead-end examples to a condemnation of just about all independent organization around such issues as homosexuality, feminism, or race as inherently divisive and subversive of universals. And it is finally such movements that Gitlin and others at the SSC oppose. These movements have been the health of the left, the result of hard-earned lessons learned from past movements which repeatedly submerged the interests of various groups in other people's priorities, and a way for all of us to keep thinking about what thorough-going equality and real utopia would be. The wholesale rejection of such independent organizing severs us from issues of race and gender which any movement that aims to build a democratic left majority in the U.S. must face. The strategy that is both principled and has the most realistic chance of success involves weaving together support for the struggle for universal human rights and dignity with support for particular oppressed groups.

GITLIN HAS RECENTLY MOVED FROM THE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT at Berkeley to become Professor of Culture, Journalism and Sociology at New York University. His arrival in New York City seems to have given added strength and legitimacy to a pre-existing condition: a straight male backlash among New York left intellectuals. This was especially clear in the presentation by Bogdan Denitch, the conference organizer, who spoke along with Gitlin in the session on identity politics.

In his introduction to the conference program, Denitch had written, "We must learn to effectively confront the splintering politics of identity..." Speaking alongside Gitlin, it seemed that Denitch (who had arrived at the same conclusions on his own) had nonetheless been freed from a great burden, now that prestigious validation had been given to the attack on most kinds of feminism, gay liberation and black self-organization. In a truculent and martyred spirit, he dragged out the old Lasch-ian vocabulary with its condemnation of "self-indulgence" (as if those who organize themselves on any basis other than class are frivolous, irresponsible and destructive). To a sprinkling of applause from other angries in the audience, Denitch announced, "we don't care if you are gay; we want to know whether you are a left gay!" And he was positively ferocious about some unspecified excesses by feminists which seemed to have been performed directly on his person. Whatever it was, I felt sorry for him and the obvious resultant trauma. As more of this kind of belligerence appears within its ranks, DSA is going to have to figure out where it stands.

"*No Exit*." Again and again throughout the conference, speakers used this phrase: in the sessions I attended, no fewer than four speakers mentioned the term to convey the contemporary left's sense of helplessness and inevitability in the face of rampant capitalism, globalization, etc. To his credit, in the early part of his talk, Denitch addressed and tried to oppose this theme, although his effectiveness was undercut by his conservative conclusion, condemning

unseemly particularism. I was struck by the degree of resignation to defeat in the air in other sessions. (On the other hand, Daniel Singer welcomed the popular demonstrations in France against cuts in social welfare in a session on "New Directions for the European Left," and others also countered the mood of resignation, as we will see.)

In a session on "Big Government, the Political and the Left," Carol O'Cleiracain, formerly with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers (AFSCME) and then New York City Commissioner of Finance, exemplified how conservative defeatism has led to a disastrous narrowing of the radical agenda: "good management," she said, should be at the core of the left's agenda, suggesting that management styles rather than struggles against murderous budget cuts should be at the heart of a socialist approach. This is the kind of sterile vision produced by "two cheers for utopia." The failure of utopian vision fits well with the amnesia about agency and resistance.

An air of defeat hung particularly heavily over a session chaired by Harry Magdoff and sponsored by *Monthly Review* on "Dominant Ideology: Power and Vulnerability." (*Monthly Review* has always been overwhelmed by the Great Forces; remember their preoccupation with tungsten as the source of the war in Vietnam.) Richard Cloward of the Columbia University School of Social Work gave a somewhat moving but utterly defeated talk, repeatedly saying that he never imagined that he would live to see the day of such capitalist triumph, the repeal of the social contract which had begun to be forged in the thirties, the collapse of organized labor, the growth of inequality, the reappearance of policies deliberately seeking to create a reserve army of the unemployed, the capacity of capital to pick itself up and go to lower-wage areas. He offered many chilling figures in support of this analysis, including growing disparities between CEOs' and workers' wages. Ed Herman of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania told a similar story, although less dramatically. For both, there seemed no way out, no suggestion of resistance.

I grew increasingly uncomfortable during these presentations. I have often been critical of a hortatory left culture that shows up in such places as left film, song and history,⁵ and think it's the job of left intellectuals to tell the truth, even when the truth is uninspiring. Our goal is not uplift, but rather solid social science and a better understanding of how capitalism works and might be opposed. *But what kind of analysis ignores agency and resistance, and how can analysis pretend to validity without them?* Putting aside the notion of social science as inspiration, how *accurate* is a social science which accepts what is as what must be and abandons the quest for sources of tension within and against the system? Such an approach is superficial and more likely to lead to surprise than to valid prediction. Our analysis has to address questions to the established order on the assumption that there might indeed be effective resistance if the points of vulnerability can be found.

The last speaker at this session was Elaine Bernard, a long-time leader of Canada's New Democratic Party who heads the Harvard Trade Union Program. She is well known for her militant perspective and sharp analysis of health care reform. Her presentation at this session offered a stunning antidote to the two that preceded hers. She began by asking, why had not Herman concluded that we must *oppose* and *break* the system that oppresses so many?

Her acute analysis pointed out the vulnerability of such new capitalist modes as "lean production": in a system run with smaller inventories, 3,000 brake workers had shut down GM's entire North American operations. Mobile as capital may be, she said — to cheers from an awakened audience — it must set its foot down someplace, it cannot leave the planet, she said (perhaps a little optimistically) — and our job is to grab that foot and break it!

Speaking against the grain of the 1996 SSC, Bernard reminds us of the relevance of utopia. Things do look pretty grim right now. But if you look, you can find scattered resistance from below, antidotes to the sense of givenness and inevitability: changes in the American labor movement, increasing consciousness about layoffs, sweatshops and wage disparities, the Living Wage movement, the collapse of Gingrich, hostility to HMOs, resistance to throwing new mothers out of hospitals, discontent with NAFTA, GATT and European Union, resistance to the austere imperatives of Maastricht by French, Belgian and German workers. In the U.S., these things might well go nowhere: Clintonism and the sterile and vacuous two-party system indeed seem to gobble things up and to offer no exit. But our job is to find the system's points of vulnerability, to renew our sense of independence and agency from below, to imagine and invent resistance, to insist on the practicality and achievability of visionary alternatives, not to bury ourselves by declaring the death of utopia.

After the Columbia "Teach-In With the Labor Movement"

THE BACKLASH AMONG ANGRY WHITE MEN (AND A FEW WOMEN) on the left has escalated into a full-fledged attack on "identity politics" and radicalism, producing a deluge of works and opinions similar to Todd Gitlin's, jeopardizing the future of the left. The debate about identity politics among such figures as Gitlin, Betty Friedan, Robin Kelley, Cornel West, Manning Marable and others shook the massively attended New York City "Teach-In With the Labor Movement," last October. Just recently, there have been the following attacks on identity politics, all supporting different aspects of the Gitlin position. (As we will see, there is also an emerging response by Barbara Ehrenreich, Martin Duberman, and Robin Kelley, among others.)

- Michael Tomasky, *Left for Dead: The Life, Death and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America* (1996), with a blurb by Gitlin: "A real contribution to the debate that the Left sorely needs if it is to return to the realm of the living." Tomasky denounces what he imagines to be the left's turn away from economic issues and fighting for goals that have turned off the white middle class. Compare Barbara Ehrenreich's review in *The Progressive*, July 1996, defending against Tomasky's "straw man" and his charge that we on the left (as she paraphrases him) "were indulging ourselves in an orgy of identity-based self-righteousness and craven pandering to same." Martin Duberman's review, *The Nation*, July 1, 1996, includes this eloquent remark: "You cannot link arms under a universalist banner when you can't find your own name on it."

- Jay Walljasper of *Utne Reader*, quoted in "If Right is Center, Where is Left?" *New York Times*, August 18, 1996, condemns the left's "crusades about identity politics" and argues that "The politics of sexuality and identity are important,... but they are 'side dishes' [emphasis added] to economics, the envi-

ronment and human rights.”

- Eric Hobsbawm, “Identity Politics and the Left,” *New Left Review* May/June 1996, a paean to Gitlin, applying the critique to England (and elsewhere), and a continuation of the kind of complaint that we heard in Hobsbawm’s Gutman Memorial Lecture, where he worried over British blacks’ refusal to organize on a class basis. Hobsbawm has always been uncomfortable with race and gender, as opposed to class. As early as 1984, calling himself a “Stone-Age Marxist,” Hobsbawm had reaffirmed the importance of base and superstructure and called for historians to return to the *real* issues of class and economic themes; meanwhile, dismissing the significance of patriarchy, he found women’s history of interest to historians largely instrumentally, because of women’s crucial location in the work force.

- Finally, coming from a former leftist but offering a historical foundation compatible with much of the above is Ronald Radosh, *Divided they Fell: The Demise of the Democratic Party, 1964-1996* (1996): a critique of what Radosh sees as the Democrats’ move out of the “mainstream,” beginning with their acquiescence [!] to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964. Here and elsewhere, Radosh has criticized the Democrats, including Clinton, for falling into identity politics. As with Gitlin, a rejection of the left’s behavior in 1968 plays an important role in this analysis, and both reach similar conclusions about the necessity of voting for Clinton in 1996. (According to the July-August 1996 issue of *The American Prospect*, Clinton’s 1996 State of the Union Address was influenced by Gitlin’s *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* and Clinton sent him a complimentary note. Gitlin claims ambivalence about the influence.)

THERE HAVE BEEN RELATED CRITIQUES FROM OTHERS, including Ralph Nader, who deserves much praise for opening up an alternative by running for president, but who has unfortunately attacked “gonadal politics” and made the archaic contention that criticism of homophobia and feminism would dull the focus of his anti-corporate politics. At the Labor Teach-In, Gitlin was pleased with Betty Friedan’s attacks on identity politics; essentially, she argued that we must transcend feminist issues and move on to wages. What can the organizers of the teach-in have been thinking when they invited this known quantity, the Michael Lerner of feminism, to be a speaker at the opening plenary? For years, she has been deeply into family values and hostile to a basic feminist program. Months before the teach-in, she had argued against identity politics and, in effect, for abandonment of a feminist agenda and its replacement by a family-oriented paradigm:

... the time is ripe to go beyond the “gender issues” that have lately been the movement’s prime concerns — abortion, date rape, sexual harassment, pornography, and the like — to such larger matters as economic distress and social disintegration ... the most urgent concerns of women today are not gender issues but jobs and families.⁶

Again, non-economic issues are merely side dishes.

Gitlin’s position should be seen in the context of this general trend. Here, in a mixture of quote and paraphrase, is what Gitlin has been saying, at the Socialist Scholars Conference, the Labor Teach-In and other forums, and in columns in *The New York Observer*, *LA Weekly*, and *Twilight of Common Dreams*:

You people — gays, lesbians, feminists, African-American activists — have had 25 years (holy shit: 25 years!) and you haven't yet succeeded! The left is still marginal, and you (not Reagan, not Bush, not Clinton, not capitalism, not patriarchy, not lesser-evil Clintonism) are responsible. You're getting in the way. ("It's a dead end! We've done it!" shouted Gitlin angrily at Kelley at the Labor Teach-In.) So, it's time to end this frivolous recreation — "get real!" he cries —, suppress these unpopular (in particular, cultural) appeals, and go back to the heavy (especially economic) stuff, which he sees as the real politics. We must ingratiate ourselves with more mainstream constituencies. "Temper your demands," he tells blacks, women and gays and lesbians.

Which demands? An end to sexual harassment and gay-bashing? Opposition to date-rape and to racism? Gitlin won't name just what it is he opposes, for fear we'll see that his attack on identity politics is just a mask for his anti-feminism and hostility to black and gay liberation. As Joanne Landy pointed out at the Labor Teach-In, he offers instead only innuendo.

Gitlin has long been obtuse about and hostile to the central and positive role played within the left by those he rejects as practicing "identity politics." His *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* has come under intense criticism as history from others writing the history of women, blacks, gays and lesbians. He blames blacks for SDS's descent into violence, subordinates the protests and organizing of feminists to quarrels with men in SDS, and is trivializing or silent on gay oppression and liberation. (For the latter, see Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 1993.)

In fact, the movements that Gitlin ridicules have wrought a far greater change in American consciousness than the plodding economism which he endorses. Let's face it, Todd, Joe Sixpack's brother is in an interracial marriage, and one of his sons is gay — the one who watches Oprah, along with everyone else in America: the consciousness here — with all of its problems (I'm no Oprah fan) — is more advanced than yours. Joe may not be the stereotypical racist homophobe to whom you want us to cater. If you don't think feminism, African-American activism and gay liberation have had a major and positive impact in our culture, you're not living in the real world. Get real.

These movements have succeeded *because* they were radical, and have been willing to speak to the majority from what was at first a minority position. Think about the opposition to the war in Vietnam. Think about abortion. As Barbara Ehrenreich points out in her critique of Tomasky,

a genuine left... represent[s] a politics driven by principle, not by polls... we were pro-choice *before* the majority was... And if public opinion should revert to the anti-womanism of the Christian right, [should we] abandon our pro-choice position?

Gitlin, Tomasky and the others want us to devote more attention to more mainstream issues that won't marginalize us: as they see it, day care is real, sexual issues are not. Although we have in fact supported such important mainstream issues as health care, many of our greatest successes have occurred when we have taken principled and unpopular stands and persuaded a majority. And the American left has contributed a good deal to the international left precisely because of its distinctive diversity. (In addition, the areas Gitlin ridicules have been enormously fruitful for the development of left theory.)

The left's historical attitude toward working-class politics is an excellent

touchstone for evaluating the emerging critique of identity politics. No one would deny the importance of the working class and its potential for playing an important role in bringing about fundamental change. But the working-class politics that leftists admire have often been identity politics, self-centered and frequently exclusive. We have admired working-class consciousness and culture in part *because* it has been particularist. We have *called* this focused particularism universalism because of our immersion in a Marxist tradition which has declared, by fiat, that the interests of the working class are automatically the interests of all. Sometimes that has been true, and it is certainly to be hoped that it will be true again. But workers' goals and culture have often been exclusive and have, quite rightly, focused on themselves, very much like the identity politics that Gitlin abhors.

So before we attack identity politics, let's think about whether our admiration for working-class politics would withstand a similar test. If we deem identity politics to be acceptable for the working class, why do we condemn such politics among women, blacks and gays?

The attack on "identity politics" largely ignores profound social, economic and political reasons for the failure to build a viable left in the United States. That failure has little or nothing to do with the existence of the social movements which Gitlin and the others so vigorously attack. (Indeed, it should be noted that many people have come to left commitment after first contact with dissent via participation in these movements.) If we seek to build a new radicalism, the backlash thinking we are encountering these days is the surest way to minimize the left's influence in these dynamic movements.

NOTES

1. Contributions should be made out to "Socialist Scholars Conference" and sent to DSA, Dept. of Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd St., New York, NY 10036

2. Note for instance the structure of Gitlin's *The Twilight of Common Dreams*. He defines "The Problem" by leading off with "A Dubious Battle in Oakland," which discusses a textbook controversy in Oakland, California. Near the end of the chapter, he writes: "The cautionary tale with which I have begun is a *severe case* [emphasis added] of a larger wrongheadedness..." His technique is to take what he interprets as severe individual cases and then to leap to unjustifiable general condemnation.

3. Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (London 1986).

4. Naomi Weisstein, "Psychology Constructs the Female; or, The Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist" (1968), reprinted in a twenty-fifth anniversary symposium, "Psychology Constructs the Female: A Reappraisal," *Feminism and Psychology*, III, no. 2 (1993). Weisstein concluded: "But it is clear that until social expectations for men and women are equal, until we provide equal respect for both men and women, our answers to this question will simply reflect our prejudices."

5. See, for instance, Lemisch, "Pop Front Culture: I Dreamed I Saw MTV Last Night," *The Nation*, October 18, 1996; and Lemisch, "The Politics of Left Culture," *The Nation*, December 20, 1986.

6. Friedan, "Children's Crusade: A Gathering Heralds a Shift Toward a New Paradigm," *New Yorker*, June 3, 1996, 5-6.

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Netanyahu and the Palestinians

Adam Keller

IT REALLY SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A SURPRISE. For months, all of us in the peace camp had ended practically every article and leaflet with the warning that continued blocking of the peace process would lead to an explosion. Mainstream politicians and respectable commentators mentioned it as well. Even the Security Services pointed out in their regular "confidential reports" to the Prime Minister that frustration and anger among Palestinians were reaching a dangerous level. Yet, when it did happen, everybody was stunned by the dimensions of the popular upsurge and the swiftness with which the conflagration spread.

Binyamin Netanyahu has promoted himself as the advocate of two ideologies: radical Jewish nationalism and neo-liberalism. His extensive international contacts are with individuals, groups (and funders!) supporting one or the other. Unfortunately for Netanyahu, these two ideologies — though both are right-wing and conservative — turn out to be mutually incompatible in the Israeli context. A neo-liberal program of privatization and deregulation could only be carried out in the context of a developing peace process, since that would produce increased openings of international borders to a flow of goods and labor, and attract foreign investors. The Israeli business community overwhelmingly favored Shimon Peres, endorsing his vision of "The New Middle East." A nationalist policy, retaining occupied territory against Arab resistance, would entail the opposite — erecting barriers between Israel and the rest of the Middle East, driving away foreign investors who dislike such risky regions, a high level of government involvement in the economy to mobilize it for war, and to direct a national drive of settlement on Arab lands.

Logically, a nationalist policy should aim at strengthening the armed forces. Yet the Netanyahu government's neo-liberal economic policies included slashing by more than half the (already meager) grants for conscripts at the end of their three years' service. The angry reactions of soldiers in South Lebanon ("We risk our lives, and get a slap in the face!") filled the press. An attempt to cut salaries of the higher echelons has been delayed after unprecedented bickering between army generals and finance ministry officials was reported in the mainstream daily press. Thus, while Netanyahu's political policies steadily increased tensions and brought the danger of all-out war closer, his economic

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policies caused frustration and anger at both ends of the military hierarchy. The growing realization of this inherent contradiction and of the agonizing need to choose between these alternatives may account, to a large degree, for Netanyahu's often incoherent behavior since he was elected.

Many factors have contributed to the government's chronic instability. In part, it was Israel's new hybrid electoral system, in which the Prime Minister is directly elected but still requires a parliamentary majority. Overestimating his powers under the new dispensation, Netanyahu sought to staff his cabinet with "non-party experts," and establish "an Israeli White House" complete with such institutions as a Council of Economic Advisers, an Office of Budget Management and a National Security Council.

These plans were nipped in the bud by the entrenched bureaucracies of the finance and defense ministries, jealously guarding their privileges and power. Netanyahu's rivals in the Likud, whom he tried to keep out of the cabinet, proved powerful enough to elbow their way in. The only "expert minister" Netanyahu did get in was the shrewd but shady lawyer Ya'akov Ne'eman, who lasted a single, stormy month as Minister of Justice before being hauled off to police investigation, on charges of having suborned a witness in a political corruption trial.

The religious community, though divided into numerous parties and sects, gave Netanyahu its overwhelming support, in return for which it expected the new government to enact measures enforcing a more religious tone in public affairs — a path opposed, however, by secularists inside the Likud like Finance Minister Meridor. The issue came to center on a Jerusalem thoroughfare whose closure on the Sabbath was demanded by the ultra-Orthodox inhabitants, leading to demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, widespread rioting and clashes with the police. A government order to close the controversial road was blocked by the Supreme Court resulting in anonymous threats on the life of Justice Aharon Barak by extreme Orthodox groups. Respectable rabbis openly called for "non-recognition of the ungodly court." Netanyahu drew fire by declaring himself in favor of "limiting the Supreme Court's authority."

On still another front, the Netanyahu government immediately found itself involved in a controversy when the new Prime Minister introduced extensive cuts in the welfare budget, modeled on the program of the U.S. Republicans with whom Netanyahu has a close ideological affinity. However, the program encountered considerable opposition inside the Likud, a party with a populist tradition, whose voters are drawn mostly from the poorer half of Israeli society. Many Likud rank-and-file activists joined in the one-day general strike called in protest by the Histadrut Trade Union Federation. Netanyahu backtracked, promising to modify some of the draconian welfare cuts he originally planned. At other times and places such controversies would have occupied a government's full attention and energy but, under the conditions prevailing in Israel, they were soon pushed aside by the deepening crisis in relations with the Palestinians and the entire Arab World.

Promises and Provocations

NETANYAHU'S POLICIES ON THIS VITAL ISSUE WERE FORMULATED UNDER THE IMPACT of the 1992 elections, in which Yitzhak Shamir — Netanyahu's patron during his

early career — went down to defeat. As Prime Minister and party leader, Shamir had been inflexible. A staunch adherent of the Greater Israel ideology, he had pursued settlement construction on the West Bank to the point of direct confrontation with the U.S., placing in jeopardy Israel's lifeline of American financial support. He also rejected out of hand the idea, raised by some Likud leaders, of declaring unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. In Shamir's view, Gaza, overcrowded refugee camps and all, was part of sacrosanct Eretz Yisrael, ancestral heritage of the Jewish people. Giving it up was too high a price to pay for winning the elections.

Shamir's inflexibility alienated traditional Likud voters at the political center, who went over to Rabin; the Likud went down to a crushing defeat. Binyamin Netanyahu, the young, ambitious politician who took over the divided, decrepit Likud soon after drew a clear lesson from Shamir's failure. During his three years as opposition leader, he repeatedly shifted his views to win over divergent constituencies. He made utterly demagogic speeches at the scenes of terrorist attacks and, in order to destabilize the Rabin government, allied himself with wild and violent settlers.

Yet, in the aftermath of the Rabin murder, Netanyahu chose to pose as "the respectable statesman." A few months before the elections, he announced his acceptance of the accomplished facts of Oslo, and made rather ambiguous promises to continue the peace process if elected. To further buttress a "peacemaker" image, Netanyahu held a highly-publicized visit to Jordan and a meeting with Crown Prince Hassan.

All in all, his efforts were successful. He regained the stratum of voters alienated by Shamir four years earlier: people who wanted peace but harbored a deep distrust of Arabs. In the aftermath of the Hamas suicide bombings, followed by Peres' disastrous Lebanese adventure, Netanyahu's slogan — "a secure peace" — struck a deep chord among this section of the Israeli electorate. Actually, for the settlers and the extreme right who mobilized massively for Netanyahu, the "secure peace" slogan was little more than a convenient weapon with which to topple the Labor government. The most honest among them admitted as much. Thus, Netanyahu succeeded in putting together an electoral alliance with two essentially incompatible elements — those who wanted to move ahead with the Oslo process, albeit "slowly" and "cautiously" — and others who sought to roll back the process, or at least freeze it at the point where the Labor government left off.

This division between "pragmatists" and "hard-liners" was apparent at all levels of the Likud Party, from voters and grassroots activists to the top leadership. One of Netanyahu's main achievements in the electoral campaign was to keep his various followers together, without the discrepancies becoming obvious until election day. This was possible primarily because the hard-liners were willing to restrain themselves until the elections were won.

Once Netanyahu won power, however, the question was immediately posed: would the new government go beyond recognizing the facts created by its Labor predecessor and move further along the Oslo road?

During the first months of his term, Netanyahu made every effort to avoid a clear answer to that question, constantly declaring himself bound by the previous government's international treaty obligations, yet he always came up with new excuses for delaying active implementation of any of them. He kept friends

and opponents alike guessing about whether he was a pragmatist or a hard-liner. But such tactics can be maintained only for a limited time, and gradually it became apparent that virtually all of Netanyahu's moderate gestures were verbal or symbolic, while his government's policy on the ground was increasingly aggressive and provocative. Of the many issues outstanding between Israelis and Palestinians, one soon came to the foreground: Hebron, the only major Palestinian city still under direct Israeli occupation, and with some 450 armed, fanatical settlers in a well-fortified enclave in the midst of its 160,000 Palestinian inhabitants. Under the provisions of the Oslo-2 Agreement, redeployment of Israeli forces from most parts of Hebron was due to take place in March. The Peres government failed to carry out this redeployment, due largely to the campaign waged by Netanyahu, then leader of the right-wing opposition. Netanyahu and his settler allies had managed to gain the support of key religious leaders; Peres put off the Hebron redeployment in the vain hope of winning at least some points among the rabbis — and their flocks.

After his electoral defeat, Peres seemed to enjoy some vindictive glee at handing Netanyahu the Hebron hot potato. For the settlers, Hebron was the rallying point for stemming the Oslo tide, the city's Biblical holy graves holding a powerful emotional attraction to the nationalist-religious camp. At the same time, the evacuation of Hebron — where occupation lingered on in its most brutal form — also became a priority for the Palestinians, and for the entire Israeli peace camp. The numerous international mediators and intermediaries — American, European and Arab — therefore, found Hebron on the top of their agenda, the litmus test of Netanyahu's adherence, in practice, to Oslo.

Prime Minister Netanyahu started his career with an ample reservoir of goodwill, both inside Israel and internationally. In his victory speech, he went out of his way to appear a generous victor, and to calm the defeated parties, initially, with considerable success. Similar efforts were directed at the Europeans, the Americans, the Palestinians and the Arab states.

At the Cairo summit, where Arab leaders gathered in alarm about the new Israeli government's rejectionist "guidelines," Netanyahu had one clear friend: King Hussein of Jordan, smug at having been the only one to notice and cultivate the new Israeli leader before the elections. The summit host, President Mubarak of Egypt, fended off Syrian proposals for an immediate boycott of Netanyahu's Israel, preferring to give the new government a period of grace, despite its declared extremism.

On his visit to Washington, Netanyahu was given a standing ovation on Capitol Hill, especially from Republicans, whose catch phrases of "privatization," "deregulation" and "cutting down government" Netanyahu repeated in his impeccable American English. Netanyahu's hosts were also enthusiastic about his declared willingness "to begin the process" of phasing out American aid to Israel. (The Ministry of Finance in Jerusalem, which was not consulted in advance, was not so eager, and the Prime Minister had to beat a hasty retreat.)

Netanyahu's visit to the White House was a bit more antagonistic, especially when the issue of settlement expansion came up. However, both Netanyahu and Clinton had an interest in smoothing over their differences, and Netanyahu did make a clear promise "not to behave like Shamir" and "not to surprise the U.S." with such actions as settlement construction.

Within a single week at the end of July, the Netanyahu government em-

barked on a series of goodwill gestures. Foreign Minister Levy held a cordial meeting with Yasser Arafat in Gaza — the first ministerial-level contact with the PLO by the Likud; a Netanyahu-Arafat meeting was declared to be due “soon.” Meanwhile, Netanyahu met with President Mubarak of Egypt, informing him that the Palestinian women prisoners would be released (a clause in Oslo-2 which, despite repeated promises at the highest levels, the old and the new Israeli governments simply failed to keep). After being closeted with Netanyahu for an hour, Egyptian President Mubarak emerged, smiling broadly, and told the numerous Israeli journalists present: “You know, your new Prime Minister is not as bad a guy as everyone said. After what I heard from him, I have good reason to feel that things will start moving soon.” Similar assurances were also given a few days later to King Hussein of Jordan.

In days that followed, the press was full of “unofficial but reliable” reports, according to which Defense Minister Mordechai had formulated a plan for the Hebron redeployment, requiring only “cosmetic changes” in the Oslo-2 format. Mordechai was due to meet with Arafat and present that plan.

The impression that things were moving was reinforced by the conclusion of two drawn out M.I.A. tragedies which had haunted the Israeli public for years. As a result of imprisoned Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's help, security forces were able to locate and recover the body of Ilan Sa'adun, an Israeli soldier kidnapped and killed by a Hamas squad nearly a decade ago. The Security Services made no secret of their opinion that the seriously ill Sheikh Yassin should be released, both for the positive effect his humane views could have on other Hamas leaders, and because his death in prison might trigger riots, if not terrorist attacks.

On the Lebanese front an exchange was effected between Israel and Hezbollah, with German mediation. The Lebanese militia returned the bodies of two Israeli soldiers, as well as releasing dozens of Lebanese mercenaries who had fought on the Israeli side; in exchange, Israel returned living Hezbollah fighters and the bodies of dead ones. The deal occupied the front pages for days, and there was a good deal of speculation that it might be the first move in a bold Netanyahu plan to end the perennial guerrilla war in South Lebanon. But within weeks, all the hopes aroused at the end of July were dashed. No Palestinian prisoners were released — neither the women, nor Sheikh Yassin or anybody else; the public mood of the Egyptian president and his officials clearly indicated that Netanyahu's more confidential promises were not honored, either. The Mordechai plan for Hebron encountered strong opposition from arch hard-liner Ariel Sharon and the ministers of the National Religious Party. Neither Netanyahu nor Mordechai followed Levy's lead in meeting Arafat; for his part, Levy complained in public of being shut out of the negotiations process and threatened to resign. At the same time, the settlers put strong pressure on Netanyahu to honor the promises he made to them before the elections. After weeks of avoiding them, Netanyahu did meet with the assembled settler leaders. Afterward, the settlers' spokesman, Pinhas Wallerstein, told the press: “This is a great day in the history of Jewish settlement in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. At last we have a Prime Minister who is one of us, in the full sense of the word.”

A few days later, the cabinet formally repealed “the settlement freeze” decree — but not strictly observed — by the Rabin government. The “settlement de-freeze” resolution drew angry protests from around the world. Inside the

country, Peace Now published data collected by its Settlement Watch Team on the cost of the intended settlement extension and engaged in sharp, highly-publicized media debates with settlers. In an effort to appease the Americans, the Europeans and the Arabs, Netanyahu sent them special messages, pointing out a rider to the "de-freeze" resolution: though settlement extension was now permitted in principle, each construction plan required the personal approval of Defense Minister Mordechai. But this system failed to keep the pressure off of Netanyahu: the settlers became more and more disgruntled after every extension plan vetoed by Mordechai. At the same time, any ministerial approval for a settlement extension made headlines and aroused a fresh wave of condemnation inside and outside the country. By mid-August, the Netanyahu government was increasingly alienating its international and Arab contacts, as well as both ends of the Israeli political spectrum.

Mounting Frustrations

FOR THE PALESTINIANS, THE ELECTION OF NETANYAHU CAME IN THE MIDST of an extremely difficult period. The Hamas bombings in late February had resulted in extremely harsh Israeli retaliation in the Palestinian Territories, in particular, the imposition by Prime Minister Peres of a total, prolonged closure depriving tens of thousands of Palestinian workers of their jobs in Israel and completely dislocating the Palestinian economy. Arafat had been counting on Peres' promise that after the elections, which he was supposed to win, he would remove the closure, withdraw the army from Hebron and release the prisoners. The shock of Peres' defeat left Arafat out on a limb, desperate to regain his balance and establish contact with the new Israeli regime. At the beginning, such contact was meager: Netanyahu adviser Dore Gold repeatedly appeared at Arafat's headquarters, bearing peremptory messages from his master but with no mandate to discuss any substantial issue. Nor did the visit of Foreign Minister Levy, though more cordial, produce any practical result.

At the time, senior members of the Likud, as well as astute settler leaders, toyed with the dramatic idea of Israel's unilaterally proclaiming lifting of the closure — while putting a hold on any implementation of Oslo, such as the Hebron redeployment. They argued that the mass of impoverished Palestinian workers cared for their jobs more than for anything else, and that such a move might undercut Arafat's base of support. After all, lifting the closure and allowing free circulation between Israel and the Palestinian Territories accorded well with the formal Likud ideology, by which both are part of the same (Jewish-dominated) entity. Netanyahu, however, cared little for such abstract considerations: he decided against a dramatic lifting of the closure, because of the possibility that it could be followed by a terrorist attack for which he would then be blamed (just as he had blamed the Labor government in the past). The best he would allow, following the security chief's advice, was a gradual and partial easing of the closure, occasionally giving the Palestinians a few thousand more work permits as a "reward for good behavior." Tragically, many Palestinians who got such a miserly hand-out found their jobs already taken by workers from the Third World and Eastern Europe, brought to Israel in the tens of thousands some years earlier.¹

Nothing whatsoever was done to address other aspects of the closure, such

as strict security checks of Palestinian trucks, which slowed to a trickle the flow of Palestinian goods from the Territories into Israel and between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which hitherto had sold much of their produce to each other. These checks, which the Palestinians claim are intended to protect not only security but also the interests of Israeli competitors, caused the bankruptcy of many Palestinian enterprises, and drove away most of the foreign investors who had considered investing in the Palestinian Territories.

At all points where Palestinian daily life is touched by Israeli bureaucracy, conditions became noticeably more harsh: passage through roadblocks entailed greater humiliation and intimidation by soldiers; permits to go abroad, either by land or via Ben Gurion Airport, became more difficult to obtain; human rights groups collected more and more testimony from Palestinians beaten up by Israeli police or soldiers; the military authorities embarked on a systematic campaign of demolishing houses in "area C" (70% of the West Bank) which was still under direct Israeli rule, with dozens of homes in a single village receiving demolition orders while, at the same time, plans were announced to extend a nearby Israeli settlement. It is not clear whether all these developments occurred under instructions from above, or resulted from elements in the low and middle ranks in the hierarchy who felt that now was the time to follow their inclinations — nor does it matter.

Initially, much of the Palestinian anger and frustration were directed at Yasser Arafat, and the Palestinian Authority, its police and its administration, in general. Arafat was accused of having become a collaborator. Opposition members of the newly-elected Palestinian parliament became increasingly bold in exposing cases of corruption and human rights violations by senior officials. News of a young Palestinian's death by torture while in the custody of the Palestinian police in Nablus sparked large-scale riots in that city; at Tulkarm, the local Palestinian police station was stormed and dozens of prisoners set free. The deteriorating situation aroused increasing concerns in Israel — not only in the media and opposition parties, but also among Netanyahu's own security advisers. More and more the Prime Minister was urged to hold his long-delayed personal meeting with Arafat and give the Palestinian leader some concrete gains to show his people. Netanyahu, however, stuck to his concept of "reciprocity," by which dialogue with Arafat and any discussion of substantial issues was dependent upon Palestinian rectification of their "violations of Oslo."

In his first days as Prime Minister, Netanyahu's advisers prepared a list for him of some 30 alleged Palestinian violations. (Following its publication, the Palestinians promptly published a similar number of Israeli violations.) After some consideration Netanyahu decided to focus on the Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem, an issue that had figured prominently and successfully in his election campaign.

During that campaign, Netanyahu promised his voters to close the "Orient House," Palestinian headquarters in East Jerusalem, whose de-facto extra-territorial status made it a favorite target of right-wing agitation. Once in office, Netanyahu realized that the cost of closing Orient House, a place officially recognized and regularly visited by the European Foreign Ministers, would be prohibitive. Lowering his sights, Netanyahu settled on three less-known Palestinian offices located in East Jerusalem, involved with such issues as statistics, cartography and vocational training. Numerous messages, transmitted to Arafat

via several intermediaries, made clear that closing the three offices — deemed to be official extensions of the Palestinian Authority, whose presence in Jerusalem is forbidden — was a precondition for a Netanyahu-Arafat meeting, and for any substantial discussion of Hebron or any other issue. Much against the opinion of his advisers, Arafat decided to accept these terms, and ordered that the East Jerusalem offices be closed, which they were after much grumbling by those involved. Had Netanyahu then set a time for meeting Arafat, he could have gone to that meeting as a victor. Instead, he greeted the news with marked indifference and, on the same day, authorized Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert to demolish a large Palestinian building in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The building in question, a recreation center for youths and the handicapped, had been built over the past two years, financed with grants from the French and Canadian governments. The officials at the Jerusalem municipality's planning department proclaimed the project part of "a Palestinian conspiracy to take over the Old City" and refused to grant a building permit; the Palestinians had, nevertheless, gone ahead, which gave the municipality the legal right to issue a demolition order. After Netanyahu okayed the demolition order it was carried out at once in a military-like operation, with hundreds of police surrounding the site and cranes lifting bulldozers over the Old City Wall (since the heavy machines could not enter through the narrow medieval gates). On the same day, the Israeli authorities also declared their intention to evict the Jahalin Bedouins, whose land was deemed necessary for extending the Israeli settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim, ten kilometers east of Jerusalem.

The Palestinian parliament met in Ramallah, in a unanimous mood of anger, with speaker after speaker delivering militant speeches. Arafat, who made a special trip from Gaza and whose helicopter was held up in the air for half an hour by Israeli air controllers, called on all Palestinians to say "a prayer to save Jerusalem" at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, and asked their Christian compatriots to do the same at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The Arafat proclamation at once changed the atmosphere, creating a mood of enormous tension and expectation, during the 48-hour countdown to the Friday Muslim prayers. The government, rejecting out of hand proposals to allow the prayer to be held, declared its determination to enforce the closure, by which West Bank Palestinians are barred from entering East Jerusalem. Thousands of police were mobilized from all over the country to seal off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Outwardly, they were successful; attendance at the Jerusalem Mosque was even lower than usual. But this success was bought at the price of having the major international TV networks showing Israeli police blocking the way of worshippers to prayer. Thus was exposed the reality long known to Palestinians, of which the wider world was hitherto largely ignorant, that despite the claim of all Israeli governments to preserve freedom of worship in Jerusalem, the closure denies that freedom to millions of Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

The False Dawn

ONE OF THE EFFECTS OF THE CONFRONTATION WAS AN ENORMOUS INCREASE in the pressure on Netanyahu to hold his promised meeting with Arafat. Labor leader and former Prime Minister Peres held a much-publicized meeting of his own

with the Palestinian leader. A few days later, Israeli President Ezer Weitzman, whose official role is purely titular, delivered an unprecedented ultimatum to Netanyahu: if the Prime Minister would not meet with Arafat, the president would do so instead. Finally, President Clinton made clear that he would not see Netanyahu, on his forthcoming visit to the U.S., unless Netanyahu first met with Arafat.

Ironically, it was Netanyahu who was now eager to meet Arafat, while the Palestinian leader was reluctant. In complicated secret negotiations, in which Netanyahu had to resort to the same Norwegian diplomats who mediated the original Oslo Agreements in 1993, the modalities of the Netanyahu-Arafat meeting were agreed upon.

Three years after Rabin and Arafat had their first meeting on the White House lawn, Israeli newspapers once more featured full-page color photos of the Prime Minister shaking hands with Yasser Arafat with the news that now, at last, the Likud's taboo was also broken. For two brief days, Netanyahu enjoyed the support of the opposition and the peace movement, while the hard-liners in his own party were furious. In a temporarily successful effort to appease them, Netanyahu declared his total and absolute opposition to a Palestinian state, making abundant use of rejectionist-style demagoguery.

It soon turned out that the long-awaited meeting had produced no tangible result other than photographs, and that Netanyahu had never intended it to be otherwise. In fact, he started using having met with Arafat as an alibi for not making any political progress. Netanyahu's second visit to the U.S., was noticeably cooler than the first, the televised meeting with Clinton was Netanyahu's only evidence of "progress on the Palestinian track." Clinton, however, confronted him with another increasingly difficult problem, that of Syria.

The North Heats Up

UNLIKE THE PALESTINIANS, THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD NOT REACHED any official agreement with the Syrians which would have been binding upon its successor. The four years of negotiations, broken off in March 1996 in the wake of the Hamas bombings, had produced only an unofficial agreement ("non-paper" in diplomatic jargon) stating the two sides' acceptance of the principle of Land for Peace, in this case, return of the occupied Golan Heights in exchange for genuine peace between Israel and Syria. In what turned out to be a colossal mistake, Syrian President Assad had refused to transform this "non-paper" into an officially binding agreement without a detailed agreement on all the complicated subordinate issues, the exact delineation of the border, the demilitarized zones and security arrangements, the water sources, etc.

Prime Minister Netanyahu made no secret of his intention to ditch the "non-paper" and re-start negotiations, with an Israeli claim to the whole of the Golan. And Syria was, of all Arab states, the one to greet Netanyahu's election victory with the strongest and most unmitigated hostility, which was amply reciprocated. Netanyahu's first plan was to open a major propaganda campaign depicting Syria as "a terrorist state," with the aim of instigating international sanctions and forcing Syria to the status of a "pariah state" like Iran and Iraq; the removal of sanctions would have been dependent on Syria's accepting Israeli possession of the Golan.

On his first visit to Washington, Netanyahu took with him a fat dossier on terrorist organizations based in Damascus and on Syria's long-standing alliance with Iran but he made no use of it. In talking with President Clinton and other decision-makers in Washington, Netanyahu got a clear message: the U.S., which in 1990 invested great efforts to get Syrian troops to fight at its side against Iraq, was not about to sacrifice that achievement. It was difficult enough to maintain the "double containment" of Iran and Iraq; there was not the slightest desire for a third.

With this tack blocked, Netanyahu decided on an approach which became known as "Lebanon first." He offered to withdraw Israeli forces from South Lebanon, in return for Syria's tacit agreement to defer discussion of the Golan to an indefinite future. Such a move would have been very popular among Israelis who are increasingly fed up with the futile bloodletting in South Lebanon; it would have obtained the support of the Labor and left opposition, and not been seriously opposed even from the annexationist right. But unfortunately for Netanyahu, there was no reason for the Syrians to accept the proposal and let Israel extricate itself from the Lebanese predicament, thus losing its own main lever for applying pressure on Israel. The "Lebanon first" proposal was rejected out of hand by the Syrian and Lebanese governments, which insisted that South Lebanon and the Golan are two interlinked, inseparable issues.

In theory, Netanyahu had the option of pulling Israeli forces out of Lebanon unilaterally, without any agreement. In that case, however, he would have risked Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israel from the evacuated area (though, after an Israeli withdrawal, he could have hoped for wide international acceptance of Israeli retaliatory action). But a unilateral withdrawal would also have meant abandoning members of the Israel-backed "South Lebanon Army" to the mercy of the Syrian and Lebanese governments, which would, to say the least, have deterred other Arabs from future acts of collaboration with Israel.

Netanyahu chose to shelve the "Lebanon first" idea and let the guerrilla war meander along its bloody course. With no more brilliant proposals for Syria, Netanyahu fell back upon an official call for "renewing the peace talks with no preconditions," at the same time promising new government investments to the Golan settlers, with the aim of expanding their population. The Syrians indignantly responded that they would only resume negotiations at the point where the Labor government had broken them off in March. At that point, Israelis and Syrians started to trade accusations and insults daily, gradually descending into threats. A Syrian military redeployment in Lebanon became the subject of speculation and apprehension. Troops which had garrisoned Beirut during the past decade were moved eastward, officially because the internal situation in Lebanon had stabilized, and stationed at a location where they could block an Israeli outflanking attack on Damascus via East Lebanon. And, as Israeli experts were quick to point out: the new Syrian positions could also serve as a springboard for a surprise attack on the strategic Mount Hermon, the highest point of the Golan, and the site of savage battles during the 1973 war.

The verbal exhibition of mutual hostility reached a crescendo as Israeli Minister of Agriculture Rafael Eitan, a former general of Lebanon War notoriety, declared: "If war comes, we will just wipe Syria off the map."

Meanwhile international TV crews were invited to the Golan, to take footage of galloping tank squadrons; tongue in cheek, Israeli generals reiterated

that these were "no more than routine maneuvers."

THE DETERIORATION OF ISRAELI-SYRIAN RELATIONS WAS MATCHED by relations with Egypt, the first of Israel's neighbors to have signed a peace treaty. The Egyptians supported Palestinian and Syrian grievances. The Egyptian press resorted to vitriolic language, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Amer Musa warned that without significant motion in the peace process Egypt might reconsider holding the November Middle East Economic Conference. Netanyahu's reaction to this threat caused a diplomatic incident. Insisting that the Egyptians themselves very much needed that conference, he added, "Musa is cutting off his nose to spite his face!"

Given Netanyahu's record of the previous months, Israeli diplomats had a hard job trying to convince the furious Egyptians that "it was a quite common English expression whose translation into Arabic made it sound more insulting." Cartoons appeared in the Egyptian press suggesting "modifications" to Netanyahu's anatomy, and the Egyptian army carried out "routine maneuvers" in which journalists noticed that several Egyptian divisions were practicing the rapid crossing of a canal, which would be the first step in any military confrontation with Israel.

A great American effort was needed to calm things down. The Egyptians were induced to give the economic conference another chance. For the Syrians, Clinton got Netanyahu's agreement to the formula that Israeli-Syrian negotiations would reopen with the new Israeli government "acknowledging" the positions of its predecessor but not committing itself to them. Though the Syrians rejected this as insufficient, Damascus' tone became a bit less belligerent, with Assad reportedly agreeing to wait until after the U.S. presidential elections.

While the spotlight was turned on Syria, the Palestinian situation continued to deteriorate. An inconclusive meeting between Defense Minister Mordechai and Arafat was followed by the demolition of several Palestinian homes in Jerusalem and other houses taken over by settlers. South of Jerusalem the first "Jews-only" road was opened, with soldiers at the junction ordered to turn away all Palestinians, including those at the expense of whose fields and orchards the road had been built.

Diggers

EVER SINCE THE YOM KIPPUR WAR OF OCTOBER 1973, ISRAELIS have been apprehensive about the approach of Judaism's holiest day, a day of fast and silence, on which there is neither traffic nor radio or TV broadcasts. That was the day on which the Egyptians and Syrians launched their surprise attack on Israel. In other years, this fear had seemed rather irrational. Still, in spite of the existing tensions, the fast of 1996 passed quietly enough. It was Netanyahu who, the following night in Jerusalem, committed his supreme provocation, setting alight the Palestinian powder keg.

No spot among the many disputed between Israelis and Palestinians is as sensitive and emotionally loaded as the Old City of Jerusalem; the place known to Jews as Har Habait (The Temple Mount) and to Muslims as Haram-a-Sharif (The Noble Shrine). For Jews, it is the site of two successive Jewish temples, both destroyed in war, revered by many persecuted Jews as the symbols of a

lost Golden Age. The 1,300-year old Mosques which now stand upon the site are Islam's third holiest place, after the shrines of Mecca and Medina. In Muslim tradition, it is the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven. During the 20th century, the place already steeped in religious symbolism assumed a potent nationalist significance as well. The emotional appeal of the former Jerusalem Temple was a recurrent theme of the Zionist movement from Herzl on and the Mosques have become a powerful symbol of the Palestinian national identity, their pictures found at nearly every Palestinian home (including those of Christians).

Fortunately, for the sake of stability on this sensitive spot, farsighted Jewish sages many hundreds of years ago strictly forbade Jews to make any effort to rebuild the Temple, or even to set foot on that mountain, until the coming of the Messiah. Instead, Jewish tradition sanctified the Wailing Wall, the outer wall of the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif Compound, and the only existent relic of the original Jewish Temple. The age-old Jewish tradition fitted well with Israeli government policies, established in 1967 by then-Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and retained essentially unchanged up to the present. Dayan had established firm Israeli control over the Wailing Wall and its environs, even to the extent of razing a whole Palestinian neighborhood to provide a wide plaza for Jewish worshippers at the Wall. He carefully refrained from any attempt to wrest control of the Temple Mount Compound from the Muslim authorities.

This policy was repeatedly challenged by messianic nationalist groups, using violent provocations with the aim of destroying the Mosques. The most serious, in 1990, provoked riots in which Israeli police gunned down 18 Muslim worshippers.

Such organizations operate openly and conspicuously, and their spirit of messianism gradually seeped into more respectable religious associations operating at the Wailing Wall, under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Unable to approach the Temple Mount Compound directly, these associations have, since the 1970s, hit on the idea of excavating the ancient tunnels running under the Old City. From the start, these operations were given a double justification — a mundane, pragmatic explanation involving archeological research and tourism, and a highly ideological religious-nationalist reasoning of “the need to recover ancestral Jewish Jerusalem.” Over the years, the Israeli penetration into the tunnels has aroused Palestinian suspicion and anger. In the 1980s, the Palestinians started digging and excavating for their own reasons, and there ensued a real subterranean battle between rival digging crews, using fists and sticks.

Following that incident, a brick underground wall was erected dividing the disputed tunnel, and the Israeli side promised to do no more tunneling directly under the Mosque Compound. The “diggers” then tried another tack, to extend the tunnel northward, under the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City. At the same time, messianic settlers were moving and taking over Palestinian houses in the same quarters with the proclaimed aim of “Judaizing the Old City.” By the late 1980s, the northern tunnel was ready, but for an opening on the far side which would allow Israelis to emerge in the Arab inhabited part of the Old City. An attempt to make such an opening in 1988, however, sparked widespread riots in Jerusalem and all over the West Bank, fanning the fire of the Intifada. Then Prime Minister Shamir — for all his inflexibility on other

issues — ordered the opening closed.

The nationalist-religious “diggers” did not give up, mustering a formidable political lobby — the Nationalist Religious Party. Their power increased with the 1993 election of Ehud Olmert as Mayor of Jerusalem, in whose municipal administration the “diggers” have many political friends. The Labor Prime Ministers, Rabin and Peres, had to deal with the issue during various discreet meetings, assenting in principle to opening the tunnel, but with the rider that “the timing must be carefully chosen.” During Netanyahu’s first months in office, he seemed to accept that position. During a confidential meeting, Admiral Ami Ayalon, head of the Shabak Security Services, advised opening the tunnel at the time of the redeployment in Hebron, when the satisfied Palestinians could be expected to make no more than verbal protest.

Into the Fire

WHAT MOTIVATED NETANYAHU TO IGNORE THIS ADVICE AND ADVANCE with the tunnel in a period of antagonism is still an open question. In making that decision, the only bold, clear and unambiguous step so far in his term as Prime Minister, Netanyahu acted alone. The security services and the army were informed only at the last moment; the same is true for the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs. Though Netanyahu adviser, Dore Gold, made a special visit to Amman to brief King Hussein on the eve of Yom Kippur, he did not mention the plans for the tunnel at all, and apparently knew nothing of them himself. And despite Netanyahu’s promise not to “surprise” the Americans, Clinton found out only after the tunnel affair had become TV news.

One thing on which Israeli commentators and investigative journalists agree is that Netanyahu, while in opposition, had established extensive contacts with extremist groups such as the “diggers.” This included at least one source of financing, the American Jewish fundamentalist and millionaire Erwin Moskovitz of Florida, who had been investing enormous sums in settlement activities in East Jerusalem and also contributed generously to Netanyahu’s campaigns, both in the Likud primaries and in the general elections. Moskovitz, who happened to be in Jerusalem for the Jewish holidays, was one of the few informed, even figuring as guest of honor at the opening of the tunnel. It is also known that a year before the elections Netanyahu promised the messianists that once elected he would permit Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, a promise he found utterly impossible to fulfill. Moreover, the fanatics were furious about the Muslim authorities fitting out the subterranean space known as “Solomon’s Stables” as a new Mosque (actually built by King Herod about 1,000 years after Solomon’s time). The extremist groups had tried to prevent the opening of the new Mosque by an appeal to the Supreme Court, and the Shabak warned Netanyahu that they might use explosives, as well.

With this background, it appears that Netanyahu’s motive was to appease these groups, and the extreme right in general; he might even have hoped that the reaction to this provocation would weaken them a bit. But though he probably anticipated Palestinian protests, it is not likely that he fully realized how much the Palestinian position would be strengthened by his precipitate action.

Late on the night of September 23, hundreds of police occupied a site at the Via Dolorosa, where, according to Christian tradition, Jesus walked with the

cross. A little bit below them, under the ground, a small group was gathered, along with a single TV crew to commemorate the scene. The visiting millionaire was present, as was Mayor Ehud Olmert, another of his beneficiaries. Olmert personally took the chisel to strike the last few blows. When the sun rose over Jerusalem, the new exit of the tunnel was already a *fait accompli*.

Having lit the fuse, Netanyahu departed on a previously-scheduled tour of Britain, France and Germany. During the night, Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem had heard the commotion, arrived and were roughly pushed away by the police. The Muslim authorities on the mount were alerted, and in turn alerted Arafat in Gaza. In the morning, several hundred Palestinian youths gathered for a demonstration on the site, and were promptly and violently dispersed. An hour later, another demonstration broke out in the sacred compound around the Mosques, and stones were thrown at Jewish worshippers near the Wailing Wall, followed by another violent confrontation with police.

That afternoon, Arafat called for a general strike the next day throughout the Palestinian Territories, and for mass demonstrations in every town, village and refugee camp. The call was enthusiastically endorsed by all shades of the Palestinian political spectrum. On the morning of Wednesday, September 25, the Palestinian protest seemed relatively quiet, with most processions moving through the self-governing Palestinian cities where no Israeli forces are present. Gradually, reports arrived of confrontations spreading along the West Bank's roads where stone-throwing at military and settler cars had become rare since the end of the Intifada.

Sizable demonstrations in East Jerusalem were broken up by police, only to re-appear at a different location, and at Hebron, where the army slapped a curfew over the entire city, which was to last for the next ten days. At noon, some 1,500 students of Bir Zeit University, the West Bank institution which had a crucial role in earlier stages of the Palestinian struggle, set out in procession toward the Israeli military checkpoint at the southern exit of Ramallah; a checkpoint which, according to the letter of the Oslo text, should no longer have been in place. The Palestinian police were supposed to block the students' way before they approached the Israeli soldiers. Apparently, the police did not try very hard. The furious students succeeded in getting near the handful of soldiers in the outpost; the soldiers first shot rubber bullets and tear gas canisters, then switched to live bullets. Several students fell down, dead or wounded. So far, it was the classic Intifada script, enacted thousands of times on this and other spots between 1987 and 1993. The difference was that now a large armed, trained Palestinian force was present.

Many hotly contested versions exist of how the Palestinian police were drawn in, and whether anybody planned it in advance. Whatever the circumstances, the relations between Israelis and Palestinians were about to change qualitatively, with profound consequences for the future. For the first time since 1948, an armed confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians developed on something like equal terms (due of course to political circumstances preventing Israel from using more than a fraction of its available strength). For the first time, armed Palestinians confronting Israel were perceived by Israelis not as "terrorists" who are illegitimate by definition, but as soldiers who are inherently equals. Sadly, many lives were to be lost in order to bring this elementary lesson home.

By mid-afternoon a full-scale infantry battle was going on at the approaches to Ramallah, and both sides were hastily bringing in reinforcements. At the end of the day, during the six o'clock news, the Israeli radio commentator declared: "This is no longer Intifada. This is war!" On the TV news Israelis were treated to detailed footage of the fighting including close-ups from both sides of the Ramallah battlefield. In the late hours of that day, Israeli and Palestinian senior commanders, who had established friendly contacts during the past year, managed to contact each other by radio and arrange a truce. Israeli and Palestinian soldiers at the Ramallah approach retreated behind makeshift barriers; between them, what had been one of the few prosperous middle class areas in the Palestinian Territories had been turned into a ruined and desolate no-man's-land. Early the following morning, Palestinian crowds approached Kfar Darom, one of the Israeli armed settlement enclaves straddling the main North-South artery of the Gaza Strip. The previous day's sequence repeated itself, except that here it was the settlers who opened fire on the Palestinians against the orders of the soldiers guarding them.

News of the battle raging around Kfar Darom spread swiftly, and dozens of similar conflagrations broke out throughout the densely-populated Gaza Strip, all around the settlement enclaves, where one-third of the Gaza Strip's land (and half of its water!) are reserved for a total of 5,000 Israelis.

In northern Gaza, thousands stormed the Erez checkpoint, potent symbol of the closure, the place where Palestinians encounter either a barred gate or a long and humiliating search on the way to a hard day's work in Israel. Here, as elsewhere, the demonstrations and stone-throwing soon gave way to a battle, conducted throughout the day with machine guns as well as rifles.

On the other side of the Gaza Strip, at Rafah, the Palestinians broke through the Israeli-held zone separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt, cut the border fence and were fraternizing with the Egyptian border guards when Israeli forces arrived at the spot. In the ensuing battle, Egyptian soldiers were involved on the Palestinian side, the first case since 1974 in which Israelis and Egyptians fired on each other. (Later, the Israeli and Egyptian authorities — aware of the danger to their already strained relations — officially denied that this occurred, though reliable witnesses had attested to it.)

The West Bank also flared up again. At the outskirts of Ramallah, the battle resumed, and similar ones broke out near other cities. In Nablus, the small Israeli garrison in the medieval building known as Joseph's Tomb came under siege by thousands of Palestinians. A relieving force was decimated by heavy Palestinian fire from the rooftops, and the survivors, together with the original garrison, surrendered; the Palestinian Police protected them from the furious crowd, and Palestinian medics treated the wounded. On hearing the reports from Nablus, Defense Minister Mordechai ordered the evacuation of Joseph's Tomb, militarily the only sensible option. The Israeli commanders opened negotiations with their Palestinian counterparts on evacuation of the trapped soldiers. But the settlers, getting wind of this, alerted the Ministers of the National Religious Party, who used heavy pressure to prevent "abandonment of the holy grave." Late at night, after the Israeli commanders threatened an invasion of Nablus by tanks, the Palestinians agreed to let the wounded and shell-shocked soldiers be replaced by a fresh squad, which would evidently become hostages in case of renewed hostilities.

By that time, an unofficial cease-fire was in force in most places. Netanyahu, who at first exhibited a cool disdain toward "the riots," had to cut short his European tour and hasten home, making frantic phone calls to Arafat and alternating between desperate pleading and dire threats. On the morning of September 27, the focus of events appeared to be shifting to the field of politics, and it looked like a relative calm could be preserved. But there was to be one more burst of lethal violence. The Israeli police decided on a "firm attitude" at the Jerusalem Mosques, with the aim of "preventing riots," with the result that, at the end of the noon prayers, three Palestinian worshippers were shot to death. The news sparked scattered new confrontations, especially at sites untouched on the previous day, such as Jericho and Tulkarm.²

In three days, 16 Israelis perished, all of them soldiers, and 70 Palestinians, including both soldiers and civilians, many of them children. There were dozens of wounded on the Israeli side and more than a thousand among the Palestinians, many suffering from head wounds, shot from the Israeli helicopter gunships used in the later stages of the fighting. Of the Israeli casualties, nearly half were sustained at the Joseph's Tomb affair; seven fresh graves were dug to hold on to the ancient one.

DURING THE FIGHTING, THE ARMY IMPOSED A TOTAL CLOSURE on the Palestinian Territories, cutting them off from Israel. This was followed by a siege imposed on the Palestinian cities of the West Bank, cutting them off also from each other; tanks were brought in by the dozens, their cannons directed at the cities. Physically, the situation returned to what it had been in March, following the Hamas bombings. But then the Palestinians had been cowed and on the defensive; now, they were confident and assertive. International public opinion and the diplomatic world were overwhelmingly on the Palestinian side; inside Israel an enormous wave of criticism and opposition resulted in daily demonstrations, protesters numbering in the thousands and tens of thousands. In addition to the political opposition, Netanyahu was increasingly alienated from the military high command and the security chiefs who accused him of having precipitated the crisis. Israeli commentators declared Arafat and the Palestinians in general, as having emerged victorious from the crisis. The same conclusion was reached in the official report of military intelligence, leaked to the daily *Ha'aretz*.

For his part, Netanyahu dug in his heels. Using the podium of a Christian fundamentalist conference held in Jerusalem³. — about the only international forum where he could still expect to be received warmly — to declare: "The tunnel is open, and will remain open forever! We do not yield to violence!"

Intransigence Games

INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION EFFORTS CENTERED UPON ATTEMPTS TO BRING Netanyahu and Arafat together, to stabilize the still shaky situation and restart the Oslo process. Netanyahu firmly vetoed the idea of holding the meeting in Cairo under the auspices of President Mubarak. Instead, President Clinton — who conspicuously failed to veto a U.N. resolution condemning the tunnel-opening — hastily convened a Middle East Summit at the White House, including Netanyahu and Arafat, as well as King Hussein of Jordan. President Mubarak,

also invited to attend, refused, correctly surmising that Netanyahu would make no concession.

In Washington, Netanyahu refused to budge on the tunnel, nor did he agree to set up a target date for the evacuation of Hebron. He tried to make up for having made no concrete concessions by going out of his way to be warm to Arafat - repeatedly and demonstrably shaking his hand, exchanging reminiscences from the battle of Karame in 1968 where Arafat and the young Netanyahu had come close to shooting each other, and even proclaiming Arafat to be "my friend and ally" and "quite charming, indeed." Israeli journalists joked about "Netanyahu in love," but to judge from Arafat's expression during the final ceremony, this pretense of intimacy was lost on him.

Netanyahu won no more than a respite, and not a very long one, at the heavy price of offending and alienating both the President of the United States and the King of Jordan. At no previous conference in living memory did the U.S. tend to favor the Palestinians over the Israelis. Hitherto, it would have been inconceivable, especially so close to the U.S. elections, always the most auspicious time for Israeli prime ministers.

For a new round of negotiations held at Erez checkpoint, the very same place that had been a battlefield ten days earlier, Netanyahu sent his negotiating team to meet with Arafat's. The Israeli negotiators presented a list of 11 demands with regard to Hebron, each and every one in contradiction of the clear text of the Oslo Agreement.⁴ The American mediators had great difficulty preventing the Palestinians from immediately walking out.

Meanwhile the European Community declared its support for the Palestinian demands. Foreign investors canceled or suspended plans to invest in Israel, putting Netanyahu's ambitious privatization program in doubt, and the Emirate of Qatar suspended the very recent "normalization of relations" with Israel, much to the dismay of the Israeli business community, which had expected to gain a foothold in the fabulous markets of the Gulf at last.

Then King Hussein of Jordan, the Arab leader most popular among Israelis (the only one they really trust), spoke out with unusual frankness: "The present Israeli Prime Minister has nothing of the vision of peace late Yitzhak Rabin had. (...) We now stand but one step from the edge of the abyss. Soon Netanyahu may once more need the gas mask he used during the Gulf War."

Though the closure was gradually eased, Israeli and Palestinian troops continued to lay sandbags and improve fortifications along the winding and confused "confrontation lines" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli tanks were withdrawn a short distance, out of sight of the Palestinians, but military sources emphasized that they could be brought up again should the need arise. Rumors that the Palestinians had obtained anti-tank missiles were denied.

On the Golan border, both Israel and Syria prepared for yet another series of military exercises, which both states again took care to call "routine." At the same time, the Syrians started to establish a series of strategic roads, designed to facilitate the speedy transportation of troops between Syria and Lebanon.

Without an official announcement, the government seems to have halted further settlement expansion, at least for the time being. President Weitzman hosted Arafat at his residence in Caesarea and received invitations from King Hussein and President Mubarak, setting up what amounts to a parallel foreign policy. The idea of bringing the Labor Party into the government is repeatedly

vetoed by the venerable Rabbi Ovadyah Yosef whose Shas Party controls ten Knesset seats. But suddenly he seems to be playing an open role in contact with the Palestinians.

Hebron and After

THOUGH IT HAS BECOME A MAJOR ISSUE, THE HEBRON REDEPLOYMENT is hardly a decisive one. (It is not even decisive for the future of the city of Hebron itself, since the settlers will still be there after the redeployment.) Nevertheless, the Middle East being what it is, the possibility cannot be discounted that Netanyahu may insist on terms unacceptable to the Palestinians and keep at it until the Middle East does plunge into the abyss predicted by King Hussein.

But more likely, after more haggling and struggling, Netanyahu will at last disengage from Hebron. He could then certainly bask for months in the glory of that achievement and tout himself as a bona fide peacemaker in an effort to win time and avoid compliance with the further unfulfilled obligations of Oslo: the prisoner release, the creation of a "safe passage" for Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the further redeployment. As part of the "further redeployment" Israel is supposed to evacuate the West Bank Palestinian villages still under its control by September 1997. Doing so would allow the present scattered Palestinian enclaves to coalesce into a single continuous territory embracing most of the West Bank, excepting only the settlements and Israeli military camps.

Netanyahu clearly does not intend to carry out any of this. His idea seems to be to skip all these intermediate negotiations and immediately start negotiations on the final-status solution. Since under the Oslo timetable these negotiations are supposed to be concluded in May 1999, Netanyahu would then be able to twiddle his thumbs for most of his four-year term. The Palestinians, however, are not likely to cooperate in that game. In fact, they have already declared their intention to insist upon strict adherence to all stages of the Oslo process, repeatedly flinging Netanyahu's code word, "reciprocity," back in his face. Under the present circumstances, the coming year is likely to be occupied by that controversy, occasionally punctuated by the Syrians chiming in with their insistence upon the Golan. A crisis of some kind, on the Palestinian, Syrian and/or Lebanese fronts, is likely sometime in the coming year. With the intensification of external crisis, the idea of a "National Unity Government" is gaining momentum. For Netanyahu, the presence of Shimon Peres in his cabinet would lend it much greater respectability, fend off internal and external pressures, and possibly make it easier for the Prime Minister to wage a very unpopular war. Netanyahu relies on the fact that his vision of the future — a non-independent Palestinian entity, greatly circumscribed both in its authority and in its territorial extent — is essentially shared by some prominent Laborites like Ehud Barak, Peres' self-proclaimed heir apparent.

Curiously, despite this ideological affinity, Barak prefers to keep Labor in opposition for the next four years, and as its leader, contest the elections of 2000 against Netanyahu. It is Shimon Peres, loser of the last elections, who seeks to gain entry into the Netanyahu cabinet. Peres seems to believe that only such a move could save the peace process and free Netanyahu of the veto power presently exercised by Likud hard-liners and the National Religious Party.

Options Blocked and Opened

THE THREE DAYS OF "THE TUNNEL WAR" AND ITS AFTERMATH OFFER some useful insight into the attitudes of the Israeli population. The killing of 16 Israeli soldiers by Arafat's armed forces hardly endeared the Palestinians to the general Israeli public, or made for a greater feeling of trust. The extreme right's battle cry "Who gave them guns?" struck an emotional chord among Israelis. Nevertheless, during no armed conflict in the past — not even in the highly controversial Lebanon War — did so many Israelis assign all or most of the blame to their own government; never before did so many show an understanding of the grievances which led the other side to shoot; never before did Israelis show so little inclination to fight a war. Low morale and lack of motivation, unashamed shirking and conscious political refusal have all reached peak levels. The result is to greatly restrict Netanyahu's military options in practice.

While in principle it should be possible for Israel to reconquer the towns given over to the Palestinian Authority, it would be a major operation, against a fully mobilized, armed and determined Palestinian population. It could cost many hundreds of Israeli lives, many more than were needed to conquer the same towns in 1967. Politically, the cost would be prohibitive to any sane government.

Following "The Tunnel War," it becomes clear that the cost of trying to freeze the present situation, which is what Netanyahu would have liked to do, is also prohibitive. Locking the Palestinians into isolated enclaves, interspersed with numerous untenable enclaves and long, completely irrational boundaries is not a long-term option.

Israel holds an overwhelming military and economic superiority over the Palestinians but the Palestinians have the advantage of motivation. The West Bank and Gaza Strip, a pitiful 18% of which is all that is left of historical Palestine, are vitally important to the Palestinians: vital enough to die for; vital enough to endure a life of untold misery, day after day and year after year (which is in many ways more difficult than a single act of self-sacrifice).

For the Israelis, who already have quite a prosperous state, these territories — despite their Biblical connotations and their connection with early Jewish history — are not vital. They are a luxury, and a dubious one, for which only a dwindling minority of fanatics are willing to pay a real price.

Eventually, the Palestinians will have their state. It will come about either through an orderly negotiations process, or — a possibility which now seems more likely — through a unilateral declaration of independence, a declaration which most of the world will recognize, which the Israeli people will have no desire to crush by force, and which Netanyahu or any other Prime Minister will eventually have to recognize. The Palestinians will have their state, and the Israelis will have peace. Eventually. But until then, both peoples will still have to endure years of pain and struggle.

Postscript

WHEN THE ABOVE WAS WRITTEN, THE ISRAELI AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA confidently predicted that a deal on Hebron would be reached and implemented within days, based on leaks by Israeli officials who claimed that "only a few minor

details need to be worked out." The Israeli settlers in the heart of Hebron took this quite seriously, straining themselves for a last-ditch struggle against the Netanyahu government which they helped bring to power. For weeks on end, Hebron was the focus of feverish political and media activity on which hundreds of journalists and TV crews from all over the world converged, as did diplomats, foreign visitors and thousands of politically-active Israelis, Right and Left, the former to help the settlers, the latter to express solidarity with the Hebron Palestinians. The press was full of predictions of widespread violence in Hebron on the expected day of redeployment. Some violent outbreaks did occur during the tense waiting period: a settler emptied a glass of scalding tea on the face of dovish Knesset Member Yael Dayan; a joint demonstration by Hebron Palestinians and Israelis from Hadash was forcibly broken up by the army; two Israeli soldiers suffered medium burns from a Molotov Cocktail thrown at their patrol jeep in the middle of the not-yet-evacuated city.

As the days of tense waiting lengthened into weeks and months, the Israeli officials' confident predictions of a soon-to-be-signed agreement sounded more and more hollow, and were gradually replaced by accusations that Arafat, for some mysterious reason, was "holding up the negotiations and refusing to let them be concluded." It took several weeks for the mystery to become clear to the general public: one of the "minor details" which Netanyahu had left to the end was a demand for "the right of hot pursuit." In the Prime Minister's opinion, this implied that even after the redeployment, the Israeli Army would have the right to reenter the evacuated part of Hebron, not only in order "to chase Palestinian terrorists who might escape into the Arab neighborhoods," but also "to carry out preemptive entry and detention of intended terrorists." Arafat had no intention of accepting such terms which would have made a mockery of the redeployment and effectively left Hebron as much under occupation as ever.

Tensions also grew in other parts of the Palestinian territories, especially around the Israeli settlements. Near the settlement of Kiryat Sefer, soldiers shot at a protest demonstration of Palestinian villagers, killing one of them who fell down, still clutching the documents proving his ownership of the latest piece of land grabbed by the settlers. In the Gaza Strip, a major clash was narrowly averted, as Palestinians blocked the entry to the road leading to the Israeli settlement of Netzarim, south of Gaza City, a major road which, for the past two years, has been blocked to the area's 300,000 Palestinian inhabitants by the army and reserved for the sole use of less than a 100 settlers. Tensions abounded also in Israel's relations with the rest of the Arab world: military incidents in Lebanon, repeated exchanges of threats with Syria, the much-publicized detention of an Israeli in Cairo on charges of espionage, on the very opening day of the much-debated Middle East Economic Conference.

At the end of November, Netanyahu reportedly gave up the demand for "hot pursuit"; new speculations of an agreement "within days" were greeted with understandable skepticism, especially since once again "some details" still needed to be worked out.

With all due caution, it still seems likely that the Hebron redeployment will take place at some date in the near future — but it is unlikely to bring in its wake any appreciable lightening of tensions. For the Palestinians, the Hebron redeployment should be followed by implementation of the other unfulfilled elements of Oslo; for Netanyahu, it is likely to be followed by a settlement ex-

pansion drive, to compensate the settlers for the loss of Hebron — two clearly and explosively incompatible scenarios. Meanwhile, Netanyahu seems bent upon opening a second confrontation inside Israeli society, proclaiming himself the apostle of “the Israeli Thatcherite Revolution, which will make Israel one of the richest countries in the world.” (*Ha'aretz*, 11/22/96). Many prominent members of Netanyahu's own party fail to be captivated by this promise, accusing the Prime Minister of betraying his voters — most of whom belong to the poorer half of Israeli society — and threatening to bring down the government should Netanyahu persist in his intention to deeply slash the welfare, education and health budgets. For its part, the army high command stridently demands an enormous increase in the military budget, now that Netanyahu's policies have made the possibility of war much more imminent, while his neo-liberal economic advisers predict economic doom unless the budget is immediately and deeply cut... The challenge for the Israeli left: to fight Netanyahu on two fronts.

December 1, 1996

NOTES

1. Some 100,000 workers, from such diverse countries as Rumania, Thailand, Nigeria, the Philippines and many others work legally in Israel, under conditions of extreme exploitation. In addition, a number variously estimated at between 100,000 and 300,000 are working illegally in Israel, forming the majority of the population in some Tel-Aviv neighborhoods. Since the formation of the Netanyahu government, an informal coalition made up of some purporting to be concerned about the Palestinians, while others openly voice racist views, has been agitating for “firm steps” against the migrant workers. A plan to “streamline” deportation procedures and set up a detention center near Ben Gurion Airport was blocked by employers and human rights organizations. English-language information can be obtained from: Workers' Hotline, POB 2319, Tel-Aviv 61022.

2. Tensions were also exacerbated among Israel's Arab citizens, who were engaged in a general solidarity strike. The main street of Nazareth, the largest Arab city in Israel, erupted into hours of rioting and stone-throwing, and when the news from Jerusalem came to Umm-el-Fahm, youths burst out shouting “Death to the Jews!”

3. The organization in question, the so-called “International Christian Embassy,” with a center in Jerusalem and numerous branches in various countries, gives total, enthusiastic support to the Israeli extreme right. According to the organization's messianic ideology, the destruction of the Muslim Mosques and the erection of a Jewish Temple in their places would bring about Armageddon, to be followed by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

4. Among other things they insisted that in Hebron the Palestinian police be armed with pistols only, since “they have shown they could not be trusted with guns.” A similar demand was made about the Palestinian policemen stationed at the border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The debate had been going on for days, preventing the entry of food into Gaza, until the General of the Southern Command agreed on October 1 to overcome the problems of mutual distrust on the basis of reciprocity: both the Israeli Border Guards and the Palestinian Police were only carrying pistols. However, this decision was heavily criticized by the Israeli government.

A Plea for Reason, Evidence and Logic

Alan Sokal

[Editors' Note: As most of our readers probably know by now, Alan Sokal, a physicist at New York University, submitted a parody of postmodernist studies of natural science to *Social Text*, which published it as serious contribution in its "Science Wars" issue, Spring/Summer 1996. He then revealed the hoax in the pages of *Lingua Franca*, producing a wide-ranging debate on the politics of postmodernism and the nature of truth, reason and objectivity. What follows is a transcript of a talk given by Sokal at a forum on that subject held at New York University on October 30, 1996.]

THIS AFFAIR HAS BROUGHT UP AN INCREDIBLE NUMBER OF ISSUES, and I can't dream of addressing them all in 10 minutes, so let me start by circumscribing my remarks. I don't want to belabor *Social Text*'s failings either before or after the publication of my parody: *Social Text* is not my enemy, nor is it my main intellectual target. I won't go here into the ethical issues related to the propriety of hoaxing (although I'm glad to defend my ethics). I won't address the obscurantist prose and the uncritical celebrity-worship that have infected certain trendy sectors of the American academic humanities (though these are important questions that I hope other panelists will address). I won't enter into technical issues of the philosophy of science. I won't discuss the social role of science and technology (though these are important issues). Indeed, I want to emphasize that this affair, in my view, is *not* primarily about science — though that was the excuse that I used in constructing my parody — nor is it a disciplinary conflict between scientists and humanists, who are in fact represented on all sides of the debate. What I believe this debate is principally about — and what I want to focus on here — is the nature of truth, reason and objectivity: issues that I believe are crucial to the future of left politics.

I didn't write the parody for the reasons you might think at first. My aim was not to defend science from the barbarian hordes of lit crit or sociology. I know perfectly well that the main threats to science nowadays come from budget-cutting politicians and corporate executives, not from a handful of postmodernist academics. Rather, my goal is to defend what one might call a scientific *worldview* — defined broadly as a respect for evidence and logic, and for the incessant confrontation of theories with the real world; in short, for reasoned argument over wishful thinking, superstition and demagoguery. And my

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motives for trying to defend these old-fashioned ideas are basically *political*. I am worried about trends in the American Left — particularly in academia — that, at a minimum, *divert* us from the task of formulating a progressive social critique, by leading smart and committed people into trendy but ultimately empty intellectual fashions. These fashions can, in fact, *undermine* the prospects for such a critique, by promoting subjectivist and relativist philosophies that are inconsistent with producing a realistic analysis of society that we and our fellow citizens will find compelling.

David Whiteis, in a recent article, said it well:

Too many academics, secure in their ivory towers and insulated from the real-world consequences of the ideas they espouse, seem blind to the fact that non-rationality has historically been among the most powerful weapons in the ideological arsenals of oppressors. The hypersubjectivity that characterizes postmodernism is a perfect case in point: far from being a legacy of leftist iconoclasm, as some of its advocates so disingenuously claim, it in fact ... plays perfectly into the anti-rationalist — really, anti-*thinking* — bias that currently infects “mainstream” U.S. culture.

Along similar lines, the philosopher of science, Larry Laudan, observed caustically that the displacement of the idea that facts and evidence matter by the idea that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is — second only to American political campaigns — the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our time. (And these days, being nearly as anti-intellectual as political campaigns is really quite a feat.)

NOW OF COURSE, NO ONE WILL ADMIT TO BEING AGAINST REASON, evidence and logic — that’s like being against Motherhood and Apple Pie. Rather, our postmodernist and poststructuralist friends will claim to be in favor of some new and *deeper* kind of reason—such as the celebration of “local knowledges” and “alternative ways of knowing” as an antidote to the so-called “Eurocentric scientific methodology” (you know, things like systematic experiment, controls, replication, and so forth). You find this magic phrase “local knowledges” in, for example, the articles of Andrew Ross and Sandra Harding in the “Science Wars” issue of *Social Text*. But are “local knowledges” all that great? And when local knowledges conflict, *which* local knowledges should we believe? In many parts of the Midwest, the “local knowledges” say that you should spray more herbicides to get bigger crops. It is old-fashioned objective science that can tell us which herbicides are poisonous to farm workers and to people downstream. Here in New York City, lots of “local knowledges” hold that there’s a wave of teenage motherhood that’s destroying our moral fiber. It’s those boring *data* that show that the birth rate to teenage mothers has been essentially constant since 1975 and is about half of what it was in the good old 1950s. Another word for “local knowledges” is *prejudice*.

I am sorry to say it, but under the influence of postmodernism some very intelligent people can fall into some incredibly sloppy thinking, and I want to give two examples. The first comes from a front-page article in the *New York Times* (10/22/96) about the conflict between archaeologists and some Native American creationists. I don’t want to address here the ethical and legal aspects of this controversy — who should control the use of 10,000-year-old human remains — but only the epistemic issue. There are at least two competing views on where Native American populations come from. The scientific consen-

sus, based on extensive archaeological evidence, is that humans first entered the Americas from Asia about 10,000-20,000 years ago, crossing the Bering Strait. Many Native American creation accounts hold, on the other hand, that native peoples have always lived in the Americas, ever since their ancestors emerged onto the surface of the earth from a subterranean world of spirits. And the *Times* article observed that many archaeologists, "pulled between their scientific temperaments and their appreciation for native culture, ... have been driven close to a postmodern relativism in which science is just one more belief system." For example, Roger Anyon, a British archaeologist who has worked for the Zuni people, was quoted as saying that "Science is just one of many ways of knowing the world. ... [The Zunis' world view is] just as valid as the archeological viewpoint of what prehistory is about."

Now, perhaps Dr. Anyon was misquoted, but we all *have* repeatedly heard assertions of this kind, and I'd like to ask what such assertions could possibly mean. We have here two *mutually incompatible* theories. They can't both be right; they can't both even be approximately right. They could, of course, both be *wrong*, but I don't imagine that that is what Dr. Anyon means by "just as valid." It seems to me that Anyon has quite simply allowed his political and cultural sympathies to cloud his reasoning. And there is no justification for that: we can perfectly well remember the victims of a horrible genocide, and support their descendants' valid political goals, without endorsing uncritically (or hypocritically) their societies' traditional creation myths. Moreover, the relativists' stance is extremely condescending: it treats a complex society as a monolith, obscures the conflicts within it, and takes its most obscurantist factions as spokespeople for the whole.

My second example of sloppy thinking comes from *Social Text* co-editor Bruce Robbins' article in the Sept./Oct. 1996 issue of *Tikkun* magazine, in which he tries to defend — albeit half-heartedly — the postmodernist/poststructuralist subversion of conventional notions of truth. "Is it in the interests of women, African Americans, and other super-exploited people," Robbins asks, "to insist that truth and identity are social constructions? Yes and no," he asserts. "No, you can't talk about exploitation without respect for empirical evidence" — exactly my point. "But yes," Robbins continues, "truth can be another source of oppression." Huh??? How can *truth* oppress anyone? Well, Robbins' very next sentence explains what he means: "It was not so long ago," he says, "that scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African Americans ... were inherently inferior." But is Robbins claiming that *that* is truth? I should hope not! Sure, lots of people say things about women and African Americans that are not true; and yes, those falsehoods have sometimes been asserted in the name of "science," "reason" and all the rest. But claiming something doesn't make it true, and the fact that people — including scientists — sometimes make false claims doesn't mean that we should reject or revise the concept of truth. Quite the contrary: it means that we should examine with the utmost care the *evidence* underlying people's truth claims, and we should reject assertions that in our best rational judgment are false.

This error is, unfortunately, repeated throughout Robbins' essay: he systematically confuses truth with *claims* of truth, fact with *assertions* of fact, and knowledge with *pretensions* to knowledge. These elisions underlie much of the sloppy thinking about "social construction" prevalent nowadays in the acad-

emy, and it is something that progressives ought to resist. Sure, let's show which economic, political and ideological interests are served by our opponents' accounts of "reality"; but first let's demonstrate, by marshalling evidence and logic, why those accounts are objectively *false* (or in some cases true but incomplete).

A bit later in his article, Robbins admits candidly that "those of us who do cultural politics sometimes act as if ... truth were always and everywhere a weapon of the right." Now, that's an astoundingly self-defeating attitude for an avowed leftist. If truth were on the side of the right, shouldn't we all — at least the honest ones among us — become right-wingers? For my own part, I am a leftist and a feminist *because* of evidence and logic (combined with elementary ethics), not in spite of it.

This plea of mine for reason, evidence and logic is hardly original; dozens of progressive humanists, social scientists and natural scientists have been saying the same thing for years. But if my parody in *Social Text* has helped just a little bit to amplify their voices and to provoke a much-needed debate on the American Left, then it will have served its purpose.

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Postmodernism and the Left

Barbara Epstein

ALAN SOKAL'S HOAX, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," which was published in the "Science Wars" issue of *Social Text*,¹ and the debate that has followed it, raise important issues for the left. Sokal's article is a parody of postmodernism, or, more precisely, the amalgam of postmodernism, poststructuralist theory, deconstruction, and political moralism which has come to hold sway in large areas of academia, especially those associated with Cultural Studies. These intellectual strands are not always entirely consistent with each other. For instance, the strong influence of identity politics in this arena seems inconsistent with the poststructuralist insistence on the instability of all identities. Nevertheless, no one who has participated in this arena can deny that it is dominated by a specific, highly distinctive subculture. One knows when one finds oneself in a conference, seminar, or discussion governed by this subculture, by the vocabulary that is used, the ideas that are expressed or taken for granted, and by the fears that circulate, the things that remain unsaid. There are many critiques of the literature that informs this arena, which can for convenience be called postmodernism (though the term poststructuralist points more specifically to the dominant theoretical perspective).² But there is little if any discussion of postmodernism as a subculture.

The subculture of postmodernism is difficult to locate precisely. It is more pervasive in the humanities than elsewhere, but it has also entered the social sciences. It cannot be entirely identified with any particular discipline, but in some sense constitutes a world of its own, operating outside of or above disciplinary categories. Within the world of postmodernism intellectual trends take hold and fade into oblivion with extraordinary rapidity. Many of the people who play major roles in shaping it refuse such labels as "postmodernist" (or even "poststructuralist"), on the ground that such categories are confining.³ The difficulty of defining postmodernism discourages discussion of it as a particular intellectual arena. Nevertheless it does constitute a subculture. It has increasing reach and power within the university; it has become increasingly insistent that it is the intellectual left.

Many people, inside and outside the world of postmodernism (and for that matter inside and outside the left), have come to equate postmodernism with the left. There are many academic departments and programs that associate themselves with progressive politics in which the subculture of postmodernism holds sway. This is especially the case in interdisciplinary programs, especially those in the humanities; postmodernism is most likely to be the dominant perspective if the institution is relatively prestigious and if the faculty has been

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hired since the 60s. These programs tend to draw bright students who regard themselves as left, progressive, feminist, concerned with racism and homophobia. The result is that many students with this sort of orientation have come to associate progressive concerns with a postmodernist perspective. Many professors and other intellectuals, of all political shades, also accept this equation. Left intellectuals who object to postmodernism tend to complain in private but remain largely silent in public, largely because they have not learned to speak the postmodernist vocabulary. The equation of postmodernism with the left poses problems both for the intellectual work conducted under the aegis of postmodernism and for efforts to rebuild the left in the U.S. Alan Sokal's hoax, and the debate that has followed it, provide an opportunity to address these issues.

A physicist at NYU, Sokal was inspired to write a parody of postmodernism two years ago, having read Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's book, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*,⁴ which describes attacks on science, and on concepts of truth and rationality, in areas of the humanities. Sokal is a leftist, and was particularly upset that these attacks were being made in the name of left and feminist politics. He was also taken aback by the apparently intentional obscurity of the language in which these attacks were being made. At first Sokal found it difficult to believe that the statements quoted by Gross and Levitt could be representative of any significant trend. However in checking the quotes he found that these were not isolated instances but part of a growing and apparently influential literature. Believing that mockery would be the best way of combatting this trend, Sokal wrote an article that begins with the following statement:

There are many natural scientists, and especially physicists, who continue to reject the notion that the disciplines concerned with social and cultural criticism can have anything to contribute, except perhaps peripherally, to their research. Still less are they receptive to the idea that the very foundations of their worldview must be revised or rebuilt in the light of such criticism. Rather, they cling to the dogma imposed by the long post-Enlightenment hegemony over the Western intellectual outlook, which can be summarized briefly as follows: that there exists an independent world, whose properties are independent of any individual human being and indeed of humanity as a whole; that these properties are encoded in eternal physical laws; and that human beings can obtain reliable, albeit imperfect and tentative, knowledge of these laws by hewing to the objective procedures and epistemological strictures prescribed by the (so-called) scientific method.⁵

The article presents what is described as a review of developments in quantum gravity, and claims that this research justifies the conclusion that physical reality, no less than social reality, is at bottom a social and linguistic construct; that scientific knowledge, far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it. In the article Sokal extensively cites real research but (according to his subsequent critique of his own article) exaggerates and distorts its implications. His article consists of assertions that are backed up, not by evidence or careful argument, but by appeals to authorities — the postmodern masters, Derrida, Irigaray, Lacan, Aronowitz, and others, whose vacuous remarks on quantum gravity and other areas of science Sokal quotes as if they were authoritative. Sokal makes vague statements implying some connection between scientific discoveries and

the need for vast changes in thinking in other areas. For instance, Sokal claims that general relativity calls for new ways of thinking about time, space and causality not only in the physical realm but in philosophy, literary criticism, and the human sciences. He supports this point by a quote from Jean Hyppolite:

With Einstein...we see the end of a kind of privilege of empiric evidence. And in that connection we see a constant appear, a constant which is a combination of time-space, which does not belong to any of the experiments who live the experience, but which, in a way, dominates the whole construct; and this notion of the constant — is this the center? (p. 221)

Sokal responds to Hyppolite's question with a quote from Derrida, which he describes as going to the heart of classical general relativity:

The Einsteinian constant is not a constant, is not a center. It is the very concept of variability — it is, finally, the concept of the game. In other words, it is not the concept of something — of a center starting from which an observer could master the field — but the very concept of the game. (p. 221)

Further on, Sokal quotes Lacan on the importance of differential topology:

This diagram [the mobius strip] can be considered the basis of a sort of essential inscription at the origin, in the knot which constitutes the subject. This goes much further than you may think at first, because you can search for the sort of surface able to receive such inscriptions. You can perhaps see that the sphere, that old symbol for totality, is unsuitable. A torus, a Klein bottle, a cross-cut surface, are able to receive such a cut. And this diversity is very important as it explains many things about the structure of mental disease. If one can symbolize the subject by this fundamental cut, in the same way one can show that a cut on a torus corresponds to the neurotic subject, and on a cross-cut surface to another sort of mental disease.

Sokal adds: "As Althusser rightly commented, Lacan finally gives Freud's thinking the scientific concepts that it requires." (p.224)

After what he presents as a review of research in the field of quantum gravity (and in related areas of science and mathematics) Sokal goes on to claim that in order to have a truly liberatory science, it is not sufficient to dispose of the outdated view that there is such a thing as objective reality. One must also subordinate science to progressive politics. In elaborating this point Sokal first quotes Andrew Ross that we need a science that will be publically answerable and of some service to progressive interests. This is a reasonable remark, tangentially related to Sokal's point, but not a call for subordinating science to politics. Sokal then presents a quote from Kelly Oliver.

In order to be revolutionary, feminist theory cannot claim to describe what exists, or, natural facts. Rather, feminist theories should be political tools, strategies for overcoming oppression in specific concrete situations. The goal, then, of feminist theory, should be to develop strategic theories — not true theories, not false theories, but strategic theories. (p.227)

In approvingly quoting this remark, and linking it to Ross' comment about the importance of science serving progressive goals, Sokal makes the leap from a call for a socially responsible science to a call for an approach that sets aside questions of truth or falsehood and is driven by already given political goals.

Sokal submitted his article to *Social Text*, which accepted it for their "Science Wars" issue. After his article had been accepted but had not yet appeared,

Sokal began working on a piece disclosing his own hoax and explaining why he had felt that it was necessary to mock postmodernism in order to save the left from its own silliness. Sokal wanted to find humanists critical of postmodernism, like him, from a left/feminist perspective, to comment on his piece. Through a string of associations he was led to me. I began working with him on the piece in which he disclosed his own hoax. At that point Sokal wanted to allow some time to elapse between the publication of his hoax and his disclosure. He wanted to see how long it would take for someone to discover his hoax. If, after a few months, no one had caught it, he intended to send his self-disclosure to *Social Text* with a request that they publish it.

The course of events went differently. While the article was in press, an enterprising free-lance journalist, David Glenn, overheard a remark (made, presumably, by one of the by this time fairly large circle of people who knew of Sokal's hoax) which led him to believe that a scandal was brewing within *Social Text*. Some skillful investigation led Glenn to the page proofs of *Social Text*'s forthcoming issue. It seemed to Glenn, on reading Sokal's article, that even for the world of Cultural Studies this was a bit extreme. Glenn contacted Sokal and asked him if the article was a hoax. Sokal acknowledged that it was and congratulated Glenn on his detective work. The two took the story to *Lingua Franca*, whose editors offered to publish a statement by Sokal in their forthcoming issue, disclosing his own hoax and explaining why he had done it.

The result was that the "Science Wars" issue of *Social Text*, with Sokal's article, appeared in mid-April of 1996, and *Lingua Franca*, with Sokal's statement about his article, about a week later. The story was picked up by the media. On May 17 there was a story about Sokal's hoax on the front page of the *New York Times*. After that the story spread; articles about it appeared not only in newspapers throughout the U.S. but in Europe and Latin America. Probably no one concerned with postmodernism has remained unaware of it. People have been bitterly divided. Some are delighted, some are enraged. One friend of mine told me that Sokal's article came up in a meeting of a left reading group that he belongs to. The discussion became polarized between impassioned supporters and equally impassioned opponents of Sokal; it nearly turned into a shouting match. The astonishing thing about this, my friend said, was that actually no one had read the article, because that issue of *Social Text* had sold out so quickly. Members of this group knew about the article only from having read accounts of it in the press, or from discussions with others who had read it. Clearly Sokal's article has brought to the surface intensely felt divisions, raising the question: what are these differences about?

Some of us who were delighted by Sokal's hoax, at one time had a more positive view of postmodernism. The constellation of trends that I am calling postmodernism has its origins in the writings of a group of French intellectuals of the 60s, most preeminently Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-François Lyotard. Those who developed postmodernism tended to be associated with the radicalism of the 60s, and to see May '68 as a formative moment in their intellectual and political development. French postmodernism expressed many aspects of the ethos of May '68: its anti-authoritarianism, its rejection of Marxism and view of it as implicated in unacceptable structures of authority, its celebration of the imagination and resistance to all constraints.⁶

In addition to being shaped by the politics of May '68 (including the French

Communist Party's betrayal of the student movement and support for the authorities), French postmodernism developed out of the debates that were taking place in French intellectual circles at that time. It included a rejection of humanism, in particular of Sartre's view of the self as the center of political resistance and his quest for an integrated, authentic selfhood. Postmodernism rejected aspects of the structuralist legacy, particularly its emphasis on the stability of social structures but retained its focus on language, the view that language provides the categories that shape self, society. This could be extended to the view that all reality is shaped by language; it could suggest that language is real, everything else, constructed or derived from it. Such an approach could suggest a critique of social analysis or radical politics emphasizing the economic level, or overt structures of political power. It could suggest the need for a critique of culture and a call for cultural transformation.

POSTMODERNISM ENTERED THE U.S. IN THE LATE 70S AND EARLY 80S, by a number of routes simultaneously. There were academics, especially philosophers and literary critics, who were drawn to poststructuralist philosophy. Many feminists and gay and lesbian activists became interested in the work of Michel Foucault, whose attention to the social construction of sexuality, view of power as dispersed through society, and insistence on the connection between power and knowledge, intersected with their own concerns. Foucault's work seemed to provide a theoretical ground for shifting the focus of radical analysis away from macrostructures such as the economy and the state, and toward daily life, ideology, social relations and culture. Foucault's view of state power as always repressive and his identification of resistance with the marginalized and suppressed made sense at a time when radical struggles were being led by groups peripheral to mainstream culture and power relations, such as disaffected youth and women, blacks and other racial minorities, gays and lesbians.

The attractiveness of postmodernism, in the late 70s and early 80s, had something to do with the cultural and political currents with which it was associated. It was loosely affiliated with avant-garde trends in architecture and art, and also with the impulse of many intellectuals to set aside the old distinction between high and low culture and begin taking popular culture seriously. Poststructuralist theory emphasized flux, instability, fragmentation, and questioned the validity of claims to authenticity and truth. These concerns overlapped with emerging themes in popular culture: distraction, absence of rootedness in the past, a sense of meaninglessness. More important, these poststructuralist, or postmodernist, concerns spoke to levels of reality that seemed increasingly salient and that more conventional theories, including left theories, did not address. Postmodernism seemed to refer to a set of cultural changes that were taking place around us (and within us) as much as it referred to a literature or set of theories about those changes. The increasing use of the term poststructuralism to refer to a set of theories in part grew out of the need to distinguish between theory and the cultural realities to which it responded.

In the latter part of the 70s, many young people whose center of attention was shifting from the movements of the 60s to intellectual work, often in the academy, were avidly reading Foucault. Many were also reading other French intellectuals, including French feminist such as Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, the eclectic theorists of society and psychology, Gilles DeLeuze and Felix

Guattari, the Marxist structuralist, Louis Althusser, the psychoanalytic structuralist, Jacques Lacan. Through the works of these writers and the debates in which their work was embedded, the poststructuralist ideas that had come to dominate French radical intellectual circles in the late 60s and 70s filtered into parallel intellectual circles in the U.S. By the early 80s an intellectual subculture was emerging in the U.S. which tended to use the term "postmodernism" to describe its outlook. Though it was located primarily in the university, it had links to avant-garde developments in art and architecture and a strong interest in experimental trends in popular culture. Postmodernists tended to feel strong sympathies for feminism and for gay and lesbian movements, and were especially drawn to a politics that was tinged with anarchism and oriented toward spectacle — a politics that happened to be quite salient in a cluster of movements that emerged in the U.S. around the late 70s and early 80s.

The excitement of postmodernism, certainly in the early 80s and to some degree through the decade, had to do with its links to vital cultural and political movements, and the fact that it was pointing to rapid changes in culture and examining these through the poststructuralist categories of language, text, discourse. Through the 80s, original and provocative books and articles appeared, loosely associated with a postmodernist perspective or at least addressing questions raised by postmodernism. Though everyone would have a different list, most would no doubt include James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Jean Beaudrillard's *For a Critique of The Political Economy of the Sign*, Jacques Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*.⁷

Others examined postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon and criticized from a broadly Marxist perspective. Works in this vein would include David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (and his influential article, "Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism.")⁸ In the 80s and 90s a great deal of European postmodernist (or poststructuralist) literature was being published in English, and was widely read in the U.S. In fact, postmodernist books by European authors may have been read more widely in the U.S. than in their authors' home countries, since by this time interest in postmodernism had faded considerably in France and elsewhere in Europe.

DESPITE THE ATTRACTIONS OF POSTMODERNISM, SOME OF US WERE UNEASY about it from the start. Postmodernism not only pointed to processes of flux, fragmentation, the disenchantment or draining of meaning from social life, but tended to be fascinated with them. It often seemed that postmodernists could see nothing but instability, and that a new set of values was being established without ever being acknowledged, according to which the shifting and unstable was always preferable to the unified or integrated. Despite the brilliance of much of the literature there seemed at times to be a kind of flatness of vision, a tendency to insist on one set of qualities while refusing to recognize their necessary counterparts, as if one could have up without down, hot without cold. There seemed to be a celebration of the fragmentation of self and society that ignored the need for balance, for new level of coherence. Not that all writers who addressed the

questions posed by postmodernism fell into this trap. But on the whole those who escaped it were those who addressed questions raised by postmodernism rather than adopting it as their own perspective.

By the late 80s and early 90s, postmodernism seemed to have been taken over by the pursuit of the new or avant-garde. Radicalism became identified with criticism for the sake of criticism, and equated with intellectual or cultural sophistication. The aestheticization of postmodernism corresponded to the attenuation of its ties with any actual social movements, as the movements with which postmodernism had felt the greatest rapport shrivelled. Postmodernism had always been pulled between the agendas of the academy and the social movements; the agenda of the academy now took over. Politics became increasingly a matter of gestures or proclamations. By the 90s, the quest for success in an increasingly harsh and competitive academic world became the driving force. Claims to radicalism, oddly, seemed to serve this purpose.

ONE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERNISM IS TO SAY THAT THERE ARE strong and weak, or more ambitious and more restrained versions of it. According to the strong version, there is no such thing as truth. Because all perception of reality is mediated, because what we regard as reality is perceived through discourse, there is no truth, there are only truth claims. Since there is nothing against which these claims can be measured, they all have the same standing. Another way of putting this would be that there is nothing prior to interpretation or theory, nothing that stands outside of interpretation and can be taken as a basis for judging its validity. In the postmodernist or poststructuralist lexicon, the terms "essentialism" and "foundationalism" are used to denote a host of presumably bad attitudes, including the view that interpretation or theory can and should be judged in relation to some reality external to itself, the view that some social groups have characteristics or interests that are given rather than continually constructed and reconstructed — and reductionism, stereotyping, as in the view that all women are nurturant, or that African Americans have innate musical abilities. The fact that the term essentialism refers simultaneously to an epistemological approach and also to racist, sexist or at least naive politics tends to link these two and makes it difficult to have a calm discussion of whether there is such a thing as truth, and whether theory should be judged by reality external to itself. In many discussions the use of the term "essentialist" is enough to identify the philosophical stance as politically retrograde and therefore unacceptable.

Those of us who disagree with the strong postmodernist position do not object to the premise that our perception of reality is mediated. What we object to is the leap of logic between this premise and the conclusion that there is no truth, that all claims have equal status. We would argue that although we do not possess ultimate truth and never will, it is nevertheless possible to expand our understanding, and it is worth the effort to gain more knowledge — even if that knowledge is always subject to revision. This version of the strong postmodernist position is — in my experience — rarely explicitly argued in the literature; it is in discussion (in conferences, seminars, and private conversations) that one encounters it. It is often posed against a straw-person argument that would claim that the truth is readily accessible, completely transparent, unaffected by culture. This straw-person argument is used as a foil, to excuse

the implausibility and logical weakness of the strong postmodernist view. On the whole postmodernist literature, instead of arguing this position explicitly, assumes an attitude of radical skepticism toward truth, or toward claims that there is an objective reality that is to some extent knowable, without ever clearly defining the grounds for this skepticism.

The strong position, as it appears in postmodernist or poststructuralist writing, tends to take the form of an extreme social constructionism, a view that identities, relations, political positions are constructed entirely through interpretation, that there is no identifiable social reality against which interpretations can be judged, no ground in material or social reality that places any constraints on the formation of identities or perspectives. Joan Scott, for instance, in her influential article "Experience," argues that any account of experience takes for granted categories and assumptions that ought to be questioned, that to accept the category of experience, or to use the word without distancing oneself from it by surrounding it with quotation marks, is dangerous, and opens the way to essentialism and foundationalism. Scott admits that the concept of experience is too deeply embedded in culture to be done away with easily. In the end she suggests that we retain it but treat it with suspicion.⁹

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, apply the same approach to the formation of political positions. They argue that all political identities or perspectives are constructed, that there is no particular relation between class position, for instance, and political stance. In support of this, they argue that workers are not automatically socialist or even progressive: often they support right-wing politics. Laclau and Mouffe are of course correct that there is no automatic connection between class and politics, or between the working class and socialism, but this does not mean that there is no connection between the two, that all interpretations or constructions of class interest are equally possible and equally valid. For instance, it is hard to imagine a situation in which a socialist program, proposed by the capitalist class, was defeated by working-class opposition. Laclau and Mouffe make their argument by setting up a straw argument (that workers are automatically socialist — a view held by no one that I know of), knocking it down, and substituting a position that is equally extreme, namely that there is no connection at all between class position and political perspective. Without this straw economism as a foil, the problems of the extreme social constructionist argument become more apparent.¹⁰

An even more extreme example of strong postmodernism is Judith Butler's argument, in her book *Gender Trouble*,¹¹ that sexual difference is socially constructed. Butler accepts Foucault's now widely accepted view that gender is socially constructed; she goes beyond this and criticizes Foucault for his unwillingness to extend an anti-essentialist perspective to sexuality itself. She argues that not only gender but sex itself, that is, sexual difference, should be seen as an effect of power relations and cultural practices, as constructed "performatively" — that is, by acts whose meaning is determined by their cultural context. Butler argues that the conventional view of sex as consisting of two given, biologically determined categories, male and female, is ideological, and defines radical politics as consisting of parodic performances that might undermine what she calls "naturalized categories of identity." Her assertion that sexual difference is socially constructed strains belief. It is true that there

are some people whose biological sex is ambiguous, but this is not the case for the vast majority of people. Biological difference has vast implications, social and psychological; the fact that we do not yet fully understand these does not mean that they do not exist. Butler's understanding of radicalism shows how the meaning of the word has changed in the postmodernist arena. It no longer has to do with efforts to achieve a more egalitarian society. It refers to the creation of an arena in which the imagination can run free. It ignores the fact that only a privileged few can play at taking up and putting aside identities.

There is a weak, or restrained, version of postmodernism which is much more plausible than the strong version described above. This version argues that language and culture play a major and often unrecognized role in shaping society, that things are often regarded as natural which are actually socially constructed. This is a valid and important perspective. Those of us on the left who criticize postmodernism reject the strong version, not this more restrained approach. The difference between the two lies in the excessive ambition, and the consequent reductionism, of the strong approach, and the greater modesty or caution of the weak or restrained approach. Strong postmodernism is cultural reductionism: it represents the ambition to make culture the first or only level of explanation. It is no better to argue that everything can be understood in terms of culture or language than to argue that everything is driven by economic forces, or by the quest for political power. The project that frames postmodernism is the critique of Enlightenment rationality; there are aspects of that tradition that deserve to be criticized, such as the tendency to take the white male as the model of rational subjectivity, and the equation of truth with the discoveries of Western science, excluding other contributions. But the postmodernist critique of the Enlightenment is one-sided. It forgets that a universalist view of humanity was a major (and only partially accomplished) step away from narrow nationalisms, and that the concept of truth is a weapon in the hands of progressive social movements, that they rely on opposing the truth of oppression to hollow official claims that society is just.

THE PROBLEMS OF POSTMODERNISM THAT I HAVE NAMED, and more, have been displayed in the public response to the Sokal article. The first response was from Stanley Fish, Professor of English at Duke University and a leading figure in the field of Cultural Studies. In an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke,"¹² Fish tried to shift the terrain of the debate from postmodernism to the social sciences, suggesting that the field of Science Studies consists of scholars whose modest aim is to investigate the ideas that drive scientific research. The work of these scholars, he implied, hardly goes beyond the bounds of conventional sociology. In this article, Fish appeared not to have noticed the more extreme positions that have been taken in the name of postmodernism or Cultural Studies, inside or outside the field of Science Studies. It is hard not to see Fish's piece as a strategic move, a slide to the weak or restrained position when the strong position has begun to look foolish.

The next piece to appear was a statement in *Lingua Franca*, by Andrew Ross and Bruce Robbins, editors of *Social Text*.¹³ Robbins and Ross wrote that they had regarded Sokal's article as "a little hokey" and "not their cup of tea" but that they published it to encourage a natural scientist who appeared to be interested in Cultural Studies. Next, *Tikkun* published an article by Bruce

Robbins,¹⁴ who wrote that the editors of *Social Text* had published the article because of the merit they saw in its argument. Robbins asked what conclusions should be drawn and what should not be drawn from the fact that *Social Text* had published Sokal's piece. One conclusion not to draw, he wrote, is that postmodernists can't recognize an unintelligible argument when they see one.

When Sokal said his essay was nonsense, most reporters instantly followed his lead. After all, he should know, right? But we thought Sokal had a real argument, and we still do. Allow me to quote Paul Horgan, senior writer at *Scientific American*, summarizing in the July 16 *New York Times*: Sokal, Horgan says, "proposed that superstring theory might help liberate science from 'dependence upon the concept of objective truth.'" Prof. Sokal later announced that the article had been a hoax, intended to expose the hollowness of postmodernism. In fact, however, superstring theory is exactly the kind of science that subverts conventional notions of truth.(p.58)

Robbins went on to argue that the concept of truth is questionable on political grounds:

Does subverting conventional notions of truth really have anything to do with being politically progressive?...Is it in the interests of women, African-Americans, and other super-exploited people to insist that truth and identity are social constructions? Yes and no. No, you can't talk about exploitation without respect for empirical evidence and a universal standard of justice. But yes, truth can be another source of oppression. It was not so long ago that scientists gave their full authority to explanations of why women and African-Americans (not to speak of gays and lesbians) were inherently inferior or pathological or both. Explanations like these continue to appear in newer and subtler forms. Hence there is a need for a social constructionist critique of knowledge.(p.59)

Here we have an argument that has become hopelessly tangled, perhaps through the effort to see everything through a postmodernist lens while refusing to acknowledge that postmodernism is a lens, that it is anything other than pure Truth. Robbins is of course right that some people say things about African Americans, women, etc., that are not true. This does not mean that we should reject the concept of truth. It means that we should reject false assertions.

Robbins goes on to deride critics of postmodernism as "know-nothings of the left [who] delude themselves: 'Capitalism is screwing people! What goes up must come down! What else do we need to know?'" Robbins continues, "It seems likely that what is really expressed by the angry tirades against cultural politics that have accompanied the Sokal affair is a longing for the days when women were back in the kitchen and it was respectable to joke about faggots and other natural objects of humor. These are not the family values I want my children to learn." (p.59) Presumably Robbins is referring to people who have expressed support for Sokal, such as Ruth Rosen (a feminist historian), Katha Pollitt (a feminist journalist), Jim Weinstein (editor of *In These Times*), Michael Albert (editor of *Z Magazine*), myself. Robbins' remark is self-righteous posturing, and unfortunately it is not an isolated example. In the arena of postmodernism, left politics is often expressed through striking poses, often conveying moral superiority, greater sophistication, or both. There often seems to be a sneer built into postmodernist discourse, a cooler-than-thou stance. This enrages the critics of postmodernism, and it is one reason why it has been so difficult for supporters and critics of Sokal to discuss their differences calmly.

THERE ARE SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITHIN THE POSTMODERNIST SUBCULTURE. There is an intense ingroupyness, a concern with who is in and who is out, and an obscurantist vocabulary whose main function often seems to be to mark those on the inside and allow them to feel that they are part of an intellectual elite. This is not to object to the use of a technical vocabulary where it is needed to express ideas precisely. The world of postmodernism has unfortunately come to be flooded with writing in which pretentiousness reigns and intellectual precision appears to have ceased to be a consideration. There is the fetishization of the new: the rapid rise and fall of trends, the collective deference to them while they last. For a while it seemed that every debate in this arena entailed accusations of essentialism. The exact definition of essentialism was never clear, but it nevertheless seemed that essentialism was the source of all error, and the use of the term as invective was enough to halt discussion. There is the inflation of language and the habit of self-congratulation: it has become common practice in this arena to advertise one's own work as radical, subversive, transgressive. All this really means is that one hopes one is saying something new. There is the worship of celebrities. This is a culture that encourages and rewards self-aggrandizement and grandiosity. There is intellectual bullying, the use of humiliation, ridicule, implicit threats of ostracism, to silence dissent. All of this stands in direct contrast to the endless talk of difference that takes place in this arena.

Efforts to raise criticisms from within this arena have not had much effect; those who have made such efforts have been treated with hostility or at best ignored. Those of us who supported Sokal's hoax felt that a public act of mockery was required to open up discussion. Now that postmodernism has lost its aura of invincibility people have begun to laugh, and it does not seem likely that the laughter will stop anytime soon. For instance, in a review of a book entitled *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line*, by Calvin Thomas (University of Illinois Press), reviewer Daniel Harris writes,

In the fast-paced intellectual environment of postmodern cultural studies, the line between ostensibly serious scholarship and outright parody is not just thin but, in many instances, nonexistent, as became embarrassingly evident last month to the editors of one of the house organs of contemporary theoretical discourse, *Social Text*....One can only hope that Sokal's brilliant act of intellectual terrorism...will be the first of many similar practical jokes. If even a handful of the numerous critics of cultural theory did their part, postmodern journals and academic presses would be swamped with fraudulent manuscripts that would shatter the self-confidence of the entire field. This vast industry would collapse into a state of total disarray were its tightly-knit ranks to become infiltrated by jargon-spewing moles posing as the real McCoy, double agents cloaked in the uniform of the American university's elitist new brand of paper radicals.

Harris goes on to speculate that the book under review must be another hoax. How else, he asks, can one explain the bewildering statements that appear in this book, such as:

The excrementalization of alterity as the site/sight of homelessness, of utter outsideness and unsubiatable dispossession figure(s) in...Hegel's metanarrational conception of Enlightenment modernity as the teleological process of totalization leading to absolute knowing.

The anal penis...function(s) within a devalued metonymic continuity, whereas the notion of the phallomorphic turd functions within the realm of metaphorical

substitution.

If the bodily in masculinity is encountered in all its rectal gravity, the specular mode by which others become shit is disrupted.

Harris suggests that if Thomas wants to become an academic success he should follow Sokal's example and proclaim his book to be a prank. Only slightly less tongue in cheek, he speculates that what he describes as the central metaphor of this book, the comparison of writing to "productions" of the body, especially shit, may be apt in a field in which jargon is used as an offensive weapon, to score points against competitors in the battle for tenure and prestige.¹⁵

POSTMODERNISM DID NOT INVENT INTELLECTUAL BULLYING. This is not the first instance of dogmatism on the left. In the 30s people on the left (at least those in or close to the Communist Party) felt considerable pressure not to admit, or even consider the possibility, that the Soviets were anything less than angels. In the late 60s a kind of Maoist politics swept the left, in particular the radical core of the anti-war movement. Under the aegis of "Marxism-Leninism" a politics was put forward that revolved around the assumption that revolution was possible in the U.S. if only people on the left would follow the example set by revolutionaries in the Third World. Strategies were proposed that were utterly inappropriate to the U.S.; questioning these strategies, or for that matter suggesting that a revolution was not very likely in the U.S., was tantamount to labelling oneself a defector from the cause. Similar things took place in the radical wing of the women's movement: extreme conceptions of feminism, such as the belief that having anything to do with men amounted to fraternizing with the enemy, took hold in many circles, and questioning these ideas was likely to earn one a reputation as a friend of the patriarchy. The left in the U.S. seems prone to being seized by ideas which, when recollected a few years later, look somewhat mad. But it is worth asking why particular ideologies take over at particular moments. After all, in the case of postmodernism, it is not clear why culturalism, a social constructionism set in competition with other levels of social analysis, should be equated with radicalism.

Terry Eagleton, in his article "Where Do Postmodernists Come From?"¹⁶ argues that left intellectuals in the U.S. have adopted postmodernism out of a sense of having been badly defeated, a belief that the left as a political tendency has little future. Culturalism, he argues, involves an extreme subjectivism, a view of the intellect as all-powerful, a mindset that might be described as taking the May '68 slogan "all power to the imagination" literally, combined with a deep pessimism, a sense that it isn't worth the effort to learn about the world, to analyze social systems, for instance, because they can't be changed anyway.

I would add two points to Eagleton's analysis. First, postmodernism takes many of its ideas from the 60s. To some extent it represents a rigidification of ideas that were widespread in movements of that time, especially the voluntarism or hubris of a generational cohort that tended to think that it could accomplish anything. The widespread view among leftists of the 60s that revolution was waiting in the wings, and the fact that so few people openly challenged this, reflected a grandiosity, a loosening of the collective grip on reality. In the heated atmosphere of the late 60s it was possible for radicals to take fairly crazy positions without utterly losing their audience or becoming irrelevant to politics. In the 90s there is considerably less room for extreme voluntarism, or grandiosity,

cast as a political position.

There was also a widespread tendency in the movements of the 60s to equate personal and cultural change with broader social change. One of the most important contributions of the movements of the 60s (especially feminism and the countercultural left) was the critique of a culture that promoted consumerism, that equated happiness with individual striving for power and wealth. But in rejecting a politics that left this element out it was easy to fall into the opposite problem of believing that creating communities in which people tried to live according to different values would inevitably move society as a whole in the same direction. This made change seem easier than it was. The prosperity of the late 60s and early 70s allowed alternative communities to flourish, and it seemed plausible that the more egalitarian relationships and humane values developed in them might serve as models. But as it turned out the egalitarian impulse that found expression in these communities was overshadowed by the shift to the right that has taken place in American society as a whole since the mid- to late 70s. Alternative communities themselves were weakened and destroyed by social changes over which they had no control, especially the depression of the 70s and the withdrawal of support from the public sector in the 80s and 90s. In the 90s it would be very hard to make a convincing case that cultural change equals social change. The equation of the personal or the cultural with the political was a mixed blessing for the movements of the 60s. In the 90s it tends to mean retreating into one's own community and allowing politics to drift further and further to the right.

POSTMODERNISM SUFFERS NOT ONLY FROM ITS RELIANCE ON a conception of radicalism that made more sense in the 60s than it does now, but also from the fact that it is located in academia and reflects its pressures. The logic of the market is not a new presence in the American academy, but it now seems to be sweeping all other values and considerations aside. There has been a dramatic increase in the pressures toward intellectual specialization and a frantic pace of publication. There is intense competition between and within fields. In the years following World War II there was a widespread belief, in government and business circles, that the U.S. economy would benefit if a broad liberal higher education were widely available. In the wake of Sputnik there was a sudden rush of support for science education; this resulted in more government support for universities without diminishing its commitment to the humanities. Through the 60s it was mostly the children of the white middle class who attended universities, public or private. Since the 60s the economy has changed, the values governing public spending have changed, and the composition of university student bodies has changed. In a society increasingly stratified between haves and have-nots, an economy in which technical expertise seems more important than familiarity with history and literature, support for liberal education is hardly reliable.

In the 50s and 60s academics could believe that their profession was held in high esteem. They were well paid, and at least some found their opinions sought by the White House or by large corporations. Over the last few decades it has become harder to believe that public esteem of the academy is unqualified. The loss of prestige (and of resources) is felt most sharply in the humanities. In the 50s the social sciences tried to show that they could be as rigorous,

quantitative, and ostensibly value-free, as the natural sciences. This encouraged huge quantities of unimaginative, narrowly-conceived, jargon-ridden papers. Now it seems to be the turn of the humanities to try to raise their stock within academia, though this time the strategy is not to imitate science but to assert the supremacy of a vocabulary and theoretical perspective nurtured in the humanities over all fields of knowledge. But postmodernism only highlights its own weaknesses when it overreaches its scope. I have heard many postmodernists denounce Sokal on grounds that his hoax could lead to funds being withdrawn from Cultural Studies or the humanities generally. It seems more useful to look at postmodernism's internal problems. Sokal's hoax and the laughter it generated shows that the field had become ripe for parody.¹⁷

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FOR THE LEFT? As restraints on capitalism have loosened and the logic of the market has crept into virtually every area of life, the more human values of the left have come to seem archaic and irrelevant. We certainly need a critique of this culture. But postmodernism is not that critique. There are too many respects in which postmodernism accepts or revels in the values of the marketplace for it to serve as a critique. On a deeper level the problem is that postmodernism is a stance of pure criticism, that it avoids making any claims, asserting any values (or acknowledging its own implicit system of values, in particular its orientation toward sophistication and aesthetics). Left politics requires a conception of a better society and an assertion of a better set of values than those that now prevail. This does not mean that any particular vision of society or any particular definition of those values is the last word; a left perspective requires ongoing discussion and debate. But it is not possible for a purely critical stance to serve as the basis for left politics.

No doubt, one reason that postmodernism has taken hold so widely is that it is much easier to be critical than to present a positive vision. Being on the left means having a conception of the future and confidence that there is a connection between the present and the future, that collective action in the present can lead to a better society. It is difficult these days to articulate any clear vision of the future, even more difficult to figure out how we might get from where we are to a more humane, egalitarian, and ecologically balanced society. A friend of mine recently told me that her image is that we are on a log that is slowly drifting down the Niagara River, and we can begin to hear the roar of the Falls. But because we do not know what to do, we are not roused from our lethargy. It seems to me that postmodernism has become an obstacle to addressing urgent issues, including impending environmental and social disasters, and how to build a movement that might begin to address them. Clearing away the fog won't automatically provide us with any answers, but might make it easier to hold a productive discussion.

NOTES

1. Alan Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* 46-47, Spring/Summer 1996: 217-252.

2. For critiques of postmodernism, or poststructuralist theory, see Brian Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), Alex

Callinocos, *Against Post-Modernism* (London: Methuen, 1982); Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 1982), and *Deconstruction and the Interests of Theory* (London: Pinter, 1988), Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1984), and Somer Broberibb, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism* (North Melbourne: Spiniflex Press, 1992).

3. See, for instance, Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'", 3-21, in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992).

4. Paul Gross and Normal Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1994).

5. Alan Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* 46-47 (Spring/Summer 1996), p. 217.

6. See Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, *French Philosophy of the 60s: An Essay on Antihumanism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985) on the ways in which poststructuralism and the spirit of May '68 coincided, and differed. Ferry and Renault point out that while a politics of authenticity, of the self as agent of social change, was central to May '68, poststructuralism emphasizes fragmentation and incoherence to the point of denying the existence of the self and the possibility of authenticity.

7. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), Jean Beaudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981), Jacques Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

8. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), and "Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism," first published in *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92, later included in Jameson's book of the same title (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

9. Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott: 22-40.

10. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 82-85.

11. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

12. Stanley Fish, "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke," *New York Times*, Op Ed, May 21, 1996.

13. "Mystery Science Theater," Bruce Robbins and Andrew Ross, Co-Editors, of *Social Text*, *Lingua Franca*, July/August 1996: 54-57.

14. Bruce Robbins, "Anatomy of a Hoax," *Tikkun* Vol. 11, No. 5, September-October 1996, pp. 58-59.

15. Daniel Harris, "Jargon Basement," review of *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line*, by Calvin Thomas (University of Illinois Press). *Bay Area Reporter*, June 13, 1996, p. 40.

16. Terry Eagleton, "Where Do Postmodernists Come From?" *Monthly Review* Vol. 47, No. 3, July-August 1995, Special Issue: "In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda," pp. 59-70.

17. For a discussion of the public view of academics and how postmodernism has made a bad situation worse, see Loic J.D. Wacquant, "The Self-Inflicted Irrelevance of American Academics," *Academe*, July-August 1996, 18-23.

Power, Resistance and Science

Naomi Weisstein

Introduction

Naomi Weisstein has worked in cognitive visual neuroscience since she received her PhD from Harvard in 1964. She pioneered in demonstrating the capacity of simple neural circuitry to figure out complex visual relations, ran head on into the scientific establishment, but went on to see her ideas help to give birth to the cognitive revolution in visual neuroscience. She is Professor of Psychology at the State University of New York at Buffalo, a Guggenheim Fellow, and is on the editorial boards of several scientific journals.

Weisstein has been an active feminist since she co-founded the Chicago Westside Group in 1967. She went on to co-found the Chicago Women's Liberation Union and to organize and play keyboard in the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band, and to found women's caucuses in several professional associations. She has published on a wide range of feminist topics.

In 1968 Weisstein wrote: "Psychology Constructs the Female; or The Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist."¹ In this paper, she argued that gender is socially constructed and that therefore the focus by Freudians and other psychologists on an "inner dynamic," particularly in women, was unfruitful and was more often an expression of prejudice than of science. This work has been extremely influential and has been reprinted some three dozen times in the U.S. and elsewhere.

In 1993, on the 25th anniversary of its publication, "Psychology Constructs the Female" was reprinted in the British journal *Feminism and Psychology* in an issue devoted to discussion of it. (Unless otherwise noted, references in parentheses are to that issue.) As comments came in from other feminist psychologists, Weisstein was struck by their subjectivism and anti-science attitudes. She wrote a reply in the same issue of *Feminism and Psychology*, pointing out the dead-end nature of such current feminist epistemology and chastising feminist psychology for losing sight of important issues of gender.

More recently, debate has erupted around *Social Texts'* publication of Alan Sokal's parody of postmodernist notions of science. This raised anew important issues concerning science and scientists, truth and objectivity, and social constructionism. It spurred Weisstein to expand and develop her earlier piece to include discussion of various matters which shed light on and extend the Sokal-*Social Text* confrontation. In particular, drawing on her experience as a laboratory scientist, she addresses the realities of scientific research, including its uncertainty and creativity. She shows the capacity of science to overturn existing paradigms, regardless of the interests that may support them. Turning to matters of gender, she discusses questions concerning "male" and "female" science (touching on the influential work of Sandra Harding), and rejects the characterization of science as ineradicably male. She shows how social constructionism has left its empirical foundations and become the underpinning for an epistemology and metaphysics that dismisses the existence of truth. She concludes with mention of the paralysis of postmodernist feminism due to a conservative and subjectivist epistemology.

—Jesse Lemisch

WHEN I WROTE "PSYCHOLOGY CONSTRUCTS THE FEMALE" IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM in 1968, the Second Wave of 20th-century U.S. feminism had begun to sweep the country. Transformation charged the air. Women like myself, who had been too intimidated to speak in public, were delivering fiery orations to wildly enthusiastic audiences. Women who had previously considered lesbian sex a crime worse than infanticide suddenly claimed that they had been dykes since the moment of conception. Even the resentment that women of different classes and races usually felt for each other was temporarily muted. We were creating and beginning to live within an alternative social context which, in turn, redefined who we were. Thus I was writing from a consideration of direct experience when I said in "Psychology Constructs the Female,"

A study of human behavior requires first and foremost a study of the social contexts within which people move, the expectations as to how they will behave, and the authority which tells them who they are and what they are supposed to do."

But what has happened to social constructionism! It is being used where it shouldn't be, and it is not being used where it should be. And where it is being used, it is leading us back into the cave, away from reality and away from an understanding of our world and how to change it. An understanding among mainstream psychologists of how important the social context is in determining behavior seems now to have faded from consciousness. We have a psychology which is again depoliticized, individualized and decontextualized, a psychology which is still looking for the allegedly true and different natures of men and women (for critiques, see Rhoda Unger, and Sandra Bem). Individual acts that cry out for contextual and political explanations are again being enfolded in theories of personality that look no further than individual traits or that invoke bio-psycho-sexual ritual curses, like, bad moms, evil primate imperatives, and rotten genes. Meanwhile, social constructionism is being used to clear our heads of the facts of social reality in an area which should know better — feminist psychology. Feminist psychologists are averting their eyes from the larger barbarism of the social context in which we operate. They choose instead to put forth a notion of female difference which, while no longer biologically based, is nevertheless essentialist, or at least highly decontextualized, for example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (1982); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (1990). That is, they assume that female difference is fixed, rather than contingent on social context.

Feminist psychology has also claimed that females have a different way of knowing, or know different things than men do, and therefore that science, a male pursuit, is the wrong way to study women (Una Gault; see also Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, 1991). Individual biography, participatory interaction and something called "feminist theory,"² also known these days as, simply, "theory," are presumed to get us closer to the truth — "whatever that is" (Harding's phrase). Sadly, such challenges to science further unmoor us from the reality of women's lives, and make it even more difficult to figure out how we can fight our oppression.

In this paper, I will suggest that we feminist psychologists open our eyes once more to a larger social context and begin to focus on questions of social change. This means that we should return to an inquiry into *power* and how people resist power. Then, I will suggest that my focus on social change puts me

at odds with the current feminist obsession with the limitations of science, an obsession which is essentially conservative.

Power

I WOULD STUDY POWER (SEE FOR EXAMPLE UNGER; SANDRA BEM'S BRILLIANT BOOK, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (1993)). It is clear to me that if we are ever to replace our gendered, genocidal world with a less barbaric, more just and generous one, we must understand how "cultural, institutional, situational, interpersonal and psychological power" (Bem) — and, I might add, economic power — sustains the current brutality. Bem summarizes the task perfectly in her questions to feminist psychologists: "where is psychology's analysis of how power and privilege operate to maintain the status quo with respect to gender, sexuality, race, or class ... how power gets into the heads of both the marginalized and the powerful alike?" (Bem). I would add one other question as well: where is psychology's analysis of the brutality that accompanies power?

Consider the hatred, sadism and violence that men direct against women everywhere. Two and a half decades of feminist research, analysis and agitation have shown us the violence that women suffer all over the world. The UN reports that there are one hundred million females who should be part of the earth's population, but are missing from it (see Amartya Sen, "More Than One Hundred Million Women are Missing," *New York Review of Books*, December 20, 1990). Where are they? Rape, child molestation, wife beating, and murder are the dark underside of male power over women. Such eruptions of violence are considered "random," "inexplicable," a product of "male rage, out of control." But are they? Certainly, such action is *not* just random, but is rather to be understood within the context of a sexist ideology, which permits and promotes it. However, beyond that, this kind of violence seems to happen to *every* marginalized group: violence against the powerless seems to accompany every hierarchical culture that I know about. I am convinced that violence is an inevitable accompaniment of the interactions between the powerful and the powerless, regardless of gender. So, to repeat Bem's question, where is the feminist psychology that deals with this violence? Where are the explanations of how to get rid of this brutality? At a time when women are dying all over the world, feminists are questioning whether there is such a thing as objective reality. It would be putting it charitably to call this a diversion.

Resistance

AND WHERE, IN ALL THIS, IS PSYCHOLOGY'S STUDY OF RESISTANCE? As long as men have power over women, our gender oppression will continue. As feminists, we need to oppose male power in all its cultural, institutional, situational, interpersonal and psychological forms. As feminist psychologists, we need to understand how this resistance can arise and the circumstances under which it is effective. This leads to a variety of questions dealing with: individual agency despite gender hegemony; individual defiance vs. collective resistance; the dynamics of collective resistance.

If we are to have social change, we need more than individual resistance.

This may occasionally start things rolling, but it cannot change the relations of power by itself. The status quo is a social conspiracy against the powerless, and nothing is more feeble against a social conspiracy than individual defiance. We have to oppose power with power — it's as simple as that; we need collective resistance.

As anybody who has ever tried it knows, it is extremely difficult to oppose power and authority. How, then, do we persuade substantial numbers of people to do it? In other words, how do we develop collective resistance? And how do we maintain it? Part of the answer is that collective resistance sets up an alternate context which in turn maintains the resistance. But it's a tricky business, and it often does not work. We know, for instance, from Stanley Milgram's experiments in obedience, that there must be more than one dissenting voice present to convince most people to change their behavior so that they move away from complicity with authority. Can we discover other such rules? We need to build an arsenal of such psychological techniques that will help us to initiate and maintain collective resistance. Alongside this crying need, much of current feminist intellectual activity seems like negligence.

Science

FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY HAS TO A GREAT EXTENT ABANDONED A CONCERN with subjugation and sedition and has begun to focus reflexively on issues of methodology and epistemology. If science is male, as many feminist psychologists claim, then women should avoid it. So, for instance, "Psychology Constructs the Female" has been welcomed over the years for its social constructionism, but it is now being attacked by social constructionists, on the grounds that it is naive about science and that it believes in scientific method. It is now thought by many feminist psychologists that scientific method is a useless approach to the study of gender.

At first, I was perplexed by these attacks on "Psychology Constructs the Female." The paper criticized a sexism in psychology that cloaked itself in the authority and grandeur of science. What better way to criticize this pretense than by showing that the psychology was sexist and not at all scientific? But now I understand the postmodernist feminist psychologists' anti-science attack on "Psychology Constructs the Female." The attack argued that science was a useless enterprise. And, they argued, even if the science had been perfect, the psychology of women propounded in those days would have been wrong, whether or not it met the criteria of "good science." I imagined that they imagined me at the most elegant resort in Monaco, where internationally known gangsters were meeting. I am standing outside wearing my science-nerd beanie hat with the airplane propellers on top of it, screwing up my little face, purple with indignation, and yelling, "You guys are not telling the Twuth! You *pwomised* to tell the Twuth!" As if it mattered. Even if they did tell the truth, they would still be international gangsters. In other words, how could I have been so naive as to think that science could have told us anything useful in the first place? Science, according to such feminist epistemologists as Harding, is a "western," "bourgeois," "imperialist," "androcentric project," whose knowledge is "embedded in social relations." (In the old days, we used to call this abuse of power "pig" science (Weisstein, V. Blaisdell, and J. Lemisch, *The Godfathers: Freudians*,

Marxists, and the Scientific and Political Protection Societies (1976)). In short, Harding claims that science describes not ultimate reality but merely the relativist and subjective reality of those who serve it and those whom it serves.

I agree with parts of this characterization of science. I speak from 30 years of experience as a woman neuroscientist who has done insurgent research in vision and cognition that has often been infuriating to the scientific establishment, because of both my gender and the work itself. However, just because knowledge is obtained under androcentric conditions doesn't mean that the knowledge itself is invalid or hopelessly androcentric. Science often does not get us to the noumena, that is, to the ultimate truths about the world.

Our ideas are filtered through our cultural and social categories, the ongoing social context and our social rank — but filters do indeed pass information, and science is one of the intellectual procedures that holds open the possibility of constructing a model of reality that works and predicts and that others can replicate. I believe science can not only change our relation to the natural world (think: penicillin), but it can also change our social world. (For instance, if we really could figure out how resistance to power arises and is maintained, then we could suggest ways to begin to dismantle patriarchy.) Science affords prediction and control, and therefore it can give us roadmaps for social change, providing us feminists with a plan for a kind of countervailing power.

Moreover, science has its own internal momentum which makes it partially independent of the social relations in which it is embedded. Arrogant, dogmatic and bullying as science is, the ideas of science do change when the old paradigms are found to be inadequate. Even scientific ideas wedded to existing power relations can be overturned. "Male" science can indeed be coerced into demonstrating truths that are considered "female." It happened before my very eyes. Brain structures that were considered incapable of registering anything but simple sensory information — lights flashing on and off, and so forth — have now been shown to figure out the most complex relations between the simple stimuli that they respond to. In other words, what Harding has called a "male" explanation, focusing on brute physical events, has been replaced by a "female" explanation, focusing on relationships. (See Weisstein, "Neural Symbolic Activity: A Psychophysical Measure," *Science*, 168(1970)).

What does this example mean? Does it mean that:

1. female scientists' brains are different from males'?
2. female scientists have different experiences from males?
3. certain kinds of scientific discoveries are more likely to be made by one gender or another?

1. Maybe. However, there is no convincing evidence one way or the other that females' brains are different from males in the structures relevant to science.

2. Yes. Female scientists do have different experiences from males, and this may indeed open them to see things differently.

3. No. Certain scientific discoveries are not more likely to be made by one or another gender.

Curiously, women in science do not seem to make gender-distinctive contributions. The evidence is that females don't really make discoveries that are qualitatively different from those of males, nor can their discoveries be characterized as "female." If you are not aware that the author of a particular scien-

tific study is a woman, there is no way of divining it from the content. I have had many female graduate students as part of an effort on my part to bring women into neuroscience. Many of them have been brilliant and creative; not one of them has discovered something that I would consider unavailable to a man's brain or work.

But isn't the fact that I found something relational in my work on neural symbolic activity (females are good at relations) *prima facie* evidence that women think differently than men? Not in neuroscience, or at least not anymore. Most researchers I know, men as well as women, are now looking at neural response to relations between stimuli, and men do not seem at all handicapped in this pursuit.

Certainly in my field, neuroscience, there are huge gaps in our knowledge. But these deficiencies cannot be characterized by the crude categories, "male" and "female." And neuroscience hasn't yet begun to explain how agency works — how the mind with its purpose, play and creativity can be explained by a brain full of mindless matter.

(I should add that when I first reported the above finding about relationships in visual processing, nobody believed me. Indeed, one colleague threatened to drive me out of the field completely. But others came along, with a variety of motives, genders and social ranks, ran my experiment in their own laboratories and replicated my results. My findings did not go away with changes in fashion or fortune. There seems to be an objective reality out there.)

I think that what Harding and the other feminist critics of science have in mind when they think about science is an archaic, hard-case, narrow endeavor which does not at all fit the realities of how contemporary science is done. It's easy to hate science if you don't understand the uncertainty, creativity, subtlety and anxiety about what is true which permeates contemporary scientific investigation. Harding has constructed and attacked a straw scientist, a way of doing science that lives on only in sixth-grade introductions to science. Such ignorance is widespread among leftists and feminists.

I'm still wearing my beanie hat, aren't I? I don't think I can take it off. Feminist epistemologists would argue that, although the scientific method may eventually lead to recognition of dissenting information *within* its domain, the domain itself is highly limited. But the domain is in fact practically unlimited. Science (as opposed to the scientific establishment) will entertain hypotheses *generated* in any way: mystical, intuitive, experiential — from a person's social location, from their quirky brains, or from their utterly conventional application of "male" rules. It only asks us to make sure that our observations are replicable and that our theories have some reasonable relation to other things we know to be true about the subject under study, that is, to objective reality.

"Objective reality"? OBJECTIVE REALITY. "There is no such thing," feminist epistemologists might cry, "or at least none that we could ever know."³ But here the argument stops cold. Whether or not there is objective reality is a 4000-year-old philosophical stalemate. The last I heard was that, like God, you can't prove there is one and you can't prove there isn't one. It comes down to a religious and/or political choice. I believe that current feminist rejection of universal truth is a political choice. Radical and confrontational as the postmodern feminist challenge to science may appear, it is in fact a deeply conservative retreat. It is deeply conservative because it denies what's out there, or at least

it denies the possibility of our knowing what's out there, and how can we change what's not there? We are left with no practical ways to alter our murderous world.

Ros Gill mentions the "tentativeness," "anxiety" and "paralysis" of post-modernist post-structuralist counter-Enlightenment feminism. *Of course*, there is paralysis: once knowledge is reduced to insurmountable personal subjectivity, there is no place to go; we are in a swamp of self-referential passivity. Sometimes I think that, when the fashion passes, we will find many bodies, drowned in their own wordy words, like the Druids in the bogs. Meanwhile, the patriarchy continues to prosper.

It has been my experience that, in times of no movement, reality itself falls into question. In times of dynamism, change and movement, people abandon doubts about reality, properly seeing them as part of the conservative past which they are rejecting. The fog lifts. The fact of movement gives us a clearer picture of what is really out there — what we are fighting against, and what we are fighting for. We need a feminist scholarship which will, once again, be infused by, revitalized by, renewed by movement.

Women are subjugated all over the world, and with the consolidation of corporate male rule, our situation will continue to deteriorate. Let us return to an activist, challenging, badass feminist psychology. One hundred million women missing from the face of the earth. We can help to insure that future generations of women will not suffer this holocaust.

As I am in poor health with Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome, I am particularly grateful for the support, both intellectual and logistical, of Jesse Lemisch and Anne St. George.

NOTES

1. After first presentation to an audience of feminist activists at Lake Villa, Illinois, in October 1968, this paper was presented as "Kinder, Kirche, Kuche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female" at a conference sponsored by the American Studies Program at the University of California, Davis, in November 1968. The paper was published, more or less as delivered, by the New England Free Press and, has since been widely reprinted, most recently in *Feminism and Psychology* [London], III, no. 2(1993), 195-210.

2. Perhaps the best development of feminist theory can be found in Schwartz-Belkin, ed., *Listening to Ourselves Talk: The New Feminist Project* (New York: Ponzi Press, 1995).

3. I should note that I am delighted with the new feminist methodology as a means to develop better hypotheses. Biography, emphasis on the experiential and the requirement that those gathering information must be empathic, egalitarian and participatory are all, I think, great advances in our ability to know the world. But all these methods have their own pitfalls: biography and accounts of direct experience are subject to the fictions that we tell ourselves about ourselves. Postmodernist suggestions that observers can only be fairly observed by like-minded observers may make sense in some areas. But no interpersonal interaction is free from the distorting expectations of the participants.

Sweeney Among the Warlords

Bob Fitch

THIS YEAR, QUITE SUDDENLY, AFTER NEARLY HALF A CENTURY OF DORMANCY, the classical anti-Establishment cause has re-emerged on elite college campuses across the country: the cause of organized labor. Who could have imagined! Not so long ago, in the fattest years of the 80s, Ivy League Establishmentarianism waxed so thick, nearly 40% of all graduating Yale seniors applied for positions as investment bankers with just one firm — First Boston. Even anti-Establishment feeling on campus has had a vaguely cynical, self-preoccupied, self-cuddling, postmodern mein. It expresses itself in “the politics of the body”; in nose rings and New Age health concerns; in “discourse politics” — whose vanguard proclaims that power grows out of the spine of literary texts — and whose liberation struggles take the form of jargonized professional writing. American reality, it’s said, has been transformed into a kind of Baudrillardian “hyperreality,” where image *is* reality, and the best defense is mass apathy, the refusal to be manipulated.

Now in the leaner 90s, the pinch of ordinary reality has helped awaken a new student radicalism that risks “transgression” of more than academic boundaries. Small but significant numbers are caught up in the politics of solidarity: over 2,000 undergraduates volunteered this year for “Union Summer” jobs paying \$200 a week. Not so they could pad their resume, but to picket bosses’ houses; leaflet factory gates, and help America’s poorest workers gain the elementary rights and dignity that go with a union contract. Students have given impressive support to strikes of teaching assistants at Yale, campus workers at Harvard and Barnard. And on October 3, 1996 you could have mistaken Morningside Heights for Madison Square Garden, as thousands snaked across the campus in lines from Broadway to Amsterdam Avenue to jam Low Auditorium for “A Teach-In With Labor.”

Without John Sweeney, the new AFL-CIO President who sat on the dais that night, comfortably mixing with the brightest lights of American liberalism — Richard Rorty, Betty Friedan, Patricia Williams and Cornel West — there would have been no overflow crowds, no campus movement, no Union Summer, no intoxicating sense of fresh possibilities.

What drew the thousands that night and those that packed workshops that followed the next day, was the narrative of Sweeney’s contested election a year ago against a tired labor establishment, his insistence that labor was going back to its roots, organizing the unorganized once again, his repeated calls for a new dialogue between union leaders and liberal intellectuals, and above all, his turn toward campus youth as a source of energy and inspiration.

In a way, Sweeney’s enthusiastic reception on Morningside Heights recalled

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the generous hero's welcome given to Nelson Mandela, when he came to Manhattan in 1991. New Yorkers knew that Mandela had won the leadership of the anti-apartheid forces after spending more than 30 years breaking rocks in a South African prison. They were aware that for the last decade of his ordeal, the prison gates were always open. Mandela remained inside until the Apartheid regime met his conditions for black liberation.

But who was the hero of this hour? Who was the stout, sixtyish, apple-cheeked man in the pin-striped suit with such soft hands? Harvard theologian Cornel West, in the course of an otherwise stirring Low Auditorium oration inadvertently referred to "Brother Weeney." West's slip suggested, that like most people in the audience that night, he might have been more familiar with Mandela and South Africa than with Brother Sweeney and the AFL-CIO.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan's back cover blurb for Sweeney's new book, *America Needs A Raise*, asserts that the new AFL-CIO President, "with the audacity and diligence of FDR during the Hundred Days, has transformed the American labor movement." What accomplishments does Sweeney affirm to validate the comparison? What's he going to do next? How does he plan to stop the two decades' long fall in American wages and the four decade slide in union density? How will he revive what is arguably the feeblest and most backward labor movement in the advanced industrialized world?

Unfortunately, Sweeney doesn't provide convincing answers. He has a chapter that contains a good economic primer, rehearsing the Economic Policy Institute's analysis of U.S. wage decline in terms of American management's "low road" strategy. But all-in-all, *America Needs A Raise* exemplifies that increasingly popular genre, the Celebrity Book.

A Celebrity Book is one that the celebrity didn't write. It's blurbed by other celebrities who haven't read it. And it's full of intimate stories about the lives of "little people" whom the celebrity has never met. In fact, Sweeney probably wouldn't know "Eddie Neace and his father, Roy," from Eddie Kennedy and his father, Joe. The same is true of David Kusnet, the real author of *America Needs A Raise*, who, according to Roy Teixeira of the Economic Policy Institute, wrote every word. This is because neither ghost nor celebrity author ever had a human contact with any of the workers whose problems are so feelingly described throughout the book. All the union members' concerns are extracted from focus groups, polling data, and paid interviews. These were carried out by a battery of consultants, researchers, and public opinion specialists like Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Stanley Greenberg, who also served as President Clinton's pollster.

SWEENEY PROVIDES US WITH A SPRINKLING OF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA: we learn, for example, that like two predecessor AFL-CIO Presidents, George Meany and Tom Donahue, John Sweeney was born in the Bronx. As a boy, he accompanied his father to meetings of the Transit Workers Union (TWU) where the famous "Red" Mike Quill held forth. Sweeney put himself through college digging graves, (two mentions); he attended the Xavier Labor School run by Father Philip Carey and John M. Corridan, whose battle against organized crime in the International Longshoremens' Association was immortalized by Karl Malden in *On the Waterfront*.

Still, we discover surprisingly little about Sweeney's road to power. How

did he wrestle the old guard to the ground to become AFL-CIO President? What about his longest, most crucial and controversial union affiliation — with New York City's Local 32B-32J, the 70,000 member janitors' union mired in corruption, bossism, indictments, job-selling and secret collaboration with employers. How *did* he grow the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) from 600,000 to 1,100,000?

Under a picture of pinstriped Sweeney wearing a baseball cap, the dust jacket proclaims that in the last decade, when the rest of the labor movement was in steep decline, "the SEIU virtually doubled its membership." We learn the increase came about through organizing new members. This would be remarkable, if true. It would suggest Sweeney knows how to get the organizing job done. Justice for Janitors, Sweeney's exemplary nation-wide organizing campaign among immigrant workers, brought in 35,000 new members. But where did the other half million come from? During the entire period, from '85 to '95, the entire AFL-CIO organized 1.1 million workers. Sources at the SEIU now claim that the union organized only 200,000 since 1985. The truth is that SEIU grew overwhelmingly through mergers and "accretion," — i.e., the boss grew, so the union grew — not through organizing.

When Sweeney left to become SEIU International President, the man he left in charge, "Greedy" Gus Bevona, became the nation's highest paid local union leader. But Bevona appointed Sweeney his "Executive Advisor," paying him over \$100,000 a year, while he continued to draw his SEIU Presidential salary. His multiple salaries became an issue in last year's AFL-CIO election. Critics charged that the Executive Advisor job was just a sinecure. Sweeney protested he earned his money. He attended meetings. He made decisions. And court papers confirm Sweeney's claims. As a member of the 32B-32J Executive Board, Sweeney voted to hire detectives to tail union dissident Carlos Guzman, and his wife. For siccing detectives on a critic, Sweeney was ordered last month by a Federal Appeals Court to re-pay his share of the \$19,000 in union funds mis-used on the gumshoes.

Sweeney *was* involved. At 32-B-32J's 23-story headquarters, topped with Bevona's lavish penthouse apartment, there's a plaque in the hallway that Sweeney had to pass every time he attended a meeting. In the official history of 32B-32J, "Sixty Years of Progress," Sweeney is pictured presenting the plaque to Greedy Gus for his role in "securing the Service Employees Center for Local 32B-32J."

In fact, the union doesn't own the building. Members are paying over \$40.00 a square foot — more than double the market rate to Edward Minskoff and Allan Silverman who do. In the first 20 years of a 99-year renewable lease, the union pension funds will contribute \$190 million into the coffers of Minskoff and Silverman. Who are they?

The employers. In 1989, when the deal was cut, Silverman owned Prudential Services, a commercial cleaning business that employed hundreds of 32B-32J workers. It was a classic two-handed deal. On the one hand, Silverman was paying into the pension funds. On the other, the pension funds were feeding Silverman's bottom line. The U.S. Labor Department is investigating the matter. But where was Sweeney?

Where was Sweeney when dozens of union members' affidavits attesting to widespread job-selling piled up at the Association for Union Democracy and the

Manhattan D.A.'s office? According to the members' complaints, union delegates were regularly selling jobs from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Eventually, last year, the Manhattan D.A.'s labor racketeering unit had Louis Gonzalez, a building superintendent, who had been shaken down, wear a wire when he made another installment to his importunate union representative, James McGorman.

Immediately after McGorman's arrest, Gonzalez lost his job. Gonzalez charges that the union sabotaged his appeal. Meanwhile, McGorman pleaded guilty and will be sentenced. [See article by Michael Hirsch that follows.—Ed.] But you have to ask again: Where was Sweeney? Why, when so many accusations piled up, when they became common knowledge inside and outside the union, didn't Sweeney intervene or at least investigate? Does the reason for his inaction have anything to do with his role as \$80,000-a-year Executive Advisor to Greedy Gus?

SWEENEY DEVOTES ONLY A FEW PARAGRAPHS IN HIS 167-PAGE BOOK to the most important days of his life: the dealing, spinning and vote wrangling in the suites of New York Sheraton that led to his ascendancy as AFL-CIO chief. Yes, it was the "first contested election" in its history. But contested by whom? Not the members. There are no direct elections for AFL-CIO President. Effectively, the AFL-CIO President is elected by the Presidents of the 96 affiliated unions — precious few of whom are elected by the members either.

No unelected union President was more decisive in Sweeney's election than Arthur Coia, President of the Laborers'International Union of North America,(LIUNA) who had been named in a 212-page November 1994 complaint by the Clinton Justice Department as a tool of organized crime. LIUNA comes across in the document as less a union of workers than a crooked conglomerate of regional crime families. One allegation: that Coia's takeover of locals in Rochester, Plattsburgh and Massena had been part of a conspiracy with the Todaro organized crime family of Buffalo to drain benefit funds. But instead of being ousted as LIUNA president, as the Justice Department's complaint originally recommended, top officials negotiated a settlement that placed Coia in charge of the LIUNA clean-up. Perhaps coincidentally, Coia raised nearly a million dollars for the Clinton campaign, in loans and contributions. And \$2 million in contributions to various Democratic politicians. (Senator Al D'Amato was one of two GOP recipients.)

So by AFL-CIO convention-time, in October '95, instead of having to keep a low profile, Coia could point to his dozen White House visits, his exchange of golf clubs with the President, and the appearance of Hillary as a speaker at his '95 convention. He could even boast of his own special pipeline to the top in the person of White House aide, Harold Ickes, who lawyered LIUNA, HERE, and, according to the *Washington Monthly*, a mobbed up local in the Teamsters.

Coia was thus particularly well-placed to serve as the broker for a coalition of construction unions with a history of racial exclusion, mob domination, and assassination as a means of suppressing dissent. The Coia coalition included Painters, Sheet Metal Workers and Iron Workers. Altogether, Coia brokered nearly 750,000 votes: Sweeney's margin of victory.

In the bidding war for Coia's votes, Sweeney outbid the man who got him his job at 32B-32J, Thomas Donahue. Sweeney gave Coia's cohorts seats on the AFL-CIO executive council. Donahue refused. Unlike Donahue, Sweeney, in his

campaign, soft-pedalled the issue of corrupt practices. And he appointed Coia, notorious for his union's practice of raiding other unions in the name of organizing, chair of the AFL-CIO's executive committee on organizing.

ORGANIZING IS THE CENTERPIECE OF SWEENEY'S STRATEGY FOR REVIVING THE LABOR MOVEMENT. How's he doing? You might well say it's too soon to tell. But if you're going to present yourself as the second coming of FDR and his 100 days you ought to have something to show. When asked recently on National Public Radio's "Fresh Air," how the campaign was doing, Sweeney evaded the question. Perhaps his silence is due to the results: not good.

True, there's been a slight uptick in the total number organized compared to last year — one of the most dismal in organized labor history. But the percentage of elections won by unions 47.6% — if it holds steady for the entire year — would represent a ten-year low. And the total number of representation petitions filed — would represent an all time low. Given just the rate of corporate downsizing, at more than 2,000,000 a year — the AFL-CIO would have to organize at least 250,000 workers to keep from shrinking. Organizing less than 100,000 guarantees that the AFL-CIO will continue to lose members — as it did again last year. And the year before.

"Wait 'til next year, when we transfer our organizers from the '96 election campaign to organizing the workers," say labor officials. But there are several good reasons why Johnny can't organize. And won't. Bad labor laws, strong employer resistance from the world's most powerful employing class, and inattention on the part of the unions are the usual explanations offered for the failure to organize. All valid — as far as they go. But not very illuminating. Capital in America is strong today — principally because labor is weak. To explain the weakness in terms of bad labor laws is to confuse symptoms with causes. When management decides it no longer has to respect workers' right to organize, they are simply recognizing the present balance of class forces. It sounds far-fetched, but when labor is strong, instead of trying to undermine labor laws, capital actually encourages unions to organize. Management is being rational. If they have to pay union wages and benefits, bosses want their unorganized competitors to pay union scale too. But when labor is weak, management contracts union work out to the same unorganized shops. Similarly, as management learns that impunity pays, labor's victory rate declines, and union incentive to organize falls. Labor becomes "apathetic."

Lawyer Tom Geoghegan's answer to the problem of labor's weakness in *Which Side Are You On?* was to strengthen labor laws. Surely, he argued in 1991, the Democrats must realize that they will never win another Presidential election unless they increase union density. How to get Party leaders to realize their self-interest? We have to be cautious. "Class? I wouldn't even have our leaders use the word 'class' or even 'workers' (even that word makes me cringe), but just talk about the right to vote." (p.284)

But in the European countries that Geoghegan holds as a model, the workers didn't get good labor laws by disguising who they were. Or stifling talk about class. How come the Wagner act sailed through Congress with barely a dissenting vote? A lot of the impetus was the nation-wide factory occupation movement that began in 1933.

The problem with American labor is that it never got much beyond the

strike wave movement of the '30's. Unlike European unions, Americans never developed truly national scope. Christ stopped at Eboli. The UAW never got below the Mason-Dixon Line. And the upshot today is a trade union structure completely different from what they have in Europe.

COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES, U.S. UNIONS ARE LOCALIZED, FRAGMENTED AND DE-CENTRALIZED. Sweeney as AFL-CIO president, can't tell downstream union leaders what to do. And while accountability to the members is almost nil — in 32B-32J, for example, members can't even ratify the contracts the leaders negotiate — the pyramid of authority in U.S. unions is much flatter. More like European feudalism than European social democracy. As long as local leaders send their "per capitas" to the international headquarters, show respect and keep unindicted, no one at the top is going to bother them.

Those ruling at the local and middle levels are frequently the officials Teamster President Ron Carey calls the "warlords." They operate within a system of AFL-CIO vassalage that may or may not include crime families. In return for an exclusive local franchise granted by the International, local warlords give back a portion of the dues they collect. Ultimately, their goal is keeping their six-figure jobs and expanding their cash flow. Construction union warlords don't organize — or admit blacks and women to apprenticeship programs — because organizing can upset local race-based fiefdoms. And because it depletes rather than builds cash flow.

In unions not run by war lords, organizing is still, generally, a lose-lose situation. If you lose, you drop the costs of the campaign. And if you win, you get small groups of low-paid workers whose dues won't offset the costs of servicing the contract. To break out of the dismal dynamics of shop-by-shop organizing, the AFL-CIO would have to try mass organizing. It would have to go back to the uncompromising tactics that created industrial unionism: the factory occupations in Flint and Toledo during the 30s that created the CIO; "the uprising of the 20,000" by immigrant women in 1909 that gained recognition for the ILGWU. It would have to re-invent Farrell Dobbs' "conference" concept: — creating whole regions of truck drivers who cooperated in strikes that transcended localism, building what was for a while, the strongest union America ever saw.

The 10-day French Teamsters' strike in late November 1996, provided Americans with another lesson in trade unionism. It showed again the power workers can generate when they are organized into unions that are national in scope and compete for workers' allegiance on a principled basis. Workers belonging to five confederations — CGT, CFDT, FO, FSU and CFTC — barricaded highways from Dunkirk to Lyon. They strangled French business which got no fuel, no food, no deliveries. All the unions supported drivers' demands for higher pay, and lowering pension eligibility to age 55 after which they would receive 70% of their yearly pay. With the public firmly on the side of the workers, and the strike spreading to Air France, the trucking companies and the conservative government gave in to the workers' demands.

Mass strikes work. The question is how to create the mass. Is Sweeney going to transform the AFL-CIO into the kind of social movement that could carry out mass organizing? His first steps suggest the opposite. Sweeney appointed Coia chair of the AFL-CIO Executive Council's organizing committee. And Coia's no organizer. In 1994, a year Coia took in \$175 million in dues, he

spent less than \$699,758 on organizing — compared to \$6 million dropped on the 1991 LIUNA convention.

What about the \$20 million Sweeney wants to spend on organizing? That will buy about 200 organizers nationwide. But it's a sum almost as derisory as the amount Coia's been spending. Consider first that Sweeney's \$20 million covers two years. And that each year AFL-CIO unions take in \$6 billion in dues alone. Sweeney recently announced the AFL-CIO will invest \$100 million on a commercial real estate project in San Francisco.

But can't great things grow from small beginnings? When AFL-CIO seeks allies on the Left, appoints radicals to high staff jobs, and positions itself for a great organizing leap, isn't it churlish to keep dwelling on corruption, racism, and lack of democracy? Doesn't it play into the hands of capital? After all, America's foremost postmodern philosopher, Richard Rorty, testified at Low Auditorium, that organized labor is no more corrupt than business, law firms or university departments.

Perhaps Rorty's philosophy department at the University of Virginia — like Coia's LIUNA — been controlled by the Mafia for the last 60 years. Maybe those protesting the Chairman's decisions are murdered, as happened in a New York Teamsters' local not long ago. It could also be that like Sheet Metal Workers Local 25, the Department was charged by a Federal Court with a 25-year effort to keep out blacks. But this seems unlikely.

Corruption, racism and undemocratic warlord rule are not minor flaws in an otherwise dynamic labor movement. They are structural features of a dying order that must be changed. Changed at least, if the union is to be as Sweeney insists, "a movement and a mission, not a business and a bureaucracy."

The great recognition that's taken place this year on campus — the "seismic click" that Betty Friedan heard at Low Auditorium — is that only by releasing the potential of organized labor can America be changed. Even the comparatively meager welfare state benefits Americans can no longer take for granted — public education, the 8-hour day, pensions, relief — were won only because of the power of organized labor. But the will to mobilize labor's potential doesn't rest at the top with the Sweeneys who are products of the AFL-CIO regime and a lifetime of deals to get where they've gotten.

We need to look toward the base, toward those fighting to make the Sweeneys and Bevonas accountable. To those trying to bring the members into the life of the union. Fifty years ago, when unions looked to their own members before they came to the campus for support, just one CIO union — the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee could mobilize not 200 organizers — Sweeney's goal for the entire AFL-CIO — but 5,000 organizers. "They had union summer for college students," one dissident 32B-32J janitor observed recently, "when are they going to have one for workers?"

A shorter version of this article appeared in *The Nation*.

Job Selling at the Janitors' Local

Michael Hirsch

LOUIS GONZALEZ IS A BIG MAN, WITH THE BODY OF A COLLEGE WRESTLER and the manner of a movie star. The 33-year-old building superintendent looks like he can take care of himself. But he's scared. He's scared of officials in his own union, the 70,000 member janitors Local 32B-32J of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and its well-paid president Gus Bevona, because he went to the authorities rather than spend \$2,000 on a bribe for a job.

After Gonzalez went to New York County district attorney Robert Morgenthau's office with tapes of solicitations and threats, the pressure got worse. "They came to my house at 2:00 in the morning. I was afraid for my daughter. I've been forced to move out of state." But his testimony could be the beginning of the end for a corrupt practice among union business agents many say has plagued low-income workers for decades.

The local's grievance officers, who resolve complaints against employers for violating contract provisions, work closely with building managers, their opposite numbers. With such ostensibly conflict-laden positions, the temptation is there to cut cozy deals as clenched fists morph into greased palms. When Gonzalez let it be known that he was looking for work, word reached him that a staff representative could help, "but it will cost you." Gonzalez says he paid out some \$980, but when the official kept demanding more, he blew the whistle.

The D.A.'s office filed charges in October 1995 against veteran business agent James McGorman, who before going to trial pleaded guilty to taking a bribe from Gonzalez in exchange for delivering a job. McGorman's sentence will be decided at state Supreme Court, after Court of Claims judge Rena Uviller reviews hundreds of requests from union members that she impose a stiff sentence and "send a message" to all elected officials of Service Employees' Local 32B-32J, one of the city's largest labor organizations.

The local is a magnet for corruption charges. Carl Biers, director of the Association for Union Democracy, says his organization has heard "hundreds of stories about firings and people being represented unfairly (by the Local), stories about job selling and kickbacks. But the Gonzalez case is the first hard evidence" brought to the DA.

Gonzalez and others in the union reform caucus, The Members for a Better Union, think McGorman is just one fish in a teaming sea, one that belly-flopped into their laps with little help from prosecutors. It is local president Gus Bevona's "sweet relationship" with management that allows job selling, "a common practice," to flourish, Gonzalez said. With Bevona the highest paid union official in the nation, critics say his union-provided penthouse sits atop a machine oiled by bribes. Gonzalez believes that many of the union's full-time representatives supplement their salaries by selling jobs to the largely immigrant work force of

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porters, doormen and building service workers. He wonders why Morgenthau's staff stopped at just McGorman.

It might be easy to dismiss Gonzalez's charges as partisan, something McGorman's counsel tried at the plea hearing. With the blocky McGorman standing stiffly, thick wrists crossed behind him, defense attorney Richard Hott characterized the appeals to Uviller as the product of those "with political ambitions following a political agenda that makes it unfair to punish my client."

At the hearing, Uviller said she may rethink the plea offer of financial restitution, community service and no jail time. With a reputation among courthouse hands for being bright, fair, and a straight shooter, Uviller admitted she "first thought this case was an isolated incident." But the barrage of letters convinced her "I need to know more" about the local before finalizing or "departing from the sentence promise."

Now the workers have an opportunity to tell her more.

BUT WHAT SHOULD BE A SWEET VICTORY ISN'T VIEWED THAT WAY. Dominick Bentivegna, a doorman, says Morgenthau's staff dragged its feet since taking the Gonzalez case in September 1995. Also threatened and similarly wired, Bentivegna found Morgenthau's labor racketeering unit blasé when he approached them. "I went with these tapes to the 'good guys.' It was the last day of the [first] Simpson trial. They seemed more interested in the OJ verdict than in what I had to show them."

Jim McNamara, a former consultant to the unit, isn't surprised. "You need a team with a top-priority mandate working on this. I don't see a major effort to investigate 32B-J here. When workers come in to complain, they're brow-beaten and bad-mouthed, not helped."

McNamara says he delivered a number of complainants with a variety of charges against the local to the DA during his tenure there, including two other witnesses to kickbacks. "The DA's office wasn't interested," McNamara said.

Dan Castleman, number two in Morgenthau's office and chief of its investigative unit, would say only that his office planned to "take a look at the correspondence" sent to the judge and decide whether it will change its position and recommend a stiffer sentence.

Whatever the outcome, the opposition has drawn blood and boosted the hopes of its leader, the diminutive 49-year-old Carlos Guzman, a porter from Ecuador whose 1995 run for president of the elephantine local garnered more than one-third of the vote. Many cite his chipping away at Bevena's credibility as leading to the local boss's defeat in a run for national union office last spring. Meeting with caucus activists in rented space at Washington Square Methodist Church, one of New York's oldest dissident venues, Guzman listens to members exchanging horror stories about on-the-job harassment from management and from co-workers. They believe the attacks are orchestrated. The stories recall the smell of brutalities and the sting of cold dangers, things out of a bad proletcult novel but that still dominate blue-collar life. They make middle-class complaining about battered self-esteem, à la the "Dilbert Principle," seem whiny by comparison. A burly doorman from Brooklyn's Borough Park, an Orthodox Jew who still lays tefilin and is just one of a handful of whites at the meeting, asks how to handle the Jew-baiting he gets from other workers. He says the attacks come with the blessing of his building superintendent. "It looks like they are setting

you up," several agree. "Don't use your fists."

Bentivegna tells the man instead to "create a paper trail" with the union and with the city's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "That way, if they move against you, you're covered. And use these words, 'for discrimination and a continued pattern of harassment,'" he counsels.

Are these oppositionists clear that with all their successes, their job is not to sue people? It is to organize. And do they know that, even once scaling Mt. Bevona, they'll face a bigger challenge staring down angry employers who won't have their corps of union courtesans to bed anymore? That means taking on cleaning contractors for whom a cheap non-union work force is more attractive than a cleaned-up union with a fired-up membership. Asked if they're ready to run the union and not just make life harder for "Greedy Gus," Gonzalez says guilelessly, "I'm taking union leadership classes at the Cornell labor college." How to solve the problems they may soon face isn't taught at trade union schools, yet.

BUT THOSE ARE BETTER PROBLEMS AND THEY ARE DOWN THE ROAD. Right now they just want to clean up their own local. One place they likely won't get help from is their International union. Guzman is sobered by the experience of the large building service and health care Local 399 in Los Angeles. When newly elected reformers locked horns with its entrenched executive director, the national union stepped in, and the new leadership was back on the street.

And a takeover doesn't fit new president Andy Stern's conception of expanding the 1.1 million-member SEIU through organizing and political action. The new president may talk tough and genuinely want to see his union flourish, but he grew up as an apparatchik — serving as organizing director and confidant of former president John Sweeney, now head of the AFL-CIO — and has no taste for reform. Like his predecessor, one SEIU insider laments, Stern accepts the sprawling International as a loose-knit confederation, and respects the autonomy of its many duchies. "If the right wingers and the pie cards pay their per caps and don't rip off the union," and also do not interfere with Stern making good on his pledge to put 20% of its resources into more audacious organizing campaigns, "who cares?"

As this official put it, referring to the Teamsters union's vigorous anti-corruption leader, "Stern's no Carey."

He also is no Douglas McCarron, the Carpenters president whose midnight raid last summer dethroned the tainted Fred Devine from his post as head of the New York carpenters' district.

Having the big dogs in Washington sitting on their haunches could be a good thing for Guzman, who says he fears a takeover by the International almost as much as Bevona should. After putting sweat equity into his fight, Guzman wants no condescending saviors. He thinks the members can win it all.

A shorter version of this article appeared in *The Village Voice*, December 3, 1996.

Was the Russian Revolution a Coup?

Morris Slavin

IN A RECENT, RHAPSODIC REVIEW OF DMITRI VOLKOGONOV'S BIOGRAPHY OF TROTSKY, Richard Pipes, Harvard historian, and former National Security Council Adviser to Ronald Reagan, insists that "insiders... knew that he [Trotsky] had no chance against Stalin." (*The New York Times Book Review*, March 24, 1996). Furthermore, it was Stalin who "was Lenin's true disciple and legitimate successor." That this opinion is based largely on Pipes' biased view of the Bolshevik Revolution can be demonstrated by examining his study of that event.* Moreover, if Stalin, as "Lenin's true disciple," committed numerous crimes, it follows that Lenin must have perpetrated similar offenses. Nowhere in his review does Pipes mention the well-known fact that Lenin had broken off personal relations with Stalin, that in his "Will" Lenin had asked Stalin's removal from the post of Secretary of the Party, and that a year before his death Lenin had asked Trotsky to take up the attack on Stalin-Ordzhonikidze in the infamous Georgian case where Stalin, according to Lenin, had acted like a "Big Russian " chauvinist.

More important, Professor Pipes and his co-thinkers cannot explain how it was possible for "a true disciple" to have killed thousands of Lenin's other "disciples," the Old Bolsheviks and those who had made the Revolution with Lenin in 1917. Were Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rakovsky, et al., lesser "disciples" than Stalin? If so, is it conceivable for "a true disciple" to murder other "disciples"? In short, how is it possible to explain the mountain of Bolshevik party corpses over which Stalin climbed if he was Lenin's heir?

Let us draw an imaginary analogy with our own Revolution. Supposing the following happened: George Washington has died during his term in office. An ambitious politician by the name of Aaron Burr has assumed power. Here I must apologize to Gore Vidal who made Burr a hero and Jefferson a villain in his novel. But bear with me. After 35 ballots for the vice-presidency there was still a tie between Burr and Jefferson. Burr, finally, persuades two delegates jealous of Jefferson to vote for him instead of Jefferson, and for a short time these three men

*Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

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called a “threesome” in English, or a “troika” in Russian, share power. Burr then exiles Jefferson and proceeds to consolidate his power by using the Alien and Sedition acts against his opponents. One of the weapons he employs against them is calumny. He tells the people that his personal enemies were all in the pay of George III during the Revolution. This enables him to jail all his opponents and to begin a purge of Washington’s friends. He kills every member of George Washington’s cabinet, all the leaders of the Federalist party, all former delegates to the Continental Congress, every governor of the 13 states, every senior officer who had served in the War of Independence, every signer of the Declaration of Independence and all delegates to the Constitutional Convention — and he does all this in the name of George Washington. Then we read some years later that a Polish historian named Ryszard Pipensky has written a book arguing that Burr was a true disciple of George Washington. Would we not be a bit skeptical of such a conclusion?

PIPES SHOWS HIS HATRED OF TROTSKY BY DESCRIBING HIM as “[i]nordinately vain, arrogant, often crude,” in short, possessing “a disagreeable personality.” Furthermore, writes Pipes, “Lenin valued Trotsky’s brutality and contempt for mankind.” This is written in light of the numerous biographies, observations, and commentaries on Trotsky’s devotion to the ideals of socialism and internationalism, and his unyielding defense of “the wretched of the earth.” It is true that Trotsky did not suffer fools gladly, even professors who teach at Harvard. The many witnesses who knew Trotsky had an entirely different opinion of him. Anatoly Vasilievich Luncharsky, writing in *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (New York, 1967, pp. 66, 67, 68), for example, remarks that Lev Davidovich Trotsky has “not a drop of vanity in him, he is totally indifferent to any title or to any trappings of power; he is, however, boundlessly jealous of his own role in history . . .” In her recent autobiography, *Back in Time: My Life, My Fate, My Epoch* (Oak Park, Michigan, 1995, p. 41), Nadezhda A. Joffe writes that one reason Trotsky “lost the battle” to Stalin was that “he was simply incapable of lowering himself to Stalin’s level, to act using Stalin’s methods.” As for “brutality,” in light of the history of our century, a little more “brutality” in 1923 (read revolutionary intransigence), on the part of German revolutionaries might have avoided the brutality of the Nazi regime a decade later.

Pipes repeats the Stalinist slander that Trotsky and his son Sedov called for Stalin’s assassination. This charge, among others, was exploded in the famous hearings chaired by John Dewey in Mexico. (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, By the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry (New York, London, 1937, pp. 259-260). Trotsky was asked specifically: “When you said ‘Remove Stalin,’ you used it in the ... political sense? Trotsky: Not only that; ... as a slogan, ‘Down with Stalin!’ I repudiated it. ... Because ... in a legal way I proposed to remove him; to change the secretary. When it becomes a slogan of the masses, it cannot mean assassination. I repudiate it.” (Ibid., p. 277 and the “Eight Session” of April 14, 1937 that deals with the theme of individual terrorism.)

Surely, Pipes is acquainted with this event that exposed the Moscow trials of the 1930s. Moreover, he knows that Russian revolutionaries (with the exception of the Peoples’ Will group, *Narodnaya Volya*), condemned assassination as a substitute for political action. Trotsky spoke of the need for “a political revolution” against the Stalinist bureaucracy, never for assassination. We chal-

lenge Pipes to cite a single document, remark, or memoir that contradicts the above.

Even if Pipes condemns the Revolution, a reader expects an objective, scholarly history of this climactic event. Instead, we are subjected to a biased interpretation that often repeats the old slanders of the White Guards, the Entente's politicians, the anti-Bolshevik socialists, and assorted defenders of Old Regime Russia.

NOWHERE IN HIS LONG RECITAL DOES PIPES CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY that the Bolshevik Revolution was an insurrection supported by millions of workers, peasants, and soldiers. It was only a "coup," a "tightly organized conspiracy" (p. 385), staged behind the backs of the people, without their knowledge and consent, he writes. Its organizers were not interested in bringing an end to the war, giving land to the peasants, or nationalizing the factories — except as slogans to fool the masses. The real purpose of the "coup" was to give power to a power-hungry leader, Lenin, and his small entourage of Old Bolsheviks. Those who demonstrated their support for the Bolshevik Party were a "mob," easily led by a clique of terrorists. This characterization could have been culled from Dostoevsky's novel, *The Possessed*.

Equally important, Lenin's "coup" was financed by German marks in a successful effort to pull Russia out of the war. (391). Ludendorff and the Kaiser could not have cared less about Lenin's program, politics, or goals — so long as he would help them win the war. This action, Pipes assures us, was not only dishonorable and unpatriotic, but shows Lenin's traitorous intentions. He cared nothing about Russia except to use it as a base in his pursuit of revolution. Thus, his "coup" was really an act of betrayal of Russian national interests as well as those of Russia's allies. Pipes puts quotation marks around the word *imperialist* describing World War I, implying that it was something else, without telling us what it was. (390).

Pipes calls Lenin's April Theses "mad" (394) — this, despite the fact that they foreshadowed the development of the Revolution and the Bolsheviks' future role in it. It was simply a means whereby Lenin would "wrest" the power from the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) in the soviets — not win over the majority in those organs, but "wrest" it from them. And that was to be done through frightening the majority with "the specter of a *counterrevolution*," (395) a word also in quotes to imply that it was only a "specter," not a real threat.

As to what Lenin meant by "class war," Pipes assures us, he meant the "extermination of rivals," not winning over their troops. And it was the "lust for domination" that defined Lenin's politics. Lenin "was never interested in reforming Russia, but only in subjugating it so as to have a springboard for a revolution in the industrial countries and their colonies," writes Pipes. (396) Furthermore, Lenin used street demonstrations to discredit the Provisional Government. Nowhere does Pipes mention the fact that it was the pursuit of the war that was discrediting the government, not Lenin's alleged "secret" intentions. By calling "the mobs" into the street, Pipes continues, even if they failed to overthrow the government, it would show they wanted change, and their suppression would make the government appear "anti-democratic." Lenin, however, always remained in the background pretending to follow the people

rather than to lead them, says our historian. (397-398)

Lenin's tactic, writes Pipes, "required the manipulation of crowds." No-where does Pipes consider that popular revolutions are made by masses of men and women who will no longer be "manipulated." "Lenin," he adds, "won power by first breaking the spirit of those who stood in his way, persuading them that they were doomed." (399) But how could he have "persuaded" them? we must ask. Were they inherently so weak that they could be "persuaded" by a "mad" revolutionary. Pipes adds that the Bolshevik "triumph in October was accomplished nine-tenths psychologically." If this were true, how account for such "psychological persuasion?" Weren't the opposition parties capable of using "psychology" to counteract the Bolsheviks?

ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF A SOCIAL REVOLUTION is the growth of political awareness and the decisive intervention by formerly passive masses of men and women. Unlike what Pipes thinks, they are not easily maneuvered. They are not "the mobs" that Le Bon describes in his *La Psychologie des Foules*. Contemporary historians speak of "revolutionary crowds," who have a psychology, tactics, and goals of their own. Pipes cannot admit such a concept since he insists that the forces engaged were "negligible." Quoting Napoleon to the effect that a "battle is won or lost in the minds of men before it even begins," he cannot answer the obvious question: why the Bolsheviks showed confidence in their goals, while the others failed to do so. Besides, let us recall that Napoleon also admitted, "God was on the side of the biggest battalions," and more of them went over to the Bolsheviks every day.

Pipes is forced to admit that although the Bolshevik party was a minority in the Soviets during May and June, "the tide was running in its favor." (407) The reason was not because Bolsheviks expressed the growing disillusionment with the war, the economic crisis, the overwhelming desire for the promised distribution of land to the peasant-soldiers, plus the weakness of the Provisional government but, rather, because of the "moral cowardice" of the Mensheviks and SRs, says Pipes. The latter parties believed the government was "bourgeois" and that the war was "imperialist" (Pipes's quotes), which logic demanded an end to both the government and the war. The contradictions in the politics of Mensheviks and SRs undoubtedly did contribute to strengthen the Bolsheviks. Pipes's charge, however, is that the Bolshevik advantage lay "in their total unconcern for Russia... It suited them very well if spontaneous forces 'smashed' existing institutions and destroyed Russia." (408) The Bolsheviks were not out to "smash Russia," however, but to destroy the old Czarist and bourgeois institutions in order to reconstruct Russian society and the state on a new basis. Pipes uses a loaded word, "Russia," — not, the institutions and social classes bent on restoring the old dominant classes to power. It should be remembered that with the outbreak of the war Izvolski, the Czar's foreign minister, boasted: "*C'est ma guerre!*" (It's my war). The Provisional Government, unfortunately, had not surrendered Izvolski's aim of seizing the Dardanelles.

The rise of factory committees as new organs of power and leadership at the expense of the national trade unions was a sign that new, local leaders had become spokesmen for the workingmen and women in the factories. But according to Pipes they were led by "politically inexperienced individuals amenable to

Bolshevik manipulation.” (408) Our historian fails to ask himself why they were not “amenable” to the “manipulation” of the other parties. There was still open debate in the factories. Why did these “inexperienced” workers shift toward the Bolsheviks, rather than the other parties? Isn’t it possible that the appeal of the Bolsheviks, rather than the slogans and propaganda of the Mensheviks and SRs, more closely expressed their desires? By May 30 two-thirds of these factory committees (*Fabzavkomy*) were under Bolshevik control. Then, in a revealing dig at the more progressive unionism, Pipes adds that 20 years later the same kind of struggle occurred in the United States between the “plant-based unions [industrial unions] affiliated to the CIO [and] the AFL craft-oriented unions. Here, as in Russia, the Communists favored the former.” (409) Is Pipes implying that the CIO was also “maneuvered” by the Communists to struggle for “plant-based unions”?

Pipes calls the Workers Militia Lenin’s “private army,” that proved disappointing. This view is contradicted by Rex A. Wade’s study entitled *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1984). Its author cites an observer, G.P. Georgievskii, who said that the workers’ drive to arm themselves was spontaneous and “instinctive.” Furthermore, the “lower level” workers were far more eager to arm themselves and to organize than were the party leaders, writes Wade. It was the Mensheviks’ and SRs’ opposition to these militias, and to the Red Guards that evolved from them, that allowed the Bolsheviks to lead them after the October Revolution.

PIPES DEFENDS KERENSKY’S DECISION TO LAUNCH THE TRAGIC JUNE OFFENSIVE as a way to revive the flagging patriotism of the troops, carry out Russia’s “obligations” to the Allies, suppress “the mutinous elements in the Petrograd garrison,” and raise the prestige of the government. (412-413) But isn’t it strange that Kerensky never seemed to have considered the possibility of a failed offensive? Nor does Pipes question why Kerensky should have had to carry out obligations to the Allies rather than to Russia’s suffering population and its dispirited army. He cites the figure of Russian surrender as against the number killed as being 300 to 100. In contrast, the ratio of surrender to those killed in the Allied and German armies was fifteen times less. (419) If this was true, the decision by Kerensky to launch an offensive in June was irresponsible and proved self-defeating.

Pipes is convinced that the so-called “July days” was a failed attempt by Lenin to seize power. “[I]t was Lenin’s worst blunder,” he writes. He is certain that the Bolsheviks hoped to ride to power on the backs of the demonstrators who had insisted on marching with arms in hand. Yet he admits that “For lack of adequate documentation, it is difficult to determine the attitude of the Bolsheviks toward these developments.” (423)

However, Alexander Rabinowitch, in his *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1991, first published 1968), has determined the Bolshevik attitude. He makes clear that the Petersburg Committee by a vote of 19 to 2 passed a resolution “to draw up an appeal calling on the proletariat not to participate in isolated revolutionary actions and to exert all efforts toward winning increased influence among other classes of the population. This was a measure fully consistent with the Central Committee’s opposition to the developing movement,” writes Rabinowitch. An

amendment to take the movement [that is, the demonstration] "into its own hands" should it prove "impossible to hold back the masses," was defeated by a vote of 12 to 9. (Rabinowitch, p. 127) Rabinowitch contrasts the editorials of *Pravda*, under Lenin's control at that time, and those of *Soldatskaia Pravda* (also a Bolshevik paper), that urged an immediate attempt at an insurrection. Lenin wanted "to preserve the status quo," concludes Rabinowitch, because he felt the time was not ripe for an all-out uprising. (Rabinowitch, p. 131). Sukhanov, on the other hand, shows Lenin's vacillations during these events. (N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, London, New York, Toronto, 1955, p. 437-ff). But nowhere is there an indication of Lenin's attempt to seize power in July.

Pipes claims that Lenin went into hiding because his German money connection was about to be exposed. Yet Pipes admits that some 800 leading Bolsheviks had been arrested and the printing plant that published *Pravda* was destroyed. (433) This was reason enough for Lenin to go into hiding. Besides, if his connection to Germany were to be exposed, hiding from Kerensky's troops would not have helped Lenin or his cause.

PIPES BLAMES THE KERENSKY GOVERNMENT FOR NOT PROCEEDING with the alleged proof of Lenin's "treason" and holds the majority soviet parties responsible for the pressure on the government not to use the alleged proof because it would ostensibly aid the counterrevolution. But this illustrates exactly the dilemma faced by the Mensheviks and SRs. The destruction of Bolshevik power, they realized, would have led to their own eventual demise. The Right made little distinction between Bolsheviks and other socialists. At the same time, the government was helpless without soviet support, so could not act against its ally. Moreover, this was why the period of "dual power" was so unstable. Either the soviets would take power led by the Bolsheviks, or they would be suppressed by the Right. The unusual division of authority between the Provisional Government and the soviets could not continue. This would have been true even if a Constituent Assembly had replaced the Kerensky regime. Sovereignty had to reside either in the new legislature or in the soviets.

Trotsky, Pipes declares, could not "aspire to national leadership" because of his Jewishness, though admitting that he was an "ideal complement to Lenin." But Trotsky shared the "national leadership" with Lenin all through the period of the Revolution and the Civil War. As for his Jewishness, he had turned down Lenin's proposal for the post of Commissar of the Interior because he felt his Jewishness would have given counterrevolutionaries an additional weapon. This is well known.

What has never been examined is why a Georgian who spoke with a thick accent could "aspire" to national leadership while an internationalist of Jewish origin who spoke and wrote flawless Russian could not. No one separated the "Lenin-Trotsky" leadership during the Revolution. And it is yet to be proven that had Trotsky decided to fight for Lenin's mantle his Jewishness would have held him back. He was the most popular man in the party; he had presided over two revolutionary soviets, those of 1905 and 1917; he was the successful organizer of the Red Army, a leader of the Third International, and an outstanding Marxist theoretician. In a recently completed biography of Lenin by Robert Service (*Lenin A Political Life*, vol. 3, *The Iron Ring*; Indiana Uni-

versity Press, 1995), the English historian writes that Trotsky "could write as well as Tocqueville and Burke; he could orate like Demosthenes and Churchill (and without their need for textual self-preparation); he could organize a war machine with the skill of Ludendorff." (p. 353, n. 139). Thus, Pipes confuses the revolutionary period with its aftermath, when Trotsky's Jewishness had become another weapon in the Stalinist arsenal.

Pipes is sympathetic to General Kornilov because the latter "loved Russia." Kornilov wanted to revive the death penalty in the army and to dissolve the army committees, two measures which would have brought an end to the Revolution. Kerensky, according to Pipes, was jealous of the general and tried to bring him down. (443-444) But if this were true why did he appoint Kornilov to be the commander-in-chief? We have Pipes' assurance that Kornilov was no counterrevolutionary but rather a "possible savior of Russia." Moreover, "The country yearned for firm authority. But the socialists were insensitive to this mood." (447) And who is "the country?" Evidently the socialists were not part of "the country." The "firm authority" that Pipes invokes is that of Old Regime Russia, not the one to be established by Bolshevik Russia. When the Germans launched their offensive against Riga "The undisciplined and politicized Russian troops fell back," writes Pipes. (448) This is typical of our historian: if armies are "politicized" they must be "undisciplined." Yet he reveals that in a conversation with Kerensky, the latter admitted that "his [Kerensky's] actions in 1917 had been strongly influenced by the lesson of the French Revolution." (447, footnote) If so, both Kerensky and Pipes must surely have known that one reason for the victories of French arms in 1793-1794 was their "politicization." (The same can be said of Cromwell's Ironsides in their victory over King Charles's Cavaliers).

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN KERENSKY AND KORNILOV WAS ALL A MISTAKE, we are told. Kerensky was in a state of "hysteria," and thus could not judge Kornilov's actions objectively. There was no Kornilov plot, "[a]lmost certainly not," we are assured. Furthermore, it was not the agitators who halted the advance of army units on Petrograd but the generals themselves when they saw that the city was not in Bolshevik hands, writes Pipes. But if we glance at another source (Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd*, New York: 1976, p. 149), we learn that the reason there were almost no skirmishes, between Kornilov's forces and those of the government was because

agitators were soon drawing the troops to mass rallies before [General] Krymov's very eyes. With relatively little difficulty they won soldier-representatives in most units to their point of view, and by August 30 some cossacks were expressing their readiness to arrest Krymov. . . . On the southwestern front the outspoken General Denikin had been incarcerated by his own troops.

This development hardly squares with Pipes' myth that "the country" wanted Kornilov's "firm hand."

If there was a "plot," Pipes continues, it was Kerensky's "engineered to discredit the general." Kornilov's military moves were meant to defend the government against the Bolsheviks, not overthrow it, Pipes insists. (463)

But the workers, peasants, and soldiers of Russia lacked Pipes's assurances regarding Kornilov. Largely as a result of the Kornilov affair, by the end

of August and into September, they began to vote overwhelmingly for the Bolsheviks. Pipes cites the following revealing figures to show the change in the Moscow municipal elections from June to September: while the SR and Menshevik vote fell some 44% for the former and 8% for the latter, the Bolshevik vote rose from not quite 12% to 49%, an increase of almost 38%. The Kadets also gained: from a little over 17% to 31.5%, an increase of over 14%. (466) But the Rightist movement was shattered by Kornilov's defeat and "Kadet politics virtually ground to a halt." (Rabinowitch, p. 165. See his chapter eight, "The Bolsheviks and Kornilov's Defeat," and chapter nine, "The Question of a New Government" for Bolshevik gains on the eve of the insurrection).

An example of Bolshevik growth in the provinces is Saratov, the important town on the Volga. There, after the Kornilov episode, the rank and file of the garrison moved far to the left of the officers who represented them in the soviet. On August 31, the Bolshevik resolution won a majority of the soviet for the first time, 188 to 178. The resolution demanded the arrest of Kornilov and his supporters, rejected all attempts at civil peace, advised the formation of "organs of power" by workers, soldiers, and peasants everywhere, and urged a continuing struggle against "the slander" of bourgeois papers and parties — among other points. (Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov*, Ithaca and London, 1986, pp. 230-231). The vote for the soviet in September gave the Bolsheviks a majority — 164 out of 320 representatives. By fall, writes the author, "most Saratov workers and soldiers expressed sympathy for Bolshevik and other international slogans." (Raleigh, p. 233)

Rabinowitch adds the following on the growth of Bolshevik influence in Petrograd during the last days of August:

It is worth noting that even workers in industrial plants that heretofore had been Menshevik and SR strongholds, as well as soldiers in some of the more politically restrained regiments of the garrison — for example, those which initially had remained neutral and subsequently had taken the lead in helping to suppress the July uprising — now turned against the government. What is more, even some of the military personnel rushed from the front to the capital after the July days now joined the ranks of the opposition. (*The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, p. 158.)

By August 31, a clear majority of the deputies in the Petrograd Soviet, for the first time, voted in favor of a Bolshevik resolution, introduced by Kamenev. The Left SR faction now became virtually an independent party, the soviets became more radical and their "popularity among the masses [was] immeasurably enhanced. . . Workers had become more militant and better organized, and significant numbers of them had obtained weapons. . . Within the Petrograd garrison, control of many regimental committees passed from more moderate elements into the hands of the Bolsheviks." (Rabinowitch, p. 166) By September 25, the Petrograd Soviet was completely reorganized and Trotsky replaced Chkheidze as chairman.

PIPES BEMOANS THE FACT THAT "NO EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT" EXISTED without realizing, perhaps, that the Bolsheviks were about to establish a most "effective" government. Moreover, he despises the Russian intellectuals, constantly employing the term "socialist intelligentsia" as a pejorative expression. And as seen above, he refers to the Bolshevik Revolution as a "coup," citing Curzio Malaparte who, allegedly, saw the Russian "coup" as a model for modern revo-

lutions by small detachments of shock troops. Pipes agrees with Malaparte that when the public has “no inkling of what is happening,” and when small detachments of “trained shock troops” seize strategic points. . . [t]his description fits the October coup in Russia.” (485)

Contrast this description of the October insurrection with what Trotsky wrote in *The History of the Russian Revolution The Triumph of the Soviets* (New York: 1934), vol. 3, pp. 232-233):

The workers had no need to come out into the public square in order to fuse together: they were already politically and morally one single whole without that. The soldiers were even forbidden to leave their barracks without permission. . . But those invisible masses were marching more than ever before in step with the events. The factories and barracks never lost connection for a minute with the district headquarters, nor the districts with Smolny. The Red Guard detachments felt at their back the support of the factories. The soldier squad returning to the barracks found the new shift ready. Only with heavy reserves behind them could revolutionary detachments go about their work with such confidence. . . The bourgeois classes had expected barricades, flaming conflagrations, looting, rivers of blood. In reality a silence reigned more terrible than all the thunders of the world. The social ground shifted noiselessly like a revolving stage, bringing forward the popular masses, carrying away to limbo the rulers of yesterday.

Observers and historians of the events agree that the Bolshevik uprising made no impact on the people of Petrograd. On the following day, October 26, they went about their business as if nothing drastic had occurred. Pipes adds that people in the provinces did not know what was happening and remained indifferent to the change. No one was really upset over the fall of the Provisional Government.

In concluding, Pipes refuses to accept the very idea of a Bolshevik Revolution. Everything the Bolsheviks did, he writes, was “illegal.” And, of course, it was. Long ago Robespierre gave a classic reply to those who attacked him for acting “illegally.” He declared: “All these things were illegal — as illegal as the Revolution, as the overthrow of the throne and of the Bastille, as illegal as liberty itself. You cannot have a revolution without a revolution.” A historian who fails to understand this should not attempt to write on revolutions.

Book Reviews

Resisting Dehumanization

DWIGHT MACDONALD AND THE POLITICS CIRCLE: THE CHALLENGE OF COSMOPOLITAN DEMOCRACY by Gregory D. Sumner. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996. \$35.00

Reviewed by Michael Wreszin

RIDING DOWN FIFTH AVENUE ON THE TOP OF A DOUBLE DECKER BUS in the midst of the Depression, Dwight Macdonald scanned the passing throng from his elevated perch and saw only "the cheap undistinguished faces" of the pedestrians. He had been researching a paper on dictatorships and their relationship to the masses. He conceded in his journal that he, like Woodrow Wilson, "combined a scorn for individuals with respect for THE PEOPLE." This careful and well-written monograph is about that ambivalence if not always intentionally so. It is a study of a serious, thoughtful group of people dedicated to finding a way to live a humane life in a terrifying world and passing it on to others. This is a published doctoral dissertation but it transcends that forbidding category because of the author's impassioned commitment to the search of his subjects. So much does he identify with them that at times he can hardly be separated from the group of intellectuals he is writing about. This is one of the charms of the book. For in our own despairing and jaded age, Sumner takes these former struggles seriously and finds a relevance and positive example for our own times.

For those despairing souls who identify with the left this is a history of a group of dedicated radical intellectuals who experience almost nothing but defeat, disillusionment and ultimate loss of hope. This story offers an example of the message in Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*. The struggle is endless and futile, but engaging in the struggle is what makes one human. It is the "Myth of Sisyphus." Dwight Macdonald and his circle rolled the rock and their sympathetic chronicler follows their example. For them as for us the fight was against dehumanization, against "massification," "thingification." It is the struggle of modern humans to avoid becoming superfluous. There is a widespread notion

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that it took the horrors of the 30s and 40s to demolish the sanguine optimism characteristic of Americans and to awaken them to the innate evil in the world. It was clear to vast numbers of people in the modern world that human life was simply not worth much. Camus described this "absurd world" to a large crowd at Columbia University in the Spring of 1946. He observed that if this dehumanized world had been caused by

the bankruptcy of a political ideology or a system of government, it would have been simple enough. But what happened came from the very root of man and society. There was no doubt about this and it was confirmed day after day not so much by the behavior of the criminals but by that of the average man. The facts showed that men deserved what was happening to them. Their way of life had so little value; and the violence of the Hitlerian negation was in itself logical. But it was unbearable and we fought it.

Not very long before Camus's observation, Irwin Edman, a lecturer in philosophy, declared after reciting the horrendous chain of events that "men in the 19th century were sad that they could no longer believe in God. They are more deeply saddened now by the fact that they can no longer believe in man."

This study is about this "terrifying world" as the meaning of events gripped the imagination of a group of young Americans and Europeans during World War II and the immediate post-war years. It focuses on a group of like-minded writers and readers brought together by Dwight and Nancy Macdonald's astonishingly, independent, radical journal, *politics*, from 1944 to 1949. Sumner has mastered the material, worked in the archives, thoroughly grasped the arguments and for the most part brought his characters to life intellectually. He is an intellectual historian. You seldom get to know these people personally nor do you learn much about the relationship between their public lives and their private lives. Sometimes this missing information is crucial to an understanding of their public actions. This is the nature of intellectual monographs. But if one takes ideas as seriously as Mr. Sumner, then the ideas themselves take on life and character and great interest. Reading Sumner's account makes you intimately acquainted with the ideas of significant partisans who have cast a long shadow across the intellectual history of the 20th century, not simply in the United States but in Western Europe as well.

First there are the Macdonalds, Dwight and Nancy, who is every bit as important as he in terms of building the intellectual community in which these people lived. She was, as he once conceded, the unknown soldier of the enterprise. There are also the well known "New York Intellectuals": Irving Howe, Lewis Coser, Lionel Abel, Sidney Hook, Mary McCarthy, Daniel Bell, Paul Goodman, Hannah Arendt, James T. Farrell, C. Wright Mills, and many more. And there are the Europeans: Nicola Chiaromonte, the most important, was the life-long friend and collaborator of Macdonald's; Andrea Caffe, a legendary intellectual vagabond of Russian and Italian descent; Niccola Tucci, a sardonically whimsical Italian, formerly a propagandist in the Mussolini government; Victor Serge, a Belgian revolutionary of the 1917 era, member of the Soviet Communist International and subsequently driven into exile in Mexico where he remained in close touch with the *politics* circle. But most important to Sumner, after Nicola Chiaromonte, is Albert Camus. Camus's actual connection to Macdonald and *politics* may be a bit more tenuous than the relationship described by Sumner; they were hardly friends or even associates. However, Sumner

is rightfully interested in the similarity of their feelings and their notions about how to challenge the dehumanization of the modern world. There are countless other French and European writers and intellectuals who contribute to the magazine or pass through the close knit world of the *politics* circle. Given the opportunity, Sumner invariably provides an informative profile.

FOR SUMNER, AS WELL AS HIS SUBJECTS, THE LETHAL POWER of the modern nation state demands resistance. It often seemed, as he points out, that it was either collaboration or resistance to these partisans. After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Macdonald went so far as to say that

We must 'get' the nation state before it 'gets' us. . . Every individual had better begin thinking 'dangerous thoughts' about sabotage, resistance, rebellion, and the fraternity of all men everywhere.

This hyperbole may illustrate what Robert Westbrook, another contemporary Macdonaldite, has described as "the politics of fearful anticipation," in which, as Sumner points out, there is a fuzzy line between "cautionary metaphor and reality." It is also often the mark of a world where words do duty for things. Sumner is right on target when he notes rather wistfully that the problem of "connecting talk to some kind of action" continued to "bedevil Macdonald" and the circle throughout the post-war years. But Macdonald's rhetoric did express some of the major themes of this book. The "we" is addressed, obviously, to a relatively small group of what Sumner describes as "ideologically homeless dissidents. . . people with unpopular political ideas." Can such an isolated and alien group "foment real change in a world of unparalleled state power and mass apathy?" Sumner's entire book addresses that crucial question. He is mainly interested in the political potential of dissidence and negativism against the prevailing powers. This is a study, almost a tract at times, concerning the possibility of local community associations, "grassroots fraternities," "pockets of resistance," "small heretical groups" to challenge the status quo and literally change the world. In Macdonald's "Root is Man" essay, published in 1944, he envisioned such intimate groups of like-minded negativists who would, as Camus had called for, "consistently oppose to power the force of example; to authority exhortation, to insult, friendly reasoning; to trickery, simple honor."

Such a stance obviously poses serious contradictions. The message of nearly all these radicals is that mass organization is not only not possible but not even desirable. For many, expecting an alliance with a militant class conscious working class had become a chimera. Dwight had only a fleeting positive relationship with the working class in the late 30s. Whatever hope lay in that quarter was pretty well dashed when there was so little resistance to the conservative power of the United States after the war and what he viewed as the compromising docility of the American labor movement. Sumner is sensitive to this obvious dilemma and critical first of members of the French resistance for "dismissing the 'masses' and withdrawing from political debate." They should have met the obligation to continue trying to connect with the public, to create an agenda and a "national-popular," idiom that spoke in a more positive, specific way to its needs and desires — in short to build a viable alternative to the mainstream choices.

Labor's failure to resist in Europe soon became the *politics* line. By the end of 1944, Dwight and his colleagues had given up on the class struggle. Dwight

never tired of returning to Trotsky's revealing assertion that if the proletariat failed to fulfill its revolutionary mission "then nothing else would remain except openly to recognize that the socialist program based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society ended as a utopia." There had been no revolution and only Marxist ideologues waited upon such an event. To one *politics* reader Dwight wrote in June of 1946: "It is my opinion that serious political action toward socialism is not possible on a party or mass basis and that we must begin again in a much more modest and directly personal way." This was not only Macdonald's message, it was the message of Chiaromonte, Andrea Caffi, Albert Camus and pretty much the implicit message of Gregory Sumner and the group of contemporary communarians with whom he is intellectually allied — Jeffrey Isaac, Casey Blake, both mentors, and Vaclav Havel who takes the place of Albert Camus.

THIS RAISES ANOTHER SERIOUS CONTRADICTION if one is thinking about a viable political program for confronting the iniquities of the capitalist status quo. Sumner is very sensitive to the inherent elitism in much of this politically minimalist stand. Macdonald in particular, had always harbored a kind of Brook Farm fantasy about a comforting protective society of friends who would retire to a rural commune and "live together a life such as few could live in this rotten age." He wrote a schoolboy friend "By God we have a group as talented, as full of intellectual and artistic juice as any in these United States." He was sure they could create a community "where people of wit, intelligence, understanding [could] live together." In those early years Macdonald was thinking of a literary, artistic community. But after his radicalization, brought about primarily by Nancy Macdonald, he thought frequently of small communities of radical friends who, through serious discussion, could build an example-setting community living a humane life.

Briefly the Trotskyist movement seemed a possibility and so did the small group around the *Partisan Review*, although he quickly learned that those intellectual street fighters were hardly what one would call friends. Factional bitterness and internecine warfare always seemed to frustrate Macdonald's aims. Macdonald had a habit of quickly becoming his own organization's most persistent critic. Immediately after joining the Trotskyist Workers Party he attacked Trotsky, its international leader. Finally he established *politics* and during its brief tenure he and Nancy did create the kind of intimate organization in which he took such pleasure. But he was its sole editor. The circle of contributors and readers was a relatively elite group. There were no bars to membership but the journal's appeal did not go far beyond a relatively educated, politically sophisticated readership.

Sumner makes a good deal of two efforts to transcend the rhetoric of dissent and create practical political agencies. One was the Politics Package Project designed to aid beleaguered intellectuals in war-torn Europe by sending them life-giving aid in the form of food, clothing, money and intellectual sustenance since the American government wasn't doing it. On the contrary, Dwight charged that the U. S. government was helping to starve them. Sumner is right that the Package Project was an important and successful enterprise, "energizing the *politics* community and fostering lasting transatlantic ties even as it helped alleviate a desperate human tragedy." But of course it was small scale, it "lacked

by itself sufficient ideological content" to form the basis for a third camp movement challenging superpower control and domination of political life. One adherent of the Marxist wing of the *politics* readership dismissed the project as "an attempt to bail out the ocean with a thimble." Again it was minimalist; it served human needs but made no challenge to established structures.

The other attempt was the establishment, through the leadership of Nicola Chiaromonte and Mary McCarthy, of Europe-America Groups, again designed to create a cosmopolitan international community of intellectuals. It would hopefully begin, in Camus's words, a "*civilization du dialogue*" against the Cold War and its leading antagonists. Sumner deals with this failed attempt at some length but concedes that it never really got off the ground largely due to constant factional disputes. An interesting one he ignores is an exchange between Macdonald and Chiaromonte over the nature of Soviet totalitarianism. Dwight's obsessive anti-Stalinism, which insisted that Stalinism was the main enemy to a peaceful world, did not sit well in Paris where such rhetoric smacked of the United States State Department. Chiaromonte had to plead with Dwight to stop such a manichean black and white analysis and recognize the grey side of both the Soviet Union and the United States, which was the only rational position for a third camp person to take. The whole concept of Europe America Groups was to provide a haven for critics of both Cold War superpowers. But Dwight was approaching the point of fear, despair and disillusionment that led him to "Choose the West" in a famous debate with Norman Mailer.

The Europe America Groups also suffered from the kind of "insular elitism" that Sumner is clearly aware of. He questions *politics*' constant portrait of "a barren domestic landscape" of "coopted workers" and "mesmerized masses." While admiring Andrea Caffi, he refers to his absurd portrait of "sheeplike hordes." But despite these observations and the record of failure to achieve an effective cosmopolitan movement of dissent, Sumner remains a dedicated advocate of a "decentered pluralistic politics of 'limits' that contrasted sharply with the statist alternatives commonly associated with the post-war years." Even though the *politics* circle succumbed to an "oasis psychology" he believes that the ideas of the group deserve a new look because we are in a current crisis similar to that faced by the post-World War II intellectuals — "the anti-humane dynamics of high technology and bureaucratic organization, the dangerous centralization of economic and political power" and, most important, the isolation and alienation of average citizens from any meaningful sense of control over decisions which affect their lives. Macdonald's insights into the possibilities of "informal, transnational lines of dialogue and friendship 'outside' traditional structures of authority" have not, he believes, lost their relevance.

SUMNER IS A PART OF A SMALL BAND OF COMMUNITARIANS who have accepted a Niebuhrian view of human potential, are deeply aware of human frailty and like one of their most articulate spokesmen, Jeffrey Isaac, a political scientist at Indiana, are skeptical of almost any form of mass politics. To the question, repeatedly asked throughout this study: "What can a small number of heretics do to nurture humanist values in such a forbidding climate? It is these communarians' hope that they can follow Andrea Caffi's vision. The answer lies outside of conventional mass politics and in the "patient efforts to rebuild an autonomous public life by a few scattered individuals and groups, who might

find in a resolute pessimism about the immediate future the courage not to despair of the eternal 'good cause of man.'" One can only entertain what Isaacs calls "local responses" to immediate problems "the solutions of which are at best "partial, fractious and in many ways unsatisfying." This is reminiscent of the Niebuhrian observation that "nothing worth doing can be done in a life time." Surely it is the sign of a liberalism in retreat which would be an understatement of the present situation.

Sumner, like this reviewer, can never resolve the inevitable contradiction between the penetrating and negativistic criticism of Dwight and many in his circle and the absolute need to engage in a more open, receptive and essential "grassroots movement building." As the editor of *politics* Macdonald insisted that the post-war society had reached such an extreme of "rationalized lunacy" that the only hope lay in a band of "specialists in abuse, technicians of vilification, expert mudslingers." As one of the most prescient and penetrating critics of American society he honed those skills. His forte was not any kind of movement-building. That takes very different kinds of skills. A real movement leading to change probably demands both devastating critics and movement-building leadership. But they are unlikely to be found in the same person. Nor can Sumner work out the obvious contradiction between Macdonald's libertarian individualism and his obvious desire to see a genuine community consciousness that goes beyond such precious communities as Wellfleet, Massachusetts, East Hampton Long Island or Bocca di Magre on the sea coast in Italy, all his summer retreats far from the "madding crowd."

Mary McCarthy understood the contradiction between the rarified discussions of the need for radical social change combined with a contempt for the potential encroachment of the masses and the "spreading ooze" of *their* mass culture. She spoofed this conflict in *Oasis* but also in the *Hounds of Summer* in which she has a sardonic account of her and Dwight's attempt to retard the arrival of more ordinary Italian citizens, a kind of intellectual improvement association. It is not dissimilar to the struggle of property owners to prevent a bridge being built to Fire Island for fear that the metropolitan transit company would soon be bringing out the day-tripping masses. These are the obvious ironies of those who would change the world but not be of it. Gregory Sumner is acutely aware of them. His own intelligence and sophistication make it impossible for him to offer a resolution, for after all even Marx had contempt for the "idiocy" of the peasants. Dwight often expressed a similar contempt. In addition Dwight was an outsider in any community he ever had anything to do with. Like the other Marx, Groucho, he suspected any organization that would have him as a member. That is what makes him so interesting and even lovable. But he and his kind with their frequent "creative mistakes" are only a necessary ingredient in the complex mix of forces and talents that bring about genuine social change. Resting our future in small groups of "resolute pessimists" outside of politics and history is a leap of faith, even if it is made on Kierkegaard's "far side of despair," that I for one can't make.

The Need for Feminist Struggle Persists

REASONABLE CREATURES: ESSAYS ON WOMEN AND FEMINISM by Katha Pollitt.
New York: Vintage, 1994. 186pp., \$11.00

Reviewed by Laura Lee Downs

The real troubles in this world tend to settle on the misalignment between men and women — that's my opinion, my humble opinion, as I long ago learned to say. But how we do love to brush these injustices aside. Our wont is to put up with things, with the notion that men behave in one manner, and women in another. Carol Shields, *The Stone Diaries*

FEMINISM HAS LONG BEEN DOGGED by a kind of denial-cum-wishful-thinking that is often shared by its sympathizers and enemies alike, namely, the delusion that the need for fierce political engagement (and any attendant upheaval in well-worn perceptions of self and society) is now safely behind us. Of course, few outside the far right would deny that once upon a time, there was a crying need for feminist struggle. Women were virtually enslaved to their husbands, lacked the vote, had no legal, separate personhood, no right to sue for divorce, or even too much say in the care and fates of the children they bore. But that was in the bad old days. Now (and "now" might be 1792, 1857, 1921, 1972, or just last week, to choose but a few commonly cited "transformative" moments...), today, all that has been reformed and resolved, women are now mistresses of their own fates, happier and stronger than ever. Surely the time for such a powerful liberatory politics is now safely behind us.

The popular notion that our need for a feminist politics has (unlike the state) happily withered away is a delusion whose wide skirts owe to the multiple forms that women's oppression has taken across time and space. Movements thus tend to rise and form around resolving or changing one or more of these particular manifestations. When these specific issues have been conquered, the movement appears to have succeeded. Energies dissipate and people's passionate, deeply held convictions of separate and unequal genders, barely touched by the movement, lodge themselves in some other cultural and social niche, from whence they continue to shape an unequal society. Little girls and grown women alike thus share the uncomfortable sense that all is not right with the world, a sense that is reinforced by daily experiences of sexual harassment, even danger, as one walks down the street at night, of unequal pay and uneven opportunities at work, of expectations that one will accept and bear the burdens of motherhood alone, if necessary, and without question (for biology remains destiny in our "post-feminist" moral universe).

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And yet haven't the real battles already been won? Isn't the time and space for feminist complaint long past?

One of the most striking qualities of Katha Pollitt's writing is her unerring eye, trained squarely on the heart of the matter, never mistaking particular victory for that end of feminism whose arrival is so often and eagerly hailed. I suspect this is why her essays stir in people a sense of welcome relief: while others are prepared to bid feminism a hasty farewell, Pollitt stands ready to remind us why the send-off remains a bit premature. As new issues surface (surrogate motherhood), or old favorites return for a visit (the many faces of "family" values, sexual harassment in the workplace), Pollitt lucidly unfolds the specific details with an eloquent economy of gesture. In so doing, she consistently underscores one clear and unavoidable certainty: that without a feminist analysis, that is, one that regards women as human ends in themselves, rather than the conveniently situated instruments of male will, one is simply unable to understand how such issues might affect the lives of individual human beings. Indeed, without a solid feminist framework, one would be hard pressed to identify these as political questions, as opposed to a series of endlessly interesting personal dramas.

But as Pollitt well knows, the debates surrounding date rape or surrogate motherhood are political in the most fundamental sense of the word. For these are issues that pose, time and again, the question of women's freedom to decide how they will live — a freedom that Americans seem increasingly prepared to compromise in the name of fetal protection or the integrity of the family. Writing from the ground of a generous humanism, an appealing blend of envisioning the world as it might be with an acute sense of current social and political realities, Pollitt invites her reader to understand and embrace gender equity as integral to the struggle for social justice:

For me, to be a feminist is to answer the question 'Are women human?' with a yes. It is not about whether women are better than, worse than or identical with men. And it's certainly not about trading personal liberty — abortion, divorce, sexual self-expression — for social protection as wives and mothers, as pro-life feminists propose. It's about justice, fairness and access to the broad range of human experience...It's about women having intrinsic value as persons rather than contingent value as means to an end for others: fetuses, children, 'the family,' men. (p. xxi)

Reasonable Creatures elaborates this utopian vision in a series of essays that illuminate the strands of feminist concern winding through a whole range of cultural and political dilemmas, from campus culture wars to media hype. Together, they make an eloquent and powerful argument that feminist politics cannot be separated from the broader project of constructing a more humanitarian and collective public sphere inside the shell of American political practice, hollowed out by a competitive, hyper-individualist and essentially negative vision of human freedom and social interaction.

IT IS HERE, I BELIEVE, THAT THE EXTRAORDINARY POWER AND APPEAL of Pollitt's political vision lies. For in setting forth the discursive and practical links that bind anti-feminism to the forces that drive and uphold structures of economic exploitation and political inequality, Pollitt accomplishes two crucial tasks: first, she addresses people's uneasy perception that there are far more important and pressing social problems than "mere feminism" at stake in the troubled

late 20th century (and here, "feminism" translates roughly as the problems of the middle-class woman with briefcase, pressed up against a glass ceiling at work while juggling the unforgiving schedules of nanny/day-care center on the home front). Secondly, her searching analyses reveal the poverty of current political discourse in the United States. For ours is a language of individual striving and economic ascent that remains stubbornly mute — blind, even — to the inherently inegalitarian and oppressive nature of everyday transactions in an allegedly free marketplace, a market that is in truth shaped and underwritten by deep divisions of class, race, and gender. By attending to those divisions, Katha Pollitt offers a sharper and more nuanced understanding of particular events, from incidents of date rape to domestic violence to the bombing of family-planning clinics. She thus gives voice to sorrows and injustices of which our political language cannot even speak. Let me offer one brief example.

In discussing the unfortunate early childhood of Baby M, Pollitt turns our attention away from the middle-class angst of Elizabeth and William Stern in order to reflect on the very troubling questions that Mary Beth Whitehead and the Sterns had opened up with their unenforceable contract in flesh:

What is new about contract motherhood lies in the realm of law and social custom. It is a means by which women sign away rights that, until the 20th century, they rarely had: the right to legal custody of their children, and the right not to be bought, sold, lent, rented or given away...Goods can be distributed according to ability to pay or not. People shouldn't be.

By concentrating on the larger issues raised by such trafficking in babies, on the conflicts between material lack and maternal desire that gathered around the unprepossessing figure of Mary Beth Whitehead, Pollitt calmly turns aside the disingenuous argument-from-stereotype that feminism is mere bourgeois self-interest clothed in Wall-Street drag. Indeed, her delicate opening out of this case quietly, almost off-handedly, reveals the bourgeois-lady-with-briefcase stereotype for what it is: a selective, distorted and angry portrait drawn by a harsh and ungenerous political right, for whom women in the home, maternal, fecund, giving, and (above all) subordinate to patriarchal authority, has deep affective and political significance.

It is here that the core issues dwell, straddling the uncomfortable divide between gender as symbolic category and gender as lived experience. For on the political right, woman in the home stands at the center of a powerful (if fantasy-laden) chain of moral and political associations that point toward an orderly and harmonious world where clearly differentiated beings (children/adults, females/males, lower-class/upper-class, non-white/white) know their place in various race, class and gender hierarchies, hierarchies that are, in theory, warmed by vertical ties of affection and obligation. As Pollitt well understands, the patriarchal family remains the last secure bastion of this social vision. For it is the only site on which self-abnegation and subordination (of women and children) still hold some purchase on political discourse in the late 20th century, comparable forms of racial or class-based deference having at last been dismissed as the no-longer-credible products of a conservative and paternalist alchemy that would transform oppression into just and affective order.

In the context of a political culture that is marked by adversarial and indi-

vidualist modes of interaction, a culture in which many feel (understandably) drawn toward more accommodative and communitarian mores, the right is offering a vision of community that is anchored in the patriarchal family as a model of harmonious political order. It is a vision that is purchased at the cost of women's basic right to self-determination — a price that is all too easily ignored. It is a vision whose basic appeal lies in the imaginative transformation of oppression into a just order, one that is accepted from the bottom up, as it were. And it is a vision whose capacity to persuade lies partially in the slippage between gender as ideology (gendered categories of social difference, or the representation of nation-states as women) and the gendered experiences of living humans. The two are closely linked, and therefore easily confused, especially in political discourse. But they are not the same thing. Pollitt moves with fluid precision between the two levels, dissecting the paternalist dream of moral order so that the consequences for human, and especially female freedom are always clearly to the fore.

“Somos los abandonados!”

THE ABANDONED ONES: THE IMPRISONMENT AND UPRISING OF THE MARIEL BOAT PEOPLE by Mark S. Hamm. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995. 235 pp.

Reviewed by Mark Dow

IN THE SPRING OF 1980, MORE THAN 120,000 REFUGEES arrived in the United States from the Cuban port city of Mariel. Seven years later, 2,400 of these Mariel Cubans were being “indefinitely detained” in federal facilities at Oakdale (Louisiana) and Atlanta — the U.S. would not release them and Cuba would not take them back. In November 1987, Cuba and the U.S. signed a treaty which would have made possible the deportation of some of the Mariel prisoners; in exchange the U.S. would have accepted a number of Cubans who wanted to come here. The prisoners at Oakdale and Atlanta responded to the news by staging what criminology professor Mark S. Hamm of Indiana State University describes as one of “the most successful revolts ever undertaken in the annals of American penology, if not world penology.”

On the day the migration treaty was signed, a Cuban inmate at the Oakdale Federal Detention Center hurled an empty food tray at a supervisor: that may have been the start of the uprising. By the time 250 Cubans were chanting “*Somos los abandonados!*” (We are the abandoned ones!), there was no doubt. The revolt spread to Atlanta’s Federal Penitentiary and lasted 11 days, “the

MARK DOW, a Miami-based writer and poet, has written numerous articles for *New Politics* on Haiti and immigration matters.

longest prison riot in the history of American penology." Along the way, Hamm looks at "theatrical events" staged by the Cubans (including the psychological torture of hostages to pressure the government negotiators), the "sophisticated organizational structure" of the revolt, and the "profound sense of spirituality that guided the rebellion from start to finish." Included are descriptions of altars used by Cubans detained in Terre Haute, Indiana, in their practice of Santería (the Cuban Afro-Caribbean religion), as well as close readings of protest banners displayed for the media ("MR. REAGAN IF YOU DENY OUR FREEDOM YOU KILL U.S.!").

Hamm has been a warden at Arizona State Prison (where a violent riot left a strong impression on him), and he has represented Mariel Cubans at Immigration & Naturalization Service (INS) hearings; the Cubans won the right to such INS reviews in their negotiations with the Justice Department during their successful revolt. In this book, Hamm looks closely at the uprisings themselves, at a few of the individual participants, at the immigration policies that caused the Mariel Cubans to become long-term prisoners, and at the foreign policy behind the immigration policy. He concludes that it was "the confluence of . . . institutionalized violations of human rights and state-organized moral panic" that set the stage for the uprisings. These refugees "were systematically deprived of an adversarial system of justice and deliberately criminalized by an extremely partial tribunal of INS officials."

In some circles, the term "Marielito," referring to Cubans who came here during the Mariel flotilla, is practically a synonym for "deviant." Hamm argues that this is inaccurate, but not accidental. In 1980, an INS official told *People* magazine "that as many as '85% of the refugees are convicts, robbers, murderers, homosexuals and prostitutes." The wave of Mariel refugees was tainted, according to the media and U.S. government officials, by the significant presence of mental patients and prisoners whom Castro had released among them. "In the months to come," writes Hamm, "official INS resettlement figures would show this characterization . . . to be wrong. Unfortunately for the refugees, however, the damage had already been done." There may have been an honest if narrow-minded mistake at the beginning, but the lie continued, as even in "the early days of the Mariel resettlement, officials within the Justice Department, together with their political allies, engaged in a deliberate disinformation campaign to justify their continued harassment and abuse of Cuban men."

EVENTUALLY, ARGUES HAMM, THIS "CRIMINALIZATION" ESCALATED to "the INS's construction of a moral crusade against all Cuban men from the port of Mariel. . . . The official approach used by the INS during the latter half of the 1980s was to exaggerate the criminal propensity of the Mariels already in custody, thereby justifying the continued criminalization of hundreds more. The INS had successfully created a moral panic around the Cubans." (The INS has a number of variations on this strategy of creating moral panic — a term, by the way, which Hamm borrows from Israeli criminologist Stanley Cohen. On another front in the 1980s, the U.S. pushed its lie that Haitians coming here were almost all economic refugees; a federal judge determined that there was, in effect, a "Haitian program" designed to deny Haitian refugees the right to fair asylum hearings and to expedite their deportation. More recently, Nigerians have been publicly associated with fraudulent business schemes; low-level INS officers echo

the sentiment by refusing to release Nigerian asylum-seekers from detention, explaining that lying is part of their culture.)

As for the criminalization and detention of the Cubans, what was in it for the INS? Hamm ventures an explanation: before the Mariel boat lift, the INS "was a relatively obscure subdivision of the Justice Department." Between 1982 and 1988, its budget increased by over 100%, to \$2.2 billion. A significant part of that increase came in 1986 to construct the Oakdale facility. This agency's fundraising and self-preservation also has resonance these days; the U.S.-Mexican border became a key photo-op in the last presidential campaign, and Clinton approved funding for many more Border Patrol officers to help stop the invading hordes from the South.

Given the well-orchestrated demonization of the Mariel Cubans, and the simple fact that they were held in maximum-security facilities, "the hardest [fact] for readers to comprehend" may be this: "The historic Oakdale and Atlanta revolts were not waged by violent criminals, but were fought in guerrilla fashion by dedicated collectives of leftover nonviolent offenders from Cuba, the disadvantaged, petty criminals, and the doubly punished." One of Hamm's own Mariel clients had done time in Cuba for stealing some cheese as a boy and, years later, was arrested again for stealing two pairs of jeans. Hamm continues: "... as evidenced by the way they managed their revolt, Oakdale-Atlanta was waged by a group of relatively peaceful men." Hostages were taken, for example, but all were released unharmed. Hamm also praises the prison negotiators and administrators for their own strategy of "endless patience." He examines the uprisings with the eye of a novelist because he sees them as a form of human expression by people with no other options. After unanswered letters, hunger strikes, and suicide attempts, "the Mariels spoke to their beloved president [Reagan] through the language of collective violence." Hamm also distinguishes Oakdale-Atlanta from other prison revolts: "Instead of focusing on their 'posture as prisoners' and their own personal suffering at the hands of prison officials, the Cubans waged a united guerrilla attack against the political forces that had abandoned them in the suites of Washington."

One of the key Washington players was Ed Meese. He was Reagan's Attorney General during the Mariel uprisings; so he was the head of the Justice Department and its agency the INS. The detainees refused his offers during negotiations — though they would later end the revolt once someone they trusted made the same promise. "We didn't trust Meese," one Cuban told Hamm. "He's a liar." With that, Hamm weaves the story of Justice Department corruption into the story of the Cuban detainees: he reviews the various Meese scandals, and shows how Robert Wallach, Meese's attorney and Wedtech connection, became the human rights ambassador who unsuccessfully pushed a resolution at the United Nations to condemn Cuba's treatment of *its* prisoners, thus precipitating a chain of diplomatic events that would lead to the migration treaty which sparked the Mariel uprisings. To get all that, you'll have to read the book.

The Continuing Significance of Race

BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE by Manning Marable. London and New York, Verso. 229 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by William Mosley

THE AFTERMATH OF THE O.J. SIMPSON VERDICT, THE MILLION MAN MARCH and, looking a little further back, the Los Angeles riot has left many Americans, including many on the left, more confused than ever about the meaning of race. Those of us groping for an intellectual path toward the building of a multiracial movement for economic and social justice are eager to find voices of sanity that can cut through the fearful, pessimistic and sometimes hateful rhetoric that today tends to strangle open, constructive discussion of race relations.

In his new book *Beyond Black and White*, Manning Marable, professor of history and African-American studies at Columbia University, provides a too-rare voice of clarity, helping all of us think more clearly about the role of race in America and how we might overcome racial polarization.

This fourth book by Marable collects 18 of his essays written over the previous decade, most of them over the past five years. While the essays encompass numerous aspects of race relations, American politics and the state of the African-American community, several themes unify the book.

"Race is essentially a social construction, not a permanent fact of biology or genetics. It is dynamic and constantly being renegotiated along the boundaries of color," Marable writes, and this is an idea to which he returns again and again — that race is principally a vehicle for reinforcing the social barrier between privileged and powerless.

Marable points out the oversimplicity of the terms "black" and "African-American" when one considers that "native-born African-Americans, Trinidadians, Haitians, Nigerians and Afro-Brazilians would all be termed 'black,'" although in ethnic terms they share very little except African ancestry. However, he writes, the "smallest manifestations" of daily existence — "the white merchant who drops change on the sales counter, rather than touch the hand of a black person; the white salesperson who follows you into the dressing room" — reinforce to non-whites the continuing significance of race.

Marable discusses the evolution of the struggle for equality from the "liberal integrationism" of the civil rights era to black nationalism. Both of these approaches have been unsatisfactory, he says — integrationism because it relied on the indefinite expansion of prosperity, and nationalism because it reduced race relations to a zero-sum game. A flaw in both ideologies is their reliance on "symbolic representation" — the elevation of African-Americans to elective office and other positions of power. Experience has shown that these

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officials do not necessarily represent black voters, especially the black poor, Marable says, citing Clarence Thomas as an obvious example.

Instead, Marable stresses the need to look beyond racial identity politics.

Our ability to transcend racial chauvinism and inter-ethnic hatred and the old definitions of "race," to recognize the class commonalities and joint social-justice interests of all groups in the restructuring of this nation's economy and social order, will be the key to constructing a nonracist democracy, transcending ancient walls of white violence, corporate power and class privilege.

However, Marable cautions, this does not imply ignoring race and racism today. While projecting a vision of a nonracial future, "we must simultaneously mobilize on the basis of racial oppression," he writes, an argument which leads him to a staunch defense of affirmative action even as he acknowledges its insufficiency.

Over the breadth of this volume Marable draws from recent events to illustrate his points: the rise and decline of the Rainbow Coalition, the 1992 Los Angeles riot, the stormy tenure of Benjamin Chavis as NAACP director, the accession of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court (Marable thinks Anita Hill told the truth). He includes a 1985 essay on race and realignment largely to flaunt his prescience in declaring that "[Newt] Gingrich . . . may ultimately become the right's spearhead for bringing its quasi-fascist agenda into state power." However, he has little to say about the consequences of Gingrich's ascendancy to the House speakership, although several of these essays were published after the 1994 election.

In some essays Marable's arguments are less than persuasive. In an essay on education he acknowledges that "to be well-prepared and knowledgeable enough for a position is not enough . . . when there are absolutely no prospects for decent employment." Yet in the end he calls only for a revival "of that long secular tradition of learning and educational faith," not for social action to create jobs. And in an analysis of the 1993 March on Washington his prescience failed him when he predicted that the march "might mark the beginnings of a reconfiguration of the entire protest map of black America." Three years later, after the Chavis debacle and the Million Man March, the 1993 mobilization is largely forgotten.

But these are minor points. *Beyond Black and White* offers a glimmer of hope that a multiracial, democratic movement can help pave the way to a future where race truly may begin to fade as a social force.

What's Right with Single Payer

THE RATIONAL OPTION FOR A NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM by John Canham-Clyne, with Steffie Woolhandler & David Himmelstein, Westport, CT, Pamphleteers Press

Reviewed by Elaine Bernard

A MONTH BEFORE THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, the *New York Times* declared "the debate over health care is over." According to the *Times*, "managed competition won." President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton proceeded over the next year to develop an awkward, expensive, complicated reform, based on the large insurance companies' framework of managed care. Their plan was eventually rejected, and we are now facing an unprecedented wave of hospital mergers and consolidation of corporate interests and control in the health care area. As a result of these changes, at least partially stimulated by the failed attempt at health care reform, any future major reform in health care will be significantly harder, as it will face a more consolidated and stronger corporate opposition.

The Rational Option is a short, crisp analysis of what's wrong with managed competition, and what's right with single payer and why it remains the "rational option for a national health program." While Hillary Clinton admitted early in the health care debate that the single payer option was the "most rational proposal," the Clinton's and political insiders nevertheless rejected out of hand the single payer model as "unrealistic" and "too radical for American politics to digest." (*Times*, May 4, 1993). Yet, as *The Rational Option* shows, a single payer system, modelled on Canada's universal health insurance, could deliver most of what Americans say they want in a health care system: choice of doctor, no bills, no premiums, no co-pays, no lifetime maximum, no managed care by an insurance clerk and lifelong security with "insurance that can not be taken away." And, most remarkably it can do so at a cheaper total price than the U.S. currently pays for health care.

So why was single payer called "politically unfeasible?" Because it is not what the insurance, pharmaceutical, hospital and medical equipment industries want. What concerns them about single payer is the tremendous bargaining power the public single pay entity would hold. With two physicians as co-authors, both of whom have been long-term supporters and advocates for single payer, the authors characterize the American Medical Association as "having long ago abandoned patients' interest" and as being "so distracted by its fear of government that it barely noticed insurance company shackles snapping shut on its profession."

The AMA, unfortunately, were not the only ones who could not keep their eye on the right target — the growing control of the insurance companies. If there is a weakness in *The Rational Option*, it is that it doesn't directly deal

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with the fear of "government control." To the extent that the authors deal with this fear, they point out that government intervention will be minimal — after all single payer isn't government run health care, it's government run insurance, and private health care delivery.

It's a sad fact of the health care debate, and politics in the U.S. that such a modest reform, could be so misrepresented. All the more depressing, when you consider that we have a functioning model of the system next door in Canada. Single payer is not a radical alternative to the free market in medicine, alas. Rather it is a compromise between a genuinely radical alternative to for-profit medicine (socialized medicine) and the United States' current costly, discriminatory, inefficient system of private insurance.

The main difference between Canadian and American health care systems comes down to how each pay for health care insurance. The majority of doctors in both countries are private, for-profit, independent business people, charging patients on a fee-for-service basis. In the U.S., patients pay their bills through a patchwork of varying levels of insurance coverage and a variety of additional out-of-pocket payments. In Canada, health care is paid by universal, comprehensive insurance coverage from a public insurance agency which is financed by general tax revenues. Canadians simply eliminated the role of private insurance companies in basic health-care coverage and replaced them with publicly administered provincial insurance agencies.

Ultimately, health care reform is about building a political constituency which demands quality health care as a right. And *The Rational Option* is an important educational tool in this campaign. It's a good short summary of the single payer option. It deals with most of the arguments against single payer, and it even includes in the costing for the rational option a proposal for including long term care in the universal system.

The conservative agenda in the U.S. is aimed at lowering expectations, convincing us that change is not possible, and demonstrating that there is no role for government in providing social services. *The Rational Option* is a good counter to these arguments and a valuable source for those of us interested in continuing the slow, grass roots campaign to convince our neighbors that we can challenge the rule of the market and health care for profit.

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Exploiting Fears About Immigrants

THE NEW UNTOUCHABLES by Nigel Harris. I.B. Tauris, London/ St. Martin's Press, NY. 256 pp. (\$23.50/hb).

Reviewed by John Palmer

NIGEL HARRIS IS WELL KNOWN AS A PERCEPTIVE AND RIGOROUS ANALYST of the dramatic structural changes which have transformed world capitalism in recent decades. His earlier books, in what has now become a four-volume project, have traced the emergence of an integrated global economy. They have also charted the development boom which has called into question the very concept of the "Third World" and have exposed the decline of nationalism as a viable political project for the 21st century. In *The New Untouchables*, Nigel Harris focuses on the remarkable growth of a world labor market — one in which literally millions of people are constantly drawn from backward and poverty stricken regions to the labor-hungry centers of growth and industrialization.

No issue is as drenched in myth as 20th century mass migration. In almost every corner of the developed world there are politicians who have made successful careers and sometimes created formidable power bases by exploiting fears about and resentment against immigrants. But the conventional "common sense" view, shared by moderate, middle-ground politicians, insists that immigrants are a burden on the welfare state, are disproportionately responsible for crime, and contribute to unemployment by taking jobs which would otherwise be available for the native labor force.

Nigel Harris has little difficulty in disposing of these myths. With a wealth of official data he shows how immigrants play an indispensable role in stimulating economic growth and how they contribute far more in taxes than they consume in social benefits. He points out that even the United States Presidential Council of Economic Advisors concluded in 1988 that the "...net effect of an increase in the labor supply due to immigration is to increase the aggregate income of the native born population."

The central question posed by Harris is "why, if immigration is so essential to the operation of a globally integrated economy, should immigration controls be such a universal panacea of politicians?" His answer is precise and goes to the heart of the crisis of the national state and its politics.

One of the state's essential functions is to incarnate a national identity which is, of necessity, defined against aliens, foreigners and immigrants — against "the other." But Harris graphically describes "the arrival of an integrated world economy, emerging out of its constituent national parts and imposing on the old national economic order new and unforeseeable processes of restructuring." He insists that the traditional "vehicle of social transformation, the old state, is weakening before global markets, producing a sense of helplessness in those who used to work for change" and concludes that "...the tran-

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sition to a global politics involves the painful destruction of the old national politics of left and right, of corporatism and state socialism.”

The economic and political decline of the national state has been marked by the collapse of the postwar full employment-based social compact between governments and their own citizens/workers. Thanks to globalization, governments are no longer wired to the economy in ways that allow them to operate the levers of a national Keynesian strategy with effect. The disillusion engendered by the loss of full employment has undoubtedly provided ammunition for the anti-immigrant new right.

Nigel Harris believes the integrated global economy is transforming the very essence of what we mean by politics. He imagines a global variation on what the European federalists call “subsidiarity,” where the surviving rump of the national state would be little more than “a junction in flows (of people, goods and capital)...simply the administration of things, not people.” For many young people, the problem of state power is now merely one element in a new politics which embraces issues ranging from human and animal rights to the environment, local and regional communities, peace and the defense of the new working classes in the poor countries.

It is a pity that Nigel Harris does not treat racism itself in a more systematic fashion since it draws on very deep cultural and historical roots. He might also have examined the growing importance of the new global economic and political regions. These include not only the European Union but also the North American Free Trade Area, the Association of South East Asian Nations, and other groupings still being incubated.

The new global regions could provide the building blocks of a new international democratic and interdependent world political order. After all, the European Union is economically strong enough — it if has the political will — to strike a different economic and social balance with the forces of the global marketplace than is possible for a single national state. But the global market will require a truly global politics. Nigel Harris suggests the creation of a worldwide General Agreement on Migration and Refugee Policy — modelled on the old GATT, now the World Trade Organization. This is the language of a new politics about which we are going to hear much more.

The CIA and the Portuguese Revolution

CONTOS PROIBIDOS. MEMORIAS DE UM PS DESCONHECIDO by Rui Mateus
Publicações Dom Quixote. Lisbon, 1996. 457 pp.

Reviewed by Loren Goldner

THIS IS A STRANGE BOOK. In the Kennedy years, Rui Mateus, a young Portuguese and son of a prosperous businessman, comes to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as an American Field Service exchange student. There, from 1961 to 1963, he discovers a "free society, without complexes." Upon his return to Salazar's Portugal, his attempts to describe American life to his friends, understandably, sound like science fiction. In 1964, he leaves again for London, where he decides to stay in self-imposed exile. He drifts into the orbit of a tiny group of Portuguese socialist exiles and in 1969 joins *Accao Socialista Portuguesa*, which at the time had no more than 50 members. He moves to Sweden and does political work there among other exiles, and in 1973 participates in the founding of the still-tiny Portuguese Socialist Party in Germany, under the auspices of the SPD's Friedrich Ebert Foundation. With such inauspicious beginnings, the new PSP had difficulty even getting office supplies from its Socialist International sponsors. But in a heady surge of less than two years, it was at the center of world events as the largest political party in a new Portuguese democracy, under the auspices of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) coup that ended almost 50 years of fascist dictatorship.

Rui Mateus received his Swedish diploma in political science in the spring of 1975, and returned to Portugal in the midst of the political crisis which culminated in an armed uprising by elements of the far left and a military coup ending a quasi-revolutionary crisis in November 1975. Mateus' long experience abroad landed him in the international department of the Portuguese Socialist Party (PSP), where he remained for ten years, moving into the global political arena of the Socialist International. He was through this period the close associate of Mario Soares, during a series of governments dominated by the PSP. In this capacity, Mateus participated in the founding of a series of fancy foundations established by the party with generous donations from Socialist International's fraternal parties from northern Europe. In 1987, through the web of contacts built up over the years, he founded an audio-visual consortium with the dream of at last bringing the socialist movement to the cutting edge of "social communication". (In the same year, he proudly joined David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission.) There ensued wheeler-dealer, high-flying business contacts with the likes of Robert Maxwell, and finally a "Macao scandal" through which Mateus and many other SPers were indicted for corruption in an atmosphere not unlike what occurred at the same time in Italy. At this writing, Mateus has been sentenced to 4 years imprisonment for his alleged role in the "Macao scandal".

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These are but the bare bones of Rui Mateus' story, the rise and fall of a right-wing social democrat (the book is, among other things, a long process of self-exoneration). As such, it would hardly attract attention outside of Portugal, let alone be worthy of any serious review. But Mateus' book is highly unusual, not merely in offering a very detailed look into the global operations of the Socialist International (Mateus himself became deeply involved in the politics of the Middle East, the Nicaraguan revolution, the democratization of Latin America, and the European peace movement of the early 1980's), but because it is bluntly frank, even enthusiastic, about the role of American and British secret services in the Portuguese events of 1974-75. For the latter reason alone, the book created ripples in Portugal and abroad upon publication in January 1996. (It created ripples in Spain, where a similar book remains to be written about Felipe Gonzalez and the rise of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) after the death of Franco.) It offers a rare look into the world where Social Democracy, big international foundations, the media and intelligence services overlap, and how they intervene in and against radical social movements in the interests of world capitalism.

Little that Mateus reveals was not the stuff of speculation in 1974-75, but 20 years later he emerges with names, dates, and the check stubs. Perhaps the decline of both Stalinism and the radical left in Europe since the mid-1970's inspires the candor of Mateus's narrative; perhaps it is an exercise in self-promotion. Whatever the case, and assuming that half of what he tells is true (and little of it seems improbable) this book should be translated into English and should serve as a warning about CIA involvement in subsidized "left" politics.

MANY PEOPLE OF MATEUS' PERSUASION, DERIVING FROM THE "NOSKE" STRAIN of social democracy, are quiet or circumspect about their friends in high places. But Mateus positively boasts about them. Such luminaries as Frank Carlucci, Michael Ledeen, and Irving Brown move in and out of his story. He is proud to visit America's super-secret Air Force installation at Cheyenne Mountain, proud that he and Mario Soares, alone among world "socialists," had a special relationship with the Reagan Administration, and defended "American views" at the conferences of European Social Democracy dealing with Nicaragua or Pershing missiles. Perhaps, writing for a Portuguese audience, Mateus thinks he is building up his case by trumpeting big, powerful contacts abroad. But it is exactly the disarming openness of his account, talking about such sleazy contacts, that gives it the ring of truth.

Less than a third of Mateus's narrative is actually devoted to an account of the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75. (He devotes almost as much space to explaining his version of the "Macao scandal.") It is a rather different view than those who followed or participated in the radical (left of the Communist Party) left during those months generally remember. The working class, the massive occupation of factories and offices, land seizures in the Alentejo, the wide interest in workers' self-management, the partial dissolution of the army by soldiers' councils, the break of an important section of the working class away from CP control in August 1975: these are exactly nowhere in Mateus' world view, and hence his book. He likes André Malraux's formulation that in Portugal, for the first time, "the Mensheviks defeated the Bolsheviks" (in reality, an insult to both Mensheviks and to Bolsheviks). And that, for him, is in a nutshell

what it was all about: a battle for state power by the PSP and its Western backers against the PCP and its Warsaw Pact backers. The small groups of the far left, and even COPCON and the "Group of Nine" (who proposed a kind of Peruvian military corporatism) have a remote, shadowy existence in the background. The real struggle, the battles in the factories, the agrarian cooperatives, the army and the streets never sullies a view of politics limited to parties, institutions and state power. And this in a book that wants to show how, under Mario Soares, the transparency and accountability of public institutions evaporated into an (unaccountable) "government by judges"! It never occurs to Mateus that "transparent" social institutions were dismantled with the defeat of the radical social movement, because for him there is no contradiction between "socialism" and the persistence of capitalism and bourgeois democracy, propped up by his "friend" Frank Carlucci, and the likes of Michael Ledeen and Irving Brown, the CIA and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The Portuguese events did turn Mario Soares into one of the more successful "State Department socialists" of all time. Mateus rightly points out how the Iberian transitions influenced the dismantling of military dictatorships in Latin America and of Stalinist dictatorships in the East. As a result of such a high profile for his mentor, Mateus got an opportunity to promote "democratic socialism" to such pillars of the left as Walid Jumblatt, Shimon Peres, the presidents of Costa Rica and Venezuela, as well as to work with the Reagan Administration against the pacifist impulses of the major Western European SPs (as if any of these parties or their leaders, the Olaf Palmes, Willy Brandts and Bruno Kreiskys would have seriously opposed the U.S. in a crunch) during the missile crisis of the early 80s.

THE THRUST OF MATEUS' BOOK, WHERE PORTUGUESE INTERNAL POLITICS ARE CONCERNED, is a reckoning with Mario Soares for the latter's responsibility in the degeneration of political institutions since 1975, and an indictment of the "government by judges" that has moved in to fill the vacuum. It is, inseparably, an attempt to show how Mateus himself was a victim of that system. This reviewer neither knows nor cares whether Mateus was guilty of using public funds for personal self-enrichment, because the assumptions of his explanation of post-1975 Portuguese politics are a paean to the role of some of the least "transparent" forces in the world in the shaping of those politics. It is understandable how a young visitor from Salazar's Portugal in the early 60s might get the impression, in small-town Iowa, that the United States was a "democracy, without complexes" (perhaps he should have tried small-town Mississippi), but Mateus seems to have been awed for a lifetime.

Nevertheless, it is this very awe which allows him to describe, with unusual detail, the workings of international forces of repression and containment in a full-blown revolutionary (or at least proto-revolutionary) crisis which riveted the world for 18 months. The handful of founders of the PSP in 1973 could hardly have imagined the events which, in so short a time, thrust them onto the stage of world politics, and the paradigmatic quality of the Portuguese transition which kept Mario Soares on that stage into the 1990s. Whether Mateus is ultimately just an awed hick or a self-promoting cynic, the richness of detail of his story goes far beyond his own rotten politics, and his book shows people interested in real change what they are up against.

World War, Class War and Hard Times

THE STRUGGLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS: ESSAYS ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR
by Raymond Challinor (Bewick Press, Whitley Bay, 1995), 118 pp.

Reviewed by James D. Young

IN HIS SUPERB BOOK *THE STRUGGLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS: Essays on the Second World War*, Raymond Challinor has produced a shorter version of a much larger work in progress. It was designed to counter the jingoism, racism and chauvinism about the Brits' recent celebration of the Second World War. A socialist historian well-known for his wit and formidable scholarship, he has very courageously exposed the real nature of World War II as a war between rival imperialist powers. It will not earn him any "brownie points" from Establishment historians.

Eschewing the ever present temptation on the left during a period of sloth and reaction to produce simplistic explanations of the origins and outcome of the war between 1939 and 1945, Challinor refuses to gain cheap popularity by trying to deny that fascism confronted the libertarian Left with problems that did not exist during the so-called "Great War." Iconoclastic and irreverent, he ridicules Goebbels' appeal to German civilians in November 1944 to resist the "Russian barbarians" at the gates by concluding that: "Old men and young boys enthusiastically volunteered. A few months later, however, the tattered remnant of Germany's *Dad's Army*, tired and much wiser, queued up to enter the prisoner-of-war camps."

From the beginning to the end of his excellent and well-documented book, he tears away the veils that have long concealed the truth about the war — a war that was allegedly fought against fascism, though the British ruling class, including many intellectuals and writers, were fascist sympathizers on the eve of the war. Challinor's inspiring book is good on recovering the lost history and stories of working people's resistance to Nazism, Stalinism and Stalinist Communist betrayal of the left during and after the period of the abysmal Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939-41.

What Challinor focuses on is the determination of the various ruling classes, including the Russian one, during the 1944 Teheran and the 1945 Yalta conferences to carve up Germany. Summing up their common objectives before the onset of the Cold War, he insists that "an even greater kinship of interests" was "the desire to crush [the] revolutionary forces" that were emerging in many parts of the world. Even in the fascist-dominated countries, workers' revolts were much more extensive than anyone was encouraged to believe at the time.

In an early chapter titled "Betrayal on the Left," Challinor argues that in the 1930s "[t]he hammer blows hit the [British] workers so hard, so relentlessly, it robbed them of self-confidence and self-reliance." To underline this

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point, he says: "Less and less did they have control of their own lives, Most stood as passive spectators, convinced they could not influence events. Some of the courageous few resorted to acts of individual defiance." However, a few chapters later and without any explanation of what produced the changes in workers' consciousness, he discusses the serious threats to the established social order by the same workers in 1940, 1942 and 1945. Summing up this point, Challinor says: "As I get down to writing the hidden history of the Second World War, increasingly I realise that all the embarrassing 'black holes' were not dug by Stalin. Churchill and his henchmen were excellent diggers, too."

CHALLINOR IS, OF COURSE, ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. He could have added that Hitler was even more successful at concealing working-class opposition to Nazism than either Stalin or Churchill. In the American socialist newspaper *Workers' Age*, the socialists' consistent resistance to the Nazis was documented in great detail. (Incidentally, it is very important for historians of the socialist left not to be taken in by the seemingly "factual" statements of those right-wing German historians like Joachim C. Fest — "the assassins of memory" — who have almost obliterated the memory of that resistance.

By neglecting to look at the diverse American socialist newspapers published in the 1930s and 1940s, most historians of the left have fallen asleep at their posts. By restricting himself to British socialist newspapers, Challinor has begun the important task of recovering crucial facets of the hidden history of anti-fascism. Yet, despite the Nazis' totalitarian censorship, detailed reports were smuggled out by the German socialists. It was reported in January 1939 that the working class refused to have anything to do with the "anti-Semitic outrages" in Berlin, and that when the Hitler-Stalin pact was signed, Hitler murdered 1,200 members of his storm troops and blackshirts as well as "an unknown number of rebelling members of the Nazi Reichstag." The following year, Goebbels was "heckled" by socialist workers at a shipyard in Hamburg.

Moreover, many German socialists were involved in the assassination attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944, assisted by the International Federation of Transport Workers. In his *Nuremberg Notebook* in December 1945 Gerhart H. Seger reported a meeting of 1,000 socialist survivors who had gathered in the Nuremberg Opera House to re-build the German Socialist Party. Dr. Wilhelm Hoeger gave "a vivid description of the underground activities of the labor movement whose victims number *hundreds of thousands*." To "frenetic applause" he said that the "Social Democratic Party resents the falsification of history that makes it appear as if only the churches offered resistance against the Nazi regime." And one result of the war was that Karl Liebknecht's brothers Theodor and Wilhem and his sister rejoined the Social Democratic Party and emphasized that "if their beloved and honored brother were still living, he would take the same step."

The fine cartoons in Challinor's book — an almost forgotten socialist art — illustrate and illuminate some workers' and socialists' anti-war activity. There are cartoons from the Glasgow socialist newspaper *Forward*, the Trotskyist *Socialist Appeal* and the anarchists' *War Commentary*. A particularly good cartoon that reflected the socialist workers' culture of those years was the one of the top-hatted, cigar-puffing capitalist telling a British Tommy: "GO — my boy, defend your freedom and My Cash!"

One well-intentioned, though small criticism I would make, in the hope that this will be corrected before he produces his much larger work, is the dominance of a too narrowly British approach, historical context and language. Younger people will not understand the popular language of the 1940s without some explanation. Are phrases like "British Tommy," "Dad's Army" and literary allusions to *Arms and the Man* self-evident in 1996?

At his best in exposing the hypocrisy of Laborism or Social Democracy, Challinor has an excellent chapter on "Franco's Spain: Britain's Silent Friend." Depicting the 500 former Spanish Republican soldiers held in a prisoner of war camp in Lancashire even at the end of the "war for democracy," Challinor describes how they were treated like *criminals*. And when 136 refugees from fascist Spain turned up at British ports in 1945, the Labor Government in imperial London sent them back to face almost certain torture and/or death. His concluding chapter on the "Origins of the Cold War" is also excellent.

I would like to encourage my friend Challinor's research into fascism, the Second World War and workers' resistance to both fascism and "democratic" capitalism. In spite of my own rather trivial criticisms of *The Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, our generation of socialists has a special responsibility to dissect and analyze fascism as well as denounce it, especially as it rears its murderous, anti-human head once more.