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California

The Late Great Golden State

DAVID JACOBS

IN THE AFTERMATH of the U.S. presidential election, and as the world contemplates the grim prospect of four more years of the Bush-Cheney Experience, the question of California and its governor appears almost irrelevant. At most, given Schwarzenegger's inflated dimensions — both as physical specimen and as the mega-celebrity known simply as Arnold — California seems like some kind of carnival act, a sideshow with its very own muscleman, but with little relation to broader social trends in the United States.

Still, even if considered only in terms of the scale of its population, economy, and cultural influence, California is an important part of the puzzle of what's wrong with America. Any diagnosis of social pathology in the United States must include this state, which exhibits symptoms shared with the rest of the country and ones uniquely its own. Moreover, given the importance of the so-called "culture wars" in the country at large, it is worth examining how they have played out in California, where in many ways they can be considered to have started.

At the moment, California seems more anomalous than representative of national trends. Whereas the 2004 election revealed a country which was polarized along party lines and by such issues as the Iraq war, California's polarities are expressed in a manner all its own, within what might be termed a collective split personality. California voted by a convincing margin for Kerry, and yet the approval ratings of its Republican governor, and occasional political stuntman for the Bush campaign, have hovered around the 65 percent mark. It would seem that many of the state's inhabitants are capable of holding, at one and the same time, anti-Bush and pro-Schwarzenegger

opinions, and at the most extreme level of paradox, even antiwar and anti-immigrant ones. Mainstream political scientists now speak of California's "conflicted voters," but it might be simpler, and more appropriate, to refer to California as a conflicted state, in both the social and psychological senses of the term.

Such a broad picture requires some nuance. After all, there are a good many Californians who have maintained a consistent and resolute opposition to the status quo in Bush's America — and in Schwarzenegger's California. The foyers of resistance to a second Bush administration will include major population centers in California, most of them "coastal" areas, to use the jargon of contemporary American political science. But this alternative California of dissidence and difference may exist more as a radical foil or counterpoint than as a social movement capable of attracting majority support; it may be more anachronism than harbinger of revolutionary change. Appalling as it may seem, Schwarzenegger's California may very well be the prototype for the future, in California and elsewhere in the United States. The mere fact that the Schwarzenegger show has succeeded to the extent that it has warrants closer scrutiny.

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WHEN SCHWARZENEGGER WON election last year, much of the informed opinion in the country and elsewhere engaged in a collective fit of *schadenfreude*, evincing a barely concealed glee

at California's misfortune even while expressing outward shock at the turn of events which made an action film star governor of the state. Behind this reaction, one sensed that many felt that California only got what it deserved: a made-in-Hollywood leader as punishment for the state's perceived superficiality, its apparent hedonism and frivolousness, and its outsized role in shaping American popular culture and taste. On more sober reflection, it dawned on these same opinion makers that what happens in California often happens elsewhere later. Some remembered that the movie cowboy-turned-politician Reagan had figuratively ridden out of the west on a wave of authoritarian resentment, and had gone on to rule the West along with his monetarist and militaristic cronies. During the eight long years of Reagan, the political goalposts in the United States were shifted dramatically to the right, where they have remained for the most part ever since. With the memory of this precedent, Schwarzenegger no longer seemed so funny or oh-so-very-Californian.

A year ago, looking at California's recall election and the metamorphosis of Schwarzenegger from cinematic into political superstar, one could be forgiven for thinking that state had been swallowed whole, Matrix-like, by some other, counterfeit dimension, in this case, the world of entertainment. It seemed to epitomize the situationist concept of the "society of the spectacle," with the recall show in California being broadcast to a worldwide audience. Indeed, on a very basic level, the Schwarzenegger phenomenon was an example of political illusionism, a function of klieg lights and mirrors, of an actor in sunglasses and a motorcycle jacket. Not only were Schwarzenegger's campaign appearances highly staged and tightly scripted affairs, he entered the political arena almost entirely on the basis of his status as a celebrity, as a media superstar.

Moreover, by its very nature, his candidacy transformed the recall campaign into a form of popular amusement. Commentators at the time likened it to a "reality" show on television, one in which voters could participate, both in the poll-

ing booth and by means of a vicarious identification with the "excitement" generated by Schwarzenegger's media-projected aura. Schwarzenegger's candidacy also injected elements of risk and thrill-seeking into the political process, allowing voters the chance to effect change out of sheer boredom, as if they were rightwing Yuppies making counterrevolution "for the hell of it." In this extension of the sphere of entertainment into public life, the recall election ultimately transcended the binary divisions of show and spectator, outstripping Debord's theses (in his 1967 treatise, *Society of the Spectacle*) and becoming a kind of reactionary living theater where the lines of fiction and reality, and of performer and audience, were blurred.

In an otherwise worthless and empty book, *Why Arnold Matters* (2004), the authors Michael Blitz and Louise Krasniewicz make the following pertinent observation: "Arnold Schwarzenegger did not win the gubernatorial election in California . . . the election was one by one of the most familiar, popular, and telling mythical figures produced by late-twentieth-century American culture: The Terminator." (12) The flesh-and-blood-and-steroids Arnold Schwarzenegger ran as a candidate in the recall election, but his campaign was implicitly and explicitly based on his role as a man-machine. As the Terminator, Schwarzenegger embodied fantasies of omnipotence, order, and destruction: his cyborg character was one that assumed both malevolent and benevolent guises. It was ideal for use in a campaign where the candidate would appear both as challenger to, and restorer of, the "normal" order, the *status quo ante*.

The Schwarzenegger phenomenon did not occur only within a screening room, however. The reception of his candidacy may have been initially driven by the image of Schwarzenegger the film star, but the magnitude of that reception was produced by the context in which the recall campaign occurred, a situation of economic recession and the perceived ineptitude of the incumbent governor, Gray Davis, in handling both California's energy crisis and shortfall in state revenues caused

by the bursting of the dot.com speculative bubble. That this scenario (the effects of utility deregulation and the workings of the capitalist business cycle) was largely independent of Davis's doing was ignored: he was viewed as passive, as ineffectual, whereas Schwarzenegger, simplistically yet with great effect on the electorate, merely had to assume a pose and to continue to speak the lines from his movie roles. In effect, like Reagan before him, Schwarzenegger impersonated his fictional characters in creating his stylized public persona.

For all of the media commotion it caused, Schwarzenegger's campaign was not unprecedented within California politics. Not only was there the earlier example of the actor Reagan becoming governor, Schwarzenegger tapped into deep veins of populist resentment which at key moments have determined political outcomes in California during the past three decades. Schwarzenegger and his handlers skillfully modulated his message to appeal to various constituencies, and he was careful to appear as "tolerant" on certain social issues so as not to alienate the large number of voters in California uneasy with the culturally repressive agenda of the hard right. But at the pugnacious core of his candidacy was an appeal to an element of voters — what might be called the anxious and angry Anglo electorate — a largely white and middle class demographic motivated by feelings of insecurity and hostility, and striking out at targets perceived as threatening its interests, from Mexican immigrants to taxes funding education and other state programs. It is these people who have responded most enthusiastically to Schwarzenegger's exhortations to "terminate" various government programs and to deny drivers' licenses to illegal immigrants. In reward for his championship of their interests, they have made Schwarzenegger, the Austrian immigrant, an honorary "native" Californian.

Although the nativist vote is only one part of Schwarzenegger's electoral base, it has long served as a kind of seething undercurrent in California politics, making its force felt in a number of ways, most recently and visibly in the success of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in 1994. The imple-

mentation of this initiative, which would have denied a variety of social services to illegal immigrants, was later blocked in the courts, but the xenophobic sentiment expressed in this vote flows like magma just below the surface of the state's political landscape, forming a reservoir of support

One could be forgiven for thinking that California had been swallowed whole, Matrix-like, by some other, counterfeit dimension, in this case, the world of entertainment.

over the past four decades for a broadly regressive social agenda in California, one far at odds with common perceptions of the state as enlightened or progressive.

California's cultivated self-image is one of multiculturalism and diversity, and it is a place where a high degree of cultural autonomy has been achieved by a variety of social groups, and where boundaries of personal freedom have been radically expanded in many ways. However, the state has also long been a pioneer in the politics of backlash and it was in the vanguard of the rollback of the New Deal/Great Society model of welfare capitalism. First came the law-and-order politics of Reagan, with its attacks on unruly students and minorities; a decade later — and in a direct line of descent from Reagan — came the antitax revolt of Howard Jarvis and Proposition 13, the success of which has acted as a permanent brake on state spending in California. The ruinous consequences of this fiscal policy on public education and social services have been such that the mainstream political analyst Peter Schrag has referred to the "Mississippification" of California in the years since the passage of the proposition (see his book, *Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future*, 2004). A state that once symbolized abun-

dance and public entitlement, at least in terms of modern capitalist development, now became a vastly different kind of social laboratory.

In many ways, California served as the precursor, not only for the “Reagan revolution,” but for Thatcherism and the neoliberal program of deregulation and privatization which has been pursued by a globalizing capitalism in the past decade and a half. It has been as much the state of Milton Friedman as that of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and the apparently antithetical spheres of the counterculture and technocapitalism have even intersected in the laissez-faire but socially “progressive” environment of Silicon Valley. In a region which glorifies the role of the heroic entrepreneur, and whose dominant ethos is one of self-aggrandizement, Schwarzenegger’s message of deregulation and unfettered corporate power found a ready audience.

The dynamics of rightwing populism have been described by Thomas Frank in his analysis of trends in the state of Kansas (*What’s the Matter with Kansas?* 2004). Politically it expresses itself as a “revolt” against “special interests — and Schwarzenegger the multimillionaire made just such an attack a central component of his campaign — but one which leaves structures of privilege and inequality in place, and the corporate class not only unscathed but further empowered. The legacy of this in California has been a kind of “antipolitics,” with none of the nonconformist and emancipatory spirit associated with a term once used by Eastern European dissidents. In California, “antipolitics” has meant a kind of sullen reaction, combining a recuperated “antistatist” rejection of government bureaucracy with enthusiasm for state-sanctioned repression, leading to a dramatic growth in the state prison system even as social services have been dismantled.

One of the enduring myths about California is that, by virtue of its referendum process, the state functions as some kind of participatory or direct democracy. The fact that California voters often decide on a bewildering number of propositions at election time does not mean that they have a meaningful role in deciding social or eco-

nomic issues in the state. The model of development pursued by elite interests in California has never been, and never will be, on the ballot. Although the initiative and recall features of the California constitution date from the so-called Progressive era in state politics, there was never a desire on the part of the Progressives (who were anti-monopoly in their battle with Southern Pacific, but pro-business in their general outlook) to have citizens exercise direct power within the state on an ongoing basis. As Stephanie Pincet convincingly demonstrates in her *Transforming California* (1999), California Progressives sought to depoliticize the public sphere and to install the rule of professionals and experts drawn from the business class.

In recent years, the initiative system in California has resembled a kind of rigged roulette game, in which money usually determines which proposition numbers will triumph. During the 2004 election, California voters were asked to decide on issues ranging from public funding of stem-cell research to a relaxation of the punitive “three strikes” feature of the state penal code. In the case of stem-cell research, where biotechnology interests spent heavily and enlisted the support of Schwarzenegger for their initiative, California voters said yes. By contrast, the measure to liberalize the “three strikes” rule was actively opposed by Schwarzenegger and went down to defeat at the polls. Another proposition (72), which would have mandated that businesses over a certain size provide health coverage for their employees, was also defeated, albeit narrowly. It was opposed by both Schwarzenegger and the retail behemoth Wal-Mart, which contributed some \$600,000 toward its defeat.

II

The subjects may extend a more active or passive ‘recognition’ to the personal mission of the charismatic master. His power rests upon this purely factual recognition and springs from faithful devotion. It is devotion to the extraordinary and unheard-of, to what is strange to all rule and tradition and which therefore is viewed

as divine. It is a devotion born of distress and enthusiasm.

Max Weber, *The Sociology of Charismatic Authority*

A YEAR AFTER THE recall election, much of the shock of the Schwarzenegger phenomenon has worn off, but it has lost none of its grotesqueness merely because it has somehow become routine. In a culture suffused with “news” about celebrities, and in which there is a surfeit of cartoonish public figures, Schwarzenegger is not the only outlandish character. However, there is no real way to ignore him. In the year since his election, his stature as both

political personality and as cultural icon has only been enhanced. Having run for office very largely on the basis of a politics of personality, it should not be surprising that he has cultivated a veritable cult of personality as governor. In this, he has been aided by other politicians, awestruck by Schwarzenegger’s Hollywood celebrity, and by a sycophantic media, anxious to record the every move of such a “hot” personality.

Like the younger Bush before him, Schwarzenegger has been able to turn the demonization of him by his opposition to his own advantage. With such low expectations, almost any kind of accomplishment acquires exaggerated importance. Schwarzenegger was portrayed initially as lacking in political skills: his few gestures toward a working relationship with Democratic politicians have been portrayed as skillful and adroit, almost as portents of genius. And even when Schwarzenegger reverts to pure Hollywood type, and does something as ridiculous as erecting a tent in the middle of the state capitol building in which to smoke cigars and receive supplicants, much in the manner of an oriental potentate of antiquity, he receives adulation from poli-

ticians (including many California Democrats, who have few equals for being spineless and craven, seeking entry into that tent) and fawning coverage in the press for his individuality and “style.” Even Schwarzenegger’s blatant *faux pas* — as when he described Democratic politicians as

“girlie men” for not passing his budget proposals — have not eroded his standing with the California public. Such outbursts have only enhanced his maverick image, giving Schwarzenegger an air of “authenticity” because he is apparently unpredictable.

The fact that Schwarzenegger is not an object of popular rid-

icule and scorn underlines the degree to which the culture of mass entertainment has contributed to the trivialization and infantilization of contemporary social discourse. And this process is not something limited to California or the United States, as witness Schwarzenegger’s recent triumphant visit to Japan:

At each stop on the trade mission, the governor is the star . . . Television camera operators jostled for space with photographers who staked out spots on portable stepladders to capture the governor’s first public appearance of his trip.

Drinking a glass of California merlot, Yujiro Kimura marveled at the spotlight on Schwarzenegger, attention his predecessors could only dream of.

“George Deukmejian and Pete Wilson never had such big media attention,” said Kimura, managing director of Kitoku Shinryo, a California rice importer, who evoked the endearing Japanese nickname for the “larger than larger-than-life” American movie star. “He’s Shuwachan.”

San Jose Mercury News, 11/12/04

In the past year, Schwarzenegger has largely succeeded in redefining California politics so that

The fact that California voters often decide on a bewildering number of propositions at election time does not mean that they have a meaningful role in deciding social or economic issues in the state.

political debate (if it can even be called that) has centered on his person, and not on the policies he has endorsed. To some extent, this has allowed Schwarzenegger to escape narrow classification as a Republican governor, or even as a politician. In the cover story of its September 2004 issue, *Wired* magazine, the “hip” bible of computer programmers and technophiles, hailed Schwarzenegger as “The New American Idol,” gushing that he “really does have a chance to set off a national movement that puts problem-solving above ideology and snatches government from special interests.”

Of course, this focus on Schwarzenegger and his person has served as an enormous distraction, one largely obscuring the fact his candidacy was promoted by Republican cadre with longstanding ties to the state’s business elite. In many ways, Schwarzenegger’s governorship is the administration of Pete Wilson *redux*. Nine out of the sixteen appointees made by Schwarzenegger to his Council of Economic Advisors come from the Hoover Institution, a think tank aligned with the Republican party and an avid promoter of monetarist policies. For all of Schwarzenegger’s disdain for “special interests,” he has cultivated quite a few of his own among California’s most wealthy and powerful. On August 3, 2004, the *San Jose Mercury News* reported:

After bashing former Gov. Gray Davis for his prodigious fundraising during last year’s recall election, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has outpaced his Democratic predecessor by raising a record \$12 million from donors during his first seven months in office.

Campaign records released Monday show that Schwarzenegger has collected millions from insurance giants, developers, energy companies and an array of groups that have stepped up help the new Republican chief executive.

By raising an average of \$53,000 per day, Schwarzenegger has far outpaced Davis, whose reputation for linking politics and policy helped lay the groundwork for the campaign that drove the Democrat from office last fall.

With an eye to his political future, Schwarzenegger has taken a “moderate” stand on certain social issues; he has even made a few ges-

tures toward Sierra Club-style conservationists, but closer scrutiny of the record of his first year in office shows a strong pattern of rewarding his corporate patrons, as he did most openly in vetoing an increase in the state minimum wage. There are also clear limits to Schwarzenegger’s supposed “environmentalism.” Most mainstream journalists seem to have fallen under the spell of Schwarzenegger’s ersatz charisma, but some have followed the money trail leading to many of his executive decisions:

The governor proudly donned an environmentalist mantle in a campground while signing a bill to set up a Sierra Nevada conservancy, but quickly took it off when he vetoed another law aiming to clean up smog produced by ships, trucks, trains and wharf equipment at the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex, the nation’s largest seaport and the single biggest source of smog in California.

Tom Elias, *The Palo Alto Daily News*, 10/9/04

BROAD SOCIAL TRENDS in California, as elsewhere in the United States, are of course only partly related to the policies of state governments, which have usually served as mere accessories to corporate interests. The Schwarzenegger phenomenon is hardly at the root of what ails California, nor would his removal from office (unlikely anytime soon) change much. Powerful forces linked to the imperatives of agribusiness and industry have shaped California for the past century, creating a model of development famous for its shapeless, sprawling suburbs, and an automotive-centered “culture” of freeways, shopping malls, and smog. The result has acquired such a sinister reputation that other Americans have sought to resist the “Californication” of their states.

The “California Dream,” a phrase that once conjured an image of a carefree life led in endless sunshine, was always more myth than substance, but it is seen now as a highly ambiguous and elusive image with a visibly dark side. Many in California itself have the feeling that something has gone drastically awry in the state, and narratives of loss and decline are at the heart of most ac-

counts of contemporary California. Schwarzenegger himself campaigned to “restore the California Dream,” but it is clear that he wishes merely to return the state to the Age of Greed only recently concluded. A few months ago, he announced with great fanfare that California was “back on track,” but his notion of progress is itself retrograde. Schwarzenegger’s own California myth is one of perpetual business expansion, with its necessary corollary an exacerbation of all the negative trends in the state: environmental degradation; increasing social inequalities; mass congestion.

These dystopian tendencies have drawn the attention of a generation of social historians, urban theorists, and writers, who have painted a bleak picture of the state, ranging from the wistful memoirs of Joan Didion (*Where I Was From*) to the apocalyptic warnings of Mike Davis (*The Ecology of Fear*). At the anecdotal level of popular consciousness, dissatisfaction with the “state of the state” is often expressed in a nostalgia for a supposedly golden time gone by, an atavism which often edits out the negative features (the realities of cannery work and agricultural labor in Santa Clara county before the coming of Silicon Valley, for example) of the past. However there is a real historical memory at work behind such rosy recollections: except for the happy few, most residents of California over the age of 50 have personal experience of a worsening social and natural environment, and of a quality of life which has only deteriorated over time.

Given such a general awareness, one would think that a kind of radical environmental critique, one that included the social world as well as the natural one, would have great resonance in California. To some extent it does, but environmental movements in California, as elsewhere, tend to be narrowly focused on specific problems (offshore oil drilling; toxic chemical dumps, and so on). In recent years, there has been a greater consciousness of the deleterious consequences of pollution on disadvantaged social groups, leading to local movements against what has been called “environmental racism.” These protests implicitly chal-

lenge the dominant social order and its definition of “progress,” but they are presented — and often present themselves — as parochial and circumscribed, pursuing limited if laudable goals.

In recent years, California has lived through a period of what can only be called economic devastation. During the recent recession, one quarter

In recent years, California has lived through a period of what can only be called economic devastation.

During the recent recession, one quarter of the people employed by high-tech firms in Silicon Valley lost their jobs in a kind of silent hollowing out of an entire economic sector.

of the people employed by high-tech firms in Silicon Valley lost their jobs in a kind of silent hollowing out of an entire economic sector. Since then, conditions of employment, even at the professional level, have remained precarious, with an outcry being raised about the outsourcing and offshoring of jobs, but with little recognition of the systemic source of such phenomena. On the whole, labor struggles in California — such as last year’s prolonged grocery strike in southern California — have been defensive battles, often protracted but rarely victorious in terms of winning major concessions from employers.

Of course, California has been the birthplace of numerous radical movements, many of which have achieved a kind of semi-permanence in enclaves like Berkeley, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz. The establishment scornfully refers to such places as ones where “the sixties never ended,” and to some extent this is true. But whereas much of the 1960s new left in California, as elsewhere, was

eventually dominated by Marxist-Leninist sects, contemporary radical discourse has been inflected by more antiauthoritarian currents, evidenced in a vigorous anarchist “scene” in San Francisco, for example. However, this remains very much a subculture by and large composed of radical intellectuals and bohemians, with little impact on larger society, except on sporadic occasions, as during antiwar protests. To the right of the anti-authoritarians, more pragmatic (and far more prosaic) leftists have pursued electoral politics at the grassroots level, largely under the auspices of the Green party, whose candidate for San Francisco mayor nearly won last year’s race against the Democratic candidate. As a diverse, multiethnic society, California was also the seedbed of social movements defining themselves on the basis of various essentialist identities (gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity) and this kind of identity politics continues into the present day, leading to a highly diffuse oppositional milieu which rarely coalesces and which frequently lives up to its caricatural image in popular culture as the refuge of humorless and “politically correct” ideologues.

In a strange irony, the current apotheosis of Schwarzenegger, the self-designated heir of a Ronald Reagan who once famously vowed to “clean up that mess in Berkeley” (and sent the National Guard and a tear gas-spraying helicopter to do so), has coincided with a very public and official commemoration of the Free Speech Move-

ment, one of the very wellsprings of 60s radicalism. This celebration included an officially sanctioned recreation of a key FSM event, complete with a police car on Sproul Plaza with a throng of students surrounding it. Only in this absurd redramatization (a replaying of history as farce) it was the Democrat Howard Dean on top of the squad car, playing the role of Mario Savio. One might plausibly say that the powers that be were forced to acknowledge this anniversary because of the enduring impact of the FSM; one could equally point to the commemoration as an example of how opposition is domesticated and neutralized in this society.

In the meantime, and away from such restagings of the past, the political heirs of the *anti*-Free Speech Movement go about the business of running the world, in Sacramento and Washington. They owe their power, in some important way, to their continuing ability to mobilize their supporters against “the sixties,” and should another oppositional movement arise on the scale of that decade, it will be demonized in turn. The question of how to put an end to this cycle, and to radically transform a culture which views an Arnold Schwarzenegger in heroic terms, is a daunting one, to say the least. It is a project that requires feats of imagination and daring, in thought as well as in acts. In this, California may yet again prove to be a visionary state, and not merely a delusional one.

The 2004 Elections and the Collapse of the Left

THOMAS HARRISON

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity*

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, "The Second Coming"

SELDOM, IF EVER, SURELY, have the results of a presidential election brought such a sense of despair to so many people. Progressives, in particular, are riddled with anxieties and self-doubt, uncertain of their most cherished beliefs and wondering if there is any hope for this country. The talk of emigrating to Canada seems to have died down, but a great many now feel like strangers among their fellow citizens. Meanwhile, the right claims, falsely, a landslide in favor of their "values," while Democratic Party politicians seem all too ready to agree and are falling over themselves to make the appropriate concessions.

There is certainly ample reason for dread. No one can deny that with the reelection of George Bush, the United States has taken another giant leap to the right. This is not merely a result of the obvious — the victory of a viciously reactionary Republican administration, perhaps the most cynical, dishonest, and ideologically fanatical in our history, plus the tightening of the Republicans' stranglehold on Congress. The triumph of conservatism is also a consequence of the collapse of the left in the face of the Republican threat. It's bad enough that Bush won; what makes it far worse is that he won without ever being challenged by Kerry on a range of vital issues, but especially on the brutal occupation of Iraq — and that the left, in turn, did not challenge Kerry.

In the 2004 election, the big winner was the politics of imperialism and war, of gargantuan military spending and starved and declining social services — and it was a bipartisan victory. In its crudest, most naked form, this is what Bush stands for, of course; but in a less ugly-sounding, but also less

realistic,¹ form, so did Kerry. And because the vast bulk of the left self-destructively sold its birthright to the Kerry campaign, it could not intervene in this non-debate. The silence, therefore, was deafening. There were important differences between Bush and Kerry, but not over the burning question of whether the United States will continue to play the role of a hyperreactionary, arrogant and ignorant superpower, bullying the world, policing a horrendous global status quo that condemns billions to misery and early death, and inciting violent hatred as a result. This was simply not on the agenda. And because it wasn't, masses of Americans, instead of being confronted with progressive ideas, were simply further confirmed in some of their worst prejudices — prejudices it will now be much harder for the left to shake.

What a waste. All those liberals and radicals, including tens of thousands of young people, people who had marched in antiwar demonstrations, flocking to the swing states to leaflet, ring doorbells, sit at phone-banks, and register voters, all on behalf of a candidate who was promising them at least four more years in Iraq! The great outpouring to elect Kerry amounted to a veritable

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mass movement; though profoundly misguided, it exhibited enormous energy and idealism.

It would bode well if there were now at least some awareness on the left that working for Kerry

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was a fool's errand, and that the impact on progressive politics has been calamitous. But so far the signs are not good. MoveOn has informed the members of its vast network that "We are truly stronger than ever." In a mind-boggling display of denial, Robert Borosage and Katrina Vanden Heuvel, wrote in *The Nation* that progressives "drove the debate" during the election and "drive the [Democratic] party now" ("Progressives: Get Ready to Fight," Nov. 29, 2004). "Even in the ashes of this defeat," they declare, "progressives can take pride in the remarkable role we played, both in arousing opposition to Bush and in building the independent progressive machinery necessary to communicate, educate, register, and get out the vote." Pride in working their hearts out for a candidate who had nothing but contempt for progressives' demands and wanted only to render them invisible and unheard until the campaign was over? Embarrassment would be a more appropriate response. As for the "independent progressive machinery," the trouble is that when it is placed at the service of the Democrats, it ceases

to be independent. If only it were used to organize a new political party that is *controlled* by progressives and serves *their* interests.

Instead, *The Nation* and others insist on more of the same. If the history of the past century is not enough to prove that the Democratic Party is unreformable, that it can never be transformed into a people's party, then surely the Kerry campaign, which confirmed that the slick corporate politics and macho militarism of the "New Democrats" have become the party's very essence, should put these dangerous illusions to rest forever. On this score, however, the absurd bravado of liberals like Borosage and Vanden Heuvel provides little reason for optimism.

A Failure of Nerve

BEHIND THIS BRITTLE FAÇADE, the reality is that demoralization has descended on the left like a toxic cloud. Among its poisonous effects is a tendency to blame the supposed stupidity and atavism of the mass of Americans, to observe bitterly that benighted voters "got what they deserve."

It would be spiteful and wrong to say that it was the Anyone But Bush left that got what it deserved — no decent person deserves Bush. But by lining up behind Kerry, by lowering its voice and largely withdrawing from the public spotlight in order not to "embarrass" the ticket, by excusing Kerry's conservatism and flag-waving in the interest of removing Bush, and by joining — and indeed leading — a venomous attack on the only effort to mount a serious national challenge to the reactionary bipartisan consensus — Ralph Nader's deeply flawed, yet infinitely preferable independent campaign — the left only succeeded in making itself more invisible and ineffective than usual.

In its desperate quest to elect Kerry, the left allowed almost every progressive goal to be ignored — the need to slash military spending and launch a genuinely democratic foreign policy, to respond effectively to global warming, to restore and defend civil liberties, to combat poverty, to launch public works to create jobs, to make the tax structure progressive, to implement prolabor legislation that actually helps workers unionize,

to reform the country's cruel immigration policy, reverse the decay of urban schools, and a host of other crucial matters. For the better part of a year, the Kerry and Bush camps focused on the question of who would be a stronger and more decisive Commander-in-Chief, while most of the left obsessed about polls and worried about Kerry's personality.

The left put no pressure whatsoever on Kerry: its support was unconditional and, mostly, uncritical. Rep. Barney Frank boasted that "Kerry has less of a problem on the left than any candidate in my memory. . . . The proof is that I am less busy this presidential campaign than other ones. I'm not being sent out to calm down the left."² Had Kerry won, he would have taken office with no mandate for change and with no political debts to pay to the progressives who worked so hard to elect him.

The Anyone But Bush hysteria represented a colossal failure of nerve on the part of the broad left. Without any doubt, we are in deep trouble. The power of the right constitutes a moral and political crisis of alarming proportions, but just as in any emergency, there are sensible ways to respond, and ways that simply heighten the danger. For the left to sacrifice its principles on the altar of Kerry's alleged "electability," for it to stand silently by while the Democrats allow the savagery of the U.S. occupation and the torture scandal in Iraq, as well as the grim erosion of civil liberties at home, to be excised from the nation's consciousness, was the worst possible way to combat the dangers of Bushism.

As usual, those who had opted for the lesser evil strained mightily to find reasons for thinking that their candidate was "not so bad." In truth Kerry was worse on most counts, and closer to his Republican opponent, than any Democratic presidential candidate since the 1920s. This is not to deny that Kerry was, despite his conservatism and hawkishness, undeniably the lesser evil. A Kerry presidency would probably prevent, or at least postpone, the privatization of Social Security. Abortion rights would certainly be more secure with a Democrat in the White House than with a

Republican. Kerry would doubtless feel obliged to continue the occupation of Iraq, if only out of fear of Republican charges that the Democrats "lost" it, but would be less likely, perhaps, than Bush to launch new military interventions.

Had Kerry won, we might not be witnessing such a frenzied and unseemly scramble to the right on the part of most Democratic politicians. Nevertheless, most Democrats have an extremely superficial commitment to progressive principles, one that is shaky in the best of times; now that these principles appear to be electoral handicaps they are ready to discard them like so much used Kleenex. The fact that in defeat so many Democrats are capable of compromising on so many things, including, it seems, even Social Security, shows the futility — or more pointedly, the *extreme danger* — of relying on them even to hold the line. Even for those who have abandoned all hope of radical reform, whose only political goal is to maintain some shred of humane social policy in the increasingly Darwinian world of American capitalism, to preserve at least a few of the gains of the New Deal, the labor, civil rights, and women's movements, it should be obvious by now that depending on the Democrats to defend these things and stand up to the right is madness. To do so is *maximally* unsafe.

Antiwar Movement Goes AWOL

During the campaign, the antiwar movement kept a very low profile, despite the carnage in Iraq and the fact that half the population opposes the war — a much larger percentage, for example, than during the early years of the Vietnam War. Its one major mass mobilization was in New York City on the eve of the Republican National Convention.³ The antiwar movement's semihibernation was, in a way, bizarre. The leaders of the labor, women's, civil rights, and environmental movements are longtime Democratic Party serfs; their prostration before Kerry was no surprise. Kerry could throw them a few symbolic concessions and get away with leaving it at that. But what could a frankly pro-war candidate concede to the millions who had come out against the imperialist occu-

pation of Iraq? By what twisted logic could Kerry, who repeated over and over again his commitment to “finishing the job” in Iraq, whose minions quashed any hint of a peace plank in the Democratic Party platform, be considered an antiwar candidate? There were no bones for him to throw.

In a hard-hitting column in *The Nation* (Dec. 13, 2004) Naomi Klein described a “new era of supercharged American impunity”: the Bush administration commits war crimes in

Iraq — dismembering children, blowing up hospitals and mosques, attacking journalists and medical personnel, as it rampages through Falluja and other centers of resistance — with absolute freedom. The American public is cocooned within a media fantasy-world in which only brave American boys (and the occasional girl) die, while the rest of the world watches the scenes of civilian carnage on their televisions every night. As Klein points out, at no time did Kerry call into question the lawless depredations of our government’s forces. Never during the campaign did he so much as mention the torture at Abu Ghraib or the 100,000 Iraqi deaths calculated in *The Lancet*. Far from expressing regret over Iraqi civilian casualties, Kerry didn’t even acknowledge them. And thus, Klein says, he offered Bush “the gift of impunity.”

That this man was either openly or de facto endorsed by the organized antiwar movement was disgraceful. In fact, as the conservative columnist William Safire delightedly pointed out, on several issues Kerry was actually more militaristic than Bush (“Kerry, Newest Neocon,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2004): calling as early as the spring for an attack on Falluja, making warlike noises about North Korea, and even opining that preemptive war was “a great doctrine throughout the

Cold War.” The official doctrine of “mutual assured destruction” allegedly precluded preemptive nuclear war, which was openly advocated at the time only by madmen like Edward Teller; imagine the reaction from leftists if Bush had made this comment, the solemn reminders that voting for Kerry was truly a matter of life or death.

But no matter what Kerry said, no matter what position he took, it just didn’t seem to make any difference to his progressive supporters. The

almost religious fervor, the iron discipline, with which members of the antiwar movement campaigned and voted in their millions for this hawk, whom they knew to be a hawk, and poured scorn on all who demurred, was a deeply depressing spectacle.

MANY RADICALS WHO ARE normally highly critical of the Democrats and friendly to the idea of independent politics argued that it was only because the Bush administration was so uniquely dangerous that “this time” the left had to forego political independence. But the conditions that supposedly mandated a vote for Kerry in 2004 are unlikely to change for the better in the future. Isn’t it virtually certain that the Republicans will put up someone as bad as, and probably a good deal worse than, Bush in 2008, in 2012, and so on? In which case, is the left condemned to subordinate itself permanently to an increasingly conservative Democratic Party? If the “strategic” vote for Kerry in 2004 becomes the pattern of the future, if every four years the left declares another “emergency” that requires putting the effort to build a political alternative on hold, an alternative will never get built.

Right now, the few remaining vestiges of “progressivism” in the mainstream of the Demo-

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cratic Party are rapidly unraveling. In the aftermath of their defeat, party leaders scratch their heads wondering how they can appear more religious and “family-friendly” (code for distancing themselves from gays and feminists). The new minority leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, is a conservative Mormon from Nevada who opposes abortion and is described as “close to Bush.” He has praised the “brilliance” of Antonin Scalia as a potential chief justice. California Senator Dianne Feinstein greeted Reid’s promotion by saying, “I think it’s time to do some reassessment . . . I have noticed in the past that all the gravitas [in the Democratic caucus] has slid to the left.” And House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi has announced that she is proposing bipartisan negotiations on Social Security in which “everything would be on the table,” including, obviously, privatization.

Nor does it appear likely that the Democrats in the Senate are going to put up much resistance to Bush’s nominations. When the President picked White House counsel Alberto Gonzales to be the next Attorney General, Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy, the ranking minority member of the Judiciary Committee, assured the press that Gonzales would have no trouble winning approval because he was not “a polarizing figure.” Evidently the fact that Gonzales authored the notorious 2002 memorandum arguing that the “war on terror” allowed the United States to ignore the Geneva Convention’s ban on torturing military prisoners, and thus opened the way to the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, is nothing to get all polarized about.

And then there’s Hillary Clinton, the liberals’ great white hope apparently, who has spent most of her years in the Senate so far becoming an expert on military affairs, fawning over bombers and missile launchers and winning the respect of Congress’s most hawkish Republicans. Sen. Clinton is now helping to “reposition” the party so it can have greater appeal in the “red” states, and thereby preparing her own possible presidential run in 2008 by attacking the Bush administration for being too soft on illegal immigration. She demands more high tech surveillance equip-

ment at the borders and a better tracking system for foreigners who are allowed in. Immigrant bashing, it seems, is something else the left will have to swallow in order to stop the Republicans.

Nipping a Third Party in the Bud

IN THE FIGHT TO transform this country we may not be back to square one, but the prospects of creating an independent progressive party, the *sine qua non* of radical change, have been set back, in all likelihood. What appeared to much of the left as a dire political emergency, requiring at least a temporary united front of all progressive forces, constituted a golden opportunity for the pro-corporate politicians, centrist ideologues and professional operatives who run the Democratic Party — an opportunity to eliminate permanently any possibility that a serious political alternative might emerge to the party’s left. This is essential for the Democrats: their electoral fortunes depend on the continuing loyalty of workers and unions, Blacks, Hispanics, feminists, the poor, and progressives in general. Only when the party can feel unconcerned about losing this base is it truly free to appeal to the conservative middle-class “swing voters” whose support is so coveted by the strategists of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC).

Depending on the fear of Bush was not enough. Beginning more than a year before Ralph Nader announced that he would be a candidate in 2004, prominent liberals and radicals called on him not to run. Then when he did declare his candidacy, an unprecedented campaign of vilification was launched, which reached a pitch of intensity on the eve of the election itself. In addition to defaming Nader personally, the Democrats and their allies in the labor movement left no stone unturned in their efforts to keep him off the ballot in every state they could. Their goal was nothing less than total obliteration.

Unfortunately, Nader made it much easier for the enemies of independent political action to discredit him by his confusing statements that he would help Kerry win, by his courting of disgruntled conservatives, and especially by his failure to clearly distinguish himself from the nativ-

ist and cult-dominated Reform Party, whose ballot line he used in several states. In their public statements, Nader's running mate, Peter Camejo, and his campaign manager acted as if there was nothing more to the Reform Party than its opposition to the occupation of Iraq and the Patriot Act. And Nader's positions on immigration, while far more tolerant than the Republicans and Democrats, were also far from a recognition of foreigners' basic rights to enter and work in this country. Nonetheless, while all this provided useful ammunition to Kerry's supporters, it is important to realize that they would have been no less relentless in their attempts to demonize Nader and the idea of an independent left electoral campaign in 2004 even if he had been much better.

Four years ago, there was an upsurge of interest in independent politics among rank and file progressives and young voters, largely in response to the conservatism of the Clinton administration. In fact, disgust with the two-party system had been growing for more than a decade, and millions of Americans were receptive to the possibility of a political alternative. By 2000, it looked like this trend might produce a genuine threat to the Democrats. As a result, the big guns of labor, the organized women's, civil rights, environmental and gay rights movements, the liberal journals, and of course, the Democratic Party itself, were deployed in a desperate attempt to scare voters away from the Nader campaign. But Nader's appeal and Gore's limp performance made their job difficult.

At election time, the scare tactics proved successful. Even without the hysterical warnings of NOW, the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club and other organizations, the old lesser-evil habit probably would have induced most of Nader's potential voters reluctantly to cast their ballots for Gore, but disappointing though the Green vote was, it represented a promising beginning. Nader's personal popularity during the campaign was high, and his attacks on corporate malfeasance and the two-party duopoly resonated far beyond his actual vote total.

It was a great stroke of luck for the Demo-

crats and their loyalists on the left that because of the events in Florida Nader could be perceived as having "spoiled" the election for Gore. In reality, the election was lost for two reasons: First of all, there was Gore's totally uninspiring campaign; it was quite an achievement not to win by a comfortable margin given that he was running on the coattails of a very popular president and, as we know now, that millions of rightwing evangelicals stayed home rather than vote for a candidate they deemed insufficiently reactionary. Second, there was the massive disfranchisement of black voters in Florida and the hijacking of the election by the Supreme Court, to which the Democrats bowed with a cowardice (not to mention a cynical betrayal of their most loyal supporters) that must have few if any precedents in the annals of partisan politics. For the most part, however, all that has been conveniently forgotten, and instead Nader has been made the scapegoat. Of course, for those who have decided that there is no alternative to the horrors of Bushism other than the slightly less horrible Democrats, it is much easier to beat up on Nader than to question the Democrats' commitment to opposing the right.

And now, after four years of Bush, this conviction — that no matter how bad the Democrats have become, they are the only thing standing between us and fascism — has steadily deepened. With Washington ruled by an extraordinarily malevolent gang of thugs and zealots, large parts of the left have simply panicked, effectively abandoning any hope of changing a system that continually spawns these creatures.

Blaming the Victims

WITH THE DWINDLING of hope comes a growing tendency on the left to blame the American people for our current troubles. After the election, *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt wrote: "Maybe this time the voters chose what they actually wanted: Nationalism, pre-emptive wars, order not justice, 'safety' through torture, backlash against women and gays, a gulf between haves and have-nots, government largesse for

their churches, and a my-way-or-the-highway president. Where, I wonder, does that leave us?" (11/22/04) Where indeed, when the only alternative imaginable, according to Pollitt and other members of the Anyone But Bush brigade, is simply a milder version of the same thing? Except for government aid to the "faith-based community," all the items on Pollitt's list *were* chosen by those who voted for Kerry, whether they realized it or not, because those are the things the Democratic candidate either openly stood for, partially supported or timidly acquiesced in.

Nationalism and preemptive wars? Didn't Pollitt watch the debates or listen to any of Kerry's speeches? Kerry never lost an opportunity to stress his militaristic bona fides and his commitment to maintaining the U.S. empire, including staying in Iraq until the United States won, and he was quite explicit about the option of preemptive war. If Kerry valued justice over order, why didn't he call for the repeal of the Patriot Act? Why, as noted earlier, did he say nothing about the torture at Abu Ghraib, not to mention at Guantanamo and throughout the U.S. gulag? This might have been one of the campaign's major issues — talk about moral values!

Instead, Kerry never brought it up during the debates. What about the backlash against women and gays? To counter the multipronged attack on abortion rights, Kerry courageously announced . . . that he would consider appointing anti-abortion federal judges. His frequently repeated opposition to same-sex marriage merely added legitimacy to popular prejudices on this issue.

As for the widening gulf between rich and poor, Kerry offered nothing, and every serious person knew it. No jobs program (unless one counts his supply-side plan for big tax concessions to companies that refrain from out-sourcing), no diversion of resources from the military to domestic needs, no restoration of welfare guarantees for the most impoverished, and no change in the country's massively regressive tax structure beyond the repeal of Bush's most flagrant cuts for the rich. Kerry's program on taxes would have merely reverted to the pre-Bush status quo; as president,

he would have been only too glad to preside over the kind of frenzied, gulf-widening enrichment

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of the upper class that marked the Clinton years.

KERRY AND THE DEMOCRATS forthrightly endorsed imperialism, militarism, and chauvinism. They made crucial concessions to homophobia. Kerry, like Gore and Lieberman four years ago, furthered the intrusion of religion into politics by constantly trumpeting his faith. Is it any wonder, then, that so many Americans regard these as bedrock political values, from which only fringe elements dissent? And given the increasingly monolithic character of political discourse in this country, why should it be surprising that voters would tend to select the proudest, clearest, most consistent exponents of the dominant values, rather than their more hesitant, shamefaced, or flip-flopping supporters? The Democrats have helped push the United States to the right; and they have thereby fostered a political climate in which it is much harder — perhaps now impossible — for them to win.

We will never know if a fighting liberal, militantly antiwar presidential candidate could have been elected in 2004. Possibly not: popular consciousness is full of contradictions, but conservative ideas are undeniably powerful and widespread, thanks in large part to the decades-long complicity of the Democrats and the capitulation of the broad left, which repeatedly muzzles itself at elec-

tion time, accommodating the Democrats' move to the right precisely when people are most tuned in to politics. Polls show that large majorities support certain liberal and social-democratic ideas, such as universal, single-payer health insurance. More than half of non-union workers would like to join unions. In June and July 2004, Gallup polls indicated that 54 percent believed the Iraq war was "not worth it," and slightly less than half favored immediate withdrawal.

But such enlightened thinking coexists, often in the same individuals, with retrograde attitudes toward women, gays, minorities, and immigrants, with blind national chauvinism and brutal fantasies of military aggression against perceived "enemies," and so on. Even on these latter issues, however, popular thinking is complex and mutable. Think of fast-changing attitudes toward homosexuals: polling data reveals that a large majority of Americans support civil unions for same-sex couples with the same rights as married couples — whoever even heard of civil unions as little as five years ago? But this did not just happen naturally, or because people watched *Will and Grace*. It is the result of years of activism by the gay rights movement. The problem is that to undermine homophobia and other conservative prejudices there has to be leadership and active campaigning, not timidity and acquiescence.

Disillusioned radicals like Pollitt are simply wrong to write off the American people as permanently reactionary. The 2004 election certainly underlined a deepening and dangerous reactionary trend, but, as is well known, Bush's victory owed a great deal to the mobilization of ultraconservative religious types; it was far from the popular mandate the Republicans now claim. Moreover, voter turnout, at something over 55 percent, was higher than in any election since 1968, but was generally highest in the red states, especially in the Southern Bible belt; the turnout figure also means that almost 45 percent of Americans did not vote, and, as usual, these were overwhelmingly working class and poor. The party of nonvoters is still the largest and still potentially mobilizable by an anti-establishment political force.

Nevertheless, it will take some hard campaigning by an *independent* left even to begin to turn mass consciousness around, and, most important, to inspire millions of Americans with the belief that fundamental change is actually possible. At the same time, it will require a renewal of the elementary democratic understanding among progressives themselves that the people we want to reach, the vast majority, having no fundamental stake in the perpetuation of the existing system, are capable of grasping the reality that they are plundered, exploited, and ideologically manipulated in the interests of a ruthless elite.

Down With the Ship?

MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, ALL BUT a small fraction of the left clings for dear life to the decayed and rapidly sinking ship of the Democratic Party. The "progressive" wing of the party is utterly and permanently marginalized. *The Nation* and other liberal organs still make feeble noises about "transforming" the party, recapturing its lost "soul," and so on, but few really believe this can be done — and they are right. In any case, most of those who got on the Anyone But Bush bandwagon this time did so not because they think the Democrats can ever actually put up someone who is worth voting for on his or her merits; instead, it was all about electability. And the bitter irony in 2004 was that Kerry's alleged electability — essentially, his similarity to Bush — may have been the main thing that cost him the election. As I said earlier, there's no telling if a more liberal candidate would have won, but the Democrats' Republican Lite approach was doomed. And meanwhile, the left, yet again, forfeited an opportunity to begin to transform the political landscape by championing a consistently progressive alternative.

The demise of the Democratic Party will only be hastened if, as looks likely, the crackpot "realists" of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) succeed in pushing the party to cave in even more to the right. In 2004 Kerry refused to endorse the 11 state ballot initiatives to ban same-sex marriage (although he did not openly oppose them either). But it is noteworthy that Clinton

advised him to come out in favor of these homophobic measures; this is a sign of things to come. In fact, Democrats, apart from some gay subgroups such as the Stonewall Democrats in Ohio, did not lift a finger to defeat the marriage referenda. In many states, these measures were actually widely supported by Democratic politicians — for example, in Montana, where every Democratic candidate for statewide office did so. Of course, such a strategy makes no sense even in Machiavellian, ends-justifies-the-means terms: endorsing the backlash against gays and lesbians can only strengthen and embolden the far right; consequently, it can only benefit the Republicans.

The logic of Anyone But Bush was essentially nihilistic: eliminating almost everything that might sharply distinguish the Democratic from the Republican candidate. What's left? Abortion rights? If the present trend continues, one can easily imagine a situation four years from now, or even sooner, in which electoral success is deemed to depend on major concessions to antiabortion forces — probably not overturning *Roe v. Wade*, but very likely on late-term abortions, parental consent for minors, and other issues. If the rights of gays can be sacrificed, why not the rights of women? And then, when the Democrats do start to throw reproductive rights overboard, one can easily imagine NOW and other women's organizations, along with the rest of the liberal establishment, arguing that, bad as the Democrats have become, the Republican are still so much worse that the lesser evil choice is, once again, the only possible option. Of course, such concessions will only hasten the day when the far right will indeed succeed in reversing *Roe v. Wade* and banning abortion entirely.

The Real Choice

THERE WAS A CHOICE in 2004, and it will continue to be the choice facing the left: death by lesser-evilism or life through independent political action. Nader's muddled, compromised campaign was deeply disappointing, though I think that on balance it was worth supporting. But whether one voted for Nader or not was of little

consequence; the important thing was to declare one's political independence by refusing to be sucked into the deadening nihilism of Anyone But Bush.

With all its weaknesses, the Green Party has kept the flame of independent political action burning, and even shown significant potential for growth. All the more tragic, therefore, that it too lost its nerve and joined the panicky stampede into the Kerry camp. At its national convention the party rejected an endorsement of Nader and instead nominated David Cobb and Pat La Marche, who advocated a "safe states" strategy of running only in the dependably blue states and working for the Democratic ticket everywhere else. Some claim that the party's convention was stacked by Cobb supporters and that most Greens supported Nader. Whatever the case, unless Cobb's opponents regain control of the Greens, 2004 could prove to be the year a promising third party committed political suicide. In nominating Cobb and La Marche, the party denied its very reason for being; no independent party of the left can succeed unless it is willing to compete with Democrats across the board, even if this allows Republicans to win in the short run.

As it turned out, the Cobb campaign was effectively invisible. It won 130,000 votes — as compared to Nader's 550,000, even after he had been kept off the ballots of six out of the ten states where he got his biggest support four years ago (Nader got 3.5 million votes in 2000). The Greens lost ballot lines in more than one-third of the states, including Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Connecticut.

Greens who supported Cobb's safe-states strategy, as well as many other progressives, do acknowledge the need for an independent party of the left — someday. *For now*, they say, the effort to build it must be suspended because the danger of continuing Republican rule is too great. Because the Republican threat will only grow worse, this threatens to become a formula for the permanent deferral of political independence and, consequently, permanent political enslavement to a rightward-moving Democratic Party.

The third party to which we aspire does not exist, but the forces on which it must rest are very

We must begin by modeling the kind of political action — today, not in some ever-receding future — that we recommend for millions of others: opposing the Democrats *now*.

much alive and present. They consist of the millions of Americans who are sick of wars, insecurity, declining wages, worsening schools, racism, and homophobia and long for peace, equality, and social justice. If we are ever to succeed, in organizing these forces behind a new political party, we must begin by modeling the kind of political action — today, not in some ever-receding future — that we recommend for millions of others: op-

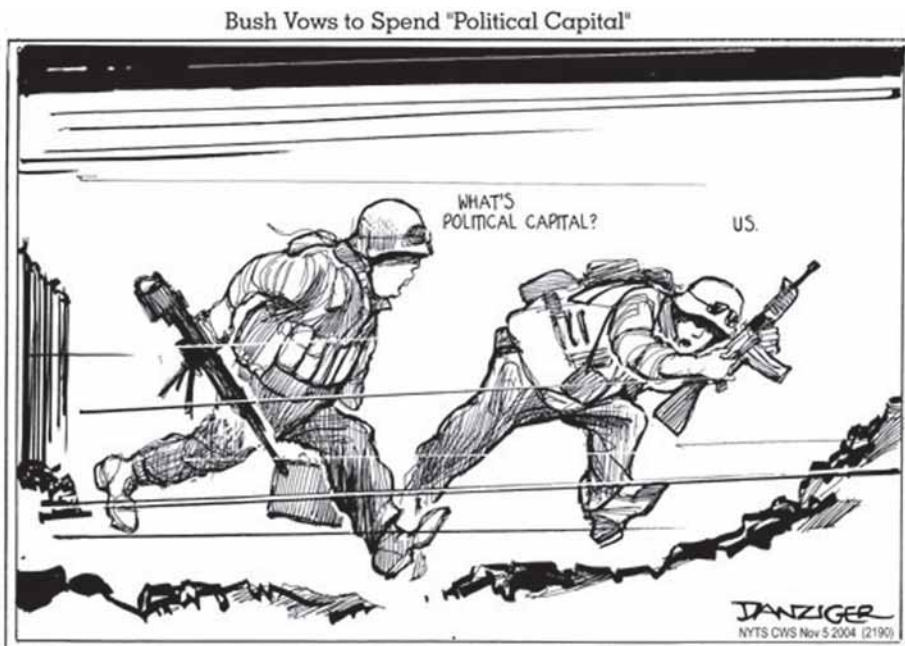
posing the Democrats *now*. In the contest between Bush and Kerry this course seemed perverse, at best, to most progressives, but logic indicates that it is the only way to build for a future of peace and real democracy. By the same token, all the evidence suggests that a very grim future indeed awaits us if the left does not declare its political independence.

NOTES

1. Kerry's "multilateralism" was a complete fantasy, his promise to persuade France, Germany and other powers to share the burden of occupying Iraqi utterly empty since these nations made it clear that a Kerry presidency would have no effect on their determination to steer clear of Washington's quagmire.

2. What a damning admission for Frank, as well as a damning indictment of the pro-Kerry left. Frank's comment should be treasured for what it reveals about the role of the Democratic Party's "left" wing in containing and neutralizing threats to the system.

3. Even this event, although it could be seen as a pro-Kerry rally, frightened the campaign's operatives and its liberal apologists. The editors of *The Nation*, worried that any show of militancy in the streets might damage Kerry's chances, initially urged demonstrators not to assemble at all but instead to stand *silently* all over the city holding candles.



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THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF IRAQ: THREE PERSPECTIVES

We are pleased to present three distinct viewpoints on the ongoing U.S. occupation of Iraq. Each contribution addresses such critical issues as the forthcoming elections, the declared and undeclared aims of the Bush administration, and the nature of the resistance. As always, *New Politics* invites further discussion and comment from our readers.

Self-determination and Democracy in the Iraqi Conflict

BARRY FINGER

THE DEMAND FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION, for the right of self-determination of a people, is understood by socialists to be a demand for radical, consistent democracy. This at once separates us from those who, such as the Buchananite paleocons, place the inviolability of the national principle above all other considerations and who may consistently oppose imperial interventions on that basis. Yet, this demand on the part of socialists for the right to self-determination may even seem self-contradictory insofar as the final aim of socialism is an international political and economic order that aims to inspire the peoples of the world with the understanding that the highest order of collective human devotion is a devotion to the human race at large. National sentiment itself, like religious ideologies, or ethnic chauvinisms, that contrast and raise the well being of a fragment of humanity above the well being of the human race as a whole are obstacles to socialist goals.

Socialists, however, are not blind to reality. We do not believe that national sentiment can be uprooted by decree or by propaganda, much less by force. We do not advocate national sentiment, but we assay a working arrangement with it wherever possible. Where the struggle against national oppression exists, we seek to solidarize with those who would merge the particular struggle against oppression with the general struggle against all oppressors, that is, into a revolutionary socialist channel.

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Socialists champion self-determination because imperial oppression is an artificial unifier of diverse national classes and political ideologies. Foreign domination concentrates the passions and energies of resistance and struggle against the outside enemy, retarding the evolution of a separate and independent strain of working class consciousness and politics that we look to as the key to social progress. The release of a nation from the grip of national oppression can unleash, at least in part, the latent tendencies for class conflict and social struggle, which are the animating forces of democracy.

Where the imperialist oppressor is a demo-

cratic capitalist country, the continued presence of foreign domination cannot but have the effect of tainting and distorting the social content of democracy in the eyes of the oppressed. This is especially true where democracy is first introduced by means of an imperial invasion. A nation that is

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politically oppressed so that it may be economically exploited, necessarily alights on the not unreasonable suspicion that “democracy” is nothing but a cultural and administrative tool in the arsenal of domination. For that is precisely the social program which it bears in that context and equally why “democratic” imperialism is so particularly pernicious. As socialists, we, especially, should harbor no illusions that the cause of democracy can be advanced by such means. Democrats, trade unionists, feminists, etc. who seek cover under a “democratic” imperialist umbrella, who moreover take responsibility for the politics of imperial intervention, dishonor their ideals insofar as they come to be perceived, justifiably or not, as agents of foreign collaboration.

This lesson applies with equal validity and for analogous reasons to the behavior of democrats and socialists within the bastions of democratic imperialism. When Stalinism was a force in the world, independent socialists distinguished themselves from liberals, social democrats, and pro-western socialists, not so much in seeing in Communism a greater evil to democratic capitalism. This we were often willing to concede. Where we parted company was in our adamant refusal to lend critical support to capitalism as a bulwark of

democracy against totalitarian movements. We explained that Stalinism fed on the fundamental inability of capitalism to solve the profound social problems afflicting society. That being so, it would be utterly senseless and suicidal to follow cold war liberals and their cothinkers in their stubborn delusion that the very same system, with the very same predatory appetites that gave rise, sustained, and multiplied these brutalities and which thereby recruited its own enemies could be successfully leveraged as a means of advancing democracy and defeating Stalinism. The futility of lending critical support to capitalist imperialist interventionism became a cardinal lesson of that era.

It is a lesson whose principles have outlived the historical circumstances through which they were derived. In these principles a broad consistency emerges that the democratic proposition requires socialists and their allies on either side of an imperial intervention — even against an authoritarian movement or regime — to break with capitalism, its parties, its politics, and its wars. The price that is paid for failing to do so is an endless loop of barbarism, inhumanity, and social stagnation and regression.

For paleocons (and, perhaps, for anti-imperialist liberals of the Michael Lind stripe) the condition of self-determination is satisfied simply with the removal of external political restraints. As long as the government of the once foreign dominated nation is now composed of personnel who share the cultural, linguistic and ethnic background of the governed, the nation can be said to be, in their terms, liberated. Socialists, on the other hand, measure national self-determination by the yardstick of democracy. The absence of imperial encumbrances is therefore endorsed as a necessary, but not sufficient precondition of self-determination and national liberation. That socialists support self-determination as a democratic demand, by no means obliges us to support any or all movements or organizations struggling for that demand. We chose to support only those movements as against the imperialist power that we realistically believe can pave the way for further

and expanded struggle in the direction of socialism and popular control from below, and resolutely oppose those whose victory would be an impediment to such further developments.

The Arab world is increasingly being convulsed by a civil war, where the United States, patron of the status quo, would necessarily be mired, even absent a 9-11. Nasserism and Baathism, the contemporary conduits of Arab nationalism, have failed to address the fundamental issues of modernization and democracy. As such, they are powerless as a viable safeguard against the rising tide of Islamic fascism. No re-orientation of American policy towards this option is possible, although America toyed with that alternative in supporting Saddam against the Iranians in the 1980s. The traditional client system, whereby Saudi Arabia most prominently policed the Gulf to maintain American interests, is in a shambles. The American ruling class has now seized on vassalizing Iraq, of turning it into a regional platform for the projection of U.S. power in securing the Gulf oil and of installing a demonstration regime, which it hopes to export regionally as its next line of defense.

Of course, nothing America is willing or able to do addresses the fundamental source of grievances in the Arab world. It is a region deeply divided between haves and have-nots, primarily determined by the ownership of oil and the relative density of populations. The Arab economy is linked by an international division of labor in which poor, population-rich nations provide oil-rich, population-poor nations with a labor force, a rentier economy, and an extravagant, deeply offensive life style. It is this essential injustice and the utter inability of the Arab revolution, stymied and frustrated at every turn by its own antidemocratic proclivities compounded by persistent Western interventions in favor of the existing system, to resolve this that fuels bin Laden's forces.

FOR ALL ITS TALK of exporting democracy, the United States is constitutionally incapable of waging a democratic war simply because it is of necessity opposed to the only solution which could

offer a way out of poverty for the Arab masses: the democratic ownership and control from below in the broader Arab context of the Gulf oil resources. Instead, the immediate problem for American imperialism is to recruit international allies in its war to crush the Iraqi resistance. But

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since opinion abroad is overwhelmingly opposed to participation in this venture, the United States acts to drive a wedge between the democratic sentiment of its would-be allies and the governments it hopes to enlist. It means extending *cart blanche* to Putin to crush Chechnya, and to Sharon to strangle Palestine. It means deep inroads into civil liberties, burdening the working class with war obligations at the expense of social programs, turning the armed forces into a charnel house for the poor and disenfranchised. It means the atrocities of Abu Ghraib and Fallujah. It means the transfer of sovereignty without the withdrawal or subordination of coalition forces. It means Allawi introducing emergency measures, including the reinstatement of the death penalty, that invest him with broad powers, thus effectively shattering the myth that post-Saddam Iraq, unlike its predecessor, is governed by the rule of law. It means 100,000 Iraqi deaths and counting.

Beyond this, the United States proposes, with the imperial arrogance and tin ear that only the world's greatest stand-pat power could muster, a neocon utopia of even more rampant inequality for Iraq. It proposes permitting 100 percent foreign

ownership of Iraqi business and resources, except for the oil industry, the complete repatriation of profits without provision for reinvestment, a flat tax on profits of 15 percent and the suppression of wages to attract foreign investors. In fact, all that remains of Saddam Hussein's economic policies are the laws that suppress trade unions and restrict collective bargaining rights. The sanctions regime that existed after the first Gulf War caused the destruction of the Iraqi middle classes, the collapse of the secular educational system and a renewal of religious obscurantism. Reconstruction funds have been too meager for any meaningful revival of indigenous Iraqi capitalist prospects.

If the United States has its way, superimposed above this foreign dominated economy will be the Allawi regime, now assiduously consolidating its base by rehabilitating former officers, pardoning Baathist penitents, conferring lucrative positions on prospective cronies and combining enormous dosages of corruption with lethal quantities of repression need to catapult themselves into power and preside over the Iraqi state and its vast oilfields. It will be a state-regime unlike other capitalist regimes, because the Iraqi state, through its control of one immensely lucrative commodity, will be self-perpetuating and socially autonomous in ways that no other normally functioning capitalist state would ever be allowed to become. Its sole function, aside from self-enrichment, will be to provide troop and logistical support for the suppression of Muslim insurgencies that threaten Gulf oil, a function that the United States in full confidence can be assured that it will have a career stake in providing. For all its talk of democracy, the American program is remarkable only for the heights of its impudence. Once having exercised the right to vote, no further civic role is envisioned for the Iraqi people. There simply is no place for the organized working class in the new hellhole

envisioned by the American architects of reconstruction.

Against this, from what we know, it seems sadly that the present Iraqi insurgency offers no additional avenues for the assertion of Iraqi democracy, and would close down those crevices that presently exist for existing democratic forces to maneuver. It appears to be a political and social deadend promising only the endless regression of society, the virtual enslavement of women, the shackling of the working class and the annihilation of socialists, democrats, and nonbelievers. Socialists can have no truck supporting such a resistance. Its ability to appeal to the Iraqi people as champions of national liberation is the consequence entirely of the reactionary nature of the American intervention. A victory for such a resistance would be completely incompatible with any conceivable socialist understanding of self-determination. Endorsing these forces would be as ill-advised and reactionary as the German Communist support in 1923 of the Nazi sabotage during French occupation of the Ruhr. We therefore demand an immediate withdrawal of occupation forces not only in compliance with the democratic demands of self-determination, but also in an effort to shakeout and fragment the reactionary forces of the resistance, artificially united in opposition to a common foe.

WE LOOK INSTEAD to the incipient forces of Iraqi democracy, of all third-force groups and elements, to combine, arm, and organize themselves, to break with the occupation forces and establish themselves as an independent coordinate of power. No prospect for the defeat of Islamic fascism nor the forging and defense of Iraqi democracy is possible as long as such forces struggle as subjects and instruments of American imperialism.

Unraveling Iraq

The Sociopolitical and Ethical Dimensions of Resistance

WADOOD HAMAD

IRAQ, AS ONE LONG conversant in its fervent political history remarked to me, is much like the earth resting underneath a giant rock laid there for a very long time. The U.S.-led invasion of 2003 destabilized — if not moved — this rock and unleashed a multitude of organisms that were unknown even to local residents. The complexity of Iraq's political, social, and economic development, or lack thereof, requires a respectable repertoire of historical knowledge that necessitates a command of the local society in order to begin to piece together parts of this intricate jigsaw puzzle. Reliance on secondary sources would be desperately inadequate: One may begin to tackle this seemingly elusive country/society only if one experienced it firsthand and, then, departed to observe, analyze, and revise — holding nothing as sacred, but a commitment to rationality and a universalist belief in human agency and development.

A blurred vision persists, amongst many, regarding the opposition to the U.S. occupation of Iraq, on the one hand, and the nature of the insurgency in parts of the occupied country, on the other. An uncritical stance of support for the current “resistance” in Iraq has dominated political discourse on the left, which has shied away from questioning its tactics, goals, backers, and, indeed, social formation which is necessarily linked to the vision — or lack thereof — it espouses. The notion that since “occupations are usually ugly. How can then resistance be pretty?”¹ must be probed beyond its rhetorical façade. Equating this insurgency to the heroism of the Vietnamese struggle is naïve and unjust at best, malicious and demeaning to the history of struggle, at worst. These temptations must be resisted. Instead, a careful examination of Iraq's historical evolution is required, not a selective treatment in support of a specific hypothesis. Only with a strong dose of rational his-

torical, sociological, and political readings of troubled third world regions can the antiwar movement begin to resist imperialism.

Adherents of the resistance-at-whatever-price notion essentially propound an ethnonationalist view of resistance in Iraq, and effectively dismiss universal norms. Occupation of land, it is affirmed, requires armed struggle to drive the occupier out regardless of the context and scope of this resistance, in particular its political and social dimensions.

Resistance is necessarily constructed within a sociohistorical context, and it must evolve to create the most effective conditions for both driving the occupying forces out and setting the country on a genuine path to freedom and progress. There is hence a dialectical relationship that forms the core of the principle of resistance, whose social ambitions dictate the format and mechanisms of struggle. For Iraq, emerging from a debilitating sanctions regime, a suffocating reign of terror, and three horrendous wars in as many decades, armed struggle is a perturbed option for people's very

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existence since it can only contribute to further shocking an already shaken social structure. Only a peaceable means to regain (a semblance of) normalcy through the careful reestablishment of society's civil institutions and the mending of ethno-socio-political bridges amongst city and village and within northern, central, and southern regions of the country can lead to a strong, countrywide social movement to drive the occupier (and all its vestiges) out and begin to repair the country's shattered ethno-socio-political mosaic. Iraq is a tattered country that needs respite from violence. This forms the crux for a people's aspiration for freedom and progress. Otherwise, the country would be bogged down into a morass of retreat and despair, a situation that will further confound people's suffering through immoral, tactically-ineffective killings of innocent civilians. A resistance that belittles human life is not worthy of the name, and in effect becomes a recipe not for liberation, but subjugation, regression, and indeed perpetuation of foreign occupation. This is what imperialist forces prayed for, and got. Such a resistance has to be condemned wholly and unreservedly.²

II

THE MODERN HISTORY of Iraq has conclusively shown the link between the pursuit of imperialist interests and the necessity for imperialists to rely on local dictators to achieve them. No one has fulfilled this role better, or performed a greater service to the imperialists, than Saddam Hussein for well over four decades. The capture of Saddam Hussein on December 13, 2003, marked a new episode in the unraveling of Arab-Western hypocritical rhetoric, and thus constituted a watershed in the role played by reactionary Arab-Islamic forces. A sizeable portion of the Arab and Muslim peoples has viewed the manner of his capture as a "direct insult to Arab and Islamic norms and ethics." Interestingly, those norms and ethics were not pricked by the news of uncovering mass graves, nor were they disturbed when Saddam Hussein's regime forcibly deported more than 750,000 Iraqis since the 1970s.

We have grown accustomed to neoconservative double standards and hypocrisy: "Sharon is a man of peace," George W. Bush averred months ago. Bush's apology for the Abu Ghraib prison scandal was proffered *not* to the Iraqi people against whom occupation, humiliation, and prisoner torture and abuse are carried out, but to Abdullah II, the monarch of Jordan. Moreover, the United States does not — beware — torture people, however, it attempts to interrogate them by "methods vetted by U.S. government lawyers." But our critique of western double standards must not ignore Arab hypocrisy towards crimes committed on their lands. Doing so will only contribute to an irrational atmosphere where the spreading of racist vituperation from the Right becomes more facile. For so very long, human rights, democratic principles, and education have shamelessly been disregarded in the Arab world for the purported "struggle against imperialism and Zionism." The Machiavellian end-justifies-the-means has proved time and again its nefarious effects on the development of social and political consciousness, and continues to perpetuate a vicious cycle of failure and blame devoid of rational self-critical assessment, which has made possible U.S. hegemony over the Middle East and its occupation of Iraq.

No one would disagree — even amongst the neocon hawks — that the U.S. expedition in Iraq serves American geopolitical interests first and foremost. The well-being of the Iraqis had never been spotted on successive U.S. administrations' radar screens. Many on the left, too, had only marginally been concerned with the Middle East and the insufferable injustices that plagued that world.³ The machinations of a brutal dictatorship and imperialism's need to employ and rely on local despots were apparently eschewed from analysis by many.

However, the simplistic juxtaposition of the Iraq and Palestinian questions, and the lumping together of Arab societies as the same smack not only of ignorance, but condescension. The East, to many living in the West — regardless of their origin, background, or political flavor — seems to be perceived as a romantic locale where peoples

are perpetual pawns in the imperialist struggle: Easterners must carry guns to combat jetfighters, tanks, and daisycutters. Abu Ghraib prison, the hallmark of Saddam Hussein's ruthless reign of terror for well over three decades, received little to no mention or criticism by — almost — anyone in spite of the powerful evidence presented by Iraqi opposition forces of every hew. Human suffering was rendered secondary to the rhetoric of a leader seemingly attacking imperialism, but in actual fact fornicating to the hilt with it.

Too many have been stuck between two inadequate visions: Apologia for U.S. imperialism and its destructive missions the world over, on the one hand, or cheering any misguided “apparent” resistance to imperialism and occupation. Shouldn't progressive politics be able to avoid both these dead-ends? Unfortunately, the progressive alternative seems sorely lacking in analyses of the troubled Middle East.⁴

III

THE COSMOPOLITANISM OF ancient Iraq, fatigued by more than four centuries of deliberate Ottoman neglect and marginalization, remained healthy at its roots and was marvelously reflected especially between 1918-20. The Iraqi nationalist vision was most evident in the June-October 1920 revolt against British rule in Iraq. Shiite and Sunni Arabs, from central and southern regions, joined forces, praying in each other's mosques, while Iraq's Muslims insisted that Christians and Jews (the largest single ethnic group in Baghdad at the time) participate in the raging protest marches and demonstrations since they were integral to the fabric of existing society. A genuine, viable, but seemingly tentative, sense of “citizenship” had been forming, which relied prominently on material facts: shared, common history and land. The *Shiite marj'iya* (the Shiite socioreligious-cum-cultural establishment) of Najaf⁵ played a dynamic and key role in fomenting this bond. It was a modern bond, based on neither blood nor tribal relations. Thereafter, this formed the nucleus for the nascent civil society: the formation of numerous professional associations — including

highly respected legal and educational professions, a vibrant press, political parties, artist ateliers, writers associations, labor unions, and an extensive, sophisticated coffeehouse culture. All of this continued throughout the first-half of the twentieth century, which effectively witnessed the climax of modern Iraq's cultural and intellectual contributions on a world scale: the pioneering of modern Arabic poetry, the free verse movement, and the establishment of the modern visual arts, whose contribution has been amongst some of the most richly nuanced and exquisitely aesthetic human endeavors.

This has to be contrasted with the tactics of the current insurgents. They have assiduously targeted any remaining semblance of modernity, and waged assassination and murder campaigns against any individual deemed “unworthy,” which principally included seculars from all walks of life and from whatever religious or ethnic group. Iraq's Christians, Shia, and Kurds have also been punished by those insurgents for their unfortunate religious and ethnic affiliation. Thus, spinning the country into an endless, senseless spiral of violence and social disintegration. Religious or nationalist sloganeering of justice and liberation are just as hypocritical as that of Bush and the neocons. And just as one shouldn't fall for the claim that Bush seeks democracy for Iraq and the Middle East, so we shouldn't believe that the Islamist-cum-Saddamist insurgents are fighting off an occupying force in order to liberate Iraq.

Identification in Iraq has almost always been along political lines. Sectarian or religious strife had scarcely taken place on any tangible scale, as any astute and objective student of history and sociology would attest to. Almost every city in Iraq comprises a mixture of Muslims — Shiite and Sunni — Christians, and (until the late sixties, and mostly in Baghdad) Jews. Baghdad and Basrah, in particular, were the arch multicultural, multiethnic cosmopolitan cities on a par with many a current Western metropolis. Those Iraqis have coexisted happily, socialized together, intermarried, lived within the same neighborhoods, studied at the same schools and universities and

worked in the same offices. Schisms, when they existed, were along political and ideological lines: Any one family could have atheists and devout believers in deity, and all in between. This peacefully coexisting and richly successful multi-cultural, multiethnic, and multireligious mosaic was peculiar to Iraq amidst most of the Middle East.

There have, however, been ardent attempts at falsifying Iraq's — and the region's — history. Rightist writers and thinkers have championed a theoretical framework that embodies cultural "incompatibility" and other sanitized and fragmentary visions of what may be presented as "identity politics" or "communitarianism." It is painfully sad to witness respected and erudite leftist writers falling into this trap, willingly or otherwise. Tariq Ali writes in *Bush in Babylon*, hailed — by the publisher — as the "best selling history of resistance in Iraq that vitalized the antiwar movement":

"After Baghdad had fallen in 1258 a conversation took place in the Palace between the Mongol leader Hulegu Khan and al-Mustasim, the Commander of the Faithful and the last of the Abbasid Caliphs. The major historian of the time explained the defeat of the Caliph in terms of a lack of preparation and bitter factional struggles between Shia and Sunni notables. Some allege that the Governor of Mosul and the Wazir al-Alqami (senior minister of the court), a Shia, literally sold out to the Mongols and betrayed their ruler. The historian al-Athir charges the Wazir with having advised the Caliph to reduce the size of the army so that only 10,000 soldiers were left to defend against a Mongol cavalry of 200,000 men. Others still point the finger at the Kurds who had backed a previous Mongol expedition."⁶

The insinuation that Kurdish and Shiite treachery had been the reason for the fall of Baghdad to the barbaric Mongols smacks of an unscrupulous attempt at perpetuating the ethno-sectarian chauvinisms that have characterized reactionary politics in Iraq and the region throughout the twentieth century. I have checked al-Athir in various references, as well as other original sources (in Arabic) on the period, and found no such direct reference to the Shia and the Kurds

selling out in the strife of 1258. Several of these primary references — for the interested reader fluent in Arabic — are available in major university libraries in the West.

Social harmony was never translated into harmonious representation at the political level. Ever since the formation of the Iraqi state, ethnosectarian chauvinism has been instituted in governance and the state structure. The British, aware of the nature of Iraqi society, played the card remarkably well when forced following the 1920 uprising to form a mandated Iraqi government. The deal struck between Sir Percy Cox and Abdul-Rahman an-Naqeeb (a wealthy landowner and Sunni notable whose lineage was purportedly traced to Muhammed, Islam's prophet) had formed the foundation for the nascent polity. The inhabitants of the north, the Kurds, and the south were excluded from the political map of Iraq. Proportional representation as indicated by elected officials from every corner of the country was never instituted. Until 1947, no Shiite ever reached the post of prime minister, and most definitely no Kurd ever reached this position in Iraq's entire history. Moreover, their share of ministerial portfolios has, at best, been minuscule. More critically, local and provincial offices have also been occupied, not by residents of the particular region privy to its many details, but by outsiders shipped from various regions around Baghdad. The institution of ethnosectarian, chauvinistic, exclusionary politics was central to allowing Britain — the imperial force of the time — to exercise effective control over, and ensuring compliance of, the minority in office: the Sunni Arabs, especially the landed class and former Ottoman officers.

The mold was fractured following the 1958 revolution that saw the overthrow of the monarchy. In the brief respite between July 14, 1958 and February 8, 1963 some serious measures were instigated to do away with old practices and turn the government's attention to seriously addressing the needs of the people: proper housing, health care, nationalization of industries, and agrarian reform. However, such measures were abruptly terminated or improperly implemented owing to the

lack of systematic scientific planning and the non-democratic manner in which policies were designed and applied. The glimmer of hope towards establishing an independent, modern, and progressive Iraq was painfully shattered. The 1960s *coups d'état* and governments that followed had one primary interest in mind: how to gain control over the central government as forcefully as possible, and simultaneously subjugate or coax Iraq's inhabitants — especially in the more restive regions of the south and north. Since then the rhetoric of Pan-Arab unity has been employed *ad infinitum* over any serious attention to social, economic, cultural, and political issues. Crucially, the ethno-sectarian divide had begun to slowly, but ferociously, grow. Deliberate negligence of municipal, social, and educational programs for the north and the south had become the norm. Basrah, once perhaps the world's richest city, had become its most dilapidated. This is not solely because of devastating wars, but pointedly owing to the appropriation of funds to security and military programs with the unabated objective of pauperizing the populace in order to ensure (1) compliance, and (2) their inability to rise to meaningful positions of government. General Abdul-Salam Aref,⁷ president from 1963 until his death in an air accident in 1966, was undeniably the arch proponent of such tactics, a staunch sectarian and chauvinist who had cruelly erected some of the most nefarious projects to marginalize and repress the Shia and Kurds.

IV

AL-THAWRA NEWSPAPER, then the Ba'ath's main propaganda organ, published a series of seven editorials⁸ in April, 1991 to put forward their version of the causes of the U.S.-led onslaught on Iraq during the second Gulf war, and the ensuing uprising of March, 1991. Six of the seven editorials chastised the people of Iraq for all that went askew: the Al-Thawra editorialist turned social scientist, quite probably Tariq Aziz,⁹ denounced the people for being “ignorant, backward” and “solely living for the purpose of eating and having intercourse;” whilst the “party” was blameworthy

for being unsuccessful in presenting an “unparalleled ideological model.” Needless to say, the “talented leader” had recognized all the ills in society, and “endeavored to rectify people's behavior;” however, we were not made privy as to why “he” seemingly did not succeed. Furthermore, the uprising — referred to in official propaganda as “*Ghawgha'iyah*,” meaning, chaotic commotion — in the words of the same editorialist involved a voluminous record of collusion with foreign enemies of the nation; the uprising was, in short, tantamount to a “page of treachery and betrayal.”

Conspiratorial and metaphysical reasoning is all that is proffered in the lone document of official explanation of the events of 1991: The root of the “conspiracy of March, 1991,” according to the editorialist was laid at the hands of “a certain sect [i.e. the Shi'a] who has historically been under the influence of the Persians. . . They have been taught to hate the Arab nation.”¹⁰ As for the Iraqis in Nasiriya, Semmawa, and Ammara, known for their secularism, they are merely dismissed as “the marsh Arabs so accustomed to breeding water buffaloes to the extent that they have become indistinguishable from them.” The ‘erudite editorialist’ went on to state that: When they migrated to big cities like Baghdad, they made their living through begging, prostitution, and robbery, not out of need but owing to their intrinsic degraded nature. Moreover, “these are not Arabs; they were brought with their water buffaloes from India by Mohammad al-Qassem [the Abbassid leader who conquered India in the ninth century].”

The March 1991 uprising was to become a watershed in Iraq's history. It revived the historical memory of the Iraqi nationalist movement, which reinstated itself into the political discourse. For the first time in modern Iraqi history, Iraqis openly discussed political ethnoreligious sectarianism and the politics of exclusion. It had become open season for critiquing every aspect of Iraqi society and historical development, or lack thereof. The exodus of hundreds of thousands of professionals, fleeing sanctions and repression, has driven people to seriously question such concepts as citizenship, nation-state and civil society. As expected,

such act of sociopolitical catharsis would encompass varied manifestations ranging from the rational to the metaphysical, but nonetheless it would be a necessary exercise if Iraqis were to seriously think about planning a peaceful and happy future for their children. This exercise is far from over, and in light of the social ills bequeathed by Saddam Hussein's rule, economic sanctions, and the current military occupation, the direction it could take is by no means determined. Democratization in Iraq necessarily requires the reestablishment of civil institutions and society. Iraq's entire educational, cultural, political, and social structures need be reconstituted. This is neither an exaggeration, nor a defeatist stance. It is reality.

No part of Iraqi society was immune to the erosion of the rational culture of politics. The effects had become palpable as early as the 1991 uprising when, for instance, the participants — many key individuals had actually come from within the ruling establishment — tended to view the cause they were fighting for in terms of norms dictated by the regime itself: the mentality of a rigidly pyramidal structure of (political) command and (military) order *ipso facto* intermingled with tribal and sectarian notions. Muqtada al-Sadr, the twenty-something self-proclaimed religious-cum-political figure, thus emerged. His power base comprised former security and military personnel and the (forgotten) unemployed. Notwithstanding his meager support within the Shia at large, his burgeoning political and militia power was swelling thanks to Iranian backing.

The Iraqi vacuum had — expectedly — become an operating ground for the intelligence services of regional countries — Iran, Syria, Jordan, Saudi, Turkey, and Israel — and for intra-governmental factional struggles within some of them. The long tradition of the *Shiite marji'ya* of Najaf being, in principle, attune to the separation between the religious and the political — however often serving a consultative role to the political — has slowly eroded due to a multitude of factors, the principal one being the current Shiite fear that they may once again be sidelined from Iraq's

future political map.

The ruptured social fabric — namely, tribalism — and the eruption of primitive ethnosectarian claims to power in Iraq are an outcome of an imbalanced power structure that characterized the Iraqi polity even prior to independence in 1921. It is not an epiphenomenon of imperialism *per se*. More precisely imperialist forces have used and manipulated these contradictions that have originated and been perpetuated internally through constant reshaping, which effectively resulted in the decline of the concept of citizenry and the erosion of civil society — without which the former finds no real avenue for effective, meaningful expression, and is thus rendered vacuous.

V

THE REMARKABLE CHARACTERISTIC that allowed Saddam Hussein to remain in power for so long did not merely stem from his Western support, but necessarily from his dynamic approach, within Iraq itself, to renewing tactics and strategies for maintaining power and control. During the 1970s, while serving as vice president to Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, but effectively number one in government and party, he pacified left-leaning elements within the Ba'ath while annihilating Iraqi communists, and briefly pacified the latter while hitting the burgeoning Shia Islamists. And throughout, he began a vicious campaign of deportations starting with the Faili Kurds and ending with the Shia Arabs during the 1980s. He relied principally on his domestic base, which was selectively formed using the long-tried principles of mercenaries. Central to his approach was adroitly playing the Shiite-Sunni and Arab-Kurd cards, and the reshuffling of populations to perpetually create ethnic and sectarian frictions, and, thus, distrust at the very core.¹¹

The regions west and northwest of Baghdad all the way to the Syrian and Jordanian borders have traditionally been poor areas that contained small farmlands typically inadequate to support the local population; they were mostly inhabited by Bedouins. Towns like Ramadi and Fallujah¹²

have normally relied on small-scale trading and smuggling — the main trading routes linking Iraq to Syria and Jordan pass through these towns. They would thus become a logical constituent for Saddam Hussein's machinery: provide them with positions to secure (relative) wealth — whether business contracts, or posts in the army, security apparatuses, and medium- to high-level governmental positions. Since the 1980s, the Dulaimis, Kubaisis, and Jumailis, the principal tribes of Ramadi and Fallujah, have grown omnipresent in government and in wealth. They are essentially hardy tribesmen who hold rigid religious and ethnic convictions. While they have indeed been in trouble with Saddam Hussein's mafia regime — that, as I pointed out above, circulates blame and rotates repression to ensure, at any one moment in time, a pliant and complaisant populace — they have grown to guard dearly their newly found wealth and power. Thus, they regard *these* winnings as rightfully theirs, and theirs for perpetuity.

Saddam Hussein had sought to employ God and flag to strengthen his grip over Iraq's populace, and shuffled and reshuffled the players as often as required to consolidate his power. Throughout the 1990s, during what was officially referred to as *al-Hamla al-'Imaniya* (the Pious Mission), he had embarked on a countrywide, monumental-scale building of mosques and the closure of bars, etc. In the same vein, and in order to create a threatening force to the Shia, especially in the aftermath of their uprising in 1991, he encouraged the spread of Wahabism in Iraq — a cult that never had a base in the country prior to the mid 1980s. Taking advantage of economic difficulties as a result of the sanctions, willing Saudi financiers supported the process, as they have throughout the 1980s in every corner of the world they could reach.

Saudi money literally bribed its way to such fertile areas as Fallujah, Ramadi, and the desert hamlets to the west of Iraq, which had become focal areas for the spread of Wahabism — a cult that was founded in the Arabian desert some 200 years ago, and relies for its interpretation of Islam

on Ibn Taymiya, a reactionary theologian from medieval times. Its puritanical interpretations are in essence political rather than based in Islamic theology or jurisprudence. Its doctrine is defeatist and steeped in simplistic and naïve interpretations, typical of unsophisticated Bedouin surroundings. While it primarily preaches abstinence from culture, pleasure, and life itself, Wahabism holds strict views on other Muslim sects and other religions: It basically regards as apostates¹³ all the adherents of the Shiite Islamic sect, and infidels all non-Muslims; and, therefore, their killing is regarded as a duty of the faithful.¹⁴

It should, therefore, become clear as to why Ramadi, Fallujah, and environs have constituted the primary locus of insurgency since Saddam Hussein's overthrow. Portions of the local population have provided the logistical support for all the Islamic fundamentalist terrorists (al-Qaeda supporters and other foreign extremist elements) who have been infiltrating through Iraq's unguarded borders. Religious extremism and sectarian chauvinism, on the one hand, intertwined with fear of losing wealth and power have become potent and real reasons to hold uncanny alliances. Patrick Graham, a Canadian journalist, wrote recently in *Harper's* one of the more accurate exposés on the nature of the "resistance" in Iraq:

The resistance was like a root fire, burning invisibly underground, waiting to explode. Village-based partisans were only one species of fighter; others included foreign jihadis, supporters of Saddam Hussein, unemployed army and secret-service personnel, and the specially trained suicide fighters of the Saddam Fedayeen, who had done most of the fighting during the war. As time went on, these underground elements linked up, their tangle of motives united under the banner: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."¹⁵

VI

IN THE MIDST of this came the U.S.-led invasion, an illegal, illegitimate, and unjust act that was bound to cause turmoil in the country as it abruptly imploded. I had opposed the war, and would do again now — as I opposed the sanctions regime

and the current insurgency — for one fundamental reason: it had been a collective means of punishing the entire population of Iraq, when alternate solutions to ease suffering and overthrow the despotic regime/occupation could have been sought. Only a fool would not recognize that the United States is a modern, unopposed imperial power that is making the world less safe by the minute owing to its pursuing ideologically-driven policies. We should reject both the Bush policy — the rogue, imperial power that knows no limit — and the more typical U.S. imperialism that adheres feverishly to a policy of containment, support of the ugly status quo in the Middle East, and strangulation of its peoples. But in refusing both these choices, we should not be acquiescent of third-world dictators — neither those that exist nor the ones to be. Nor should it be an excuse for third-world leftists to ignore terminal ills in their own societies that gave rise in the first place to such contradictions.

Sentiments of support for peoples' struggle for liberation and progress, Iraqis included, may lead one to cheer for the "resistance." But this would be a serious mistake. One's support will sorely be misplaced in tribal and ethnosectarian elements that can never form the locus of a national liberation movement. Personal not national interests are at stake, and are of concern, here. Many mosques that embraced the extremist Wahabi doctrine are being shunned by the people at large. Nonetheless, intimidation, assassination, and pillage are guaranteed to silence many a voice. Simultaneously, U.S. belligerence will ensure more unnecessary civilian deaths and destruction. Iraq's torn social fabric is undergoing the very last vestiges of avoiding an internecine civil war. The absent voice of secular Iraqis has been deafening and surprising to everyone. It is not a question of a political void being filled by Islamists, Shia, or Sunni. It is more pressingly the dilution of rational voices that seek to build unity around hope and progress. Iraqis are paying the heavy price of four decades of authoritarian reign of terror, strangulating sanctions, three wars, and a heinous occupation. Fissures in the social structure are, as a

result, growing deeper and scarier.

We must demand a timely schedule for the withdrawal of occupying forces from Iraq over a fixed, limited period. But, measures to address existing (and ensuing) chaos must receive important consideration, as well. No simple answers are available to the serious examiner, and the realities created by occupation have undermined the precarious social dynamics. A disgusting game of Russian roulette is being played with innocent Iraqi lives: The insurgents are prolonging the presence of occupying forces, and the latter are in turn lending "apparent" legitimacy to the Islamist and Saddamist claims. However, one thing seems certain, to me at least. Support for the Islamist-cum-Saddamist insurgents is tantamount to expecting the Michigan militia — and their ilk — to combat U.S. imperialist expansion: It is foolhardy, and dangerous.

NOTES

1. Tariq Ali, "The bloody price of occupation," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2004. This is slightly rephrased in the paperback edition of his *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonisation of Iraq* (Verso, 2004) as "When you have an ugly occupation you can't have a beautiful resistance."
2. Comparatively, Iraq has a rich history of constructive resistance to foreign occupiers and indigenous despots, one that held a genuine vision for freedom, liberty, progress, and democracy. *Harb al-Ansar*, the armed struggle led by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) throughout the 1980s from Kurdistan against the central government, and the armed struggle waged from the southern marshes during the late 1960s by (the more revolutionary elements of) the ICP represent chapters of the annals of articulate and humane resistance, armed or otherwise. So, too, has been the complex — in cases paradoxical — Kurdish struggle for recognition against all central governments ever since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. In addition, one ought not to forget the massive popular uprisings of 1918-1920 and 1991, which are discussed later on.
3. It is neither my intention to engage in an exercise of retrospective blame, nor to consider the left as a monolith. However, a critical appraisal of political stances is important to understand the evolution and genuineness of one's thoughts and commitments. Amongst veteran political activists, Noam Chomsky stands as a remarkable example of steadfast decency and unstinting support for peoples' right to freedom: He, for instance, supported the Palestinians when it was unfashionable, and the Kurds when they hardly mattered.
4. Pan-Arab nationalism, not unlike other nationalisms, e.g.

Zionism, is an ethnocentered political ideology having its roots in German romanticism. Inasmuch as one should objectively criticize the role Zionism played in retarding peace and progress for all inhabitants of the Middle East, one must, too, be questioning what Pan-Arabist rhetoric and “theory” have presented to the cause of peace and progress. Furthermore, one should rationally and resolutely probe if religious fundamentalism — seemingly anti-imperialist in rhetoric — can present a genuine, lasting force for liberation and human progress. A careful sociological treatment is necessary at least to combat unceasing racist attacks by the Right. (In order not to digress from the main issue, Iraq, the question of Arab nationalism will be given an in-depth treatment in a separate article. For a handling of the religious question see my “Deconstructing Arab-Islamic History: A Discussion of Its Evolutionary Dynamics,” In *Islam and the West*, Michael J. Thompson (ed.), pp. 107-121, Rowman & Littlefield (2003).)

5. Najaf has played a prominent role in advancing discourse for political events in Iraq. It is one of the oldest cities in the country, and has been home to the founding of universities that began as schools of divinity and jurisprudence in the tradition of Oxford and Cambridge in England, but older. Owing to its rich intellectual atmosphere, it was central to the debate in philosophy, literature, and politics and remained so throughout Iraq’s modern history. These were not at all, it should clearly be understood, madrasas in the fundamentalist style spreading over southwest Asia and elsewhere. They had been classic universities in the true sense as they offered courses in philosophy, literature (mostly Arabic with limited translated works), and Islamic jurisprudence. It had a large and healthy student body that came from all over Iraq, and Arab and Islamic countries; many of its graduates had become prominent communists, existentialists, Arab-nationalists, etc., in addition to the usual production of Muslim scholars. This practice has been characteristically Iraqi, and no Shiite or Sunni sect anywhere else in the Muslim world had offered anything similar. While the history of Shiism, being one of constant opposition to central authority — as represented by the Caliphate in olden times, and by the “nationalist” state in the 20th century — equipped these universities with a genuine sense of discovery, scholarship, and intellectual vigor. Iraq’s richly multicultural and heterogeneous heritage has been the prime factor behind the flourishing of these institutions of learning. The city, its inhabitants, and universities have been a constant annoyance to the central governments of Iraq, and it was Saddam Hussein who delivered the severest blow to them by closing many of the universities, harassing students, and imprisoning and killing instructors and religious leaders.

6. P. 28. It should be noted that Ali refers to no book or article, primary or otherwise, for his allegations.

7. Aref was a Nasserite who participated in the February 1963 coup with the Ba’athists, only to lead another against

them 8 months later. He was close to Nasser and received significant material support from Nasser’s United Arab Republic during his reign. Aref originated from the town of Fallujah.

8. The seven editorials entitled, “What happened during late 1990 and the early months of 1991 . . . Why did what happened take place?” have been compiled in a booklet published by the *Centre for Iraq Studies, London*, 34 pp. [in Arabic].

9. A long-serving Ba’athist who had occupied key positions since the early 1970s as Minister of Culture and Information, Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, all under Saddam Hussein’s tutelage. He is now in U.S. custody.

10. History is often a victim of ideology, and the history of Shiism in Iraq has routinely been maligned. There has been little, if any, convergence in the historical development of Iraqi and Iranian Shiisms. Iran has been until roughly 400 years ago predominantly Sunni; it had converted during the time of the Safavids into Shiism and remained. To grasp the essence of the role successive Iranian establishments — religious and otherwise — have played throughout its country’s modern formation, we need to examine the ethno-nationalist interests and primary political goals that have been the driving motive for their actions. Al-Ahwaz, south west of Iran, was — for instance — sliced out of Iraq and attached to Iran by the British in the aftermath of WWI. Its inhabitants, related to those in the neighboring province of Ammara in Iraq, have been at the receiving end of deliberate ethnic discrimination and political and cultural marginalization — in spite of their being Shiite, the majority sect. What need be understood is that Iran’s policy — in Lebanon or now in Iraq — is grounded in the desire to enhance its geopolitical sphere of influence and power base: Political national interests constitute the core of their policy, not some intangible sectarian warmth towards co-religionists.

11. Thus one of the most complex issues: Kirkuk. The character of this city has been changed drastically owing to constant demographic reshuffling since the 1970s, so that it is now impossible to avoid a civil strife amongst its various communities vying for some national or sectarian claim to it.

12. One should note that the March 1991 uprising swept 14 out of 18 provinces in Iraq. The silent 4 were: Anbar (whose main towns are Fallujah and Ramadi), Sallahu-Din (whose main towns are Tikrit and Samara), Mosul and Baghdad — except for its al-Thawra district (aka Saddam city, now Sadr city), which was cordoned off to quell its uprising.

13. They use the term *al-Rawafeth*, or deniers of the Muslim faith as Wahabism perceives it.

14. This is the official sect of the Saudi Kingdom and some Gulf states, and is widespread in Syria, Jordan, north Africa, and southwest Asian countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan.

15. Patrick Graham, “Beyond Fallujah — A year with the Iraqi resistance,” *Harper’s*, June 2004, pp. 37-48.

A Horizon Lit with Blood

The U.S. Occupation and Resistance in Iraq

GLENN PERUSEK

THIS ARTICLE SEEKS TO PROVIDE a framework for understanding the objectives of the Bush administration in Iraq, and for assessing the political situation there.¹ The distortions of the administration's rhetoric, dutifully parroted by most of the media, has made it difficult for the American public to form a clear view of war aims and the political situation in Iraq. The lack of wide circulation oppositional media leaves the American public bewildered. A welter of facts is not coherent outside of a reasonable framework. Yet, as this article will show, given a proper framework, even official documents paint a picture radically at odds with Bush administration rhetoric.

In spite of Bush's electoral victory, most Americans see the war in Iraq as mistaken, and most believe that it has not enhanced the security of the United States.² Public opinion polls since the strengthening of resistance to the occupation in April 2004 and in the wake of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal in May 2004, have shown a majority of Americans believe the invasion was a mistake. The definitive conclusion of the Duelfer report, delivered to the Senate Armed Services Committee in October, that Saddam Hussein had neither "weapons of mass destruction" nor programs to develop them, further eroded the credibility of the Bush administration.³

It is not just the left that opposes this war. Indeed, some of the harshest criticisms come from administration supporters. A mere two days after the reelection of President Bush, Paul Weyrich, founder of the Heritage Foundation, expressed the

Most Americans see the war in Iraq as mistaken, and most believe that it has not enhanced the security of the United States.

sentiment of a growing number of traditional conservatives in the Republican Party. "The consequences of the [administration's] adventure in Iraq are now all too clear," he said.

"America is stuck in a guerrilla war with no end in sight. And our real enemies, nonstate organizations such as al Qaeda, are benefiting from the Arab and Islamic backlash against our occupation of an Islamic country."⁴

The Bush administration sees its immediate task as the achievement of the pacification of Iraq, where large numbers having taken up arms in resistance to the occupation. The administration seeks a military victory over "extremists," that is, by definition, anyone who is not passive in the face of American tanks and bombing campaigns. Anyone who questions the imperial nature of the Bush administration's strategy can be instructed straight from the horse's mouth. David Frum, Bush's speechwriter, responsible for the "axis of evil" formulation, wrote before the war: "An American-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein —

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and a replacement of the radical Ba'athist dictatorship with a new government more closely aligned with the United States — would put America more wholly in charge of the region than any power since the Ottomans, or maybe the Romans.”⁵

In November 2004, with the election out of the way, Bush approved the forced entry of American troops into Falluja, a stronghold of the resistance against the occupation. The attack on Falluja, a city of 300,000 (roughly the size of Toledo) typifies the administration's approach to the occupation — massive firepower applied indiscriminately in an effort to root out persistent resistance. The U.S. military had been shelling Falluja with artillery and aerial bombardment for months. Widespread public opposition throughout Iraq had forced U.S. troops to break off their savage April 2004 siege.

In response to the April 2004 attack on Falluja, Ghazi al-Yawer, now the interim president, then a Sunni Muslim council member, asked, “How can a superpower like the United States put itself in a state of war with a small city like Falluja? This is genocide.” Even Adnan Pachachi, generally considered the most pro-American member of the twenty-five-member Governing Council, spoke sharply against the siege of Falluja. “We consider the action carried out by U.S. forces as illegal and totally unacceptable,” said Pachachi to the Arab satellite channel *Al-Arabiya*. “We denounce the military operations carried out by the American forces because in effect, it is (inflicting) collective punishment on the residents of Falluja,” said the elderly former Iraqi foreign minister.⁶

We will never know exactly how many civilians died and how many were turned into refugees through this campaign; news reports estimate a staggering 70-90 percent depopulation by the beginning of November 2004.⁷ Eyewitnesses to the November 2004 attack on Falluja called it a ghost town. “This city smells of explosives and decaying flesh,” Fadhil Badrani, an Iraqi journalist and Falluja resident, told the BBC.⁸ In the first week of fighting, the U.S. military claimed to have



Suspected insurgents captured in Ramadi by a United States Army artillery brigade. Guerrillas had paralyzed the city; American forces said they were getting little assistance from locals in capturing them. Photo: Patrik Bax/Agence France-Presse-Getty Images

killed 1,200 “insurgents,” and a Falluja insurgent leader put the number at 100. “Both of them are lying,” an official of the Red Cross told independent journalist Dahr Jamail. “While they agree on the 1,200 number, they are both lying about the number of dead fighters.” The Red Cross estimated that 800 of the 1,200 were civilians.⁹

BBC reporter Paul Wood, embedded with U.S. marines in Falluja, said: “I have questioned many times senior officers here about the use of heavy weapons because they have been using 155mm artillery in Falluja, they have been dropping 2,000 pound bombs. The bullets that they fire are high velocity. The buildings are of poor construction here — the bullets travel through the walls. And when they see what they believe to be militants — and these marines are incredibly calm under fire, they are almost unflinching — they do wait until they see a guy with a gun but when they see that, they open up with everything they have

got and the question is, how much collateral damage is there going to be?"¹⁰

The U.S. military refused to allow Red Cross, Red Crescent, and other organizations entry to the city to deliver food, water, and medical supplies, which doomed many of the estimated 50,000 people trapped in Falluja when the military's forced entry into the city began. This humanitarian crisis provoked widespread international criticism.¹¹

One of the first acts of the U.S. military in newly reoccupied Falluja was to cut the phone lines to the main hospital — hospitals being a prime source of information on civilian casualties.¹²

An Associated Press photographer who tried to flee Falluja after the American entry says he witnessed American helicopter gunships shoot anyone attempting to swim across the Euphrates River to safety. The photographer, Bilal Hussein, a native of Falluja, claimed that snipers shot a family of five as they tried to cross.¹³

As one web blogger wrote from Baghdad, "Iraqis will never forgive this — never. It's outrageous — it's genocide and America, with the help and support of Allawi, is responsible."¹⁴

Balanced accounting would calculate that the scale of this crime cancelled whatever moral high ground the Bush administration sought to stake out, vis-a-vis either Saddam Hussein or al Qaeda. *Jus in bello* stipulates a proportional response. When we consider the continuity of American policy toward Iraq going back to the sanctions regime (1991-2003) — "sanctions of mass destruction," as they've been termed — policymakers from both parties bear an enormous responsibility that far outweighs the attacks of September 11, which, in any event, bore no direct relationship to the U.S. response in Iraq.

Again and again, ordinary Iraqis survey the "collateral damage" from the American occupation and ask, "This is democracy?" The horror has been expressed at higher levels, too. The barbarity of the American strategy elicited criticism even from those installed by the United States as leaders of the interim government. The American-selected interim president of Iraq, Ghazi al-Yawar,

publicly opposed the siege of Falluja. "I absolutely disagree with those who believe a military attack [on Falluja] is necessary," Yawar told the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al Qabas*. "The way the coalition is managing the crisis is wrong. It is as if someone shot his horse in the head to kill a fly that landed on it. The fly flies away and the horse dies."¹⁵

The Iraqi Islamic Party resigned from the Iraqi Governing Council on Tuesday, November 9, 2004, in protest of the November invasion of the city. "After the attack on Falluja, we decided to withdraw from the government because our presence in the government will be judged by history," said party leader Abdul Hameed. At the same time, the Muslim Scholars Association, a group of leading Sunni clerics, called on "honorable Iraqis" to boycott the January elections in protest against the U.S. action.¹⁶

II

A REPORT PUBLISHED in the well-regarded British medical journal, *The Lancet*, concluded U.S. and coalition forces killed about 100,000 Iraqi civilians in the eighteen months of invasion and occupation of Iraq, starting in March 2003. (The report's figure is based on profoundly conservative assumptions, as the authors point out. The study excluded data for Falluja, which was the object of intense bombing, especially in April, and again in August 2004. The report indicates that the real number is probably far higher.) Most deaths during invasion and occupation were violent deaths; most of those killed were women and children, and coalition forces were responsible for most of these.¹⁷ "Helicopter gunships, rocks, or other forms of aerial weaponry" caused the deaths of the vast bulk of Iraqi civilians killed by coalition forces.¹⁸ Iraqi President Yawar condemned American air strikes against Iraqi cities as comparable to Israeli operations in occupied Palestinian territory, terming them a form of "collective punishment."¹⁹

The Bush administration expected American troops to be welcomed into Iraq as liberators. Instead, a stubborn and multiform resistance has threatened to bog them down in a Vietnam-like



In Falluja in November, 2004, civilian casualties. Photo: Ashley Gilbertson, New York Times

quagmire.

Officials at the CIA were “mad at the policy in Iraq because it’s a disaster, and they’re digging the hole deeper and deeper and deeper,” a former intelligence officer told the *Washington Post*. The National Intelligence Council (NIC), which advises the director of central intelligence, and represents a consensus outlook of officials of the CIA, the State and Defense Departments, completed a report in July 2004 that saw “tenuous stability” as the best possible outcome over the subsequent eighteen months. The NIC had completed reports in late 2003 and even before the war began that said essentially the same thing. An intelligence expert with contacts at the CIA, the State Department and the Pentagon said that there was conflict between all of these agencies and the administration, which for the most part continued to offer rosy scenarios about the progress of the occupation.²⁰

As Juan Cole, the respected Middle East scholar, has argued, one of the prime arguments against Saddam Hussein had been his brutal treatment of his own population. “Sadrists Shiites proved hard to control, and the United States was called upon to kill thousands of them and to bombard Sadr City, Kut, Najaf and other places, killing rebellious Shiites just as Saddam had done. So, in retrospect, was Saddam’s crushing of the Sadrist uprising in 1999 really different from the U.S. crushing of the same movement in 2004?”²¹

III

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION would have us believe that the opposition to the American occupation is comprised of (a) terrorists and extrem-

ists and/or (b) adherents of deposed president Saddam Hussein. Some on the left have come to essentially agree with this characterization: ex-regime supporters, “foreign fighters” who have joined homegrown Iraqi “terrorists” and al-Sadr’s al Mahdi militia.²² But in fact, there is broad opposition to the occupation, which includes religious and secular organizations, dozens of paramilitary operations, and a proliferation of political parties.

One of the problems with the focus on “terrorism” is that it lumps together many different expressions of opposition, with a variety of conceptions of objectives, tactics and strategies, into a single category. Armed resistance fighters who stubbornly defend themselves against the U.S. Marines are a far cry from bomb throwers who attack civilians indiscriminately. Those on the left who repeat the contention that the Iraqi opposition is comprised of “terrorists” parrot the Bush administration’s war-driven distortion.

Even pro-establishment analysts recognize much greater diversity in the Iraqi resistance than simplistic Bush administration formulas will admit. “The insurgency is not a monolithic or united movement directed by a leadership with a unitary and disciplined ideological vision,” argues Ahmed Hashim of the United States Naval War College. The insurgency draws from broad segments of Iraqi society — including “students, intellectuals, former soldiers, tribal youths, farmers, and Islamists,” with tactical support from the surrounding community.²³ These elements are united in seeing expulsion of the United States as a prerequisite — as the first goal — for normalizing the political situation in Iraq. “We first want to expel the infidel invaders before anything else,” said one insurgent leader to Professor Hashim. The broad support for the insurgency can be gleaned from a poll taken by the Coalition Provisional Authority itself, which found 92 percent of Iraqis see the American forces as occupiers, with only 2 percent considering them a liberation force.²⁴

“A lot of people want democracy here, but they are just not comfortable with elections under American supervision,” said Wamid Omar

Nadhmi, who leads to Arab Nationalist Movement, a primarily Sunni party. "If they don't meet our conditions, we will call for a boycott. Otherwise, we would be accused of being puppets of America," Nadhmi told the *New York Times*.²⁵ An underlying secular trend in Iraq is continued strengthening of public sentiment against the occupation. As an anonymous Bush administration official

told the *Washington Post*, in reviewing poll data, "The picture it paints is that, after all the blood and treasure we've spent and despite the occupation's democracy efforts, we're in a position now that the moderates would not win if an election were held today."²⁶

Ironically, one consequence of the Bush administration's strategy has been to enhance support for the most extreme wing of militant Islam, in Arab and Muslim countries and in the diaspora, including al Qaeda. As the British ambassador to Italy, Ivor Roberts, said in September, President Bush is "the best recruiting sergeant ever for al Qaeda . . . if anyone is ready to celebrate the eventual reelection of Bush, it's al Qaeda." The occupation and pacification strategy of the United States has strengthened the appeal of militant Islam, concurs the British-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.²⁷

The Bush administration believes it can stage-manage Iraqi politics even after the January 2005 elections. It is perfectly willing to see a rigged or "scaled back" election, as long as the voting provides sufficient political cover for continued occupation and pacification of the country. In any case, American domination is secure. In spring 2004, before the highly publicized "transfer of sovereignty," the Coalition Provisional Authority established a "parallel government structure of Commissioners and Inspectors-General . . . who, elections notwithstanding, will control Iraq's chief ministries for the next five years."²⁸ While it speaks

publicly of allowing Iraqis to control their own destiny, to choose their own leaders, behind the scenes it works feverishly to bolster its own puppets. Remarkably, two-thirds of post-transfer cabinet ministers are citizens of the United States or Great Britain. This fact, combined with the continued arbitrary brutality of the U.S. occupation, has turned much of the Iraqi population against collaborating.²⁹

Important for Bush administration plans are two large Shiite parties, SCIRI and Dawa, for the administration hopes they can provide enough legitimacy for the new government with the Shia majority. Yet the Bush administration will pressure to have elements of SCIRI and Dawa that are most sympathetic to Iran isolated or eliminated from the political process.³⁰ The more the Bush administration pushes for strict collaborationists, the more it risks driving even its friends into radical opposition. The clumsiness of the American leviathan, whose military firepower is matched by its political ineptitude, leads to suspicious distrust even among those elements that can most clearly be termed collaborationist. Thus the whole situation is unstable, with a wide range of possible outcomes in 2005.

The political situation in Iraq is complicated. A welter of political parties, anti-opposition groupings and other organizations has sprung forth in Iraq, resulting in a highly fluid domestic political situation. It should come as no surprise that lopping the head off of the Saddam regime has meant opening a political Pandora's box. Iraq is so fluid and unstable that it is difficult even to draw a sharp distinction between "collaborationist" and insurgent, oppositionist forces. Some elements that today are on opposite sides of such questions as participation in U.S.-underwritten elections could be working together a year from now. Political parties and tendencies that the United States supports could turn against the

Some elements that today are on opposite sides of such questions as participation in U.S.-underwritten elections could be working together a year from now.

imperial overlords, particularly elements in the Shiite parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).³¹ Even if the Sunni parties decide to participate in the election, large segments of the Sunni population remain opposed to the American occupation. "In the areas recently freed from insurgents, like Samarra and Babil Province, the attitude seems to be not one of gratitude, or even ambivalence, but of anger and resignation. Such bitterness seems widespread in the Sunni Triangle."³² Nor is the political fate of those closest to the United States, such as Prime Minister Iyad Allawi of the Iraqi National Accord or Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress, secure. Even the politically clumsy American operatives will quickly cast off useless puppets.³³

Some of the elements participating in the current government opposed the war and continue to oppose the opposition. As the occupation continues to kill innocent civilians, it erodes support among allies of the United States. At an October 2004 meeting of the Muslim Scholars Association, an organization of leading Sunni clerics, the siege of Falluja was condemned. The meeting called on Arab leaders throughout the Middle East to end their silent acquiescence to U.S. actions. They also called on their followers to boycott the January election if the siege were not ended. Representatives of the Iraqi Islamic Party, whose head participated in the Iraqi Governing Council and who is also a member of the interim national assembly, participated in the MSA meeting, and joined in condemning the siege. Along with other Sunni organizations, the Iraqi Islamic Party has said that no genuine democracy can exist as long as 135,000 U.S. troops remain in occupation of the country.³⁴

IV

AS SUSAN WATKINS HAS ARGUED, compared to twentieth century insurgent oppositions to occupation, the Iraqi opposition has developed quickly, and with minimal international support. They rely particularly on large and indestructible caches of weapons that exist all over the country.³⁵ Such is

the American problem: After selling arms to the dictatorial Saddam Hussein for many years, the weapons remain in place when policy changes.

In contrast to the steady diet of demonizing rhetoric about the insurgent opposition served up to American soldiers and the American public alike, the foreign policymakers and intelligence community recognize full well that the opposition is broad-based, drawing in "students, intellectuals, former soldiers, tribal youths, farmers, and Islamists."³⁶ The fundamental objective of the opposition is national independence; the immediate goal is withdrawal of American troops. "The insurgency is not a monolithic or united movement directed by a leadership with a unitary and disciplined ideological vision." The respected Middle East scholar, Juan Cole, points to the analysis and description offered by Baghdad-based journalists Haddad and Ghazi, as providing a sensible delineation of the opposition to the U.S. within Iraq today.³⁷ Haddad and Ghazi characterize the opposition as based on "a mixture of Islamic and pan-Arab ideas that agree on the need to put an end to the U.S. presence in Iraq." The focus of these groups is military opposition to American troops; the vast majority shuns abductions and the execution of hostages; they do not attack Iraqi police and "respect . . . the beliefs of other religions." These groups see only a minority of Iraqi society as collaborationist, and believe that attacks on this collaborationist element are justified. Haddad and Ghazi delineate the opposition this way:

A. *Sunni resistance groups* include the (1) Iraqi National Islamic Resistance, the "1920 Revolution Brigades," which has launched armed attacks against American forces, particularly west of Baghdad, in the Abu-Ghurayb, Khan Dari and Falluja regions. This group issued a statement on August 19, 2004, saying that they had carried out an average of ten operations per day between July 27 and August 7.

(2) *The National Front for the Liberation of Iraq*, which includes ten resistance groupings, is comprised of nationalists and Islamists. The NFLI is active in Arbil and Karkuk in northern Iraq, in Falluja, Samarra and Tikrit in central Iraq, in Basra

and Babil in the south and Diyali in the east. It is seen as smaller than the 1920 Revolution Brigades.

(3) *The Iraqi Resistance Islamic Front* (JAMI) is the newest Sunni resistance group, a coalition of smaller resistance fractions. It announced its existence on May 30, 2004, and warns against “Jewish conspiracies in Iraq.”

(4) *Other, smaller Sunni factions* delineated by Haddad and Ghazi include the Hamzah Faction in Falluja; the Iraqi Liberation Army, the Awakening and Holy War group (which filmed an operation in July 2003, in which they called Saddam and the United States “two sides of the same coin”); the White Banners and the Al-Haqq Army.

B. *Ba’athist Factions*. Haddad and Ghazi see factions loyal to the Ba’ath Party and the previous regime as restricted to financing the resistance operations of other groupings. These include Al-Awdah (the Return), with members of the former intelligence apparatus, and Saddam’s Fedayeen, which is rumored to have “abandoned their loyalty to Saddam and have joined other groupings.

C. *Shia resistance groups*. The most important is the Al-Mahdi Army of Shia cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr. Formed in July 2003, it quickly gained 10,000-15,000 young well-trained members, most of whom are from poverty-stricken Al-Sadr City in Baghdad. Others come from Al-Shu’lah and southern cities. The parents and grandparents of many of the young followers of Sadr were supporters of the Iraqi Communist Party. Since this party participates in the Allawi government, these young anticolonialists have shifted allegiances.

Sadr, a leading figure among Shia resistance fighters and the broader Shia population, has been staunchly opposed to the occupation. “There can be no politics under occupation, no freedom under occupation, no democracy under occupation,” he said. His family paid dearly for its opposition to the Saddam Hussein regime, which executed Muqtada’s uncle in 1980; his father and two brothers were shot in February, 1999. Nor is Muqtada impatient; for a full year after the invasion, he continued to preach non-violent resistance to the occupation. Only in the spring 2004 did he begin to speak of armed resistance.



A four-year-old with shrapnel wounds treated at an American military hospital in Baghdad. Photo: John Moore/Associated Press

Seymour Hersh suggests that the Bush administration sought the arrest or assassination, if necessary, of Sadr as early as summer 2003, in a plan called Operation Stuart. Sadr’s large following within the Shia community, as well as his possible ties to Iran, frightened the occupiers.³⁸ American forces closed Muqtada’s newspaper, *Al Hawza*, in March 2004. His followers responded by organizing peaceful protests. American forces arrested his senior aide, Mustafa al-Yaqubi, and threatened Sadr himself. Said Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez, commander of U.S. ground forces, in April 2004, “The mission is to kill or capture Moqtada al-Sadr.”³⁹ After enduring a year of occupation and violence from the American forces, Sadr finally concluded that peaceful means were a “losing card.” “We should seek other ways,” he now said. “Terrorize your enemy, as we cannot remain silent over its violations.”

Even in militant opposition, Sadr opposed car bombings and assassinations. He denounced the attack on UN headquarters and the taking of journalists as hostages. He criticized as impious the beheading of foreigners.⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, Iraqis are supportive of this measured opposition to the occupation; the Coalition Provisional Authority itself conducted a poll in June 2004 that found that the vast majority of Iraqis viewed Sadr more favorably after the uprising than before. Meanwhile, Sadr’s denunciation of the provisional government resonates with the general population. Only two percent approve of

the Allawi government — about the same approval ratings that Saddam Hussein received! Sadr remains willing to negotiate, as the June 2004 ceasefire indicated, a remarkably reasonable position, especially in contrast to the Allawi government's staunch opposition to negotiation with militias.⁴¹

A *second Shia group*, the Imam Ali Bin-Abi-Talib Jihadi Brigades, appeared in October 2003, vowing to kill coalition troops, and threatening to “transfer the battleground to the territories of such countries if they were to send troops.”

D. “*Factions that adopt abductions and killing.*” Haddad and Ghazi list nine smaller organizations that engage in the abduction and killing of foreigners — a method they see as pressuring occupying countries. Of these organizations, four are “clearly intellectually close to the beliefs and thinking” of al Qaeda.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from this inventory is that the resistance to occupation in Iraq is *multiform* — orientations from across the political spectrum are being drawn into action. The simplistic equation of the resistance with radical political Islam, or the wing that adopts terroristic tactics against civilians, flies in the face of the reality of the situation.⁴²

V

THUS WE SEE IN IRAQ: A brutal occupation marked especially by aerial bombardment of targets in areas of high civilian population. A large-scale and growing resistance, widely seen in the Middle East and the rest of the world as righteous. Opposition even within the U.S. government and the growing demoralization of U.S. troops.

Even observers close to the Bush administration acknowledged that the wheels were coming off. Brent Scowcroft, the old National Security Advisor in the first Bush administration, publicly criticized the younger Bush for being “mesmerized” by Likudist Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. Scowcroft suggested that the Bush administration's reaching out to NATO and the United Nations was an attempt to “rescue a fail-

ing venture” in Iraq. It was “as much an act of desperation as anything else.”⁴³ Otherwise conservative, august voices had for some time criticized the aggressive, preemptive American war against Iraq. Prominent social scientific students of international relations, Stephen Walt (Harvard) and John Mearsheimer (University of Chicago) suggested that the policy of containment which, from their point of view, had worked so well during the Cold War, could have been applied to Iraq — even if Saddam Hussein had *had* nuclear weapons. Hussein did not use chemical or biological weapons against the United States in the first Gulf War, nor any time since, despite repeated bombing by the United States.

In 2000, Bush's National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice herself acknowledged that Saddam Hussein could be successfully deterred from using destructive weapons. “Saddam Hussein's regime is isolated, his conventional military power has been severely weakened,” she argued. Along with North Korea, the Iraqi regime was “living on borrowed time, so there need be no sense of panic about them. Rather, the first line of defense should be a clear and classical statement of deterrence — if they do acquire WMD, their weapons will be unusable because any attempt to use them will bring national obliteration.”⁴⁴

So Mearsheimer and Walt asked: “If Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear arsenal is ‘unusable’ . . . why do the president and Ms. Rice favor war?”⁴⁵ The answer is that long before September 11, 2001, the architects of the Bush administration's foreign policy made it clear that they advocated the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. September 11 was their Pearl Harbor, the shocking attack that could be manipulated as rationale for carrying out policy that had long been on the wish list. As Paul Wolfowitz wrote in 1998, “toppling Saddam is the only outcome that can satisfy the vital U.S. interest in a stable and secure Gulf region.”⁴⁶

This goal stemmed from the overall “Regional Defense Strategy” (RDS) drafted under the first Bush administration, and signed by outgoing Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney in 1993. The

document argues for an aggressive policy of expanding American influence, emphasizing the importance of “forward presence” throughout the world, i.e., military occupations and the propping up of American “friends” against any hostile force, movement, tendency or insurgency. The RDS is characterized by the conflation of all possible enemies of American allies, that is, the same imperial tunnel vision that marked foreign policymaking during the Cold War.

The RDS speaks of the “strategic depth” of the alliances secured during the Cold War as the foundation for expansion. It calls for the United States to “extend the zone of peace” to make Eastern Europe a free market region. But strategic resources and regions — oil, always oil — must be guarded. “Together with our allies, we must preclude hostile nondemocratic powers from dominating regions critical to our interests and otherwise work to build an international environment conducive to our values.”⁴⁷ In those early post-Cold War days, it was possible for the defense planners to speak of force reduction even as they forecast increased “forward presence,” in critical regions. Reductions in manpower could be achieved through ever-greater technological sophistication in weaponry.

Overall, the RDS is centered upon the idea of “forward presence,” i.e., the occupation of countries around the world to advance American interests (including bolstering “friendly” regimes and dissuading those who are “hostile”).⁴⁸ “In the Middle East and Persian Gulf, we should seek to foster regional stability, deter aggression against our friends and interests in the region, protect U.S.

nationals and property, and safeguard our access to international air and seaways and to the region’s important sources of oil.”⁴⁹ Defending Israel is prime among the regional objectives, and contin-

ued military presence is to be used against any “hostile” forces. “We . . . must be prepared to counter the terrorism, insurgency, and subversion that adversaries may use to threaten governments supportive of U.S. security interests.”⁵⁰

In short, the RDS conflates all kinds of opposition to American interests — any organization, movement or tendency that poses a threat to American interests or allies. The political character of the states the United States is backing — and the character of the “hostile” movements

— is an entirely secondary consideration. “To discourage the rise of a challenger hostile to our interests in the region, we must maintain a level of forward military presence adequate to reassure our friends and deter aggressors.”⁵¹ In the Bush administration thought world, the Saudi regime — an authoritarian monarchy that ruthlessly suppresses its population, violates women’s rights and human rights in general, virtually enslaves foreign workers, arrests and holds suspects without charges, tortures political prisoners, forces confessions — counts as a “moderate” regime worth defending against subversion because it is allied to the United States.⁵²

Within the Bush administration, several competing concerns led to the consensus on attacking Iraq. First of all, the United States wants permanent military bases in Iraq. Because the United States is now able to build military bases in Iraq, it will be possible in the near future to remove

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American troops from Saudi Arabia. As Paul Wolfowitz said candidly in an interview with *Vanity Fair*, “by complete mutual agreement between the U.S. and the Saudi government we can now remove almost all of our forces from Saudi Arabia. Their presence there over the last 12 years has been a source of enormous difficulty for a friendly government. It’s been a huge recruiting device for al Qaeda. In fact if you look at bin Laden, one of his principle grievances was the presence of so-called crusader forces on the holy land, Mecca and Medina.”⁵³

Secondly, the United States sought to use the Iraqi invasion as a *demonstration* to others that American military might will be used against any government or movement that threatens the American conception of its strategic interests. When the RDS spoke of the impact of “forward presence” upon “friends” and “enemies” alike, it expressed the idea that military bases and troops would deter hostile action against American interests. Of course, the Bush administration war planners significantly underestimated the breadth and depth of anti-imperialist sentiment in Iraq and in the wider Arab world.

Thirdly, of course, the United States would want the control of Iraq’s oil resources. Americans widely believe that this is because the American economy is reliant on Persian Gulf oil. In fact, the Persian Gulf provides only a small portion of the oil used today in the United States. In fact, raising American fuel efficiency by a mere 2.6 miles per gallon would obviate the need for oil from both Iraq and Kuwait; an increase of 7.6 miles per gallon would eliminate the need for all oil from the Persian Gulf entirely. Control of Persian Gulf oil needs to be seen in broader context, as a counter in the ongoing competition between the United States, Europe and Asia — it is European countries, Japan, and China that have genuine reliance on Persian Gulf oil.

The Bush administration’s talk of the democratization of Iraq is a red herring, a diversion from its real concerns. Genuine concern with democratization would begin with pressure on Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, American allies in the region.

Instead, there is a long history of American support for repressive regimes in the Middle East. As Said Aburish argues:

The existing division of the Arab Middle East into friendly and unfriendly governments has little to do with their true nature. Historically, legitimate nationalist regimes were rejected when they were considered a threat to Western interests while friendly illegitimate ones were supported regardless. Perpetuating Western hegemony and protecting economic interests from real or imagined threats takes precedence [over all other concerns].⁵⁴

VI

SOME IN THE WESTERN LEFT have managed to convince themselves that the Bush administration’s democracy rhetoric holds water. They cast the choices as terrorism or fascism on the one hand (believing that al Qaeda-associated fighters or ex-Ba’athists form a majority of those resisting in places like Falluja) or (American-backed) democracy on the other. This tendency sees the Iraqi Federation of Workers’ Trade Unions as the best hope for democracy in Iraq. Likewise, Frank Smyth, criticizing what he terms “knee-jerk anti-imperialism,” argues for a more nuanced treatment of domestic Iraqi political tendencies. Yet, he divides the resistance to American occupation into just three tendencies: ex-Ba’athists; Sadr’s al-Mahdi militia, and “foreign Islamist members of al-Qaida.”⁵⁵ Ultimately, Smyth’s position is a pox on all your houses. Neither the Bush administration nor the international left apparently *has* a secular, mass-based, pro-democratic force to back in Iraq.

It would take the west a long way in the direction of being able to understand the situation in Iraq — and the rest of the Middle East — today, to acknowledge that the general relationship between Islam and politics is culturally distinctive from the religious-political nexus that obtains in the west. With the sole exception of Kemalism in Turkey, Islam and politics historically have been inseparable. “Thus, the demand for the separation of religion and state in Muslim countries is

more than secularist; it is openly antireligious.” Gilbert Achcar goes so far as to say that the task of separation of religion from state is beyond the task of bourgeois and petit bourgeois classes in Islamic countries. Even Nasser, the radical bourgeois nationalist, identified with Islam as part of

The pressure of Western imperialism in the Middle East through the whole twentieth century has hardly promoted secular democratic forces and political stability.

the battle against imperialism.⁵⁶

When Marx spoke of the possibility of all sorts of superstructural playing out of deeper economic conflicts, he was pointing in the direction of precisely such a phenomenon, which is applicable, as it were, “below” the level of struggles over the mode of production. Language, nation, ethnicity, and, yes, even religion, can be markers in class struggles or in anti-imperialism ones. And in the case of religion, we should be careful to acknowledge further the possibility of both ideological breadth *and* ambiguity. In some circumstances, fundamentalist Islam can be an instrument of authoritarian domination — the Saudi royal family’s use of Wahhabism. In other circumstances, it can be a marker for opposition to imperialism. Given the ambiguous historical role of Christian churches — think for a moment of the contradiction between the Catholic Church’s longstanding role in the oppression of women and in the contemporary liberation theology movement — should we really be surprised at such political flexibility from Islam?

In general, “modern Islamic discourse is largely secular, concerned more with contemporary political and social issues than with a spiritual concern with salvation or the hereafter, pre-

cisely because Islamic societies were able to secularize within Islam, rather than in opposition to it.” Unlike political Christianity, political Islam was the creation primarily of public intellectuals, not fundamentalist clergy. Public intellectuals like Muhammad Iqbal and Mohammed Ali Jinnah in India, Abul A’la Mawdudi in Pakistan, and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt are the norm; Ayatollah Khomeini the exception. The fact of a vibrant debate over the meaning of *jihad* (struggle, effort) in Islam — the relationship between spiritual, personal and political aspects is contested — strongly indicates the open-textured nature of Islam. Mahmood Mamdani contrasts society-centered progressive Islam from state-centered reactionary Islam. This left-right distinction hinges on contrasting *ijtihad*, legal interpretation of the *sharia* (Islamic law). Society-centered Islam insists on taking historical circumstances and therefore a plurality of viewpoints into account. State-centered Islam closes off interpretation. When Iqbal called for the modernization and democratization of *ijtihad*, the institutional conclusion was the interpretation of the *sharia* “by a body elected by the community of Muslims, the umma, and not just the religious ulama.”⁵⁷

Therefore to the search for a *secular* left in Iraq today is to start off on the wrong foot. It would be better to recognize that all political tendencies are likely to bear an Islamic inscription, and that this fact alone scarcely commits them to any particular political outlook.

Socialists in the Marxist tradition have historically held that in conflicts between imperialist countries and colonies or quasi-colonies, the right to national self-determination is the prime concern. The “cause of anti-imperialism [has] always belonged to the metropolitan Left.”⁵⁸ Long ago, at its 1896 Congress, the Second International unanimously endorsed “the right of all nations to complete sovereignty.” “With whatever pretexts colonial policies may be justified in the name of religion or civilization, their sole aim is simply to extend the area of capitalist exploitation in the exclusive interests of the capitalist class.” The prime responsibility of socialists within im-



Falluja digs for its dead, November, 2004. Photo: Aljazeera

perialist countries is to point out the imperialist design of “their own” ruling class — and how these interests do not serve or advance the interests of the working class of that country. In this tradition, the political character of the national liberation movement is a secondary consideration: the prime concern is opposition to imperialism and the establishment of national independence. National independence is prior, temporally and logically, to the development of political democracy.

The movement against American occupation, because it is drawing hundreds of thousands of young Iraqis into an earnest struggle for anti-imperialism, has opened up intense political debate throughout the country. It is out of these conditions that a democratic left could be forged. Yet the prime concern of politically minded Iraqis today is an effective opposition to the occupation. Given its savagery, only the naïve or self-servingly duplicitous in the west can be surprised that these forces wage this struggle in a forthright and rigorous manner.

A wide variety of political forces, with varying attitudes toward the occupation and the question of collaboration, exists in Iraq today. Even Middle East specialists find the situation “difficult to decipher, with social and political forces that are in part allied, in part in competition or in opposition to each other: those who participate in the Interim Governing Council set up by the Americans and those who are not involved in it; those who are defined on religious or ethnic bases”

and so forth. Achcar goes on to suggest that the central fracture is not between Sunni and Shiite, but between Kurd and Arab, as Iraqi Kurdistan enjoyed “real autonomy and a very privileged status” compared to the rest of the country since the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, able to develop economically under American/British protection. The rest of the country is characterized by a fractured, divided opposition. Yet, these might be circumstances under which a “certain form of democracy” could develop, on the condition that the occupation is ended. Genuine electoral competition premised upon vibrant political dialogue could emerge in post-occupation Iraq. Achcar draws out this possibility by contrasting the admittedly constrained democracy of contemporary Iran with the “totalitarian Islamic fundamentalism of the Saudi kingdom, or the semi-fascist former dictatorship of Saddam Hussein”:

The potential for a certain democratic life in Iraq is even greater than in Iran, because there is no hegemonic Iraqi politico-clerical force. Furthermore, within the population, the Shiite majority cohabits with a Sunni minority, not to speak of the other minorities, and moreover none of the communities is homogenous. All this contributes to the existence of the objective conditions for pluralist political life, even if it remains within certain limits.⁵⁹

Yet, Achcar rightly underlines the weakness of the secular left in Iraq. The Communist Party, a major anti-imperialist force in the 1950s, collaborated with Ba’athism in the 1970s; while before the current war it opposed both Saddam Hussein and American machinations, it then participated in the puppet government, discrediting itself in the eyes of militant opponents of the occupation. “There exists other forces that are more to the left, but they are not strong enough, given what is at stake in the country. As in Palestine and in the whole region, it is the Islamic fundamentalists who take the most radical line against Western domination who have the upper hand, and who have exploited popular resentment at the situation.” As with other forms of populism, in principle Islamic fundamentalism has the poten-

tial for reactionary, moderate, or progressive expressions — and for rapid shifts between them.

The pressure of Western imperialism in the Middle East through the whole twentieth century has hardly promoted secular democratic forces and political stability. Shocked revulsion at the American occupation, from the torture scandal to the leveling of Falluja, leaves western democracy with little prestige in Iraq. Muslim fundamentalists are the popular heroes who have benefited from the hegemon's acts of clumsy brutality.

American troops, largely from poor and working class backgrounds, are paying in blood to suppress an anti-imperialist movement. The country of their death has suffered for decades under western influence, radiating first from London, now from Washington. The rate of civilian deaths in Iraq occupied by the United States is far greater than anything orchestrated by Saddam Hussein, a vicious dictator. From the Iraqi point of view, the brutality of the occupation is a continuation of the policy of sanctions that choked off vital resources from the Iraqi people in the 1990s. One failed policy of destruction follows another.

"Why do they hate us?" asked the American media innocently after September 11. Because they hate freedom, responded Bush. No, in the Middle East the United States is hated because it arms Israel, which systematically suppresses the Palestinians; supports military dictatorships and

monarchies (as long as they keep the oil flowing); opposes popular or nationalist movements that seek even mild redress of these grievances. Iraqis and the broader population of the Middle East see the United States and Britain as persistent *enemies* of freedom — of self-determination.

During the Cold War, the rationalization for the systematic policy of backing brutal dictators as long as they were friendly to American strategic or economic interests was fear of advances by the rival superpower. Today that rationalization is gone; the new rationalization is the fear of "evil-doers," "enemies of freedom," terrorists. To emphasize the terroristic or theocratic elements of movements opposed to American imperialism, in a context where the American military is pouring billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of troops into the pacification of Iraq, is to miss a key point. The point is to remove the American boot from the neck of the Iraqis, who have suffered so long under first British imperialism, then an American-backed dictatorship, and now an Anglo-American occupation. Such are not conditions of bourgeois democracy, but of armed struggle.

The western left needs to patiently build a broad antiwar movement, teaching once again fundamental lessons of imperialism. The United States, the "first new nation," a country that was founded on the right to self-determination, opposition to colonialism, has, certainly since its ascension to position of hegemon in 1945, systematically stood on the other side. The Vietnamese strove for national independence; having ousted the colonial French from their country, they were forced to fight for another twenty years against the surrogate imperial power, the United States. The United States used the bogey of "communism" as the excuse for the brutal effort to pacify the country, to install puppet governments. Today, the Bush administration talks of the struggle against terror — it is, for them, a good new rationalization.

Attacks on noncombatant human targets creates a backlash that makes circumstances worse, not better. At the same time, weak forces with lo-



Grieving the death of a loved one, killed in an American bombing raid on Sadr City, Baghdad, October 7, 2004. Photo by Ali Jasim/Reuters

cal popular support have long enjoyed success with hit and run irregular guerrilla tactics against occupying enemies with overwhelming military superiority. It is precisely this force asymmetry that imposes such tactics on them. People turn to such tactics when they feel powerless to act through other channels. In the

Middle East, the grievances are so great, and of such longstanding duration; the power balance is so profoundly unequal between the United States and its Israeli surrogate — and the allied hierarchical powers from Egypt to Saudi Arabia — and those who fight for national independence, that many ordinary Arabs are willing to turn to such tactics. They feel that they can maintain a sense of pride in the effort to give Goliath a black eye.

Expecting ready-made secular pro-democratic political parties to emerge, Athena-like, fully formed from the political environment of Iraq, is a vain hope. Certainly the international left should solidarize with the weak shoots of the democratic left within Iraq. But the historical origins of the weakness of the democratic, secular left within Iraq must be acknowledged. The country was shaped under British domination after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire emerging from World War One. The British installed a puppet monarchy that ruled for decades up to the national revolution of 1958. Ba'athist Arab nationalists and the Iraqi Communist Party were the strongest elements of the country under the nationalist-military rule of Qasam; Ba'athism proved more powerful in the coming decades. At times, Ba'athism sought alliance with the west; at other times to establish an independent role in the Gulf region; at still other times engaged in popular nationalist policies, such as the mid-1970s nationalization of the oil industry. But in no case did conditions exist under which “normal” bourgeois democracy could take hold, let alone flourish. Now, in the minds of many ordinary Iraqis, democracy equals indiscriminate

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from the United States.

bloodshed, the use of overwhelming firepower against civilians, bombs raining down on urban areas, the desecration of sacred shrines. Democracy means hubristic overreaching, collective punishment, injustice. Is it any wonder that there is weakness in the democratic forces in Iraq today?

Throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, “normal” development of bourgeois-democratic political organizations and institutions have been weak in the Middle East, and the role of western imperialism in this development should not be underestimated. It was Britain who placed the monarch on the Iraqi throne. It has been the United States that gave military and political support to Saddam Hussein at precisely the moments of greatest suppression of his own population, during the fighting against Iran in the 1980s. Those familiar with American foreign policy in the period of U.S. hegemony will not be surprised that the American conception of strategic and economic interests in the region systematically trumped “democratic” considerations. How else to explain the overthrow of Mussadiq in Iran in 1953, the overthrow of Allende in Chile in 1973? Of course, as the politically conscious population in the Middle East is well aware, the United States has a consistent record of supporting monarchies, military dictatorships, and other oppressive regimes precisely because these “friendly” regimes keep the oil flowing.

In the present state of American politics, looking tough, having a formidable if shadowy enemy, and making spurious connections between the underground enemy and any national state that shows defiance toward the American hegemon (“if you aren't with us, you are against us”), is enough to win elections. Candidate Kerry wished it were the case that Bush and Cheney were the last two men on earth who lived in a fantasy world about Iraq. Sadly, because neither the Democrats nor anyone else has the capacity to both tell the truth

about Iraq (that is, to offer a plausible alternative account) and mobilize voters around it, a sizable segment of the American electorate continues to support the war. Yet, the appearance is a mirage, and each month of occupation will see increasing opposition to this war and the policy that informs it.

Cynics will say that the Bush administration knew all along that their aggressive policy toward Iraq would provoke the reaction that it has. The bold American thrust into Iraq would drive young Iraqis, and young Arabs throughout the Middle East toward Islamic militancy in general, and some to al Qaeda in particular. The American policy would, therefore, make the problem worse, as it were, necessitating ever larger American military budgets, and ever more aggressive interventions around the world. When the Bush National Security Strategy speaks of a war of uncertain duration, perhaps this is what they have in mind.

DURING THE COLD WAR, American foreign policymakers viewed the entire world through the lens of their conflict with the Soviet Union. Struggles for national independence could not really aim at national independence, they believed. The Vietnamese were pawns of the Russians and/or the Chinese.⁶⁰

Nationalist regimes like Mussadiq's in Iran or social democratic ones like Allende's in Chile had to be overthrown because, in the words of Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Nixon, "we cannot allow a country to go communist because of the irresponsibility of their own people."

The terminology has changed, but the sentiment has not: For those managing American hegemony today, collaborationists in Iraq are "friends" and "democrats," no matter what their formal politics or former record; oppositionists are "terrorists," regardless of their actual tactics or orientation. It is an old game of linguistic blackmail which, in this case, has elicited quite widespread refusals — across the political spectrum, and across the world — in short order. The Iraqi resistance will continue to fight, beyond the January 2005 elections, in which many participants will be oc-

cupation opponents. The most popular politicians in Iraq today are opponents of the occupation. No amount of American firepower will quell the desire of ordinary Iraqis for political independence from the United States. Iraqis fought the British and their puppet monarchy before 1958; they fight today in memory of that great struggle.

NOTES

1. The Iraqi poet Al-Jawahiri spoke of "a horizon lit with blood" in commemorating the 1948 Iraqi uprising against the British. See Tariq Ali, *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonization of Iraq* (London: Verso, 2003), 27. Thanks to Michael Bastian, Libby Garland, L. Dennis, Andrew Grossman, Samantha Hill, Joanne Landy, Adam Lutzker, Troy Piwowarski, Steve Shalom, and Lee Sustar for providing valuable materials, perspective and suggestions, and a special thanks to Michael VanHouten of the Albion College library. They of course bear no responsibility for what follows.
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3. Joshua Chaffin, "Rice puts up defiant defense of Iraq war," *Financial Times*, October 11, 2004, p. 7; "Lessons of the Duelfer Report," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 8, 2004; Rupert Cornwell, "Is Iraq the Curveball that could dismiss the President?" *Independent on Sunday* (London), October 10, 2004.
4. David Kirkpatrick, "The Antiwar Right is Ready to Rumble," *New York Times*, November 7, 2004. Opponents also include more than 650 foreign affairs experts, "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy," including prominent American and British conservatives. Their letter called Bush administration policy in Iraq the "most misguided" since Vietnam. They criticize "an emphasis on speculation instead of facts, on mythology instead of calculation, and on misplaced moralizing over considerations of national interests." See Oliver Burkeman, "Scholars condemn Bush policies," *Guardian*, October 13, 2004, p. 13.
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 11. Jamail, "800 civilians."
 12. Richard Opiel, "Early target of offensive is a hospital," *New York Times*, November 8, 2004.
 13. Katarina Kratovac, "AP Photographer Flees Fallujah," *Associated Press*, November 15, 2004, accessed from lexis-nexis.com on November 17, 2004.
 14. "Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq," November 13, 2004, accessed from riverbendblog.blogspot.com on December 12, 2004.
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 16. Edward Wong, "Sunni Party Leaves Iraqi Government over Falluja Attack," *New York Times*, November 10, 2004.
 17. Roberts, et al., "Mortality"; Sarah Boseley, "100,000 Iraqi civilians dead, says study," *Guardian* 29 Oct. 2004; Phyllis Bennis, "On the eve of the elections: 100,000 Iraqis dead," UFPJ Talking Points 24, accessed from www.ips-dc.org/comment/Bennis/tp24eleceve.htm on November 2, 2004.
 18. Roberts, et al., "Mortality," 7.
 19. See juancole.com for 30 September 30, 2004.
 20. Dana Priest and Thomas Ricks, "Growing Pessimism on Iraq," *Washington Post*, September 29, 2004, p. A1. When the NIC report was disclosed to the *New York Times*, White House spokesman Scott McClellan termed the report the work of "pessimists and naysayers."
 21. At www.juancole.com on November 6, 2004.
 22. Given the role of "foreign fighters" and enemies of (British) democracy in the American revolution — Lafayette, Pulaski, Kosciusko, and Steuben — Americans should be especially suspicious of the language of "outside agitators."
 23. Ahmed Hashim, "Terrorism and Complex Warfare in Iraq," Jamestown Foundation, 18 June 2004, at chechnya.jamestown.org, accessed 12 November 12, 2004.
 24. Susan Watkins, "Vichy on the Tigris," *New Left Review* 28 (July-August 2004): 8.
 25. Dexter Filkins, "Iraqis fear a Sunni boycott of the election," *New York Times*, 11 October 11, 2004.
 26. Robin Wright, "Religious leaders ahead in Iraq poll," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2004.
 27. Salim Muwakkil, "The right choice for terror," *In These Times*, October 1, 2004.
 28. Watkins, "Vichy on the Tigris," 5.
 29. Saad Jawaad, "Why most Iraqis shun their government," *Financial Times*, October 28, 2004, p. 17, says that Iraqis use the term "ex-Iraqis" to designate the carpetbagger exiles "who for decades lived in the west, became citizens there and co-operated with the U.S."
 30. Ashraf Khalil and Paul Richter, "U.S. is said to urge its Iraqi allies to unite for election," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2004.
 31. The most popular politician in the country is SCIRI leader, Abdel Aziz Hakim, whose ties with Iran frighten the United States.
 32. Filkins, "Iraqis fear."
 33. The United States gave leaders of six parties key positions in the governing council, appointed in July 2003, and these figures remained in the interim government after the so-called transfer of power in late June 2004. In August 2004, when the selection of an interim assembly became a demonstration of the power of the six parties, independents withdrew from the process in protest. The six parties include: (a) The Iraqi National Accord, the party of Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, a security officer in the Ba'ath Party who regularly spied on dissident Iraqis in Europe in the 1970s, before himself falling out with the Saddam Hussein regime. For many years Allawi was a paid informant of the CIA. (b) The Iraqi National Congress, headed by Ahmad Chalabi, descendent of possibly the wealthiest family in Iraq under the British-backed monarchy before the 1958 revolution, who was for the first year of the occupation the favorite of the United States Department of Defense. "Ahmed Chalabi, close to the Pentagon and the neo-conservatives but hated by the CIA and the US State Department, has fallen from grace as a result of bureaucratic wars in Washington." Patrick Cockburn, "We will crush Fallujah's insurgents: Iyad Allawi, the CIA's new stooge in Iraq," *Counterpunch*, June 26/27, 2004 at www.counterpunch.org, accessed November 10, 2004. Chalabi, who has managed to maintain relations with extraordinarily diverse elements, has "connections to the most hardline elements in Iran, particularly the intelligence officers of the Revolutionary Guards." Andrew Cockburn, "Why the U.S. turned against their golden boy," *Counterpunch*, May 20, 2004, at www.counterpunch.org, accessed November 11, 2004. (c) Two Shiite parties, Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). (d) Two Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.
 34. Hannah Allam, "Sunni clerics urge boycott of Iraq elections in wake of Fallujah siege," October 20, 2004, accessed from www.occupationwatch.org on November 5, 2004.
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- Al Zawra* (Baghdad), 19 September 2004, accessed from www.fas.org/irp/news/2004/09/az091904 on 19 Oct. 2004.
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39. Stephen White, "Dead or alive," *The Mirror*, April 13, 2004, p. 9, accessed from lexis-nexis.com on November 8, 2004.
40. See Sharif Hikmat Nashashibi, "What is so radical about Iraq's rebel cleric?" *Independent*, August 24, 2004.
41. Nashashibi, "What is so radical about Iraq's rebel cleric?"
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43. Daniel Dombey, "Scowcroft lambasts Bush's unilateralism," *Financial Times*, 14 Oct. 2004, p. 9.
44. Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January-February 2000).
45. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box," *New York Times*, February 2 2003, p. 15.
46. Paul Wolfowitz, "Iraqi rebels with a cause," *New Republic*, 7 Dec. 1998.
47. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, United States Department of Defense, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy," accessed from www.informationclearinghouse.info on October 27, 2004 [Hereafter cited as "RDS"]. In the thought world of the RDS "radical" means "hostile to American interests," and "moderate" means "friendly to American interests." The first Gulf War neutered a potential "radical" threat in Saddam Hussein. "Instead of a more radical Middle East/Persian Gulf region under Saddam's influence, Saddam struggles to retain control in Iraq, Iraq's dangerous military has been greatly damaged, our ties with moderate states are stronger, energy resources are secure . . ." In this outlook, the Saudi monarchy's world-class authoritarian regime is "moderate" because pro-American; Iran's Muslim republic is "radical" because it asserts independence. Words no longer retain their familiar meanings.
48. RDS, "Elements of the Regional Defense Strategy."
49. RDS, "Regional Goals and Challenges."
50. RDS, "Regional Goals and Challenges."
51. RDS, "Regional Goals and Challenges."
52. Toby Jones, "Seeking a Social Contract for Saudi Arabia," *MERIP Report* 228 (Fall 2003), accessed from www.merip.org on 15 Oct. 2004.
53. "Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Sam Tanenhaus, Vanity Fair," United States Department of Defense, News Transcript, 9 May 2003, accessed from www.defenselink.mil on 18 Oct. 2004.
54. Said K. Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite* (London: Indigo, 1998) cited in Anthony Arnone, ed, "Introduction," to *Iraq under Siege* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 13.
55. Frank Smyth, "The Left, the Right, and the Islamists," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, at www.fpif.org, accessed 29 Oct. 2004.
56. Gilbert Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 49.
57. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 47; 48; 60-1.
58. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 203.
59. Gilbert Achcar, "Iraq's Year of Blood," *ZNet*, 20 Sept. 2004, at www.zmag.org, accessed 15 Nov. 2004.
60. Errol Morris' film, *Fog of War*, contains an instructive scene: Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968 — a principle architect of the American war in Vietnam, reports his heated conversation with the former Vietnamese foreign minister, Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, in 1995, long after the war.
- Thach*: You're totally wrong. We were fighting for our independence. You were fighting to enslave us.
- McNamara*: Do you mean to say that it was not a tragedy for you, when you lost 3,400,000 Vietnamese killed . . . ? What did you accomplish?
- Thach*: Mr. McNamara, you must never have read a history book. If you had, you'd know we weren't pawns of the Chinese and the Russians . . . Don't you understand that we have been fighting the Chinese for a thousand years? We were fighting for our independence and we would fight to the last man and we were determined to do so and no amount of bombing, no amount of U.S. pressure would ever have stopped us.

Why Not Have Empire?

C. DOUGLAS LUMMIS

IN THE PROLOGUE TO *BLOWBACK*, Chalmers Johnson introduces himself as a former “spear carrier for empire,” both in his role as a Naval officer during the Korean War and in his later role as a Cold War academic.¹ “The problem was,” he says, “that I knew too much about the international Communist movement and not enough about the United States government and its Department of Defense.” He was, apparently with some reluctance, a supporter of the war in Vietnam and, from 1967 to 1973, acting out the fantasy entertained by only the most paranoid students in those days, by simultaneously teaching university and working for the CIA.

Johnson recalls that he was “irritated by campus antiwar protesters, who seemed to me self-indulgent as well as sanctimonious, and who had so clearly not done their homework.” When I first read these lines I had the feeling that I must have been the person he had in mind when he wrote them — not to say that I accept the characterization. But of course I am sure there are others who had the same feeling. In any case, as one who was a graduate student and an antiwar activist in those years in the department where Johnson taught, I can testify that “irritated” is hardly the word for his attitude. “Enraged” is probably closer to the mark.

C. DOUGLAS LUMMIS’ “Concerning a Small Matter of Definition” appeared in NP 37 (Summer 2004). He is the author of *Radical Democracy* (1996) and *Is Japan Really Going to Junk its Peace Constitution?* (2003).

In the great cities of Europe and America, where a few years ago these things would only have been whispered, now people are openly talking about the good side of imperialism and the need for a strong empire to police an unruly world. . . . Occasionally some of us are invited to “debate” the issue on “neutral” platforms provided by the corporate media. Debating imperialism is a bit like debating the pros and cons of rape. What can we say? That we really miss it?

ARUNDHATI ROY

And like his mentor Robert Scalapino, he was not above using his powers as a tenured faculty member to do what he could to prevent these alleged dunces from getting fellowships or jobs teaching in universities. Unsurprisingly, Johnson doesn’t mention that part, but he does make a courageous confession. He still insists that the antiwar students “knew nothing about communism and had no interest in remedying that lack.” But he goes on,

As it turned out, however, they understood far better than I did the impulses of a Robert McNamara, a McGeorge Bundy, or a

Walt Rostow. They grasped something essential about the nature of America’s imperial role in the world that I had failed to perceive. In retrospect, I wish I had stood with the antiwar protest movement. For all its naiveté and unruliness, it was right and American policy was wrong.

Here Johnson has carried out an act that most people in the teaching business find utterly beyond their powers: admitting that those irritating and unruly students got it right and the professor got it wrong. I have to admire him for this. While it is not exactly an apology, I suppose it is the closest thing to an apology he will ever write. And while I can't speak for any of the other people who may have borne the brunt of his "irritation" in

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those days, the present review is probably the closest I am likely to come to saying, "accepted."

A New Voice

IRONICALLY, THE FACT THAT Johnson didn't stand with the antiwar movement from those days may have its positive side. Had he done so, it's unlikely that either *Blowback* or *The Sorrows of Empire* would have the freshness that they do. But there is a mystery here. For years people have been writing eloquent, well-reasoned, well-documented books criticizing U.S. imperialism; what is so new about these? Of course there is the fact that he is a startling new voice; in 1969 I would have considered him about the last person likely to begin this kind of work. Then there is his great prestige as a scholar — though one could hardly say that he has prestige as a China/Japan scholar greater than Noam Chomsky has as a linguist.

But the comparison with Chomsky (who is conspicuously absent from Johnson's indices) is interesting. Chomsky, who has been attacking the

U.S. empire heroically and doggedly for decades, often allows his writings to take on a monotone of bitter irony.² Johnson, the latecomer, is genuinely surprised and newly outraged by the things he discovers, and this adds vigor to his writing. Chomsky's writings have somewhat fallen victim to the "boy who cried wolf" syndrome, which is unfair because every time he has cried "wolf!" the wolf was real. Johnson's voice, crying "wolf!" for the first time, rings more like an emergency alarm, and is more likely perhaps to get people to jump up and take notice.

But this does not mean that Johnson's work is merely a reorganizing of materials covered by other earlier anti-imperialist researchers. His materials are new, and his analysis is original. In *The Sorrows of Empire* he writes that it was a visit to Okinawa in 1996, his first, which forced the fact of the American empire onto his attention. In addition to being shocked by the arrogance and ugliness of what he saw, Johnson came back persuaded that "no serious American strategy could explain the deployment of thirty-eight separate bases on the choicest 20 percent of the island." He began a study of U.S. military base structure around the world, and gradually came to the conclusion that "Okinawa was typical, not unique." And he proposed an interesting new hypothesis. The 725+ U.S. bases around the world are not the means to empire, they are the empire. The bases are not built to serve a strategy for protecting U.S. interests; rather, U.S. strategy is (in large part) designed to protect the bases.

The bases are themselves a form of rule, and generate their own interests. They are organized into regional commands, and the regional commanders (CINCs, meaning commanders in chief) are like proconsuls in the Roman Empire, outranking ambassadors, making foreign policy statements, and reporting directly to the president rather than through the normal chain of command. In most of the countries where the United States has bases, U.S. military personnel enjoy the colonial privilege of extraterritoriality thanks to Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs), which protect them wholly or partially from prosecution

under the laws of the country where they are based. The United States admits having such agreements with 93 countries, “though some SOFAs are so embarrassing to the host nation that they are kept secret, particularly in the Islamic world.”

This empire of bases, as Johnson calls it, forms a world of its own, “an aspect of contemporary American life that most Americans never see.” Here on Okinawa where I live, if you drive up Highway 58 from Naha past Kadena Airbase, and then look across the fence into the base you will see parking lot filled with scores of big school buses. So there are that many children in there, tragically and unconsciously living the lives of colonials! Inside the bases there are schools from daycare through college, churches, shopping malls, bars, restaurants, tennis courts, private beaches, many individual and team sports, a counseling group for controlling stress and anger, a hotline for battered women, a rape survivors’ group, a childhood sexual abuse survivors’ group, police, courts, jails, and countless lawn mowers, not only for the golf courses but also for the lawns on the big empty spaces between the scattered buildings.

Outside the bases, although Okinawa’s relative prosperity compared to the 1950s and 1960s has shut down a lot of the businesses aimed at GI trade, there are still bars, restaurants, tattoo parlors, souvenir shops selling things no Japanese or Okinawan would ever buy, warehouses, and a large number of evangelical churches (these generally with American ministers) catering to the U.S. military. Houses are not scattered but crowded together; there is no space for lawns. To be stationed on such a base is to be given an education in colonial arrogance. Disrespect for the local population is not an individual “attitude” one may or may not have; it is in the air; it is built into the structure of things; it is unconscious.

Johnson’s conclusion that “Okinawa was typical, not unique” is one with which few Okinawans would agree. It is correct in that the Okinawa bases are not an isolated case but rather part of a world system of bases operating under a unified imperial policy. But it ignores the old Hegelian principle, that Quantity becomes Quality. The sheer

scale of the U.S. military presence on Okinawa means they dominate daily life there in a way they do not in, say, Italy or Britain, or Greenland, or even “mainland” Japan. In Okinawa there is no place free from the scream of fighter planes and the roar of giant transports overhead; there is no day in which some news about the bases is not in the newspapers; there is no politician who can carry out a campaign without taking a position on them; and there is no one under sixty who can remember when they were not there.

Is Okinawa Exceptional?

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY in which Okinawa is different — at least in the U.S. military’s attitude toward it. Okinawa is the one territory that the U.S. military took in battle during World War II and then kept as its own. From 1945 to 1972 the U.S. military ruled Okinawa, at least in its own view, not on the basis of any treaty but through the right of conquest. It saw Okinawa not so much as America’s territory as its own, the U.S. military’s: the spoils of war. This view is particularly strong in the U.S. Marine Corps, which played a big part in the Battle of Okinawa and which has had the biggest presence there since.

Thus, when Okinawa was reverted to Japan in 1972, the Marines, while of course formally having no choice but to accept this, were not entirely persuaded. Aside from public pronouncements, in Marine Corps culture, the territory inside the bases was not transformed from “Marine Corps turf” to “Japanese territory loaned to the U.S. by treaty.” To them it remains what it was, the spoils of war, where they exercise sovereignty. As for the Okinawan territory outside the bases, Marine Corps attitudes have been harder to see, but became clearer just while this article was being written.

On Friday, August 13, 2004, a Marine Corps CH53D transport helicopter from Futenma USMC Air Station crashed into a building of Okinawa International University and then fell to the ground inside the campus. There were three big explosions and black smoke poured into the sky. Before the fire department or the police could arrive at the scene, several hundred Marines broke

through the wire fence that separates the campus from the base (the two are back to back) and occupied the crash site. For this they did not ask the permission of the College president, the Ginowan City mayor, the prefectural governor, or anyone else. They cordoned off the area with yellow tape, posted armed MPs to guard it, and allowed no one in, including Okinawan police or fire fighters. The police wanted to investigate the site for evidence of criminal negligence, but they were refused.

While local officials protested helplessly, the Marines carried away all the evidence, including the dirt under the crash site. Politicians and journalists said, “well, the United States has the authority under the SOFA agreement, so what can you do?” In fact, however, the SOFA agreement makes perfectly clear that U.S. military police has no jurisdiction at all over civilians outside the base. Those MPs guarding the yellow tape had no authority whatsoever other than their guns. At this point, no one knows what it was the Marines were so anxious to hide. But they made it clear that in a crisis, Japanese or Okinawan governmental sovereignty over Okinawa is not something they are prepared to honor. And they made it clear how Okinawa will be treated should the Marine bases there ever get directly involved in a war (by “directly” I mean, a war nearby in East Asia. They are already involved in the war in Iraq).

Perhaps this is an example of what Johnson means by “militarism.” Johnson is not arguing against the military per se, but rather against its corrupt form: militarism. “A military,” he tells us, “should be concerned with ensuring national independence...” Militarism he defines as “the phenomenon by which a nation’s armed services come to put their institutional preservation ahead of achieving national security or even a commitment to the integrity of the governmental structure of which they are a part.” The U.S. military, especially now that it keeps such a big part of itself outside the country, where ordinary U.S. citizens can’t see what it is doing, has, Johnson argues, become a militarist organization. It is not “planning” an empire, or “like” an empire, or taking on the “attitude” of empire, or even “serving” an em-

pire. It is an empire: the empire of bases.

But if the bases are indeed an empire in themselves they are a peculiar one: an empire in which there is no productive labor. Inside the bases nothing is manufactured, nor is the labor of people off the base organized or managed. The bases are not designed to extract surplus value from the countries they occupy and remit it to the homeland; this is left to private industry, operating in the business-safe environment that the bases help to create. Thus while the bases may be an empire in themselves, they are by no means all of the U.S. empire. But even having said that, Johnson’s notion of the “empire of bases” is an important contribution to the understanding of the U.S. empire today.

But there is another way in which Johnson’s work differs from earlier critiques of empire. For the last half century or more, say roughly from the time the U.N. Charter was ratified, world opinion has considered empire to be *prima facie* wrong. “Empire” and “imperialism” became negative-value terms that, within the imperial powers, they had not always been. If you called a policy “imperialist,” everyone understood you were criticizing it. The argument turned on that question. If you could show that a policy was in fact imperialist, that would be enough to show that it was wrong. A defender of the policy would counter by arguing that it was not imperialist.

From Taboo to Option

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS all this has changed, at least in the United States and Britain. Little by little, and especially after the beginning of the “war on terrorism,” defenders of Anglo-American policy have moved empire back from the category of “taboo” to the category of “option.” When you say, “But that’s empire!” the response has changed from, “no!” to “so?” Books and articles discussing the advantages of the United States becoming a straightforward empire, or arguing that the United States has already become such and we should accept it, have been appearing with increasing frequency, beginning mainly with journals read only by elites, and gradually filtering down into magazines and newspapers read by the general public.

So the once-taboo question has been publicly raised: Why not have empire? The arguments for it are simple enough. Maybe imperial rule would make the world a little more peaceful than it is now. Maybe it would bring its subjects fairer and more stable governance than what they have. Maybe it would make them better off economically as well. And (the clincher), maybe it would serve the U.S. national interest, and be good for business.

Once raised, the question presumably has to be answered, but where does one look for an answer? Marx' writings on colonialism, for example his "British Rule in India" (where he argues that imperialism, ugly as it is, is the only way to introduce the capitalist mode of production into the colonial world, which has to be done for socialism to become possible) offer little help. Liberalism offers even less, especially now that the great liberal Woodrow Wilson is being rediscovered as the founder of make-the-world-safe-for-democracy imperialism, a tradition of which George W. Bush is the latest exponent. Can we look to religion? But religion — just about any religion you can name — has served (and been served by) empire from ancient times. Then there is humanitarianism — but humanitarianism has not only been transformed into the ideology justifying "humanitarian intervention," but has also produced a new breed of bleeding heart imperialists typified and led by Michael Ignatieff.

Why not have empire? Chalmers Johnson has proposed an answer to this question. It is not the only answer, nor is it necessarily the best, but it is pretty good. The answer is summarized in the term, blowback. Blowback, which originally meant gasses discharged from the rear of a gun when it is fired, became a CIA word meaning unintended consequences harmful to the U.S. government's overseas clandestine operations. In Johnson's writings (though he himself does not use this image), it becomes a force reminiscent of the Furies, the three terrible Greek goddesses who wreak vengeance for crimes that have gone unpunished by human authority. In its contemporary form, this means such things as terrorist attacks coming from

people an imperialist policy has offended. Thus the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC was archetypical blowback. (These attacks came after *Blowback* was published. Interestingly, Johnson has said that when he first heard of these attacks, he thought they might have come from, among other places, Okinawa.) Here Johnson is true to his background as a mainstream political scientist: interest, not values, is what matters. If you build an empire in the long run it will turn out to work against the national interest. Imperialism is not so much bad as dumb.

But the weakness of the blowback argument is that it depends on a prediction, to which one can respond, "well, maybe, then again maybe not." At one point Johnson writes, "In a sense, blowback is simply another way of saying that a nation reaps what it sows." But the Bible's "As thou sowest, even shall thou reap" (Galatians 6:7) doesn't refer to blowback destined to take place in this life; rather it is about punishment in the afterlife — a notion, agnostics would say, invented to comfort us for the fact that in this life, it is not at all certain that criminals will be duly punished. There have been plenty of people who sowed havoc and died peacefully in bed, and plenty of cases where U.S. policies have sowed havoc in other countries without the United States suffering appreciable blowback. If, for example, annexing land as the spoils of war is always followed by blowback that outweighs the gains, where was the blowback that outweighed the gains the United States received when it acquired California, Arizona, and New Mexico in the Mexican war? Johnson is to some extent aware of this problem, and revises the notion.

Although the term originally applied only to the unintended consequences for *Americans*, of American policies, there is every reason to widen its meaning. Whether, for example, any unintended consequences of the American policies that fostered and then heightened the economic collapse of Indonesia in 1997 ever blow back to the United States, the unintended consequences for Indonesians have been staggering levels of suffering, poverty, and loss of hope.

Certainly, the argument that an empire will bring suffering upon itself is made more palatable by adding that it will bring suffering to its victims, but this is no longer properly called blowback. The misery visited upon the Indonesians mentioned in Johnson's example is part of the blow forward, not the blowback. And the reasons one should be concerned about the former are very different from the reasons one should be concerned about the latter.

An Empire of Bases

IN HIS LATEST BOOK, JOHNSON expands blowback, as the title indicates, to "the sorrows of empire." These sorrows, he writes, are of four types. First, empire will bring about "a state of perpetual war, leading to more terrorism against Americans..." Second, Americans will see their democratic form of government and their rights as citizens eaten away, as the executive transforms itself from a "branch" of government to something like a military government in its own right. Third, the "already well-shredded principle of truthfulness" will be further damaged by never ending war propaganda. And fourth, more and more resources will be transferred from education and social services into military adventures, and eventually the country will go bankrupt.

None of these arguments is new, but all are terribly important, and Johnson writes about them with the eloquence and passion of a person who is genuinely fearful for the future of his country. But notice that these "sorrows," like the original blowback, have again been defined within the context of national interest. This does not mean that Johnson is wrong or that the argument should not be made. On the contrary he is right: all of these things are likely to happen — are in fact happening right now — and all Americans should be made aware of that. There is nothing wrong with making the argument from interest. It is powerful and persuasive, and has the potential to make the most inveterate patriots back off from empire when they see that it will destroy their country. Certainly it is the first (though not the last) argument to be made to those people who say, "Em-

pire? So what?" But it is an argument that will be persuasive only to Americans and a few of their loyal friends abroad. To the victims, blowback may be the only aspect of the empire that they like.

But perhaps this is to interpret Johnson too narrowly. As I pointed out above, while he sets out his theoretical position in terms of national interest, in the narrative part of both books, to his credit, he doesn't stick to that, but rather expresses a natural outrage and sorrow at the horrors brought by the empire to peoples around the world. Moreover, there is another aspect to the blowback argument, inherent in it but not adequately expressed in its CIA definition. Johnson makes frequent references to the Roman Empire, but reading his books took my mind back rather to the tale of the demise of the Athenian Empire as told by Thucydides, and in particular, to his account of the Melian Dialogue. Recalling that story may help us to see a deeper aspect of the phenomenon of blowback.

During the war between Athens and Lacedaemon, the Athenians sent an expedition to seize the small island of Melos in the Aegean Sea. After making their landing, the Athenians invited the representatives of Melos to join them in a dialogue, and explain (if they could) why Athens, with its vastly superior power, ought not to destroy them and take the island. And in this dialogue, the Athenians specified, sentimental arguments about loyalty and right were to be disallowed, and the discussion limited to interest only, "since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only a question between equals in power, while the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must."

Here the victims are forced to explain to their assailants why they should not be victimized, arguing solely on the basis of the assailants' self-interest. Their response, as set down by Thucydides, is powerful and brave. They urge the Athenians to recognize that from the standpoint of their own interest, they "should not destroy what is our common protection, the privilege of being allowed in danger to invoke what is fair and right . . ."

Why should they not? The Athenians have

asserted that “fair and right” do not apply to the powerful. Against this, the Melians remind the Athenians of the factor of fortune: today you are so strong that it seems there is no one in the world who can oppose you, but this will not last forever. Given the uncertainty of fortune, the day will surely come when you are in the weaker position, and you will wish that you could invoke the principles of fair and right to protect yourself, and you will sorely regret that you yourself have taken actions to destroy them. To this the Athenians reply with amused contempt, “This...is a risk that we are prepared to take.”

The dialogue soon breaks off, and the battle begins. As they knew they would, the Athenians soon win, after which they “put to death all the grown men they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves.”

Read by itself, it seems as though the Melians, in their position of weakness, were desperately grasping at straws. In the context of the entire history, however, they are cast as seers. For it was immediately after this that the Athenians began planning their invasion of Syracuse, the adventure that brought their empire to its miserable and humiliating end, of which Thucydides writes,

They were beaten at all points and altogether; all that they suffered was great; they were destroyed, as the saying is, with a total destruction, their fleet, their army — everything was destroyed, and few out of many returned home.

This is a tale about hubris; it is also a tale about blowback. It is not simply that the Athenians vainly overestimated their strength; it was actually their great strength that *created* the force that defeated them. The huge Syracusan army was raised because of the Athenian invasion. And it was their willingness to “destroy what is our common protection”; to destroy, that is, the fragile idea that one’s treatment even of foreigners should be “fair and right,” that gave their enemies special license to slaughter them without mercy in the final battle.

BLOWBACK IS NOT SIMPLY REVENGE or retaliation. The blowback attacks are made in the nihilistic space created by the nihilism of empire. America says, because of our overwhelming power there is no need for us to follow the rules, including international law. The result is not simply that America is exempted from the rules; rather it has destroyed the rules. In this sense, Johnson’s argument is similar to that of the Melians: Though in the intoxication of your present strength you may find it impossible to believe this, someday you will be very sorry that by your actions the rules have been destroyed, and are no longer there to protect you.

Everybody knows that Osama bin Laden began al Qaeda under the tutelage of the CIA, and that Saddam Hussein (like countless other brutal dictators) was long supported by military and diplomatic aid from the United States. But have we grasped what it means? It doesn’t only mean that the U.S. government bears moral responsibility for their crimes. It also means that the U.S. has been and is *creating* its own blowback. Blowback is America’s shadow, and in the “war against terrorism,” America is fighting its own shadow. And of course, the harder you fight against it, the greater the shadow grows. As Johnson argues, America’s empire and the “war against terrorism” are two sides of the same coin. So here we have a very persuasive argument, based on national interest, against empire. A war against your own shadow can never be won.

NOTES

1. Books reviewed in this essay: Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2004); and Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books., 2004).
2. I once tried to use one of Chomsky’s political essays in a first-year college English class in Japan. I found myself in the position of having to explain over and over, while the students regarded me with puzzled faces, “yes, that’s what he wrote, but what he means is the opposite. “Where he says, “the splendid U.S. policy,” he means “the terrible U.S. policy.” Where he says, “this is American justice,” he means “this is American injustice.” And so on.

Condom Confusion

JASON CLENDENEN

“THE USE OF CONDOMS and the education on use of condoms is to promote large rubber companies,” is just one quote given at a sex-education seminar for high school girls held in Batouri, Cameroon last November. Teaching math and physics at the local high school as a Peace Corps volunteer, I heard the same argument given by numerous Cameroonians as one of the many reasons that they did not like to use condoms. This time, however, I was considerably more disturbed because this falsehood was being taught to my students by Women’s Association for Peace in Africa (WAPA), a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), which was being funded by the U.S. government.

Batouri is a small city (around 20,000 inhabitants) in the East Province of Cameroon, the least developed province in the country (Batouri is about six hours from a paved road, for example). It is mostly a truck stop for loggers coming in from the rain forest and has something of a wild west feel because there is hardly a rule of law so far into the bush, and people tend to eat game animals, such as monkey and porcupine, at least as much as domesticated ones. There is no internet, only about half of the population has electricity, and probably 90 percent of families get their water from lowering a bucket into a well. It was in this setting that two of my fellow volunteers organized the sex-education seminar.

They believed that WAPA would give the girls from my school both the scientific knowledge and the life skills to protect themselves and

others from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies. For two days I canceled my tenth grade physics classes, postponing an end of term exam so that the girls could attend the seminar where it was discovered that the association promoted abstinence-only education. The information presented by WAPA, however, was not only pro-abstinence, but anti-condom; they used false and outdated information to promote their own ideas instead of the health of the students. WAPA presented as *myth* the following information: “the proper use of contraceptives will help lower STDs and pregnancy rates;” they also made the following statements: “Condoms offer no protection against papilloma virus (HPV) and is leading cause of cervical cancer [sic],” as well as “Condoms are unreliable against chlamydia.”

All of this can easily be seen as misinformation if you take a quick glance at the fact sheet for public health personnel of the Center for Disease Control titled *Male Latex Condoms and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, which gives the following information: “Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In addition, correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including discharge and genital ulcer diseases. While the effect of condoms in preventing human papilloma virus (HPV) infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer, an HPV-associated disease.” The association also stated that “sex education should take place when young people are older to protect their innocence,” which was brought to mind a few months later when the principal of our school announced eighth grade as having lost the most girls because of pregnancies.

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The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that Cameroon has an HIV/AIDS infection rate of about 12 percent, meaning that almost one out of every eight people there is infected with this deadly disease. The effective HIV/AIDS prevention programs elsewhere on the continent, such as in Uganda, stress condoms as a viable alternative to abstinence and fidelity; the World Health Organization (WHO) states that the success in Uganda was brought about in part by the increased focus on the use of condoms, which brought nationwide use from 7 percent to more than 50 percent in rural areas and 85 percent in urban areas; this has aided in the decline in the rate of HIV infection (from 21 percent in 1990 to 8 percent in 1998 among pregnant women under 20). The Cameroonian government itself has recently modeled its own program along these lines, teaching 'Abstinence, Fidelity, Condoms' throughout the country. The Peace Corps understands that education about the proper use of condoms is essential in combating HIV; all volunteers are given free condoms and trained on their proper use in order to protect themselves and others.

Health workers in Cameroon also know that teaching people about condoms is not enough to get them to actually use them: UNICEF reports that only 16 percent of women in Cameroon used a condom in their last high-risk sexual encounter, illustrating the scarcity of condom use in dangerous situations. There is much resistance to the use of condoms by the local population for many reasons, including the belief that condoms are not natural, and the fear that once again Africans are being taken advantage of by foreigners. The belief that condoms are not natural is often expressed by the analogy that having sex with a condom is like eating a fruit with the peel; it is also expressed by the fear that condoms cause cancer or are themselves infected with HIV. The fear of being used by foreigners is often expressed in the ideas that condoms are only sold to bring profits to overseas rubber companies, or that condoms were introduced to Africa to keep Africans from reproducing. This is the background in which health work-

ers must attempt to make a difference; more often than not the task is compounded by the fact that Cameroonian society is polygamous and a large segment of the population has multiple sexual partners.

Mr. Titus, a nurse at the government hospital in Batouri, was not happy with the education given at the seminar. When I spoke with him about it, he told me that "condoms are very useful in the fight against HIV," and that "girls should not be discouraged from using condoms." He himself had previously argued with one of the WAPA presenters about the effectiveness of abstinence and the use of condoms to prevent HIV. Melissa Horn, a health volunteer present at the seminar, was angry and worried by what happened at the event, saying "I had a hard time staying in my seat as an informed U.S. government health volunteer but finally we lost it and had to stand up and denounce what WAPA was teaching when they stated that condoms have microscopic holes that allow HIV and STDs to get by so don't even wear them, they are no use and might even increase you chance of disease." The Peace Corps Country Director, Robert Strauss, was also concerned with the information presented by the association and promised to speak with the U.S. Embassy concerning WAPA, an association that they helped fund.

One may wonder how it is that this organization, which uses false science to press its anti-condom agenda, is funded by our government. The State Department funds several local NGOs in Cameroon, including WAPA, to distribute scholarships to girls as well as to give seminars, mentoring, and peer-educator training under the Education for Development and Democracy Initiative. On the surface this would seem a good cause, except that at least one of the local NGOs, WAPA, is preaching against condoms. This is in line with the Bush administration's rules, as reported by the BBC, that at least one-third of AIDS funding going to Africa must be given to abstinence-only education programs that only allow contraception to be mentioned in terms of its failure rates to protect against pregnancy and STD

transmission. WAPA is giving seminars using a version of the Creating Love and Uplifting Esteem (CLUE 2000) curriculum created by the Pure Love Alliance, an organization associated with the Unification Church of Reverend Moon, commonly seen as a cult in the United States. The CLUE 2000 curriculum was briefly introduced to some schools in Chicago but quickly removed after public protest led by Jesse Jackson and his coalition.

A CURRICULUM SCORNE in the United States is being taught to young Cameroonian women with our government's financial support; not only is it not logical, but it is dangerous. The WHO states that abstinence "in most instances...[is] neither realistic nor desirable," but it is the best protection against STDs and pregnancy; this is not false science. However, to present incorrect information in order to attack the proven effectiveness of condoms in the fight against HIV and AIDS is nothing more than to play on the fears of Africans and push an abstinence-only ideology that directly works against the efforts of

many organizations to combat this epidemic. The Peace Corps, the CDC, the WHO, other health organizations, as well as the government of Cameroon recognize the importance of condoms in the fight against AIDS, but the U.S. government is working to undermine those efforts by financing organizations like WAPA that give miseducation to Africans. If this is how our government intends to help a continent devastated by disease, poverty, and war, then we should look closely at how compassionate the conservatives in the White House really are.

SOURCES

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UNICEF data (www.unicef.org/files/table4.pdf)

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The Offshore War

Outsourcing, Subcontracting, and Capitalist Restructuring

KIM MOODY

THE SEARCH FOR EVER-CHEAPER labor is nothing new to capitalism or, indeed, to history itself. But like the commodification of all things in general, under capitalism the search for cheaper labor grows over time, takes on new technology, reaches into the deepest crevices of the labor process, and spreads to the farthest corners of the earth. Its latest form is called “offshoring,” so new a piece of jargon that Word has it underlined in red.

In today's debate, the term refers primarily to the replacement of domestic information technology-related workers, above all in business, professional, and technical occupations, with labor located abroad. Although the outsourcing at home and abroad of working-class jobs has been going on for decades in manufacturing, the issue became the subject of radio and TV talk shows, Congressional debate, state legislative action, and presidential campaign rhetoric only when it began to hit highly paid professionals in occupations associated with digital technology. Few in the mainstream or the media noticed the lost call centers, at least until their neighborhood bank called them from Bangalore. Fewer still talked in recent years about the missing blue-collar jobs, at least until those rust belt regions dipped toward red-state status.

Now, however, the debate is on and it goes something like this: “Shifting routine computer programming, back-office, and call center jobs overseas does reduce the number of American jobs in those areas, but the cost savings generates new capital to finance the remarkable ingenuity of our economic system, to create new, higher-wage jobs

here in the United States,” says John Castellani of the Business Roundtable. “That’s the world we wished we lived in,” retorts CNN’s Lou Dobbs, a Republican turned populist in defense of the American “middle class.” “The problem is, there is absolutely no empirical evidence to support the statement. In fact, jobs lost are being replaced by lower-paying jobs,” concludes Dobbs.

It isn’t just the head of the Business Roundtable or other business leaders who argue this way. George W. Bush offered the same argument, while his chief economic advisor advises us to get used to it. “Outsourcing is just a new way of doing international trade,” argues Gregory Mankiw, chief of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors. This is not a lot of comfort given our experience with NAFTA and the World Trade Organization. Nevertheless, he elaborates, “We are very used to goods being produced abroad and shipped here on ships or planes. What we’re not used to is services being produced abroad and being sent here over the Internet or telephone wires.” And anyway, he continues, “I think outsourcing is a growing phenomenon, but it’s something that we should realize is probably good for the economy in the long run.” Dobbs, who proposed on CNN that Mankiw be fired, answered back: “Probably? It could be a probable negative. It certainly is if you’re one of the hundreds of thousands who’ve lost their jobs to outsourcing.”

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The popular debate is one of ideology (neoclassical economics) versus evidence. But it is also a matter of conflicting class interests. Castellani and Mankiw are sure the “economic system” will do well (in the long run) because of what the Roundtable leader told us, “the cost savings generates new capital.” In other words, this is all about accumulation, and in that effort evidence of negative impact on workers is irrelevant. No, negative affects on workers are central. To explore outsourcing and offshoring more deeply, let’s look at how capitalism transformed an old practice into a high tech, new, and, of course, global way of producing profits and accumulating capital.

Capitalism Transforms an Old Idea

THE IDEA OF BREAKING DOWN a production process into its constituent parts, separating the steps of the process, and placing them where they are cheapest is truly old. Historian M. I. Findlay noted how Xenophon, writing in the fourth century B.C., was amazed by the difference in the practice of rural craftsmen, who made entire products or even a variety of goods by themselves, and the practices of urban craftsmen. He wrote, “In large cities, however, . . . one man makes shoes for men, another for women, there are places even where one man earns a living just by mending shoes, another by cutting them out, another just by sewing the uppers together, while there is another who performs none of these operations but assembles the parts.” These ancient Greek artisans were not doing this under one roof, but in separate shops. The technical division of labor had been spatially broken up for efficiency to meet the demands of the larger urban market. But, as Findlay points out, this was limited production for a limited local and basically stagnant market. The specialized producers sold their products simply to make a living. In this atmosphere, one trade; i.e., specialty, is “enough to support a man.” (Findlay: 135-136)

Outsourcing is just a new way of doing international trade

There is no accumulation or profit.

This same idea of a spatially divided technical division of labor is reproduced in a different form in Medieval Europe. The “putting out” system was created to escape the confining rules of town and guild. T.S. Ashton described it in *The Industrial Revolution* as it evolved in Lancashire, “Suffice it to

say the central figure was a merchant, clothier, or linen draper, who employed putters-out to distribute materials, either direct to the scattered spinners and weavers, or to country manufacturers who, in turn, put it out in their own areas.” This was literally “farming out” work. Most of the spinners and weavers were peasant women or children. The peasant families that engaged in this production were not solely dependent on this work. Aside from the materials the “putters-out” distributed, the “capital” involved probably belonged to the peasants and had long been used to produce their own clothing. Such cash as changed hands most likely went right to the landlord. The merchant or draper made more money than in town, but there was no accumulation of capital, no advance in productivity. Indeed, the very cheapness of the labor stifled innovation. It was a stagnant system lacking as yet a mass market. Even according to Ashton, who tends to see putting-out as a prelude to the factory system, the mechanization of textile production did not come until the eighteenth century, over two centuries later. (Ashton: 33)

After capitalism emerged in England in the seventeenth century a new dynamic was created. Cash replaced obligations. Property took on its modern meaning, markets grew, and more and more peasants were separated from the land by the enclosures. By the eighteenth century the factory system arose to meet this growing domestic and international demand. Competition, the “imperative” of the market, to use Ellen Wood’s term, seeped into the pores of society and spread across

seas. It was Adam Smith's pin factory, rather than spatially separated production, that would exemplify the technical division of labor for much of capitalism's history. Still later, integrated mass production. Although in talking about mass production, it is important to bear in mind that elongated chains of suppliers were always present. In the aftermath of World War II and the growing strength of unions in the United States, industry began its journey out of town, down south, out west, and eventually abroad.

Mass production required a learning curve — autos were produced by hand before the assembly line. The divergence of textiles, an ancient industry with an international market, and off-the-rack clothing produced for a mass market only by the late nineteenth century, illustrate this point. Driven by national and international competition, by 1900 textiles had gone through several generations of mechanization and was produced efficiently in large mills. Mass-produced clothing, however, was newer and less susceptible to mechanization and still organized along craft lines — cutter, tailor, and sewer. In this industry cost cutting took the ancient route of a chain of subcontractors producing different phases in separate locations. But this was not feudalism. The workers down the production chain were workers dependent on wages, not peasants with alternative resources. The market was large, national, and highly competitive, encouraging the search for ever cheaper labor — ultimately in the worker's home. This system of subcontracting came to be called “sweating.”

In the last three decades, the rise of international competition in many lines of goods production spread “lean” production methods from Japan, where it was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, to the United States, Europe, and the world in the 1980s and 1990s. From the start, outsourcing was as central to lean production as just-in-time delivery of parts and continuous improvement in the workplace. Driven by international competition, this modification of mass production set off the rush for cheaper labor through subcontracting in industries that were fully mecha-

nized and technologically well developed. Indeed, it was the dramatic advances in transportation and communications that made the international production chains of lean production possible. Much of the outsourcing done by lean corporations was what is now called “near-sourcing,” the subcontracting of phases of production to firms or subsidiaries in near-by low wage countries — Mexico for the United States, Eastern Europe for Western Europe, China for the more developed Asian countries. It was this lean outsourcing that blazed the trail for the more recent, more publicized “offshoring” of information technology and business function services.

The Numbers, the Extent

OUTSOURCING HAS GROWN enormously from its primitive 1970s phase when manufacturing firms began contracting out functions like food service and cleaning. By the 1990s, it had taken on the mantra of management guru Tom Peters who said, “Do what you do best and outsource the rest.” Bill Gates, of course, not only built an empire on the practice, but now uses it as an excuse to resist unionization of his “perma-temps” by the Communication Workers of America's WashTech initiative. According to a 2002 survey of 410 “global executives” by Michael F. Corbett & Associates, not only are food service and maintenance contracted out by 75 percent or more of the firms represented; but so are 62 percent of manufactured components and mail facilities; 66 percent of legal services; 53 percent of payroll; 52 percent of Internet services; 46 percent of software; 45 percent of data processing; 41 percent of telemarketing; and so on. By no means all or even most this outsourcing is offshore or near-shore, but it is clear that outsourcing is widespread and growing.

The U.S. government does not measure domestic or international outsourcing as such. Most recent efforts to measure the extent of offshoring come from business consulting firms like Gartner, Inc., Forrester Research, Deloitte Research, and Global Insight, Inc. These outfits usually focus on service and information technology jobs. One

of the most frequently cited projections is Forrester's estimate that 3.3 million service jobs could go offshore by 2015. Gartner sees 500,000 information technology jobs lost by the end of 2004. Deloitte says 850,000 financial services jobs will move overseas in the next few years. Goldman Sachs estimates that a few hundred thousand jobs of all types could go abroad in the next 2 to 3 years. The sources for these projections are fed-

When offshoring became a political issue, most labor leaders knew just what to do: they contracted their hopes to the Democrats for \$150 million, much of it to go to get out the vote for John Kerry.

eral trade figures, surveys, and the database of the IT industry lobby, Information Technology Association of America (ITAA). Some are threaded through econometric models developed by these consulting firms. In other words, while there is some similarity in the estimates, these are mostly guesses.

In September, the Government Accountability (formerly Accounting) Office (GAO) got into the game using trade and foreign direct investment figures for producer service industries. The GAO is quick to warn that increases in the importation of such services, which are undeniable, do not necessarily reflect true "offshoring" in that these increases don't necessarily replace existing U.S. jobs. This misses the point that the outsourced work might have been sited in the United States, the impact of which is not much different in the long run than the outsourcing of current work. In any case, some interesting facts emerge from the GAO data.

To put things in perspective, imports of Business, Professional and Technical (BPT) services,

which cover most IT services, are less than \$40 billion and remain tiny in comparison to the more than \$1.2 trillion value of imported goods. Nevertheless, they are growing. While BPT imports were relatively flat in the first half of the 1990s, they took off in the mid-1990s, growing from \$21.2 billion in 1997 to \$37.5 billion in 2002, an increase of 76.8 percent. This accounts for a little over half of imported private services other than travel and transport-related services. Using a narrower measure, "unaffiliated" imports as opposed to those from subsidiaries abroad, it appears that the bulk of these BPT imports come from developed nations not developing countries. Britain accounts for 19.3 percent, Canada 24.3 percent and India a mere 1.9 percent. While this is not a measure of all BPT services, it certainly runs counter to the picture usually painted in the off-shore war.

The GAO also looks at foreign direct investment (FDI). From 1999 to 2002 total U.S. FDI grew by 25 percent to \$1.5 trillion. About two-thirds of this went to Europe, Canada, and Japan, and another 8 percent to the Asian tigers. China received a tiny 1 percent and India even less than 1 percent, again running counter to the usual story. The lion's share of this FDI is in manufacturing, not information technology services, which according to the GAO figures account for about 7 percent of the total. Employment by multinational corporations (MNCs) also runs against the grain of the offshoring debate. According to the GAO, employment abroad by U.S.-based MNCs ran just under 10 million employees in 2001. As a proportion of the total employment of these MNCs, however, overseas workers dropped from 40 percent in 1999 to 29 percent in 2001. This, of course, may just be the temporary impact of the 2001 recession with MNCs cutting overseas operations.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics chimed in, suggesting that 13,000 jobs were lost to offshoring in 2003. But this figure and the similar figure of 4,633 for the first quarter of 2004 were part of its Mass Layoff Survey which covers only workers in establishments of 50 or more employees with layoffs of 50 or more, so that even the GAO finds

them too small to be accurate.

The most useful study to date is that issued in October 2004 by Kate Bronfenbrenner of Cornell and Stephanie Luce of the University of Massachusetts. They tracked the media for reports of companies actually moving work abroad in the first quarter of 2004. Their projection of the total number of jobs outsourced in 2004 is 406,000 including both services and manufacturing. Since this includes manufacturing, it indicates a much lower level of service and information technology offshoring than the consultant firms typically project. But it also shows a 100 percent increase in overseas outsourcing since 2001 when they did a similar study. Because their study is more focused than the GAO's trade and FDI data, they show a different pattern for offshore outsourcing.

Bronfenbrenner and Luce focus on outsourcing from the United States to Asia and Latin America, so that their figures on Europe and elsewhere are, as they say, a "byproduct" of their research focus, a fact that probably understates the role of developed countries as both points of origin and sites of offshoring. Nevertheless, of the 255 U.S. firms that reported making production shifts in the first quarter of 2004, 69 were to Mexico, 58 were to China, 31 to India, 39 to the rest of Asia, and 35 to the rest of Latin America. Europe hardly figured in at all. Furthermore, unlike their earlier findings, where firms tended to make a shift to a single country, in 2004 121 of these companies made multiple shifts often to more than one country. They also show that production shifts tend to be industry and geographically specific. For example, 100 percent of relocation to Mexico and 97 percent of those to China are in manufacturing, whereas 66 percent of those to India are non-manufacturing service jobs. The U.S. companies making these shifts are large, publicly-traded corporations with annual revenues of \$10 billion or more employing about 40 thousand or more workers. Significantly, with private sector union density down to about 8 percent, fully 39 percent of the jobs being shifted out of the United States were from unionized facilities. And this brings us to

the politics of offshoring.

The Politics of Outsourcing

AS EXPECTED, the AFL-CIO opposes offshoring. In March at Bal Harbor, the federation issued a paper denouncing the loss of jobs from outsourcing, first in manufacturing and now in high tech work. It rejected "flawed trade and tax policies" and made proposals of its own. In September, addressing the crowd of 50,000 union members outside the Republican National Convention, John Sweeney cited as one reason to support John Kerry for president was that, "Our good manufacturing jobs are being shipped overseas, and now they're being followed by white collar jobs." But what to do? It has been decades since U.S. labor outsourced its political aspirations to the Democratic Party. So, when offshoring became a political issue in 2004, most labor leaders knew just what to do. They contracted their hopes to the Democrats for \$150 million, much of it to go to get out the vote for John Kerry in key battleground states. That's a lot of dough and in some states where union density is higher than average, though nowhere near that 39 percent of outsourced jobs, it worked.

But what would they have gotten for this money and effort? Kerry let it be known (when addressing factory workers) that you couldn't stop outsourcing, but you could give tax breaks to those firms that keep jobs here and you could extend Trade Adjustment Assistance to white collar workers. The latter is a good idea, but the former was also George W. Bush's promise at least for research work. Kerry also promised to eliminate the current tax break to companies sending work abroad and to require telemarketers to reveal their location.

Naturally, Bush's plan was even worse than Kerry's. In addition, he also proposed a tax break for those who repatriate their profits. This sounds like another incentive to outsource since the profits made abroad are likely to be above average *and* tax-free. His administration seemed caught by surprise on the matter of offshoring. The administration's Council of Economic Advisers

insisted: “when a good or service is produced more cheaply abroad, it makes more sense to import it than to make or provide it domestically.” One Bush administration spokesperson on this topic, Philip Bond, told the information technology industry’s lobby organization, the ITAA, we shouldn’t stop offshoring or “embrace isolation.” Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao dismissed the issue saying, “the anxiety belies the numbers” and anyway nine million Americans work for foreign companies in the United States. In October 2004, Bush even signed a bill that specifically allows the federal government to award offshore contracts. He signed it only after Democrats agreed to drop a clause that would have prevented most agencies from outsourcing work that would go abroad. The problem is the Kerry plan wouldn’t have done much to confront the problem either.

Tax breaks for job retention are generally a failure. In New York City, for example, companies routinely take the incentive and fail to retain or hire the promised workers. In the mid-to-late 1980s, of those firms receiving retention incentives, 38 percent created no jobs and 45 percent fewer than promised. Nothing was done and more followed. These programs are hard to enforce and typically have no serious teeth. The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program has also been largely a failure. Only about 30 percent of those affected by outsourced manufacturing jobs get the benefits because it is hard to prove a direct link between the lost job and investment abroad. You not only need to change the tax code seriously, but TAA needs a fundamental overhaul. And just who will do that? Like the promise-breaking companies, the Democrats took the money and ran.

Today, even government sends work abroad. It is estimated that outsourced state and local government IT work will go from \$10 billion in 2003 to \$23 billion in 2008. Most of this is still in the United States, but some is going overseas. Indiana’s Department of Workforce Development, the state’s employment service, award a \$10 million contract to an Indian firm to update its computer system — although the Indian workers will be brought to Indiana. In 2003, Connecticut reduced

its IT workforce by 20 percent and considered offshoring some or all of the work. Afraid of opposition the state’s Information Officer said “We do things under the radar.”

Naturally, there is a political backlash to all of this. As of last summer, 37 states had legislation pending to prevent offshoring of public sector jobs. In May 2004, Tennessee passed a law giving preferential treatment to bids from U.S. firms, but not banning offshoring altogether. In September 2004, California Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed three bills designed to limit offshoring of state jobs. Most of these bills will fail and those that pass are likely to be ineffective. Capital in search of cheap labor is like water seeking the sea, it will find the crevices and given time turn them in to grand canyons.

It is worth mentioning that outsourcing in general has its own propaganda uses. For example, as *Labor Notes*’ Parker and Slaughter pointed out a decade ago, the high productivity figures produced by “lean” outfits like the New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI) were in part the result of outsourcing work to other plants, hence fewer workers producing more at NUMMI. Both Clinton and Bush like to claim they have reduced the size of government. Indeed, official federal government employment shrank from 2.8 million in the early 1990s to 2.4 million by 2002. What is not mentioned is that federal government’s procurement of information technology work; i.e., outsourcing, rose by almost 50 percent to \$150 billion from 1999 to 2003, with a growing amount going abroad. Altogether, the federal contracts with over 12 million people, many performing tasks that could have been done by federal workers. The only thing shrinking in this picture is the government’s unionized workforce.

Restructuring and Reaction

THE PICTURE THAT EMERGES from Bronfenbrenner and Luce’s study not only shows a continuation of the capital movements of the last decade or two, but reveals something relatively new. Outsourcing abroad tends to have a specific pattern. As mentioned above, China and Mexico are sites

of manufacturing, whereas India leans heavily toward services, almost certainly information technology services. Secondly, it is not only U.S. firms that outsource internationally. According to Forrester's estimate Europe will export 1.2 million jobs by 2015, heavily from the United Kingdom. Bronfenbrenner and Luce also see large shifts in production from Europe. The companies involved in moving work to China, for example, are, like their U.S. counterparts, large ones with an average annual revenue of \$15.7 billion and total average employment of 56,816 workers. This pattern is not new.

What is new or at least newer is that outsourcing comes from everywhere, including firms in Asia, Latin America, and the rest of the world. Furthermore, companies are, as mentioned before, making multiple shifts to different locations. Bronfenbrenner and Luce describe it like this: "production transfers often involve multiple shifts occurring along complex networks of production and corporate ownership, sometimes taking place over the course of several years." Combined with the estimate that offshoring has doubled since 2001, a picture of accelerating capital motion on a world scale appears real.

At the same time, it is important to keep a few things in mind. First, offshoring is still a tiny percentage of the workforce, at 0.03 percent of the civilian workforce or 0.04 percent of the employed workforce. It is still heavily focused on manufacturing, despite all the publicity about IT outsourcing to India. What is perhaps most important from a strategic point of view, is that outsourcing abroad still follows a specific pattern of "near-shoring" in manufacturing. That is, U.S. manufacturers outsource to Mexico, Europeans to Eastern Europe and, more recently, Asians to China.

This pattern points toward a revival of the sort of cross-border organizing and solidarity begun in the early 1990s, and then largely abandoned. These geographically manageable production chains offer unions an opportunity, admittedly a long range one, to aid in the organization of these offshore plants and stabilize these indus-

tries to some extent. Because the companies doing this outsourcing tend to be large, highly visible ones disproportionately unionized, they form a starting point for such cross-border organizing.

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In addition, these are precisely the types of corporations that are highly vulnerable to strikes due to their just-in-time delivery networks, as the General Motors strikes of the 1990s showed. Capital follows these economic lines of least resistance because of the transportation that links near-shore sites to final assembly site in the United States. Labor needs to do the same. That is not likely to happen without big changes in organized labor — change within, growth without.

While one can exaggerate the country's red-state-blue-state divide, the growing forces of reaction are real and they are making headway in the working class and not just among religious fundamentalists. The fact that 33 percent of union members voted for Bush attests to the failure of the unions to educate and mobilize their members beyond the false promise of a Democratic Party salvation. This proportion is not particularly worse than the whole post-1964 record, but arguably the alternative was. Furthermore, outsourcing, offshoring, and job loss in general have been issues in moving some working class people to the right — largely because no clear alternative came from labor or the Democrats. How have we arrived at the point where Republican nationalist Lou Dobbs is point man in the fight to save jobs, while John Sweeney and Andy Stern offer little more than

pat statements on this question?

WHAT THIS REALLY SHOWS is that it is way past the time for labor and the social movements to bring political action in-house and begin providing an alternative view of politics and society. For one brief moment in 1999 in Seattle labor and the movements seemed to offer an alternative vision. Then it was 9/11 and war. Perhaps if labor and the antiwar movement took on the issue of jobs and globalization the vision could be heard again. Seattle, where are you now that we need you?

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The Roots of Poverty

MILTON FISK

IT IS COMMON TO try to understand poverty by defining it through income. This has the effect of limiting our ability to deal with poverty at a practical level. We respond to poverty through programs that are supposed to either increase income for those at the lowest levels or enhance their opportunities for earning more. These programs are important not just for reducing the misery of the poor but also for helping a certain number escape poverty. Despite these programs, the production of poverty continues creating a flow of new recruits to the ranks of the poor.

Income is admittedly an important consideration here, but it is not as important as the circumstances making for the production of poverty. It is difficult, though, to get recognition of the way poverty comes about, since this ties poverty to a central feature of our economic system. Instead, we get talk about redistributive measures favoring the poor through direct benefits as well as capacitation programs. We introduce tax credits for them as well as housing subsidies, free health care, and training to make them more flexible in the job market.

Of course, those not wishing to distort markets for labor and services will contest all such measures. Those who wish to mitigate poverty feel compelled to do battle with these opponents. The effect on the issue of poverty is to entrench the narrower focus on redistribution. Even if the defense of support for the poor is successful despite the attacks by market purists, the system continues producing poverty.

Poverty and Jobs

WHAT THEN IS THE way the system produces poverty? To answer this question we need to start

with a more defensible idea of poverty. This means trying to avoid identifying poverty with low income or even undeveloped human potential. These ideas focus our attention too narrowly on the poor person as an individual. We need to look, instead, in the direction of the relationship the poor person has to salient features of his or her surroundings. Then what stands out is the kind of treatment the poor person experiences. With this in mind, we can think of poverty as a kind of relatedness rather than as a state of the poor person him or herself.

There is a negative side to the kind of relatedness that is poverty. At least in modern poverty, the surrounding system rejects the poor person. Being treated as excluded, unwanted, superfluous, or expendable is the general form of this rejection. In many cases, the rejection is for the long term, but more often, it is intermittent rejection. Moreover, there are various kinds of exclusion, but poverty is an exclusion of a special kind. The surrounding system rejects the poor person specifically for participation in the tasks that bring people together to satisfy their needs.

Of course, it hurts deeply for fellow humans to view one as superfluous in the effort of cooperating to satisfy needs. However, there is a thought that can abate the pain of this exclusion. It is that what is responsible for one's being made superfluous is the system people have let themselves live under rather than the vindictiveness of fellow humans. This thought is far from a groundless

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rationalization of the pain of exclusion. The system achieves what it considers progress by constantly rejecting as superfluous many of those willing to work within it.

To give concreteness to this notion of poverty, the notion of superfluity it employs cannot remain that of a superfluity as regards tasks in general. It has to be a notion of superfluity as regards jobs in the sense of wage work. After all, we

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are talking here about poverty in today's society, which is dominantly capitalist. Wage work is an essential trait of this society. Rather than linking poverty primarily to income or to capacitation, the proposal here is to link it to jobs in the sense of wage work.

It would be too simple to say that the poor are those without jobs, since we know that, at least in a country like the United States, the majority of the poor at a given time has employment. This employment is, though, episodic rather than long term. The reasons for this are various. Earning too little to pay the bills, an employee may quit to look for a higher paying job. Having worked long enough to qualify for health benefits or for a wage increase, an employee may lose his or her job to make way for a new hire. Or being late or missing on several days in order to take care of family needs, an employee is dismissed for absenteeism. The rejection that characterizes poverty is then associated with frequent or long-term unemployment.¹

Referring to unemployment is only a first step toward explaining how the system produces poverty. One also needs to refer to the way unemployment arises in the economy. An economy that

aims simply at satisfying needs can avoid unemployment. As workers become more productive in such an economy, they can reduce their work times without reducing their standard of living. One avoids having to exclude people from the work process and its products. Hence, one avoids poverty in the sense adopted here of being superfluous in the system of wage work.

However, the world's dominant economic system is quite different. For, among its features are profits and competition. Corporate units that compete successfully will make profits and will invest at least some of them to increase the capital assets they use in production. To insure it will continue to compete successfully, a corporate unit will invest some of its profits in capital assets that increase the productivity of its work force. Pursuing growth in capital assets through competition tends, then, to lead to increasing productivity. This commonly means getting a given amount of product or service with fewer worker hours. However, since different goods and services are hard to compare except in terms of their economic values, it is best to think of increasing productivity as getting more value added to the product or service by each hour of work devoted to it. With higher productivity, a corporate unit can hope to undersell its competitors. In many industries, such as auto and agriculture in the United States, productivity has zoomed ahead thereby reducing the need for employees, even in the face of increased demand.

In *Capital*, Marx elaborated these links between capitalism, wage work, productivity, unemployment, and poverty.² His view stands in clear contrast with the view that poverty is a lack of something in the poor person, either of adequate income or of capacitation in areas vital for life. For him, it is the rejection by the system of increasing productivity through competition that is the root of poverty. We must start with this act of rejection of the poor by the surrounding system. Then we can view low income or lack of training as consequences of this action. The importance of Marx's view of poverty is that it gives us a glimpse of a feature of the capitalist system that produces poverty, namely its relentless increase in produc-

tivity. There will be fluctuations, of course, in this increase, so the important thing is that there should be a secular increase. In prosperous times when demand is great, poverty falls despite the surge in productivity; in times of recession when demand is slack, poverty rises, despite the interruption of investment for increasing productivity, based on of the high level of productivity already reached. These fluctuations in poverty leave untouched the basic role of rising productivity in generating poverty.

Being Superfluous

THERE ARE TWO WAYS that rising productivity produces poverty. The dominant way is through closing off opportunities for employment at a living wage for those who do not yet get it. The secondary way is through the loss of employment at a higher wage. Taking the two ways together, the effect is that rising productivity closes off opportunities for workers at the bottom to advance while it enhances opportunities for workers higher up to suffer a reversal. This double effect comes through a single mechanism — an increase in productivity making some workers superfluous for meeting a given level of demand.

The just mentioned dominant way of producing poverty accounts for the fact that around the world, the pool of people denied opportunities for work at a living wage has become enormous.³ The root fact here is that rising productivity tends to slow down the need for more hands and minds. People are leaving different areas of non-wage activity, such as schooling, homemaking, and subsistence farming only to enter the growing informal work sector or at best poverty-level wage work.

The secondary way mentioned accounts for the fact that others are coming into poverty, not just from the direction of non-wage work but also from downsizing due to productivity increases where there is already wage work. As workers drop from their old jobs to new ones, many of them stop their fall short of falling into jobs at poverty wages. Though saving themselves from poverty, their fall to a middle level can aggravate the crowd-

ing in the labor market already created there by rising productivity at this middle level. This forces other workers, who were already at this level, downward to poverty-level wages. Downsizing in response to productivity gains creates a cascade of human potential to a pool of poverty below.

As regards the production of poverty, it does not matter whether the productivity increases come through innovative technology or through speeding up the pace of work. Which way a firm chooses to increase it will depend on its circumstances. In a firm that pays good wages, there is often an effort to win out over its competitors through increases in productivity by technological changes. It may not be able to compete by speed up or by lowering wages since labor of the kind it needs may be in short supply and able to mount an effective resistance against such measures. In contrast, a firm in a sector where the norm is low wages may be able to compete successfully through going to even lower wages. In addition to lowering wages, it may adopt speed up to compete better. It is less likely to try to raise productivity through technology since, in low-wage sectors, doing so often presents serious challenges. Making beds in hotels and emptying wastebaskets from offices remain labor-intensive. Here poverty comes from a race to the bottom with wages.

However, there is another familiar scenario for firms that pay good wages and compete through increasing productivity by new technology. Such firms often turn their new technology to use in a low wage area of the world as well in order to begin to compete through lower wages and sometimes speed up. These areas tend to have an abundant supply of people trying to get into wage work, since their traditional methods of production no longer sustain them. There is little chance that all of these potential workers can find employment, since the new methods of production are more productive and hence demand less labor. Those who do find employment will often get poverty wages as well as an excessive pace of work. The resulting poverty traces back across the world to the incentive high wages gave to increasing productivity.

In these various ways, increasing productivity in a competitive economy makes workers superfluous and hence poor. Henry Mayhew, the great nineteenth century observer of the London poor, spoke of the “superfluity of labourers” in the different trades. His estimate was that half of the superfluous were partially employed and the other half unemployed throughout the year.⁴ Those whose potential becomes superfluous are unemployed, either frequently or for the long term, in the competitively driven system of productivity increases. This is not to say that the types of jobs the poor perform are unnecessary to the running of the system. It is only to say that from time to time some low-wage earners get pushed out of the jobs the system requires.

Being superfluous, whether frequently or for the long term, to the broad social task of generating the profits to be invested in increasing productivity is not an impersonal economic condition that is distinct from the personal misery of poverty. The economic condition of being superfluous is, as noted earlier, a rejection of the poor by the economic system, and like any rejection, it impacts one personally as a failure of recognition. In this regard, liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez notes, “So what do we mean by ‘poor’? I do not think there is any good definition, but we come close to it by saying that the poor are non-persons, the *in-significant*, those who do not count in society...”⁵ The poor are not recognized for their being willing to work for a living, for having a certain range of abilities, and for having needs others share. Instead, they are rejected as superfluous, periodically or for the long term, to the system of competitively increasing production. This non-recognition becomes the form in which the misery of the poor — the poor housing, the desperation, and the inadequate health care — exists. To say a worker is superfluous as regards the market in wage labor tells us that his or her misery is the kind that comes with having to stand aside while others get positive recognition. The poor do not experience the substantive misery of poverty as an isolated fact but as a misery whose form is the non-recognition involved in being su-

perfluous in the market in wage labor.

The Productivity View

IT IS A STRAIGHTFORWARD matter to apply our view that poverty is rooted in productivity to a single uniform nation. Suppose though there are nations with different forms of economy. How, if at all, does it apply then? Or suppose there are regions or nations in which basic wages are much lower than elsewhere. Our view of poverty may not apply to each region or nation separately. But if not, how do we link them so it can apply to them together?

First, we take the case of different forms of economy. It is vital to emphasize that only in capitalist societies does the misery of poverty appear in the form of the non-recognition involved in being superfluous for the labor market. In other epochs and in different societies, the misery of the poor has different forms. A common theme, though, is some version of non-recognition that gives form to the substantive misery of poverty.

In precapitalist Europe, there was little incentive to increase productivity so long as lords were able to reproduce their lifestyles from their domains, as burghers were able to live and eat well from trade, and as peasants were able to subsist on their plots. Crises were rooted in growing scarcity rather than abundant production. When scarcity came through drought, war, or pestilence, the poor were not recognized as sharers of the remaining resources, while nobles could maintain their lifestyles from their lands and burghers could draw on resources in municipal warehouses. To maintain their consumption, the higher orders in society dominated the lower orders, which included legions of the poor. To protect municipal reserves, towns passed laws to expel peasants fleeing rural famine. Braudel records the case of Troyes, a French town that at one point in the sixteen century gave each of its starving and lice ridden intruders a loaf of bread and a piece of silver while telling them not to return before the next grain harvest.⁶

What though are we to make of poverty in postcapitalist societies? In postcapitalist Cuba, the low productivity it shared with other postcapitalist

countries — whatever its causes — guaranteed that there would be scarcity in basics. With the victory of the Cuban revolution, its leaders vigorously attacked the “sub-human poverty” inherited from before by providing the poor with housing, clinics, water, inside toilets and cooking facilities, electricity, and schools. After that, and before the dollarization of the Cuban economy in the mid-1990s, which led to dollars from remittances from abroad playing a significant role in the demand for scarce consumables, Cuba had a distribution of many resources weighted in the direction of officials and of those chosen for distinction in work. Due to low productivity, equal distribution of resources such as adequate housing, a variety of foods, well-fitting apparel, furniture, transportation, and top health care simply was not possible. Those not recognized as full equals in this sort of distribution were the many poor. They were the ones with little political recognition rather than, as in capitalism, those deemed superfluous in a wage-labor market.⁷

Now we turn to the second case, that of wage differences. Poverty has increased in recent years not just by downsizing in enterprises belonging to a sector that has uniformly increased its productivity but also by driving out low-productivity enterprises from a sector in which high productivity is becoming common. Major examples of this second trend are common in the so-called developing economies. In India after the neoliberal reforms of 1991, farmers whose subsidies were cut and whose products could not compete with imports left their plots to flock into urban slums.⁸ The cumulative result is the creation of millions of what we may call “latent workers.” They have yet to enter the modern labor force but their potential for entering it depresses the labor market. They are on their way out of a labor force in a less productive sector without having made a complete transition into the labor force of a more productive sector.

Latent workers become, then, superfluous due to two increases in productivity. They leave their traditional jobs in sectors in their national economy due to a global increase in productivity in those sectors. Yet the new and more productive

parts of their nation's economy cannot possibly increase the demand for jobs fast enough to absorb all the latent workers.

We now want to connect these productivity increases that affect latent workers to poverty where wages are higher. Some of the poverty in the higher-wage part of the world traces back to capital flight to the low-wage part of the world. When corporations leave a high-wage part of the world to produce in a low-wage part, they leave behind conditions that contribute to poverty. One reason for this is that those hoping to move out of poverty wages will tend to have less opportunity for doing so since better paying jobs vanished with no guarantee of offsetting their loss by creating stable, living-wage jobs elsewhere in the economy. Poverty coming about in this way does not seem to be due to increasing productivity but to the comparative wage advantage of low-wage countries. If this is correct, then the productivity view of poverty does not apply here.

It is easy, though, to show that this failure is only apparent. We just saw that one could not explain poverty in a high-wage country associated with capital flight by linking it directly to productivity increases. What we ignored, though, was the possibility of an indirect linkage going through the low-wage country. Productivity increases in the high-wage country can, when transferred to the low-wage country, undermine traditional jobs and create a large pool of latent workers. Mechanized agriculture would have this effect on small-plot farmers. With a large pool to choose from, employers will hire latent workers at low wages. This will attract outside investment in high-productivity processes that trace back to productivity gains in the high-wage country. This investment will be unable to absorb all the latent workers, insuring that there will still be low-wage labor. So, the poverty in a high-wage country that is due to capital flight has its roots in productivity increases in the host low-wage country.

Unemployment and Low Wage Employment

THERE ARE STILL objections to be handled, but

this time they are of a more formal nature. The first introduces the case of unemployment without misery, and the second concerns the reverse case of employment with misery. How does our employment-based concept of poverty handle these cases? Are they exceptions to poverty as superfluity?

The first objection concerns efforts to im-

Poverty has increased in recent years not just by downsizing in enterprises belonging to a sector that has uniformly increased its productivity but also by driving out low-productivity enterprises from a sector in which high productivity is becoming common.

prove life for the unemployed. If being poor is being superfluous in the labor market, then we seem faced with a paradox. For, it will follow that, when state welfare keeps the unemployed from want, they remain poor. The unemployed in some European countries have been able to live off munificent unemployment insurance, and in some places, they, like their employed neighbors, also enjoyed socially supported health care, childcare, family allowances, and housing. The paradox for the superfluity view of poverty is that the truly substantive feature of poverty — the misery of want as regards basics — disappears despite unemployment. Moreover, with generous welfare benefits, the lowest wage people are willing to work for increases significantly.

This supposed paradox of poverty without misery ignores an important feature of the concept of poverty. Recall that where there is poverty the non-recognition involved in being superfluous in the job market is the form in which the misery resulting from not having the basics for

life is experienced. Far from being a generic non-recognition, it is rather a non-recognition that is not separate from that misery. With non-recognition in the labor market as its form, this misery is different from that of the political prisoner, the fasting hermit, and the medieval vagabond. They may all lack the basics but each experiences this lack under a different form. In the concept of poverty, one cannot neglect either the form of non-recognition or the substance of misery. It is, though, precisely the substantive misery of being without the means to satisfy basic needs that is done away with in the case of unemployment mitigated by comprehensive welfare measures. For this reason, the concept of poverty does not apply here.

This might seem to indicate that there is a way of eradicating poverty by state distributions of welfare. Yet at the outset, I indicated that understanding the roots of poverty would rule out such a solution. The roots of poverty are, I have claimed, in competitively driven increases in productivity. The question is, then, Can a system of unemployment without misery be anything more than a fleeting respite from poverty?

Powerful forces would be waiting to undermine this system. Due to the high threshold for wages at which people will take a job, employers would lose the chance to make a profit by putting the unemployed to work. To give them that chance, which they would need in a competitive international economy, the state would have to reduce welfare spending and, with it, the threshold for wages at which people will take a job.⁹ Within the framework of these considerations, the effort to reject this system of unemployment without misery would become irresistible. The ideology of the free market, including that for labor, would be linked with the reality of falling profits as arguments for ending this system.

So it was that, with other nations having made their neoliberal reforms, Germany faced no massive resistance to reducing its ample unemployment benefits in the early twenty-first century. Unemployment without misery no longer appears as one among various feasible alternatives for capitalism. Rather, it appears as an exceptional arrange-

ment that was destined to cover only a brief span of capitalist history.

The second objection concerns employment with misery, which reverses the case of unemployment without misery just considered. If poverty implies either frequent or long-term unemployment, then in the present case there is no poverty. In this case, though, we assume that some of the steady employment is at wages low enough to leave workers in a wretched condition usually associated with poverty. Their employers would have balked at hiring more workers at living wages — wages sufficient for living without assistance from charity or the state — though they are content to hire them regularly at considerably lower wages.¹⁰ Often, employers would hire more people if they could hire them at lower wages. The possibilities of regular employment increases as the wage barrier to employment is set lower and lower. This makes possible the misery of poverty without the rejection by and non-recognition in the labor market. Does this not show that we were wrong to make poverty depend on unemployment?

We were, in fact, right. The reason is that by itself labor at below a living wage is unsustainable. There have to be means of supplementing those low wages to avoid incapacitating the workers who earn them. If they do not earn enough to get the basics, then they will gradually become physically or mentally unfit for work along with losing their capacity to bring up a new generation of workers. Since long-term employment with misery cannot be sustained, it does not offer an objection to our view of poverty. What we have instead is a worker's short-term employment with misery followed by that worker's unemployment due to incapacitation. This is perfectly compatible with our view.

Moreover, low-wage labor will not simply wait until inadequate resources drain its capacities. It has additional choices. It will exercise these choices to make the corrective responses that avoid misery. We have to assume that the low-wage worker has a chance to make such responses. For, otherwise the low-paying job becomes a form of peonage, placing it outside the capitalist labor

market in which workers' choices are not so restricted. Workers at these low wages will be able, then, to look for second or third jobs to make their income adequate. They will try, in the United States for example, to supplement the income from a low wage job with child-care vouchers, with food stamps, Medicaid eligibility, rent subsidies, and Earned Income Tax Credits. All members of a family, even from an early age, will take work in a variety of minor jobs in order to survive. If these options do not suffice, riskier ones beckon — cleaning windshields at intersections, selling joints, automobile theft, and prostitution. In sum, the low-income job prompts a worker to take corrective measures that will help avoid the misery of poverty. Thus if the low-wage job turns out to be a long-term one, it will not entail the misery of poverty.

Cooperation and Public Goods

WE NOW TURN TO the constructive task of putting forward a way to reduce poverty and ultimately eradicate it. Measures like welfare and a living wage — mandated as the minimum wage — do their part here by moving some of the poor out of poverty. The problem, though, is that if such measures are strong enough to have more than an incremental effect on poverty they would very likely have unemployment as an unwanted side effect. After all, employers will feel the need to lighten the burden of their contributions to pay for welfare or of their higher wage bills to fund a living wage. Among other things, they will lower their costs by reducing their workforces while making sure they do not reduce production and hence their income from sales. With their trimmed-down workforces, this would require raising productivity. Its rise allows them to reduce their overall labor costs through creating unemployment with its potential for introducing more poverty.

It seems clear then that poverty reduction of a major sort must take place in the context of a program that discourages having productivity rise through competition. It is also clear that a program of productivity reduction, just like the one

for comprehensive welfare for the unemployed, will never be more than a fleeting reform in capitalism, as we know it. The conclusion is that poverty reduction of a major sort calls for one of only two choices. We could choose either a hybrid version of capitalism in which limits on productivity need not destabilize the system or a system set on very different foundations than those of capitalism.

It is less important here to decide which of the two it might be than it is to identify one of the salient changes called for by limiting productivity increases. Putting limits on productivity has a direct impact on what one can do in seeking a competitive advantage. Despite the increasing number of ways corporations combine to blunt competition, it remains a preeminent source of change in today's capitalism. Given the preeminence of competition, what would serve as a dynamic that could challenge it? The needed dynamic at this time would come, I suggest, from cooperation and solidarity. The struggles for welfare and living wages enlighten us by their own inadequacy. Their inability to overcome poverty by merely regulating competition shows us the need to make cooperation dominant in many sectors in which competition is now dominant.

The dynamic of cooperation leads away from the current tendency toward privatization, which integrates more and more activity into the competitive sphere. Due to the global privatization of public goods, such as utilities and health care systems, the inevitable downsizings of their workforces have flooded the labor markets of many countries. The lower wages that result are justified as the way to attract investors who will then put people to work in higher productivity jobs. But, as former World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz notes, "Labor market flexibility was designed to move people from low productivity to high productivity jobs. But too often it moved people from low productivity jobs to unemployment..."¹¹ Not only does privatization generate unemployment, it also deepens the misery of poverty by making scarce resources, like potable water and health care, even less accessible due to their

becoming commodities.

How does cooperation play a role in an alternative to the competitive market? The alternative will give a central role to goals that define the kind of society most of us want. These are quite different from our private aims. These goals are such that we share wanting them with most others. Of course, this sharing of goals will not happen without interaction; we discuss opinions and hammer out compromises before there is this widespread sharing of goals. A goal for our society that emerges in this way will be one that most of us want not just for themselves alone, but also for the society, that is, for all. It is natural to call this a social goal. It will be social in a double sense: at least most of us share in wanting the goal, and each of us who wants it will want it for the rest.

It is easy then to see how cooperation fits in where there are social goals. It makes no sense to compete with someone in order to get a social goal for oneself, for when we realize a social goal, it provides benefits to all. Two producers can compete for a certain part of the market for the types of good they produce. Suppose a democratic society is a social goal. Then two citizens cannot compete to determine which one will get the resulting democratic society. What they can do is cooperate with those who want a democratic society in taking steps to have it. If you want a democratic society for others, and they want it for you, then the conditions are met for you and those others to seek ways to cooperate to realize your shared goal.

To realize a social goal, there must be certain institutions that have a long-term capacity for delivering the type of benefit we expect in pursuing the goal. In the case of a democratic society, an institutional structure will be set up involving parliaments, courts, an apparatus for voting, and a variety of grassroots organizations. A structure, such as this, for realizing a social goal we call a public good. We organize the structure that gives us a democratic society on a cooperative basis; otherwise, there will be a competition for power resulting in a destruction of democracy, which requires that power be widely shared. In general, we tax ourselves according to our means to support

public goods, whereas their privatized counterparts typically charge rich and poor the same for their services.¹²

Productivity increases will still be called for in a society in which the cooperative motive comes into prominence through the spread of public goods. These increases will have, though, another meaning. They will be called for to meet hitherto unmet human needs rather than the demands of competition. The criminal underfunding of public goods around the world in recent decades, which acted as a prelude to a rash of privatization, left many people without the basics. One does not increase productivity in the delivery of the benefits of public goods simply to stay ahead of competitors but because it is the only way to satisfy relevant needs. Should productivity rise beyond what needs call for, workers can avoid both frequent and permanent superfluity through shorter hours without wage cuts.

We are envisioning a society in which the dominant motive is cooperation rather than competition. In it, the dominant form of economic activity shifts from the competitive pursuit of higher productivity to the cooperative pursuit of social goals by means of public goods. In such a society, there can be an elimination of poverty, as we know it, through an elimination of both frequent and permanent unemployment. In it, the question whether there could be comprehensive welfare for those who happen to be unemployed loses its relevance. The question whether a living wage will create unemployment also loses its relevance. If we had to face unemployment again, the reasons would have little to do with competitively driven productivity increases. Among such reasons would be an exhaustion of resources of the kind that concerns environmentalists, a hostile group of powerful countries trying to subvert the dominance of cooperation, and an internal collapse of the democracy called for by cooperation.

Can one hope to eliminate poverty without envisioning a society in which we moderate productivity increases through the cooperation inherent in public goods? Philosopher and economist

Amartya Sen has defined poverty as capability deprivation.¹³ On his view, we could eliminate poverty by giving people capabilities. One of the capabilities needed is, of course, that of being able to find regular work. Thus, an anti-poverty program calls for, among other things, measures creating enough jobs.

Our productivity view allows us to make clear that, for eliminating poverty within capitalism, acquiring the needed capabilities will depend on something more fundamental. Measures to create enough jobs, whether through the training of individuals or through incentives for employers to increase workforces, will be successful only by curbing the drive to increase productivity resulting from competition.¹⁴ For otherwise, productivity increases would constantly create superfluous workers. As we saw, merely curbing the drive, without making cooperative institutions dominant, is unsustainable. Winning the battle against poverty, even on Sen's view of poverty as capability deprivation, rests on breaking out of the current economic arrangements and envisioning a dominantly cooperative system. Sen seems reluctant to accept the need for this underlying change.

Incrementalism or the Full Program?

TO CONCLUDE, I POSE a dilemma for those of us who want to curb poverty. Should we pursue the full program of eliminating poverty or should we stick to incremental programs? The full program sees the problem as competitively driven productivity increases and the solution as an economy in which cooperation is dominant. The full program leaves behind the neoliberal consensus, with its emphasis on markets, not simply to regulate markets but to build a new consensus with an emphasis on public goods.

There are various kinds of incremental programs — education, job training, food, rent, and child-care supplements to wages, tax credits, and self-sufficiency wages. One can use these programs to address poverty within a context in which competition remains dominant, despite the limits they set on it. For example, the program of setting a minimum wage above a realistic poverty line would

limit the ability of entrepreneurs to compete by paying poverty wages. They could still compete by pushing wages as close to the minimum as successful hiring would allow. Moreover, they could take advantage of the fact that the minimum wage for escaping poverty would be lower in some parts of the world than in others. But nowhere would the “race to the bottom” lead to poverty wages.

Such a regulation would contain, though, the seeds of its own destruction. Despite limiting competition for labor, it fails to lead beyond grudging compliance to promote cooperation. The still dominant competitive urge will become the center of an effort to erode whatever political consensus had emerged to impose limits on the labor market. Circumstances will soon arise in which this effort becomes powerful enough to breach those limits, allowing the race to the bottom to lead below the poverty line. Profits from those winning this race will fuel the productivity increases that the requirement of living wages had temporarily checked.

The dilemma here is that we end in trouble whether we choose the full program or one or more incremental ones for poverty reduction. The full program is not something people seem ready for, nor does anyone have a clear strategy for making them ready for it. In short, it is not immediately actionable. The incremental programs — whether they mandate a living wage, promote capacitation of citizens, or provide welfare — slow down productivity increases in one way or another. This makes them vulnerable to a backlash coming from the competitive ethos. For example, the competitive search for low wages led to more than a 30 percent decline in the inflation-adjusted value of the U.S. minimum wage between its highpoint in 1968 and 2004, a span of time in the United States

when productivity grew considerably and average worker wages decreased.

My response to the dilemma is that we must treat the two strategies for dealing with poverty as complementary. We should pursue them together, if we are to avoid to the degree possible the difficulties just mentioned. Pursuing exclusively incremental programs leads eventually to the pessimistic view, that increasing productivity will continue to churn out poverty no matter what we do. Conversely, it will seem arbitrary to choose the full program

of building an economy dominated by public goods if there is any hope of eliminating poverty through a less radical program.

To avoid the pessimism to which incremental programs might lead, someone will remind us that there are nations that have reduced poverty significantly. Poverty in the United States and Britain is now considerably less than it was a century ago. A combination of economic growth and incremental antipoverty programs can, it seems, reduce poverty. However, one needs to examine this improvement from a global perspective. The technologically advanced countries reduce poverty by “exporting” it to other countries.

There are several ways poverty is controlled in some nations by its export to others. Producing goods or services for export reduces poverty by creating stable jobs. Expanding markets through exportation can offset the tendency of increasing productivity to create unemployment and hence poverty. The jobs created by highly industrialized nations through their export industries play an important part in controlling poverty in those nations. This way of controlling poverty entails its export. Exports of products and services from highly industrialized nations include technological products and processes that destroy many forms

Not only does privatization generate unemployment, it also deepens the misery of poverty by making scarce resources, like potable water and health care, even less accessible due to their becoming commodities.

of labor-intensive production in less industrialized nations. This creates poverty by forming large pools of latent workers in the less industrialized nations.

This leads to a second way poverty is controlled through its exportation. These pools of latent workers enable these nations to export goods and services made with low-wage workers to the highly industrialized nations. These products can then be sold to workers in the highly industrialized nations at low enough prices so that these workers can avoid poverty even at relatively low wages.

This redistribution of poverty around the world is certainly not global progress. Once this is recognized, pessimism seems inescapable unless, of course, we are determined to replace competitively driven productivity increases with a more cooperative arrangement.¹⁵ It is precisely by tying together the incremental approach with the full program of eliminating poverty that we can avoid the demoralization that the incremental approach alone would engender.

We can, I think, agree that incremental programs, all of which allow for the dominance of competition, do not solve the serious problems to which the full program is a response. Even in wealthy technologically advanced countries, the market generates poverty. When incremental programs try to remedy this market failure, they do not survive for long in a healthy form. Nonetheless, the full program, without the incremental ones, will continue to appear as a desperate gesture. It can become more than this only when taken in conjunction with the incremental programs. It can be a guiding ideal alongside them, since pursuing them demonstrates the necessity of the more radical change the full program calls for. Once enough people agree that the full program is necessary, it will then be actionable.

NOTES

1. The link between poverty and joblessness has been a theme of William Julius Wilson. See his *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage, 1997),

chapter 2.

2. The *locus classicus* for linking poverty and productivity is Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume 1 (1867), part 7, chapter 25, section 4.

3. For an interpretation of recent data on poverty in terms of productivity, see Samir Amin, "World Poverty, Pauperization, and Capital Accumulation," *Monthly Review* 155, 5 (October 2003): 3-9.

4. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and London Poverty*, Volume 2 (1884), 338.

5. See his "Preferential Option for the Poor," in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, edited by J.B. Nickoloff (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 143-146.

6. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century, Volume 1: The Structure of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, translated by S. Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 75.

7. For information leading to my interpretation of poverty in post-capitalist Cuba, I am indebted to conversations with the late María Isabel Sosa Alba.

8. Bombay's population has multiplied with immigrants coming from Indian villages. Half of its 12 million people live in slums where one-room shacks abut one another. Somini Sengupta, "A Basic Service is lost in Bombay's Shuffle," *The New York Times* (February 10, 2002).

9. For illustrations of the trend in the United States to cheapen labor by reducing welfare, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, second edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), chapter 11.

10. For a discussion of the living wage, see Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce, *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy* (New York: New Press, 1998).

11. "Unraveling the Washington Consensus: An Interview with Joseph Stiglitz," *Multinational Monitor* (April 2000): 13-17, 21. See also Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2002), 84.

12. There are discussions of public goods in a wide range of areas in *Not for Sale: In Defense of Public Goods*, edited by Anatole Anton, Milton Fisk, and Nancy Holmstrom (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2000).

13. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), chapter 4.

14. Since it is dependent on an external condition, the capability to find regular work is what Martha Nussbaum calls a "combined capability." See her *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 84-85.

15. J. Mohan Rao, "Equity in a Global Public Goods Framework," in *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*, edited by Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, and Marc Stern (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68-87.

A Special New Politics Symposium **NCLB: A Progressive Response**

WITH OVERWHELMING SUPPORT from both Democrats and Republicans, the Bush administration employed the rhetoric of equity and accountability to forge a legislative package called “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). NCLB was an omnibus bill that contained numerous provisions that made federal aid to low-income schools and children dependent on schools’ accepting new regulations on a host of school policies, from qualifications for teachers to the kinds of instructional materials that can be used. However, the mandates best known to the public require testing in grades 3-8 and punish schools that fail to deliver high test scores for all students.

We are pleased to publish the contributions of researchers and activists who were invited by *NP* to analyze the origins and impact of NCLB, as well as the contours of a genuinely progressive response. All of the contributors identify critical problems with NCLB, but they differ on whether progressives should press to eliminate or reform the legislation. Michael Charney and Michele Brooks advance the perspective of many activists in the American Federation of Teachers and parent advocacy groups that would like to reform NCLB and fund it at higher levels. Stan Karp, Carlos Torres, and Lois Weiner each describes the legislation in more starkly critical terms. Torres and Weiner (a member of the NP editorial board) argue that public education can only serve the needs of students, parents, and teachers if the neoliberal agenda that NCLB represents is comprehensively defeated.

We welcome letters from readers about the contributions and the issues they raise.

LOIS WEINER



NCLB: A Parent Perspective

MICHELE BROOKS

ASK ANY PARENT what their hope is for the education of their child and they will tell you “a good education is one that provides my child with a broad range of opportunities and experiences to gain the knowledge and skills to be successful in life.” Parents, especially those in disadvantaged communities and parents of color, whose children attend underperforming schools, want accountability. They want specific information to measure their child’s and their school’s performance and they want to be engaged in meaningful ways to support their child’s education.

In 2001, the fanfare of the signing of the *No Child Left Behind Act* was greeted with mixed reviews from parents and education activists. While there seemed to be consensus around the intent of the law — to create a national education agenda that equalizes the opportunity to learn for all children — the debate then and now focuses on implementation. At the center of the debates is testing, the formula for determining annual yearly progress, “scientifically based” reading programs and funding for the full implementation of NCLB. Engaged in the debates are lawmakers, education scholars and activists, educators, and the most important stakeholder of all, parents.

What Parents Get

RESEARCH OVER THE last few decades has found that parent engagement is a major factor impacting student achievement. In response to that re-

search, NCLB has made parent engagement one of the cornerstones of the legislation. What that means for parents is the schoolhouse door is open for meaningful engagement and accountability that is public and measurable, especially for parents of students in disadvantaged, struggling urban and rural schools receiving Title I resources and supports for their schools. (Title I provides additional funding to schools with significant population of low-income students.)

The parental “right to know” provision of NCLB gives parents access to more information than ever sharing specifics around the performance status of their child and their school.

NCLB mandates a minimum requirement for “highly qualified” teachers and parent notification when their child is being taught a core subject by a teacher who has not met the state requirements for “highly qualified” teacher. Parents also receive notification any time their child’s school does not meet its annual yearly progress goals. Schools designated “in need of improvement” that receive Title I funding must also involve parents in the development of action plans for improving school performance.

Additionally, Title I schools that are “in need of improvement” for more than two years, or in “corrective action” must notify parents and offer the option to transfer to a higher-performing school. If parents decide not to transfer, they are eligible for supplemental services from the provider of their choice.

These NCLB mandates give parents information, choices, support, and an opportunity to participate, but it is the broader implementation of NCLB that raises many concerns among parents.

What Concerns Parents

WHILE MANY PARENTS view NCLB as a move in

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the right direction, concerns abound, especially for parents of students in Title I schools. Most NCLB sanctions are focused on these schools, which have historically been low-performing, struggling schools with high numbers of under-qualified, inexperienced staff often teaching in substandard conditions with little or no resources for books and supplies. While these schools receive additional dollars through Title I, the infusion of that funding does not fully fill the funding gap that exists between the “haves” and “have nots,” resulting in an inequitable system in which poor children, children of color, and immigrant children and their schools are held to a higher standard without the resources to support their success. Furthermore, NCLB does not adequately address the disparities between school needs and state funding formulas that result in poorer urban and rural districts having fewer resources to create educational opportunities that are on the same level as their richer suburban counterparts in many states.

AYP, or adequate yearly progress, has become a common term for parents these days, as it is the determining factor for school success. How AYP is determined is a source of both concern and confusion among parents. Under NCLB, every state is required to set academic goals for performance of all schools based on state content and achievement standards aimed at the ultimate goal of moving all children to proficiency in language arts and math by 2014. Schools are required to demonstrate “continuous progress” towards that goal by meeting an annual benchmark for all subgroups within the school that is referred to as adequate yearly progress (AYP). The AYP benchmarks include test scores, graduation rates, attendance, and other indicators determined by the state. Schools that fail to meet AYP for any subgroup or other benchmark are designated “in need of improvement.”

For example, School A, a diverse, Title I school with 16 subgroups that include five racial groupings, English language learners and special education students, has made AYP on all of its subgroups except for the school’s already high performing Asian students. School A will be desig-

nated “in need of improvement.” Parents in School A receive the report of how well their school has done to improve the achievement of African Americans, Latinos, English language learners, and special education students but are told their school has failed to meet AYP and has been designated “in need of improvement” leaving parents confused and questioning the AYP process. The major concern is that AYP does not always provide an accurate picture of school performance.

To further compound the disparities between poor and affluent schools, there are NCLB mandated differences in how schools are subjected to sanctions for not meeting AYP benchmarks. Schools and districts receiving Title I funding, which tend to be more diverse and include high populations of English language learners and special education students, that fail to meet AYP benchmarks are subject to mandated sanctions which could possibly include school restructuring by the state or local education authority. In contrast, affluent, non-Title I schools, which tend to be less diverse, are exempt from NCLB sanctions but are subject to measures developed by the state.

Testing is one of the major determining factors for AYP under NCLB. Parents have now joined the ongoing debate around testing, weighing in on both sides of the debate. Many parents believe that testing is necessary to determine whether students have mastered the skills at grade level, while other parents fear that dependency on test results does not provide a full picture of student and school performance, and encourages “teaching to the test” instead of high quality instruction. The high stakes nature of testing in many states has also raised concerns among parents and education activists around the increase in drop-out and push-out rates of low performing students at the middle and high school levels. While many states report no increase and in some cases decreases in the dropout rate, further investigation reveals increases in push-outs, students who are moved into alternative GED type programs and off of the school rolls. With making AYP essential for the success of every school,

teachers and administrators are feeling pressured to meet AYP, often by any means necessary.

Other NCLB parental concerns include the transfer option and delivery of supplemental services for students in Title I schools. Major challenges exist for the transfer option. Parents in urban districts, where often over half of the schools have been designated “in need of improvement,” face the challenge of finding space at higher performing schools. If a parent decides to keep their child at the current school they are eligible for supplemental services (e.g., tutoring) from the provider of their choice, but the services are accessed on a first-come, first-served basis, leaving some parents on their own to find support for their children. After-school and youth development programming that provided much needed out of school programming, including academic supports, have been subject to deep cuts over the past four years, leaving many parents with even fewer options.

Equality and Opportunity

WHILE THE PROPOSED INTENT of NCLB is supposedly equitable opportunities for all children it has meant that low-income, low-performing schools disproportionately are the focus of harsh sanctions. Incentives and supports for teacher development and retention are needed to provide the expertise and stability that underperforming schools require to improve.

State education funding formulas need to be assessed and adjusted to provide equity to ensure that low-income students in disenfranchised communities are afforded the same opportunities and experiences as their more affluent counterparts.

Even with Title I funding most low-performing schools do not have access to the resources required to adequately provide students with the educational experiences that will move them to proficiency by 2014.

The parent engagement provisions under NCLB are strong when implemented in good faith. The law provides parent notification in a uniform and timely manner, in a language that parents can understand “to the extent practical.” Schools and districts must be encouraged to address the challenge of communicating with all parents in a way that engages them more meaningfully. It is critical that information and achievement data be shared in ways that are understandable for parents allowing them to be engaged in the process and make informed decisions regarding their children’s education.

The process for determining AYP given the high stakes of the punitive sanctions is flawed. There must be a balance in achieving accountability for the continuous progress of all subgroups that acknowledges the challenges of educating more diverse populations in Title I schools.

From a parent perspective, the bottom line is equitable access to educational opportunities that lead to successful outcomes for all children. Making school and district achievement data public has promoted dialogue and engagement of parents and the broader community in the improvement of schools. While NCLB provides a framework for standards and accountability with the goal of equalizing educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, current implementation strategies are still leaving children behind.

A Realistic Post-election Strategy to Modify NCLB

MICHAEL CHARNEY

THANK GOD FOR UTAH. The potential triumphalism of George Bush and his hold the course view of No Child Left Behind can be blunted. The Utah legislature set the tone in early 2004 with its frontal assault on the arrogance of the federal government in micromanaging the accountability standards of Utah's classrooms. The Utah legislature was on the verge of totally rejecting the federal funds following NCLB before the U.S. Department of Education sent emissaries to Salt Lake City to calm down the cry for state control.

Bush owes his election to conservative state power brokers who ironically have always been uncomfortable with the expansion of federal power into what they see as their birthright for local control over curriculum, teaching, and accountability. Within a few years these white middle class districts will face the threat of NCLB sanctions because their special education students will not be able to meet the increasing higher test score goals required by NCLB.

The congressional NCLB aficionados will be much more likely to respond to cries for NCLB modifications when the escalating attacks come from white prosperous school districts. Lawmakers representing conservative white districts possibly could make common cause with urban lawmakers already feeling tremendous pressure from teachers and school leaders. The strict accountability model of NCLB that classifies schools as "failing schools" when children with disabilities, children of color, low-income students, or second language learners do not pass the test goals could serve as the glue to bring together disparate con-

stituencies to demand NCLB reform.

What would a progressive direction for modifying NCLB look like if conservatives could lead the fight for more statewide control of the accountability and test agenda?

With Kerry's defeat, the legitimate demand for increased funding falls flat. The Bush administration did in fact increase funding for Title I as it imposed the demand of 100 percent success on grade level tests. That increased funding did little to approach what it will really cost to make sure that all students, regardless of class or race background, reach the 100 percent passing goal. In Ohio alone, a legislative sponsored study estimated an additional cost of \$1.5 billion to provide the extra help and smaller classes for students to make significant improvements.

If conservatives open up the political space for the states, not the federal government, to control the accountability system, the most promising area for NCLB modification is the implementation of the Adequate Yearly Progress definition. NCLB requires states to set up accountability goals that measure the progress of students towards 100 percent success on math, reading, and science tests by the year 2013-2014. All students, as well as the identified subgroups of students with disabilities, students of poverty, second language students, and racial/ethnic groups of students must make this progress. The way in which AYP is defined presently leaves little room for flexibility.

However, the measurement does not measure the progress of individual students from one year to another. Instead, NCLB requires the progress to be in the whole school by group and subject. For teachers, this makes little sense because a teacher could boost the ability of all students but still not meet the NCLB goals.

Instead what is needed, for example, is to

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measure the progress of fourth grade students compared to their learning in third grade. In addition, a student could move from being a non-reader to a weak reader in just one year but still not be able to reach the higher proficient category on the grade level test. Yet, AYP models today give little credit to that progress.

This change in AYP calculation would allow a realistic assessment of progress towards closing the achievement gap. Each teacher would be able to feel some control and ownership over what takes place in the classroom because the measurement would not be abstract but be directly tied to the incremental progress of each student. Presently, the in your face accountability system produces cynicism, anger, and frustration among classroom teachers because the accountability mechanism are so detached from what takes place in the classroom.

Another area for possible NCLB modification is the over reliance of standardized tests to determine grade level progress to close the achievement gap. Despite teachers' laments, there are some good reasons to use standardized tests rather than only relying on teacher professional judgment. Too often some teachers allowed their empathy for poor-performing students faced with economic obstacles to allow students to fall through the chasms in low-performing schools. Teacher subjectivity replaced any objective standard of progress.

The groundswell of legitimate parental opposition to standardized tests can be turned towards increasing the options for states, districts, schools, and classrooms. Teachers, schools, or districts that can demonstrate that their system of assessment is valid in determining grade level progress should have the option of using an alternative model of assessment. Once that system of validation is established by aligning one assessment model with the results on standardized tests that option may be used.

Yet it seems almost unrealistic to push for moves away from standardized tests when faced with so many other funding challenges for education. Standardized test are cheap compared to

other assessment models. They do not require the level of labor to produce, evaluate, and administer. In Ohio, teachers demanded new assessments, won a variety of diagnostic measures that aimed at improving instruction in state law, not in punishing schools. When it came time to use these early grades assessments teachers rose up and refused to implement these assessments because they took too much time away from direct classroom instruction.

The most politically damaging aspect of NCLB is its plans to punish schools and districts that do not make their irrational AYP goals for at least two years. NCLB places the blame for low test score progress on the schools. What is remarkable about all the mandates is that they have shown they do not work. The changes are driven by an ideological commitment to completive market forces as the only approach to school improvement.

After two years of not making AYP, NCLB requires the option of student transfer. Three years of AYP failure leads to student transfer and potential removal of significant district Title I federal funds to pay for individual tutoring by outside nonprofit or profit driven providers. After four and five years, NCLB demands the eventual removal of some of staff, or a state takeover, or conversion to a charter school.

MOVING THE BUSH administration away from their ideological commitment to the market will be much more difficult than modifying AYP or changing the overreliance on standardized testing. The timetable of schools requiring NCLB punishment will fall first on schools with students of color, low income, and second language learners. Not exactly the constituency that put Bush into his second term.

But the proposals for improvement are so self evidently stupid that there may be some political space to make changes. Very few students have used the public school transfer option to leave schools that did not make their AYP. At a time of remembering the fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, it makes sense to expand the transfer

option to any school in the state. Real desegregation can only take place when students have expanded choice beyond their urban school district.

A more promising area for eliminating the irrational commitment to unproven mandates is with the NCLB punishments when schools have not made their AYP for four or five years. The pragmatic business elite lead by the Gates Foundation has at least recognized that improving urban schools will take major investment in changing teaching practice and school culture, personal attention for students, and heightened emphasis on cultural competency for teachers. Of course, investment in the knowledge and skills of teachers while respecting their professionalism costs much more money than the quick fix of conversion to a for profit charter school. But by accepting the willingness to change the structure of low performing schools but by rejecting models of change without a proven record of success, serious reformers may be able to make their case to lawmakers.

The short-term challenge for progressives is to expand and develop deep connections with parents whose children attend these schools poised for punishment after years of AYP failure. The

Bush administration will surely manipulate the political landscape and parents' frustration to position private school vouchers and possibly even religious charter schools as the needed NCLB modifications for these schools.

Unless the same forces of labor and communities of color that dramatically increased the urban turnout against Bush in November in battleground states continue their mobilization, the opportunities for making some positive change in the implementation of NCLB will vanish. Bush plans to use the persistent achievement gap to break that coalition. Antipoor conservatives will promote a school privatization agenda as the device to attract parents of color and low-income parents.

The challenge for the anti-Bush forces is to do much more than oppose privatization. We must promote an alternative NCLB direction. Modifying the irrational AYP system, expanding public school choice to the suburbs, and promoting investment in teachers and students for schools on the cusp of punishment makes much more sense than funding religious private schools. That agenda is not sweeping, but given the November results it at least makes educational sense.

Leaving Public Schools Behind

STAN KARP

IT IS A MEASURE of how far the right is reaching that the left today finds itself defending the very existence of public education from the forces of privatization, commercialization, and even federal policy. Just four years after 1996 Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole campaigned on a platform of abolishing the Department of Education, the Bush administration came into office with a massive expansion of the federal role in education as its number one domestic priority. This time, however, the goal was not to extend the federal government's historic role as a promoter of educational access and equity, but to replace it with a conservative agenda of punitive high stakes testing, privatization, and market "reforms." The euphemistically named Bush education bill, the No Child Left Behind Act, was passed in December 2001 with overwhelming Republican and Democratic support (381-41 in the House, 87-10 in the Senate.). While the bipartisan coalition that supported passage of NCLB has since fragmented, its initial creation reflected the bill's merger of the corporate-centrist agenda of standards and tests with the right's agenda of vouchers ("choice"), and privatization.

Like most effective political strategies, NCLB rhetoric also spoke to real concerns held by large numbers of people, particularly those that have been badly served by public education. These concerns included persistent racial gaps in student achievement, a lack of institutional accountability, and seemingly intractable school failure in low-income communities of color. These very real problems have provided a platform for school reformers of all shapes and sizes to posture as champions of the underserved and underprivileged. For Bush, edu-

cation reform has always been an "outreach" issue. He came into office as a dubiously elected president with historically low levels of support among African Americans and a well-deserved anti-poor, pro-business image. Education is one of the few areas that allow a Republican president to posture, however disingenuously, as an ally of poor people of color. By focusing on the lowest performing schools and the racial dimensions of the achievement gap (e.g., the "soft bigotry of low expectations"), Bush has given his education rhetoric an edge and an urgency it would otherwise lack. However, he has used this rhetoric, both as Texas governor and later as president, to frame policy proposals that have reinforced the "hard bigotry" of institutional racism in education, for example, by promoting higher dropout rates and perpetuating funding inequities. (Combining rhetorical concern for the victims of inequality with policies that perpetuate it may be an operative definition of "compassionate conservatism.")

But the common ground that really gave birth to NCLB was the standards movement. And this traces back to the first "education president," George Bush the elder, and to the Governors' Education Summits promoted by then-Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. The standardize-and-test strategy, now enshrined in NCLB and raised to new and absurd heights by the "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) formulas that NCLB is currently imposing on your local neighborhood school, was made possible by a decade of promoting standards and tests as the key to school improvement. Standardized curricula imposed through ever-more suffocating layers of standardized testing have become the primary instruments of mainstream, business-led school reform. They are tools used to impose external political and bureaucratic agendas on local schools and districts and to push more democratic approaches to school reform aside.

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The standards and testing movement has done even more than the privatization schemes of the voucher supporters to move school power away from teachers, classrooms, schools, and local districts, and to put it in the hands of state and national politicians. Such uses of standards and testing in the service of larger policy objectives is exactly what a number of Republican strategists have been proposing for years. As Nina Shokraii Rees, a former Heritage Foundation researcher who is now an official in the Department of Education wrote before Bush took office, “Standards, choice, and fiscal and legal autonomy in exchange for boosting student test scores increasingly are the watchwords of education reform in America. The principle can be used in programs that apply to whole districts as well as entire states. Importantly, it lays the groundwork for a massive overhaul of education at the federal level in much the same way that welfare reform began.”

Currently, the No Child Left Behind Act has schools across the country reeling as its impact unfolds in numbing bureaucratic detail. As many as 80 percent of the nation's public schools may find themselves labeled as schools “needing improvement,” on the narrow basis of annual test scores and unreachable performance targets. The scheme uses achievement gaps among up to 10 different groups of students to label schools as “failures,” without providing the resources or support needed to eliminate them. It includes an unfunded mandate that by 2014, 100 percent of all students, including special education students and English-language learners, must be proficient on state tests. Schools that do not reach increasingly unattainable test score targets face an escalating series of sanctions up to and including possible closure and the imposition of private management on public schools.

Instead of an appropriate educational strategy, NCLB's test and punish formula is part of a calculated political campaign to leave schools and children behind as the federal government retreats from the nation's historic commitment to improving universal public schooling for all children. The sanctions that NCLB imposes have no record of

success as school improvement strategies, and in fact are not educational strategies at all. They are political strategies designed to bring a kind of market reform to public education. They will do little to address the pressing needs of public schools but they will create a widespread perception of systemic failure, demoralize teachers and school communities, and erode the common ground that a universal system of public education needs to survive. The privatization agenda in NCLB is reflected most clearly in its provisions for school transfers and supplemental services. (A straightforward voucher program was taken out of the original proposal as part of the legislative compromise that got it passed, though the administration continues to pursue vouchers through separate means.) Instead, NCLB has provisions that require a district to spend up to 20 percent of its federal funds to support transfers from failing schools to schools that meet their AYP targets or that don't receive Title I funds. And each state is supposed to prepare a list of approved supplemental tutorial providers for students who remain in schools needing improvement.

So far, over 60 percent of these providers are private companies. Both the transfer and the tutorial provisions have lots of complications, but there will be several overall effects: 1. The 20 percent figure will come nowhere near to covering the costs of providing transportation and tutorial services to all those eligible for them. 2. There are nowhere near enough alternative school placements for the growing numbers of students eligible to transfer. 3. The funds used to support individual tutorial services and transfers will reduce the sums available for whole school improvement in those same schools. One key part of this effort to open the public system to privatization involves a special appeal to parents, particularly in poor communities, to support NCLB's federally required tests and, especially, to utilize the law's “choice” and “supplemental tutorial” provisions.

The idea is to create pressure for more privatization of the public system. In their voucher campaigns, conservatives have learned how to repackage market “reforms” that privatize public ser-

vices as a form of “parental choice.” Similarly, NCLB encourages parents to leave public schools behind and appeals to them as individual consumers of educational services as part of an effort to replace local control of institutions like schools with marketplace reforms that substitute commercial relations between customers for democratic relations between citizens. NCLB, however, does not guarantee parents any new places to go. In districts where some schools are labeled “failing” and some are not, the new law is actually forcing increased class sizes by transferring students without creating new capacity. NCLB does not invest in building new schools in failing districts. It does not make rich suburban districts open their doors to students from poor districts. And it doesn’t give poor parents any more control over school bureaucracies than food stamps give them over supermarkets.

The transfer regulations are a “supply-side” fraud designed to manufacture a demand for alternative school placements and ultimately to transfer funds and students to profit-making private school corporations through vouchers. The link between NCLB’s “options for parents” and the administration’s voucher and privatization plans is clearly reflected in the Department of Education’s implementation efforts. The DOE has given multi-million dollar grants to pro-voucher groups like the Black Alliance for Educational Options, the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, and the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation to encourage parents to utilize the tutorial and transfer provisions of NCLB. The grants are just another example of how the federal agencies charged with overseeing and improving public education are now run by people intent on dismantling it.

Similarly, NCLB’s obsessive overreliance on standardized tests in the name of accountability is more than bad education policy. It is a political effort to push other more democratic approaches to school improvement aside. When schools become obsessed with test scores, they narrow the focus of what teachers do in classrooms and limit their ability to serve the broader needs of children and their communities. Overreliance on testing

diverts attention and resources from more promising school improvement strategies, like smaller schools and class size, multicultural curriculum reform, and collaborative, school-based professional development.

High-stakes tests push struggling students out of school, promote tracking, and encourage schools to adopt developmentally inappropriate practices for younger children, special needs students, and English Language Learners in an effort to “get them ready for the tests.” Overuse of testing can also encourage cheating scandals and makes schools and students vulnerable to inaccurate and, at times, corrupt practices by commercial testing firms. Standards and testing, especially as they have been implemented in recent decades, are not designed to make schools accountable to students, their families, or their communities, or even to educators. They are designed to increase the ability of external political and educational bureaucracies to impose top-down, “systemic” control on curriculum, instructional practice, and other matters of educational policy.

Even if the goals did include real educational accountability, standardized tests are of limited value. Assessing the effectiveness of a particular school or program requires multiple measures of academic performance, including classroom observations, portfolios of student work, and dialogue with real teachers and students, as well as a range of indicators from attendance and drop-out rates to graduation rates and post-graduation success, measures of teacher preparation and quality, surveys of parent participation and satisfaction and similar evaluations. Legitimate assessment strategies would also measure “opportunity to learn” inputs and equity of resources so that the victims of educational failure were not the only ones to face “high stakes” consequences. Moreover, while inequality in test scores is one narrow indicator of school performance, test scores also reflect other inequalities that persist in the larger society and in schools themselves.

About 12 percent of white children live in poverty, while over 30 percent of black and Latino children live in poverty. The richest 1 percent of house-

holds has more wealth than the bottom 95 percent. Students in low-income schools, on average, have thousands of dollars less spent on their education than those in wealthier schools. About 14 percent of whites don't have health insurance, but more than 20 percent of blacks and 30 percent of Latinos have no health insurance. Unemployment rates for blacks and Latinos are nearly double what they are for whites. In October 2003, the Educational Testing Service released a study on the achievement gap concluding, "The results are unambiguous. In all 14 factors, the gaps in student achievement mirror inequalities in those aspects of school, early life, and home circumstances that research has linked to achievement." Yet we do not hear NCLB's supporters demanding an end to this kind of equality. Nor do we hear the federal government saying that all crime must be eliminated in 12 years or the police will be privatized, all citizens must have good health care in 12 years or we will shut down the health care system.

Many organized groups representing parents and people of color have seen through NCLB's rhetorical promises and joined efforts to reform it. The Boston-based advocacy group FairTest has spearheaded a reform campaign that has won support from the NAACP, the Children's Defense League, and the Hispanic advocacy organization, *Aspira*. Parents have also been slow to embrace the transfer option, with only a small fraction of those eligible so far seeking to move to new schools. But a portion of the traditional civil rights coalition and a significant sector of popular sentiment in poor communities remain susceptible to the power of NCLB's rhetoric. Nourished by decades of school failure, which has reached desperate levels in urban and rural communities where less than half of black and Latino freshmen typically graduate from high school, some in these communities are understandably less concerned with the looming dangers of privatization than they are with finding ways to use NCLB to pressure schools to make good on their promises to serve all children well.

These attitudes were in striking evidence last summer at a conference of the National Coalition

of Education Activists, a multiracial network of parents, teachers, and community activists that works to promote equity and reform in public education. NCEA's conferences are typically an exercise in cross-constituency political dialogue among people with long-term common goals and interests, but not necessarily common experience or even a common language when it comes to discussing education reform. Along with Monty Neill of FairTest, I helped organize several conference sessions on NCLB. True to NCEA form, the sessions attracted a diverse and energetic group: school board members from San Francisco wrestling with NCLB's crushing bureaucratic and financial burdens, Philadelphia teachers facing the takeover of their schools by private for-profit education management companies, Latino activists concerned about the law's erosion of bilingual education programs. The participants also included a good number of African-American parents, some from northern urban centers like Chicago and New York, others from the rural south, including Tennessee, North Carolina and Mississippi.

While few disagreed with the sharp political critique we offered of NCLB's hidden agendas and negative impact, many parents were less interested in working to expose or repeal it, than they were in finding ways to use it to put pressure on schools to improve. A Mississippi parent activist described a district where black parents historically had virtually no opportunity to question school board or administrative policies, where teacher unions were nonexistent, and where educational inequality was an unchallenged way of life. In NCLB, she saw public reporting mandates that put a focus on gaps between black and white student achievement, demands that schools respond to these gaps effectively or face penalties, and options for parents to get access to "better schools" and tutorial services for their kids. She, and other parents who echoed her concerns, were not blind to the problems of standardized testing or the inadequacy of NCLB's proposed remedies. But for many, the central issue was how to use the pressure that NCLB put on schools to make them more effective and more responsive institutions.

BRIDGING THE GAP between educators who see NCLB as an attack and parents who see it as an opportunity is a formidable challenge. It requires finding common ground that begins with a recognition of the ways in which, fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, our dual school system continues to provide a separate and unequal education to students from different racial and class backgrounds. It requires that teachers, and their unions, use their power not just to narrowly defend the system as it now exists, but to advocate for radical reform and urgent expansion of educational opportunity for all children.

To prevent the gaps between educators and parents from being filled by aggressive political campaigns to promote standards, tests, vouchers, and privatization will require effective, sustained public efforts to explain why these “remedies” hold out absolutely no hope of solving the problems of public education. Supporters of public schooling need to do a better job of showing how privatization and market reform promise to do for education what they’ve done for housing, health care, and other sectors of the economy: provide profit-making opportunities for a few well-financed investors and reproduce the class and racial inequalities that exist in the larger society. Finally, building a pro-education coalition requires developing a credible alternative program of reform that combines equity and accountability for all schools, that focuses on the supports needed to improve teaching and learning in classrooms, and that puts schools reform in the context of a larger national effort to promote local democratic institutions and reorder social priorities.

NCLB is the culmination of a very active conservative mobilization around schools over the past several decades. While the “wedge issues” that previously dominated the rightwing education agenda have been eclipsed by larger policy ambitions, they are still there. Using schools to promote military recruitment, school prayer, and even homophobia (a special NCLB provision guarantees the Boy Scouts access to school facilities despite its history of antigay discrimination) are all part of the toxic NCLB mix. A political attack on

the independence and objectivity of scientific research is also a central part of the law’s “Reading First” provisions, which misrepresent research about the teaching of reading and restrict the use of funds to certain commercial curriculums and instructional packages that favor scripted, test-driven, phonics-based approaches.

Today, federal education policy has become part of a larger political agenda that seeks to erode and privatize the public sector. Though the federal government provides only about 8 percent of school funding, the administration is using federal regulation to drive school policy in conservative directions at the state, district, and school levels. What’s changed is not a new federal commitment to “leave no child behind,” but the ideological commitment of some politicians to reform public education out of existence through a strategy of “test and burn.” As commentator Danny Rose put it, “NCLB is not the answer to a crisis in public education. NCLB is a tool for creating crisis.” Or as researcher Gerald Bracey has put it, NCLB “is a weapon of mass destruction and its target is the public schools.”

The fallout from NCLB has begun to generate a growing resistance. In some places, students and parents are actively boycotting the imposition of high stakes testing. Both major teacher unions, the NEA and AFT, are looking for ways to modify the worst NCLB provisions. Advocacy groups like Rethinking Schools (www.rethinkingschools.org), FairTest (www.fairtest.org) are trying to promote alternative accountability systems and approaches to reform that engage educators and communities in collaborative school improvement. Parent-community advocacy groups like ACORN (www.acorn.org) are pressing politicians to make good on NCLB’s rhetorical promises of better educational services for poor communities without gutting or privatizing the public system. Together these efforts prefigure a movement that could project a vision of a democratic school reform that truly serves both children and society as a whole, and that works to transform public education instead of destroying it. With NCLB making its noxious presence felt in a school district near you, it is a good time to find this resistance and join it.

No Child Left Behind: A Brainchild of Neoliberalism and American Politics

CARLOS ALBERTO TORRES

Neo-liberalism and neoconservatism are in the driver's seat right now and this is not only happening in education.

MICHAEL APPLE

CULTURAL CRITIC AND EDUCATOR, Michael Apple offers a critique of the current situation in education, where liberalism has been displaced by neoliberalism, deeply affecting education and social policies: "... liberalism itself is under concerted attack from the right, from the coalition of neoconservatives, 'economic modernizers.' And new right groups who have sought to build a new consensus around their own principles, following a strategy best called 'authoritarian populism.' This coalition has combined a 'free market ethic' with a populist politics. The results have been a partial dismantling of social democratic policies that largely benefited working people, people of color, and women (these groups are obviously not mutually exclusive), the building of a closer relationship between government and the capitalist economy, and attempts to curtail liberties that had been gained in the past." (Apple, xxiv)

Throughout the world, a neoliberal agenda promoted by international organizations, professional organizations, and in the case of the United States by the American establishment, includes a drive towards privatization and decentralization of public forms of education, a movement toward educational standards, a strong emphasis on testing, and a focus on accountability. That is to say,

educational neoliberal reforms are based on an economic model of educational policy.

In this article I define NCLB as a neoliberal educational reform readily supported by the American establishment, and, as demonstrated in the presidential candidates' debates, the two mainstream parties hardly differ in their proposal for education. Next I try to show how NCLB will affect educational practices, policies and institutions, including higher education, and finally, I will offer a number of critiques of NCLB from the perspective of social justice education.

An Educational Panacea?

The economic model of education policy assumes a substantial consensus for a common set of educational goals. Unfortunately, such agreement rarely exists in the construction of real world reform.

HENRY LEVIN AND CLIVE BELFIELD

ANY ASTUTE OBSERVER of the third presidential debate, which focused on domestic issues, will agree that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was never a matter of policy dispute between the candidates of the two mainstream parties.

The challenger, Senator Kerry, did not question the values, implementation, effectiveness, or methods of NCLB. Quite the contrary, he emphasized that, "the No Child Left Behind Act is really a jobs act when you think about it. The No Child Left Behind Act says, 'We'll raise standards. We'll increase federal spending. But in return for extra spending, we now want people to measure ... whether or not a child can read or write or add and subtract.'"

In the same vein, during the vice presidential candidates debate at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio, Vice President Cheney

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said: "I think the most important thing we can do is have a first-class public school system... And the president, his first legislative priority was the No Child Left Behind Act. It was the first piece of legislation we introduced. We got it passed that first summer on a bipartisan basis. And it does several things. It establishes high standards. It, at the same time, sets up a system of testing with respect to our school system, so we can establish accountability to parents and make certain that they understand how well their students are doing. And they have the opportunity to move students out of poorly performing schools to good schools. It's also important, as we go forward in the next term, we want to be able to take what we've done for elementary education and move it into the secondary education. It's working. We've seen reports now of a reduction in the achievement gap between majority students and minority students. We're making significant progress."

Thus, the first important learning is that NCLB passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and enthusiasm because it reflects the perspective of the American establishment, and was originally supported by a number of professional organizations.

Make no mistake. The NCLB increased the role of the federal government in accountability like never before. Although the federal government only funds 7 percent of the total expenditure of education in the country, it has tried to leverage those funds for specific purposes. DeBray explains the process: "The 1994 ESEA reauthorization altered the federal role in accountability for states and schools in two significant ways. First, the Clinton administration proposed that states adopt clear standards and assessments for all students in Title I, a strategy that was intended to use the money in Title I to drive the "seed money" for standards-based reform provided in Goals 2000, a much smaller federal program enacted earlier in 1994 (DeBray, 57)

NCLB creates a condition in which the federal government diminished the educational autonomy of the states strengthening the federal role by increasing requirements for states. (DeBray, 58).

NCLB is a reform model claiming raising standards while at the same time defining what those standards are, and what quality of education is or ought to be. It is a model that bases the understanding of education in strictly and overwhelming economic terms (e.g., Senator Kerry's idea that NCLB is a jobs act). It is a model based on cognitive measurements of students, schools and teachers, making testing and accountability the buzzwords of the moment in educational environments. And finally, like in the *Wizard of Oz*, "education" has become the magic word that is supposed to transform the world around us.

Listening to the President of the United States in the third presidential debate at Arizona State University, I thought that President Bush was running for the presidency of the teachers' union, not for the Presidency of the United States. His answers to most of the pressing issues of a domestic policy agenda was "education."

- Do you want to keep the economy growing and maintain a competitive workforce? Education is the answer.
- Have you lost your job? Get education.
- You need trade adjustment assistance? Go to community colleges.

This was the voice of President Bush during the third debate:

I went to Washington to solve problems, and I saw a problem in the public education system in America. They were just shuffling too many kids through the system, year after year, grade after grade, without learning the basics. And so we said: Let's raise the standards. We're spending more money, but let's raise the standards and measure early and solve problems now, before it's too late. Got four more years, I've got more to do to continue to raise standards, to continue to reward teachers and school districts that are working, to emphasize math and science in the classrooms, to continue to expand Pell Grants to make sure that people have an opportunity to start their career with a college diploma. And so the person you talked to, I say, here's some help, here's some trade adjustment assistance money for you to go a community college in your neighborhood, a community col-

lege which is providing the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the twenty-first century.

Senator Kerry concurred. During the October 8, 2004, second candidates' Debate at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, he argued:

I think you ought to get the break. I want to lower your cost to health care. I want to fully fund education, No Child Left Behind, special-needs education. And that's how we're going to be more competitive, by making sure our kids are graduating from school and college.

While agreeing with the President on the need for NCLB, he blamed the administration for underfunding it: "The president reneged on his promise to fund No Child Left Behind." This was the cornerstone of disagreements between both parties: the appropriate level of funding for a substantial reform like this one. DeBray has argued that this is what undermined the consensus: "President Bush's budget for 2004 calls for significantly less education spending than what Congress has authorized. Further, as governors have slashed state education budgets, it is clear that states no longer have the capacity to implement the kinds of policies they did during the economic boom of the 1990s. If the federal government does not adequately fund the law's mandates, both Republican and Democratic governors will resist politically, as Vermont's Howard Dean (D) and Louisiana's Mike Foster (R) at different times suggested they might." (DeBray, 62)

Another slight difference between the candidates is that the key educational problem for Kerry, as he expressed in the second debate, is his emphasis on fostering global educational competition: "China and India are graduating more graduates in technology and science than we are." One may wonder, however, if such competition has to do with training a workforce or in different factors, such as the capacity of research and development in the United States to produce new knowledge and technology. Everybody knows that the U.S. higher education system has been braindraining other nations human capital for decades, and that once students graduate, many simply remain working for American corporations. This may not be the norm any

longer: "Testimony to this is the beginning of a 'reverse brain drain' manifested by a sustained drop in the number of doctoral students from China, India, and Taiwan (China) who planned to remain in the United States beginning in the late 1990s." (Saravia and Miranda, 608)

Thus, the issue of international competitiveness in science and technology does not seem to reside solely in the national capacity to attract and/or educate scientists, engineers, and technologists, but perhaps in the creative productivity of such a work force: "...Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan (China) account for more than one quarter of all applications for industrial patents awarded in the United States each year and, remarkably, Taiwan (China) and Singapore surpassed the United States in the overall number of citations to their patents on chemical design." (Saravia and Miranda, 608)

Still, while one may agree or disagree if the United States is lagging behind in science and technology compared to other nations, it is somewhat understandable why the issue of fully funding NCLB educational reform becomes the cornerstone of disagreements between Democrats and Republicans: "On the first anniversary of the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in January, Democrats, including senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT), sent President Bush a letter that read in part, 'America's public schools cannot overcome the enormous obstacles they face on the cheap.'" Their letter demanded a \$7.7 billion increase in the federal education budget for the next fiscal year (2004). Bush, by contrast, has proposed a \$1.1 billion increase, saying that the country cannot afford more in time of war. (DeBray, 63)

Globalization and Higher Education.

Text and discourse are never innocent of complicity with events.

E. SAN JUAN JR.

WHY DO PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES usually take place in universities? Perhaps because they are considered sacred environments for the pursuit of the quest for knowledge, liberty, and freedom of thought, or perhaps because universities are seen

as environments that welcome debate, as environments in which objectivity, neutrality, and apoliticity seems to prevail. This is not the place to discuss these commonsense perspectives on universities, and in fact, it doesn't matter because the debates, as the one that we witnessed between Bush and Kerry, were highly scripted, with little if anything left to the actual theoretical imagination or the methodological and analytical rigor of academic exchanges. The presidential debates were a form of "spectacle democracy."

On what is specific to higher education, neoliberal globalization designs four primary reforms for universities related to efficiency and accountability, accreditation and universalization, international competitiveness, and privatization (Rhoads and Torres, in press). Concerns about efficiency and accountability are manifest in the efforts of legislatures, governing boards, and policy makers to increase the productivity of faculty while decreasing university and college expenditures. The classic example is the effort to increase faculty teaching loads without raising salaries. The proliferation of large classes in which one professor can reach hundreds of students is another example, as were early efforts to promote distance and Internet-based education.

With regard to accreditation and universalization, major efforts are underway throughout the world to reform academic programs through accreditation processes and various strategies that produce increased homogeneity across national boundaries.

Reforms associated with international competitiveness are characterized by efforts to create measurable performance standards through extensive standardized testing (the new standards and accountability movement), introduction of new teaching and learning methods leading to the expectation of better performance at a lower cost (e.g., universalization of textbooks), and improvements in the selection and training of teachers. Competition-based reforms in higher education tend to adopt a vocational orientation and reflect the point of view that colleges and universities exist largely to serve the economic well-being of a society.

Privatization, of course, is the final major reform effort linked to neoliberal globalization and perhaps the most dominant aspect. Neoliberal economic supporters view the marketplace as the ideal regulator of services, products, and costs. Consequently, if we think of education as a product or service, then from a neoliberal perspective the best way to regulate schools, colleges, and universities is to allow the market to do so. Nation-states need not fund or concern themselves with tuition costs; the market can take on such responsibilities quite handily. If institutions price themselves too highly, prospective students will inform them by selecting other less costly institutions.

Alternatively, if a prospective student cannot afford higher education, then there are other options that societies offer, including military service and work within the service sector of the economy. The rationale of such a system is purely economic. Furthermore, the system is, from the perspective of neoliberalism, entirely just, given that subjective individuals do not open and close doors, but a system of costs and payments dictates nearly every outcome.

The neoliberal promise in education in the United States is one that points to progressively extend the model of NCLB to secondary school, and eventually to universities, which is compatible with a recent initiative by the World Trade Organization. The WTO, a multilateral agency heavily supported by the United States, has recently debated an initiative that promotes, or attempts to ensure that educational services worldwide be deregulated and, on behalf of free markets, treated as any other financial service. This initiative opens the way for substantial higher educational reforms, through privatization to occur not only in the world, but also in the United States, a signatory of the WTO agreements.

Pitfalls and Contradictions

Maybe their meanness killed something important in them.

LINDA BELL

FROM A PERSPECTIVE of teaching for social jus-

tice, a critique of NCLB points to fundamental pitfalls and contradictions of the model which, in the end, not only may lead to its own demise, but will deeply damage the fabric of public education as the cornerstone of the democratic pact in the United States, and by implication, will damage peoples and entire communities, especially people of color.

Carlos Ovando offers eleven reasons why NCLB could be considered a fraud. 1. The massive increase in testing that NCLB will impose on schools will hurt their educational performance, not improve it; 2. The funding for NCLB does not come anywhere near the levels that would be needed to reach even the narrow and dubious goals of producing 100 percent passing rates on state tests for all students by 2014; 3. The mandate that NCLB imposes on schools to eliminate inequality in test scores among all students within 12 years is a mandate that is placed on no other social institution, and reflects the hypocrisy of the law; 4. The sanctions that NCLB impose on schools that don't meet its test score targets will hurt poor schools and poor communities most; 5. The transfer and choice provision will create chaos and produce greater inequality within the public system without increasing the capacity of receiving schools to deliver better educational services; 6. These same transfer and choice provisions will not give low-income parents any more control over school bureaucracies than food stamps give them over the supermarkets; 7. These provisions about using scientifically based instructional practices are neither scientifically valid nor educationally sound and will harmfully impact classrooms in what may be the single most important instructional area, the teaching of reading; 8. The supplemental tutorial provisions of NCLB will channel public funds to private companies for ideological and political reasons, similar to debates about vouchers, not sound educational ones; 9. NCLB is part of a larger political and ideological effort to privatize social programs, reduce the public sector, and ultimately replace local control of institutions like schools with marketplace reforms that substitute commercial relations between customers for

democratic relations between citizens; 10. NCLB moves control over curriculum and instructional issues away from teachers, classrooms, schools and local districts where it should be, and puts it in the hands of state and federal educational bureaucracies and politicians. It represents the single biggest assault on local control of schools in the history of federal education policy; 11. NCLB includes provisions that try to push prayer, military recruiters, and homophobia into schools while pushing multiculturalism, teacher innovation, and creative curriculum reform out.

Ovando's critique is shared by many scholars, and they are also many other voices of dissent in many school districts and state departments of education struggling to comply with the letter and the spirit of the law. Yet, I will argue that even the spirit of the law, based on the notion of accountability should be carefully inspected and criticized.

Technocrats and bureaucrats take for granted that accountability is one of those terms that cannot be challenged because accountability refers to the process of holding actors responsible for their actions. Nonetheless, "Operationalizing such an open-ended concept is fraught with complications, starting with the politically and technically contested issue of assessing performance. Even if the measurement problem were solved, the factors explaining the process have received remarkable little research attention. For example, although political science has sought broad generalizations to explain wars, treaties, military coups, legislation, electoral behavior, and transitions to democracy, it has not produced empirically grounded conceptual frameworks that can explain how public accountability is constructed across diverse institutions." (Fox and Brown, 12)

If a discipline such as political science has not been able to truly define what accountability is, how can one expect to sort out those dilemmas in education? Only in the feverish imagination of technocrats who, paraphrasing Mark Twain's irony, can be criticized that if the only tool that they have is a hammer, all the problems begin to look like nails. I wonder sometimes what would Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey, or Freire, to name

just a few great pedagogues, would say confronted with the theories of the lesser-known pedagogues of the Congress, the White House, and their academic advisers and consultants who inspired the principles of NCLB.

Technocrats will probably argue that the rules of *realpolitik* call for an understanding of systemic issues and the need of solving pressing institutional needs, and what is needed are practical solutions, hopefully through consensus, solutions which cannot easily be made compatible with the lofty ideas of pedagogues. I will disagree. While recognizing the importance of those practical needs, the logic underpinning the rationales for policy formation, or the legal constraints of policy-making and institutional negotiation, there is no reason why to base all policy on economic rationality ignoring centuries of humanistic education, pedagogical research, or alternatives models and critical perspectives. Or perhaps one simply may ask why a reform like the NCLB ignores vast amounts of contemporary scientific research that shows the difficulties of implementing its measures, and the pitfalls and dangers of those measures if implemented.

The complexities of NCLB call for a more reflexive and critical understanding of contemporary schooling in the United States. While criticizing social reproduction, critical educators have been struggling to promote equity and equality in schools, alongside with achieving good quality education. To this extent, critical educators believe that better research findings, more consistent policy, better school management, teacher training, curriculum and instruction theories, and textbooks make a difference. Thus, to critically examine the foundations, instruments, methods, and policy orientation of NCLB, and its implementation, makes a lot of pedagogical and political sense. Yet, there are other pressing questions of a greater order that we cannot ignore.

Even if NCLB were to succeed in its implementation and premises, what difference do better schools — as defined by NCLB — make for the betterment of our society if the overall orientation of the U.S. government is to achieve global

hegemony through the use of brutal force (disguised through military new euphemisms such as ‘smart bombs’), and particularly acting as a world policeman by exporting democracy through carpet bombing in Iraq?

What difference do schools make in the training of children and youth who will become the new Centurions? What difference do schools make in the education of people of color, if they will become “green card Marines” in the imperial army? What difference do schools make in promoting social mobility if there are not jobs for the graduates after most of the best jobs have been outsourced out of the local markets and into a globalized market, benefiting the surplus value of globalized corporations? What difference do schools make in promoting multicultural traditions if, as many scholars have argued, there is only one dominant, hegemonic culture in capitalism, and that is the commodification of labor and knowledge and the culture of class? What difference do schools make if, as some scholars have argued, they represent the broken promises of public education?

What difference do schools make if betraying the principles of the Enlightenment, under the burden of heavy school districts and union bureaucracies, with schools located in run down buildings, managed by self-serving politicians, stuffed by technocratic curriculum, demoralized administrators and teachers, and tested-to-death, disenfranchised students, with overworked and underpaid parents, and assailed by the world of business as another site for-profit taking, schools have abandoned the key tenets of reasonability and utopia?

These are, indeed, some of the pressing questions of today and certainly, questions that NCLB, a brainchild of neoliberalism, is unable or unwilling to answer. The answer, however, is not in a top down law of the Establishment, but in the struggle in the streets. The answers are in the development of public spheres, in the new communities of debate and deliberation in the Internet and nongovernmental organizations, and in the potential new social role of universities promot-

ing a democratic discourse as a critic of the established power. The answer is also in the ability of teachers to remain autonomous despite teacher-proof educational models. To remain caring, critical, and well informed despite growing bureaucratic regulations of profession. The answer is finally in the social movements that will not accept the authoritarianism of reforms like NCLB, and will continue the struggle, challenging and even practically vetoing policies of the establishment while at the same time advancing alternatives.

Over centuries considering the contradictions of the social orders, the human condition was not improved by nihilists but by visionaries; it was not improved by negativists, but, paraphrasing Paulo Freire, by being impatiently patient seeking social transformation, equity, solidarity, freedom, and justice for all. Freedom was not conquered by the ruthless exercise of power, but by the imagination, passion, and utopia of many anonymous women and men who chose to live and to know decent, dignifying lives despite the rule of authoritarian powers. Neoliberalism and NCLB will not pass the test of time.

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Neoliberalism, Teacher Unionism, and the Future of Public Education

LOIS WEINER

WITH OVERWHELMING SUPPORT from both Democrats and Republicans, the Bush administration rewrote the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2001, drastically changing public education. One of the key initiatives of the Johnson-era “war on poverty,” ESEA has been the main source of federal aid to schools serving children in poverty. Employing the rhetoric of “equity,” the legislative package called “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), has made federal aid dependent on schools’ accepting new regulations on a host of school policies, from teacher qualifications, to instructional content and methods permissible for reading instruction, to the privatization of school services, like tutoring. However, the mandates that have received the most attention require testing in grades 3-8 and the reporting of disaggregated test scores for minority groups who have traditionally been “left behind” by schools, as well as by students identified as requiring special education. Schools that fail to deliver high test scores for all groups are publicly identified as failing and are subject to a host of punitive measures. Although there is much else in the package that affects all public schools that accept ESEA funds, testing and score reporting are the features of the NCLB that are most hotly debated, in part because they affect *all* schools, everywhere, and not just those that are assumed to be “failing,” (e.g., city schools with high concentrations of poor, minority children).

The rhetorical premise of NCLB is that the federal government will finally hold public schools

throughout the nation accountable for their failure to educate poor and working class Hispanic and African American students. In this article, I explain how NCLB’s purported aim of increasing educational opportunity masks its key purpose: to create a privatized system of public education that has a narrow, vocationalized curriculum enforced through use of standardized tests. I analyze the origins of support for some of NCLB’s key premises and explain why the most prominent liberal criticism of NCLB, the underfunding of its provisions, is dangerously misleading, for both strategic and ideological reasons. Finally, I suggest how we might develop a progressive program and movement for school improvement, one connected to a revitalized teacher union and labor movement.

Bipartisan Backing

ONE ASPECT OF NCLB mostly ignored by its opponents is that it both perpetuates and significantly deepens policies begun under Bush senior and continued by the Democrats and Clinton. Yet, the origins of NCLB in educational reforms begun a decade earlier have been well documented. Writing in the *Educational Researcher* in November 1996, Gary Natriello noted that the bipartisan National Education Summit diverted attention away from many pressing problems in the U.S. economy and its schools in a policy statement presenting high academic standards as a panacea. Describing the marketization of education in North Carolina in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* in 2002, researchers identified intensified race and class stratification that resulted from policies implemented in the Clinton administration. Clinton pressed hard for Bush’s National Goals 2000 and its emphasis on national standards enforced through standardized testing, and

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looked to his corporate allies for direction in setting education policy.

NCLB sharply divided the weakened traditional labor-liberal coalition that generally works together to win increases in school funding. The Council of Chief State School Officers, the Council of Great City Schools, and one teachers union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which represents teachers in cities, supported the rationale that holding schools to “high standards” enforced through yearly standardized tests, with severe penalties for poor performance would force schools to shape up. The National Education Association (NEA) led the opposition to NCLB, arguing that its punitive sanctions, the absence of significant new funding, and the testing mandates were dangerous and destructive to public schools. The NEA is much larger than the AFT, and though it frequently cooperates with organized labor, it is not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. In its opposition to NCLB the NEA was joined by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), which represents some 14,000 superintendents and local administrators, major civil rights organizations including the NAACP, as well as most progressive advocacy groups.

NCLB’s rhetoric and its provisions that require reporting disaggregated test scores are enormously seductive to parents and low-income communities whose children attend poorly-funded, poorly-functioning schools. Schools in predominantly Hispanic and African American neighborhoods are often incapable of providing children with more than the rudiments of literacy and numeracy — if that. Often these schools cannot recruit and retain sufficient numbers of teachers to staff classrooms. City and rural schools that enroll large concentrations of recent immigrants are frequently so underfunded and overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of students that bathrooms and closets are pressed into use as classrooms. Even in better-funded school districts in which African American and Hispanic youth are a demographic minority, they are frequently tracked into classes that offer a diet of low-level materials and poor instruction, robbed of the opportunity to take

college preparatory work. African-American boys are placed into special education in numbers vastly disproportionate to their presence in the school population. Once students are labeled as having “special needs,” they are rarely given the help they need to move into regular programs, although this is the presumed rationale for identifying their problem and grouping them together.

For many years, schools and school districts’ test scores, graduation rates, and other statistical indicators commonly used to measure achievement, have been made public. However, in many states, New York for example, reports of test scores did not break down the achievement for different groups of children. A school would report the demographics of its student body and its passing rates on standardized tests, but it did not previously have to sort out, disaggregate, the data so that correlations between achievement and demographics could be made. For this reason, inequality of achievement was often masked. Given school practices and conditions that allow millions of minority children to be undereducated, NCLB’s requirement for disaggregated test reports and its “get tough” stance to punish schools that fail to help minority youth are attractive to many parents, most especially those who feel powerlessness to make institutions that are publicly funded serve their children adequately.

Note, too, that NCLB’s passage follows on the failure of the civil rights movement’s reforms to equalize educational opportunity. A full analysis of what occurred and why for the past thirty years of school reform would take me far beyond analysis of NCLB, but it is important to understand that NCLB’s stated goal to “leave no child behind” would have far less popular resonance if schools presently served poor children of color reasonably well. NCLB’s hijacking of the rhetoric of progressive educational reform would not be possible had progressive intentions to improve schooling been actualized, and so a brief explanation of what went wrong is needed. A radical vision of improved schooling for *all* children was lost in a Faustian bargain negotiated by legislators and bureaucrats, one embodied in the legis-

lation creating ESEA. Relatively small infusions of public funds were given to schools and targeted at specific students, those presumed to need extra help, based on their family income, or in the case of bilingual education, their native language.

The funding's efficacy was measured by standardized tests, given at the beginning and end of each school year to students enrolled in classes that had materials and teachers paid for by ESEA monies. These "compensatory" programs ushered in the first widespread use of standardized test scores to measure teaching and learning, accepted as valid measures of whether public funds on education were being well spent. The model assumed that poor, minority children were not achieving because they — and their families — were deficient. It ignored, indeed contradicted, evidence of racism's destructive and systemic influences on how children are taught and what they are expected to know, as well as the bureaucratic organization of schooling.

Historically, public education in this country has coped with demands to equalize educational outcomes by blaming lack of achievement on students' individual problems, labeling their deficiencies, and then putting them in separate programs that "meet their needs." Our present policies for classifying students as having various sorts of educational disabilities differ primarily in nomenclature from those developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, when working class students disinterested in school would be labeled "anemic" or "phlegmatic" and shunted into separate classes or schools.

NCLB definitively breaks this pattern by presuming that if children are not succeeding in school, responsibility rests with the school — and not the children. But in so doing, it destroys the structure and organization of a publicly funded and ostensibly publicly controlled system of education begun more than a century ago. NCLB closely resembles the blueprint developed in ultra-right wing think tanks to replace locally controlled school systems funded by the states with a collection of privatized services governed only by the market. What NCLB adds to the original "free

market" framework is the demand for standardized curricula and testing, and the Christian Right's press for "faith-based" interventions in

NCLB's passage follows on the failure of the civil rights movement's reforms to equalize educational opportunity.

public services.

NCLB's "free market" underpinning pretends that schools can compensate for the array of savage economic and social problems that undercut children's school success, problems created and abetted by government policies. In this mad reasoning, public funding for low-cost housing is cut back or eliminated. When the market's failure to provide adequate housing is evident in soaring rates of homelessness, schools are told that children's homelessness and its attendant social and logistical problems are no excuse for their failing scores on standardized tests. If there is sufficient political furor because of the obvious inability of schools to cope with this new crisis, the government creates a discrete, token allocation for homeless children. Often the money can't be used well, or perhaps at all, because the amount provided is so small relative to the enormity of the problems the school must overcome to provide meaningful assistance. Just tracking the whereabouts of children who move from one shelter to another, let alone providing them with appropriate services, is beyond the capacity of most urban school systems, which must interact with a number of similarly bureaucratic, under-resourced, and dysfunctional agencies.

NCLB draws on and encourages the powerful political mythology touted consistently in the media that schooling is the most effective way to overcome social inequality. This notion persists despite the overwhelming evidence that our educational system reproduces existing social relations

that a program to advance educational opportunity has to be understood as part of a larger project of attacking inequality with other social policies, including an end to de facto school segregation.

To argue that schools have a limited capacity to ameliorate economic and social inequality is not to diminish the moral or political importance of the struggle to improve education. Any progressive movement deserving of the name will demand that public schools provide all students with an education that will allow them to be well-rounded, productive citizens, which includes the ability to compete for whatever well-paying jobs exist. Improving schools that serve poor and working class youth can make a difference in the lives of some children, and for that reason alone, progressive school reform deserves our attention. Moreover, struggling to improve schools for all children has a critical political significance because it demands that American society make good on its democratic ideals, its pledge of equality. While being clear that improved schooling is a moral and political imperative, we need to state its limitations as a policy vehicle for making the society more equitable. As the authors of *Choosing Equality* (1986) note, education can challenge the tyranny of the labor market — but not eliminate it. Especially as neoliberal policies tighten their grip on governments and capitalism's assault on the living conditions of working people intensifies, schooling becomes as an ever-weaker lever for improving the economic well-being of individuals even while it remains a critical arena for political struggle.

The heart of any agenda for progressive *social change, which includes improving education*, must address what historian David Hogan terms “the silent compulsion of economic relations,” the nexus of racial segregation in schools and housing, combined with dependence on local property taxes for school funding. Segregation in housing has become the pretext for abandoning the challenge of racially integrating schools, and segregation has seriously wakened the forces challenging funding inequities. Some African American activists and researchers advocate dropping the demand for integrating

schools, because the society has turned its back on its commitments to educate African American children, and they would be better served in segregated schools staffed by African American teachers. Arguing that we must attack the problems of segregated schools as they are today and not wait for integration to occur is different from substituting the former for the latter.

Although the despair that underlies desertion of the goal of integration is understandable, it fuels the erroneous romanticization of segregated schooling and ignores the reality that racially segregated schools and school systems are more isolated politically for being racially segregated and, thus, more vulnerable in funding battles in state legislatures. The urgency of making segregated schools better is undeniable, but so is the necessity of mounting a political and legal challenge both to the de facto segregation of schools *and* the use of local property taxes for schooling. Activists who lived through the busing battles of the 1970s, even those who have read about them, do not want to take up an issue that can incite vicious racism, but as racism underlies much of the opposition to funding schools serving poor, minority students adequately, it must be confronted. Unfortunately, even Ralph Nader's school reform plank (votenader.org), skirts this issue. While it observes that nationally school segregation has increased since the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the program does not call for desegregation but rather only for control of education to be left in the hands of the states with new investment in education. The federal government is identified as having a “critical supporting role” to ensure that all children, irrespective of family income or race are “provided with rich learning environments and equal educational opportunities.” The platform rejects NCLB's focus on high frequency, high-stakes, standardized testing as detrimental to children's intellectual and psychological well-being, noting that it “is unfair to poorer children from devastating backgrounds.”

There is much that is important in the statement on school reform on the Nader/Camejo

website, for instance, its rejection of vouchers and corporate influences on curricula. Still, the absence of explicit attention to connections between racial segregation in schools and housing, and state dependence on local property taxes for school funding is disappointing. Without making the case that segregation, school funding, and school quality are inextricably connected to one another, the argument against NCLB, especially in minority communities, is far less persuasive.

While NCLB's passage partly results from the right's heightened political presence generally, its allure is also attributable to public confusion about defending a system of public education that seems to be unreformable. The tune played by both Democrats and Republicans is that Americans must scale back their expectations about governmental responsibility for services now portrayed as individual and personal concerns, like housing and health care. Both parties now insist that American society cannot fulfill its promise of providing equal *educational* opportunity. As Nader points out, NCLB's passage is also a dismaying indication of the degree of popular disorientation about the role of education in a democracy and the contradiction of privatizing an essential civic function.

The New Agenda

THE OVERWHELMING SUPPORT by both Democrats and Republicans for NCLB is explained in part by the generally submissive stance of the Democratic Party to Republican initiatives. However, bipartisan endorsement of a legislative package that contains such disparate and for liberals, politically repugnant regulations, deserves a closer look. After all, NCLB contains much that contradicts basic premises of liberal capitalism in the past fifty years, including the evaporation of separation of church and state (NCLB allows religious organizations to provide after-school services and requires that classes in sex education consist of exhortations for abstinence). And yet, the Democratic Party embraced NCLB, wholeheartedly, with Bush singling out Ted Kennedy for praise for the assistance Kennedy gave in its passage.

According to the Constitution, education is a responsibility of the states, and in theory states could refuse to comply with NCLB by refusing ESEA funds. Despite a few threats to do so, no state has yet turned its back on ESEA funds because schools in revenue-poor districts, which also have students who are the most expensive to educate, would be financially devastated. The state government would be obliged to craft a rescue. As is obvious from the protracted legal battles to equalize state funding, there is little political will on the state level to give low-wealth/high-need school districts the funding they need and deserve.

Why, then, were liberals and moderates in both parties so willing to support a legislative package with these (and other) equally regressive provisions? The glue that held together the bipartisan endorsement of NCLB is the shared ideological support for neoliberalism's program for the global capitalist economy, a global transformation in education's character and role.* NCLB enacts the program for education that neoliberal economists and governments pursue internationally. In both industrialized nations and the developing world, neoliberal reforms are promoted as rationalizing and equalizing delivery of social services. Towards this end, the World Bank demands curricular and structural change in education when it provides loans. The "wish list" is seen in the draft version of the *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* (WDR 2004), which describes education's purpose solely in terms of preparing workers for jobs in a global economy: Reformed educational systems will allow transnational capitalism to move jobs when-

*In my identification of the neoliberal agenda, I use a definition of Roberto Unger, employed by several educational researchers in Europe investigating global changes in education. Unger defines neoliberalism an economic program (not just a collection of disparate policies) with these characteristics: fiscal balance, which is achieved primarily through limits to public spending rather than by increases in moneys received through taxation; heightened integration into the world trading system and its existing rules; privatization of services, which includes adoption of Western laws of private property; acceptance of some social safety nets to ameliorate inequality resulting from other aspects of the program.

ever and wherever it wishes, that is, to the country with the working conditions and salaries that are worst for workers and best for profits. (See

The tune played by both Democrats and Republicans is that Americans must scale back their expectations about governmental responsibility for services now portrayed as individual and personal concerns, like housing and health care.

econ.worldbank.org/files/23475_GCE_response_to_WDR.pdf. The final version is at econ.worldbank.org/wdr/wdr2004/text_30023/.)

The draft was later modified in negotiations with governments and nongovernmental organizations, but the original version is a declaration of war on every aspect of the social contract, especially provision of public education and the existence teachers unions. Public education remains the largest realm of public expenditures that is highly unionized and not yet privatized, and the draft report identifies *unions*, especially teachers unions, as one of the greatest *threats* to global prosperity. The draft argues that unions have “captured governments,” holding poor people hostage to their demands for more pay. The report combines a savage attack on teachers and teacher unions, including a suggestion that they should be fired wholesale when they strike or otherwise resist demands for reduced pay, with a call to privatize services, greatly reduce public funding, devolve control of schools to neighborhoods, and increase user fees. The World Bank has implemented many elements of the draft report by making loans and aid contingent on “restructuring,” that is, destroying publicly funded, publicly controlled educational systems. The results, including reduced literacy rates, have been devastating, as University

of Buenos Aires Professor Adriana Puiggrós describes in her report contrasting the reality of implementation in Argentina with the World Bank’s rhetoric of equality (see www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/cambridge/2004/02/286118.html).

A key element of the program is limiting access to higher education through the imposition of higher tuition and reduced government support to both institutions and individual students. Limiting access to higher education means lower education needs only to prepare students for work, the jobs requiring basic skills that multinationals aim to move from one country to another. Schools that train most workers for jobs requiring limited literacy and numeracy, which WDR 2004 explains is all we can realistically expect for poor people in poor countries, does not require teachers who are themselves well-educated or skilled as teachers. In fact, teachers who have a significant amount of education are a liability because they are costly to employ; teacher salaries are the largest expense of any school system. Minimally educated workers require only teachers who are themselves minimally educated, and so teacher education is eliminated or deskilled in the neoliberal program.

Most of NCLB’s elements for reorganizing education in the United States are straight out of the draft report for WDR 2004. Charter schools (and the Bush administration’s not-yet-realized plan for vouchers to be used in private schools) fragment oversight and control; testing requirements and increasingly punitive measures for low test scores pressure schools to limit what is taught so that the tests become the curriculum; privatization of school services, like tutoring and professional development for teachers — tied to raising test scores — undercuts union influence and membership. NCLB’s definition of a “highly qualified” teacher actually deskills teaching because it assumes that all one needs to know to teach well is content in the liberal arts. NCLB further limits which content knowledge teachers need by eliminating majors that are more likely to promote teaching’s nurturing functions, psychology and sociology, or a critique of social relations,

as one generally finds in the newer disciplines associated with the social movements which spawned them, like black or women's studies.

In several states teachers can become "highly qualified" by presenting a B.A. and a passing score for an online exam of teaching that Chester Finn developed with a 35 million dollar grant from the Bush administration. The hysterically antiunion politics of the draft report also explain the remark by Rod Paige, Secretary of the Department of Education, that the NEA is a "terrorist organization." Although his remark was dismissed as a bizarre joke, it echoes the tone of the draft report. The president of the AFT local in Houston with whom Paige had collaborated before coming to Washington was almost alone in defending Paige publicly, commenting to the *Washington Post* that Paige was really quite a wonderful fellow, his joke was harmless, and that the NEA wasn't even a real union, let alone a terrorist organization. (I was curious as to whether she had been quoted accurately, and so I contacted her for a clarification. Sadly, she was.)

The Bush administration is quite open about the explicit linkage between a deskilled teaching force and a narrow curriculum, a fact that is, tellingly, not publicized by Democratic supporters of the legislation, even or especially those who want only to fund it better. Grover Whitehurst, undersecretary in what was formerly the U.S. Department of Education and is now the Institute of Education Sciences, (though its blind fealty to the doctrines of market capitalism and Christian fundamentalism mock its pretensions to scientific research) explained in a meeting with educational researchers that public investment in teacher education is unnecessary because the government is required to provide only a basic education that will prepare students for entry-level jobs. Therefore, government funds are better-spent creating materials for teaching basic skills that teachers with little or no expertise in teaching can use. This is precisely the strategy promoted in WDR 2004, which lauds programs that briefly train fifteen-year old peasant girls, who then teach literacy skills in rural villages.

One way to limit access is charging fees and tuitions to attend school, in both lower and higher education. We see the former strategy in underdeveloped countries, where families must often pay for schooling that was once available for free. In fact, a World Bank policy *prohibited* provision of free education as a requirement for loans, until a movement by liberals in the U.S. Congress, informed and inspired by global justice activists, challenged this measure. Access to learning is also limited by limiting what is learned. Larry Kuehn, research director of the British Columbia Teachers Federation, has traced this process and begins the trail in Washington in 1987, in the Reagan administration, when the United States promoted development of "education indicators" to guide curricula and testing at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an organization of the 29 most industrialized countries and some rapidly industrializing nations, like Korea and Mexico. In these early discussions, the OECD planned how to develop uniform curricula with "culture-free" materials, appropriate for the new "information economy." Kuehn's work illuminates not only the anti-intellectual and anti-humanistic assumptions of these curricula, but also how existing expectations about what students should learn had to be "downscaled."

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a federal agency that monitors academic achievement, works with the OECD. In the U.S., the NAEP has traditionally assessed students' achievements in three sorts of reading: "reading for literary experience," "reading to be informed," and "reading to perform a task." However, the OECD determined that only one ability, "reading to perform a task," as measured for example by reading a computer manual, would be used in international assessments of student learning. Testing the ability to read for literary experience was rejected as being too difficult to assess because of cross-cultural differences. The decision to limit the reading assessment to "reading to perform a task" and the example of this skill illustrate transnational capitalism's to redefine education as vocational training.

Teacher Unionism

AS PUIGGROS NOTES in her description of education's restructuring in Argentina and throughout Latin America, resistance has been led by teacher unions. In organizing this struggle, teacher union activists have paid a hefty price: firings, beatings, even assassination. While both the AFT and NEA have offered statements of support to these heroic unionists, their public pronouncements and letter-writing campaigns are undercut and contradicted by political allegiances and ideological beliefs that reinforce much of the neoliberal program.

The two unions differ in important ways that I analyze below, but the starting point for understanding their response to the neoliberal assault is that they see the world in U.S.-centric terms. More specifically, their vision of the world is refracted through the eyes of capitalist hegemony. The NEA's faulty vision results from ideological backwardness, a failure it can indulge because unlike the unionists in the countries receiving the World Bank "largesse," teachers in the United States have been relatively protected from the program the United States enforces on the rest of the world. In contrast, the AFT leadership takes a more sympathetic view of the neoliberal project and seeks to position itself as a partner institution in the neoliberal agenda.

Although Albert Shanker, AFT's longtime chief, died in 1997, his organizational stranglehold on the union, his political compact with social conservatives, and his leadership of the segment of the AFL-CIO that has collaborated with the U.S. government in subverting popular movements throughout the globe, were continued by his cothinker and replacement, Sandra Feldman, who recently resigned the AFT presidency due to poor health. (See Paul Buhle's obituary for Shanker in *New Politics*, at www.wpunj.edu/icip/newpol/issue23/buhle23.htm, or the one I wrote in *Contemporary Education*, Summer 1998.) The similarities between Shanker's vision for school reform, which because of his ironclad control of the union was *de facto* those of the organization, and the neoliberal program manifested in NCLB are ap-

parent in his article, published posthumously, in the *Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy*.

If we ignore the article's curmudgeonly tone and focus on its content, Shanker's agreement with the major portion of the neoliberal educational program is apparent. First, Shanker contends that U.S. schools are far worse than those in OECD nations because we offer *too much* access to higher education, or as he formulates the problem, we have an insufficient amount of academic "tracking." We don't start early enough to put students into programs that prepare them for their vocational destinies, so he advocates putting all students into vocational tracks sometime between grades five and nine. In their earlier grades, they should have a curriculum based on E.D. Hirsch's project for "cultural literacy." Although he maintains that in these tracks students must all be held to "high standards," his use of Hirsch's curriculum signifies that instead of engaging first-hand with primary sources, reading, appreciating, and perhaps creating literature, students will memorize facts about the "great" (white men) of history, the arts, and science. He bemoans the absence of a system of high-stakes tests with really harsh penalties for failure, the absence of mandatory national curriculum standards, and the presence of far too much tolerance for student misconduct. Shanker assails the laxity of the pre-NCLB curriculum standards, which were additionally problematic for being left to the states to execute.

Shanker adds that some standards can be too "vague for example, 'Learn to appreciate literature.'" Shanker's breezy dismissal of the standard about appreciating literature echoes the OECD's rejection of international assessment in "reading for literary experience." Shanker used his weekly column in the *New York Times*, paid for by the membership, to ridicule the national standards developed by professional organizations of teachers of the arts, rejecting them as grandiose and unrealistic, though his own children attended school in a suburban district with excellent arts programs — and no E.D. Hirsch curricula.

Union members had not formally endorsed many of the positions Shanker adopted, for in-

stance rejection of the standards in the arts. Recent surveys of teachers, in cities, suburbs, and rural schools find even less support now than there was at the time Shanker advocated many of his positions about standards and testing. Yet because of the AFT's bureaucratic deformation, of which the indictments for graft in the Miami and Washington, DC locals are shamefully graphic illustrations, the opposition to the AFT's vocal, unwavering support for testing and "high standards" scarcely registers at the national level. Most of the biggest locals are so bureaucratic that rank and file challenges to the leadership must be about fundamental practices of democracy in order to allow classroom teachers' voices on issues of educational policy to be heard.

The NEA generally can be counted on to adopt liberal positions on the important political issues of the day, although its positions do not necessarily represent those of its members because its organizational structure is also bureaucratic but in a different way from the AFT. The AFT is a federation of locals so the state organizations have small staffs and little power. The AFT constitution contains no term limits for its president who has little direct control of local functions. Shanker masterfully exploited the post of AFT president to promote himself and to trumpet his political views on a wide range of opinions. He did so by using his domination of the massive New York City local to leverage control of the national organization and ensuring that his political views received a formal stamp of approval from the union's executive council but were never debated at the local level. Shanker ruled the national staff with an iron fist ideologically, employing only people who agreed with him — or were fired.

In contrast, power in the NEA resides with the state organizations. Presidents of the national organization are usually career teachers who have been active in the state affiliates. They are limited to two terms, a fact that encourages staff control of operations and policy. In the AFT, dues remain in the locals so that they hire their own organizers directly. In the NEA, dues go to the state affiliate, which hires organizers, who are then as-

signed to work for locals as the needs arise. Thus NEA's organizational structure puts the staff in the political saddle, and the politics of its staff resemble those found in other public employee unions in the U.S., like AFSCME and SEIU, generally left-leaning. While the NEA is better positioned than the AFT to lead a struggle in this country for progressive school reform, it is hampered by its own bureaucratic structure and its roots as a professional organization controlled by school administrators: It moved to become a collective bargaining agent only after the AFT's stunning successes in organizing city teachers into unions in the 1960s and 1970s forced it to do so.

As with other left-leaning public employee unions, the NEA is willing to be openly critical of the use of U.S. military and political force to safeguard capitalism in a way that the AFT is not. Perhaps in part because of its roots as a professional organization, the NEA lacks the ideological sophistication of other progressive unions in the U.S. and of its counterparts in Europe that are connected to social democratic parties. The NEA is clearly trying to make ideological sense of the global attack against teacher unionism and public education, searching unsuccessfully for a vocabulary — and lever — for resistance. At bottom, the NEA fails to understand the premise of Daniel Singer's work, *Whose Millenium* (Monthly Review Press, 1999): The struggles today do not result from changes in "technology" or "globalization," which are phenomena advanced to mask the real culprit, capitalism's structural crisis and its neoliberal "solutions." The chief ideological impediment to developing a resistance is acceptance of TINA, the notion that "There is no alternative," (TINA) to capitalism and its destructive policies. The NEA's failure to name the problem has kept it from generating a class-conscious, anti-capitalist critique that would guide development of the program needed to derail NCLB and the neoliberal program for education.

NEA and AFT are by far the biggest member organizations in the Educational International (EI), the international confederation of teacher unions, which is affiliated with the other interna-

tional organizations of unions, like the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD. The EI seems to “agree to disagree,” that is, not take a position or action on issues on which its most

The NEA is clearly trying to make ideological sense of the global attack against teacher unionism and public education, searching unsuccessfully for a vocabulary — and lever — for resistance.

powerful members, the AFT and NEA, dissent — either with one another or with the other delegates - especially those from developing countries who are feeling the brunt of the neoliberal policies formulated and pressed by the U.S. The EI's evasion of critical issues of war and peace, like the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and the war in Iraq, is possible primarily because it is comprised of national union leaders. Then General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen remarked at its Third World Congress in 2001:

One of the strengths of the Education International is that we are a genuine membership based organization. Some 80 percent of our members are involved in policy development and decision making processes. An impressive figure. But this percentage is made up of no more than approximately 2,000 individuals...who speak for EI's 24 million members. Most classroom teachers in the North have never heard of EI, and that is a bit worrisome. We run the risk of becoming a club of union leaders and their international secretaries. Don't misinterpret my words. Those 2,000 EI activists are our life and blood. But we must, I believe, find ways to open our gates to your members and enable them, where possible, to take part in our work. Teachers are world citizens by nature; they are among the most active members of organizations like Amnesty, Greenpeace, and other NGOs. Why not find ways to get them involved in their own organization?" ([www.ei_ie.org/congress2001/](http://www.ei-ie.org/congress2001/index.htm)

[index.htm](http://www.ei-ie.org/congress2001/index.htm))

The AFT flexes its muscle by influencing the EI's functioning informally, through private discussions with the general secretary of the organization, rather than in open debate at its international conferences and congresses. The NEA has traditionally been reluctant to express any opinion related to American foreign policy. Fortunately, the AFT has lost many of its contacts with other member organizations and it continues to be regarded by the social democratic teacher unions in Europe with suspicion, and rightly so because of its well-documented involvement with U.S. military and political repression of democratic, anti-capitalist struggles. (Kim Scipes' May 2002 posting on the AFL-CIO involvement in Venezuela, on the Z-net message board, usefully describes the AFT's involvement on the wrong side of popular struggles against dictatorships: www.zmag.org/content/Labor/sipesaflven.cfm).

EI minutes and official statements, posted on its website, reveal an organization that is struggling to make sense of the attack on public education and unions. It has been slow to mobilize beyond the stage of working with other international labor organizations in issuing public appeals and organizing letter-writing campaigns when teacher unionists are brutalized. Its efforts in this regard are admirable, for instance, the campaign to free Taye Woldesmiat, president of the Ethiopian Teacher Association, who has spent 6 years in prison, and its publicity about Colombian teachers being killed and exiled for union activity. However, the advocacy on behalf of individual unionists is undercut by the unwillingness to name the real enemy, the U.S.-backed economic and political neoliberal agenda.

To the extent the EI focuses on isolated outrages rather than identifying these abuses as manifestations of capitalism's current disregard for human needs that interfere with its appetite for unlimited profits, the EI campaigns allow the AFT to cover its trail of complicity with the U.S. government's subversion of popular movements by printing a blurb in its newspaper about indi-

vidual militants who need support. Without advocacy about individual abuses being linked to efforts to build a broad, militant international social movement that challenges capitalism's demands for privatization, defunding, and fragmentation of educational services, the NEA too can more easily continue to deny the implications of U.S. control over policies at the World Bank.

In the last year especially, the EI has begun to mobilize in promising ways. It joined in the Global Campaign for Education, a broad alliance of NGOs, child rights activists, and teachers' organizations active in more than 150 countries, to forcefully challenge the draft report's analysis and conclusions (econ.worldbank.org/files/23475_GCE_response_to_WDR.pdf). Unlike the tepid, polite statement issued by TUAC defending the importance of teachers unions and labor unions in general (www.tuac.org/statemen/communiq/StMinEduc2004eDublinWHP.pdf), the Global Campaign for Education tapped the vitality and language of the global justice movement. The EI has brought teacher unionism into a coalition with the defenders of the oppressed rather than the oppressors, a stance that is continued with its participation in "Global Action Week 2005," a continuation of the work of the Global Campaign for Education. EI now has an advocacy team which collaborates with the Public Services International in producing the "Tradeducation News," with updates about global resistance to the inclusion of education as a commodity to be traded in the world treaties being pressed by the U.S. (www.ei_ie.org/pub/english/tradeducation/tradeducation_02_e.pdf)

Restructuring Education

IN COMPARING THE DRAFT and final version of WDR 2004 the successes of the international coalition EI helped to forge are clear. The vitriolic attack on teacher unions was diminished to a mild criticism for them not be too self-interested. The glowing examples of teachers being fired for striking were removed. The original focus on the unions as enemies of poor people was replaced with arguments that sound like they are taken from

(conservative) political science textbooks about the "long-route" and "short-route" to governmental accountability. And in July 2004, a senior vice-president of the World Bank was invited to address the EI Congress in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He extolled the role of teachers in economic development, noting the vital nature of partnership with teachers unions and with the EI. He commented that when the top officials from Education International met with World Bank President James Wolfensohn in December [about the draft report that attacked teachers and teacher unions], they had "an open, frank dialogue about how best to support teachers." (web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20232836~menuPK:34472~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html)

I learned about the meeting with Wolfensohn and EI officials at a panel I chaired at a meeting of educational researchers in April 2004, one in which Mary Hatwood Futrell, the immediate past president of the EI and a past president of NEA, spoke. She was joined by Larry Kuehn, whose research on globalization on behalf of the British Columbia Teachers Federation is the closest substitute we have for the advocacy research the U.S. teachers unions should be doing (bctf.ca/social/globalization) and Hugo Aboites, a Mexican sociologist who works with Mexican teacher union activists in an alliance opposing the government-controlled unions. As Kuehn described the WDR 2004 draft report assailing teacher unions as enemies of global prosperity, I took a liberty as chair and asked Kuehn to pause so that we could hear from both Mary Futrell and Hugo Aboites on the issue. Mary Futrell described the dismay of EI officials when they saw the report; how they called Wolfensohn, immediately; how Wolfensohn denied knowledge of the report and said its viewpoint had not been officially sanctioned. I asked Futrell how she understood Wolfensohn's explanation and she fell silent, unable to answer. I then asked Hugo Aboites the same question, and he said he did not know of this particular report, but he was familiar with the policies. Teacher unionists in Mexico are experiencing horrible attacks

on their jobs, their unions, and their bodies when they resist, all under the watchful eye of the government — and the World Bank.

As Fred van Leeuwen noted, teachers in the North have so far avoided learning about neoliberalism's global assault on education. With NCLB, they and we are now being subjected, albeit in a protected version, to the neoliberal program wreaking devastation elsewhere. When teacher union activists who opposed U.S. suppression of popular resistance to authoritarian dictatorships in the 1980s tried to make their case, the job was difficult because even then the unions were bureaucratic. But in addition they struggled against the distance most U.S. teachers feel from the world. Today our situation is changed. On September 11 the illusion that physical distance protects ordinary U.S. citizens was shattered. With NCLB another self-deception has been challenged, the notion that teacher unions can deliver the “bottom line” of maintaining teachers' wages, benefits, and jobs without embracing a view of their purpose that makes them allies with social movements that challenge the status quo. Yet, still

NCLB cannot be doctored up. It should not be better funded.

missing in the work of teacher unions, their leaders and their ranks, is an understanding that to defend public education in this country, teachers and their unions must help develop an international response to neoliberalism, one that puts justice and equity at the forefront of the union's program for education, one that develops alliances that span national borders.

The sort of political work that is needed to awaken teachers and teacher unionists in this country to the global responsibility that comes with living in the belly of the imperial beast has begun, for instance, with the antiwar caucus

formed at the AFT convention in August 2004. This activity encourages teacher unionists outside the United States, for instance, in the EI, to make the case in official organizations to which U.S. unions belong, to name the enemy of public education correctly, *not* as globalization, but as capitalist restructuring under a neoliberal program.

ANY EFFECTIVE STRUGGLE against the neoliberal policies that are embedded in NCLB must battle the bipartisan consensus about TINA. Clearly that means creating an electoral vehicle that gives voice to real alternatives. Despite the flaws with Nader's stance on NCLB, the campaign's clear rejection of the Democratic and Republican Party agreement to reduce education to a system of job training, trashing education's political functions in a democracy, point in the right direction. This path leads to a difficult but undeniable conclusion: NCLB cannot be doctored up. It should not be better funded. It should be replaced with a legislative program that is characterized by “progressive federalism,” a concept that was clearly defined in *Choosing Equality*, over twenty-five years ago.

That is a large order, but we can see the elements of the sort of struggle that's needed: in the work of advocacy groups that fought NCLB; in teachers unions' mobilization of community groups and parents to resist World Bank policies in Latin America and elsewhere; in the work of the EI and PSI in their collaboration to develop global campaigns with advocacy and global justice organizations, which reject TINA. With “progressive federalism” we have a progressive program. What we need most immediately is for those who see the harm done by NCLB to recognize its political origins in the neoliberal project — and combat the project in its entirety. That requires the will to reject the will of both political parties who advocate a system of education that leaves children and democracy behind capitalism's race for greater profits at any cost.

In Memorial

Herbert Hill, 1924 – 2004

New Politics mourns the passing of the great civil rights advocate and historian Herbert Hill, who died on August 15, 2004, at the age of eighty. As the *New York Times* reported in its obituary, Herbert Hill “played a pivotal role in the multidecade effort to pressure many labor unions to allow blacks and other minorities to become members. But Mr. Hill also accused others of dragging their feet on desegregation, including Hollywood studios, General Motors, General Electric, and many New York City construction companies.” For many years, Herbert Hill served as the labor director of the NAACP; he subsequently became a professor of industrial relations and African-American studies at the University of Wisconsin.

Herbert Hill was a longtime contributor to *NP*. His first piece for *New Politics*, “Organizer Labor and the Negro Wage Earner: Ritual and Reality,” was published in winter 1962; his examination of “Race and the Steelworkers Union” appeared forty years later, in the winter 2002 issue. He was a sponsor and a friend of the magazine, and he will be missed.

Herbert Hill Remembered

STEPHEN STEINBERG

The best barbershop lawyer in the United States.

—THURGOOD MARSHALL*

OF ALL THE SPEAKERS here today, I suspect that I came to know Herbert Hill last. In fact, I’ve always wanted to know more about his many years at the NAACP, and so it has meant a lot to me to hear these eloquent testimonials. On several occasions I urged Herb to write a memoir, but the idea had no appeal to him, though not for any lack of ego! For Herb, politics trumped everything, even ego, and he had too many other urgent battles to fight, and articles to write, than to distract himself with a memoir.

STEPHEN STEINBERG *spoke on behalf of New Politics at a memorial for Herbert Hill that was held at the New School on October 27. He is a regular contributor to NP.*

Our paths crossed because of our mutual ties to *New Politics*, a journal that was founded and edited by two of Herb’s lifelong friends, Julie and Phyllis Jacobson. One day Phyllis called to say that Herbie Hill was in town, and invited me to meet them for dinner in the Village. Now, probably none of you ever thought of Herb as “Herbie,” but Phyllis came to this honestly because, as I found out that night, she was Herb’s nursery school playmate in Brooklyn. Either somebody was slipping something into their milk, or as I would prefer to think, these toddlers were infected with the germ of socialist politics that immigrant Jews carried over with them from Eastern Eu-

*The source of this quotation is James E. Jones, Emeritus Professor of Labor Law at the University of Wisconsin, in a personal communication.

rope.

I was stunned when I met Herb for the first time. I had read Herbert Hill as a fledgling student at Brown in 1960, and assumed that the author of this erudite study must be 60 years old, at least. By that logic, when I met him in the flesh 36 years later, he should have been 96 years old. At least! So, I was taken aback to encounter a man who, but for a bum leg, was brimming over with youthful energy and a mind and spirit that defied age.

Conversation over dinner was about — what else? — politics. Great raconteur that he was, Herb regaled us with old stories about political battles won and lost. One anecdote centered on the Third International, and political neophyte that I was, I missed the irony as the three of them exploded in laughter as Herb, in his deep resonant voice, impersonated the speaker exclaiming, “Comrades, the time has come to address the Negro question.”

Several years later, when I was at the University of Wisconsin, Herb insisted I come to dinner. It is comforting, I think, to know that Herb had some wonderful years in Madison, at this, the penultimate stage in his life. Mary was a scholar of Irish literature and a wonderful companion, and as though that were not enough, she could sate Herb's epicurean desires as well. They lived in a gracious home once owned by Robert La Follette, and Herb had a great study and a teaching appointment at the University. As I stood with him on campus, one of his erstwhile students approached us. He was overflowing with emotion as he told Herb that he now worked as a labor organizer, and thanked him for giving him a life full of purpose and meaning.

Let me speak briefly about Herb's intellectual project, as it played out on the pages of *New Politics*. Herb was determined to mine his many years in the trenches fighting discriminatory practices among unions, and to leave his mark on the historical record of race and labor. *New Politics*, which was founded by the Jacobsons in 1961, had suspended publication in 1979, but after their retirement, the indefatigable Jacobsons restarted the journal in 1985. In the second issue of the new

series, Herb had a long article under the title, “Race, Ethnicity and Organized Labor.” As was his way, Herb did not mince words: “The record of organized labor's racial practices indicates that the majority of labor unions historically functioned as an instrument of white working-class racism, and that this tradition has not yet come to an end.”

As this last phrase indicates, Herb was not interested in beating a dead horse or flaying labor for past transgressions. The last ten pages of his article railed against organized labor for its opposition to affirmative action. He reviewed the litany of cases where unions subverted or actively opposed affirmative action programs. His concluding argument was as follows: “As has been demonstrated in many lawsuits, nonwhites have been denied jobs, training and advancement not as individuals but as a class, no matter what their personal merit and qualification. Wherever discriminatory employment patterns exist, hiring and promotion without affirmative action perpetuate the old injustice.”

“The old injustice.” This provided his detractors with the opening that they were looking for. The next issue of *New Politics* devoted no fewer than 49 pages to a debate between Hill and his critics, some of whom are leading labor historians with impeccable (or not so impeccable) left credentials. They accused Hill of painting history with too broad a brush:

- Of blaming workers for the discriminatory practices of employers.
- Of overlooking the numerous instances historically where unionism transcended white racism (remember the UMW!).
- Of being “ahistorical” (which was their way of saying that the entire society was racist, as though this exonerated labor).
- Of failing to acknowledge the ways in which labor has changed its ways.
- Of ignoring recent developments, like the prominence of blacks in public sector unions.
- Of damaging a labor movement that for all its blemishes (blemishes?) remains the most plausible agent for progressive change.

In his reply, Hill rebutted all these arguments

with a litany of raw, incontrovertible facts. To his critic who complained that his writing has the character of a “lawyer’s brief,” Hill retorted: “I take this to be a compliment, although clearly he does not intend it as such. Despite his pejorative reference, legal briefs must be grounded in a record of fact and law, whatever the argument. My writing is based on *evidentiary fact*, not ideological abstraction, not wish-fulfillment or reification. For too many ideologues of the left, the theory is everything and if the facts contradict the theory, they have no hesitation in creating a new set of *facts*. My arguments are based on extensive evidence and analysis of the record, in contrast to those of some of my critics who apparently have contempt for such ‘vulgar empiricism.’”

Now it must be said that Herb was something of a factmonger, who would pummel his intellectual adversaries with facts that they would rather ignore. But Herb spoke with the moral conviction and credibility of someone who was not a mere bystander to history: he was one of those rare people who *make* history, and his mission as a scholar was to make sure that others did not distort the historical record that he knew firsthand. In a series of other articles and review essays in *New Politics*, Herb took the new labor historians to task for glossing over the dismal record of union racism because it got in the way of their larger political project. Hill’s credo was that the struggle

for economic justice could not be waged independently of the struggle for racial justice.

THIS BRINGS ME TO MY last point, and let me speak with candor. Herbert Hill was not just another “friend of the Negro” who acted out of moral indignation at the mistreatment of African Americans. What fired up Hill’s internal engines, and made him uniquely effective as Labor Director for the NAACP, was that he waged this struggle as a person of the left, committed to the ideals of socialism. It was his radicalism that led him to make employment discrimination the focal point of political action, and inescapably this led to scrutiny of the role that unions played in the systematic exclusion of blacks from coveted jobs and entire job sectors. His detractors might accuse him of “union bashing,” but they missed the point. It was precisely Hill’s *belief* in unions and his commitment to class struggle that led him to oppose unions with such vehemence—for betraying their own ideals and for their blatant racism. For Hill, unionism steeped in racism was simply not worthy of its name, and this is why he was never willing to bend principle or flinch in the line of fire.

Herbert Hill remains an inspiration for me personally, and for the rest of us who in his absence must carry on the struggle for the *inseparable* goals of economic and racial justice.

Tribute to Herbert Hill

MICHAEL MEYERS

READING THE *NEW YORK TIMES* obituary of Herbert Hill aged me — in its first paragraph, it described Herb as the NAACP's labor director in the 1950s and 1960s.

Herb Hill was labor director when Roy Wilkins hired me onto staff as an assistant director in 1975. Wilkins ushered me in as his final experiment with youth, me being in my early twenties when I showed up to take my office and position alongside of Mildred Bond, the other assistant director. She, and Roy Wilkins, and Gil Jonas, too, not only accepted my first mentor Kenneth Clark's appraisal of me as Clark's worthy protégé, they tutored me and had me delve into every policy statement and publication of the NAACP, and placed me into the immediate company of the giants, the living legends of the civil rights movement.

Back in 1975, we had plenty of giants to emulate. Herb Hill was amongst the tallest. The NAACP was then still a proudly integrationist organization, and that value was reflected in its senior staff, as well as in its pronouncements about the future.

It was an exciting but difficult time to join the staff of the NAACP: Roy Wilkins was, well, Roy Wilkins, in reputation and demeanor. He was like that character Denny Crane on ABC's *Boston Legal* — the mere mention of his name had heads turn in awe. The same may be said about Herb Hill, who actually had to be described by the *New York Times* as a white man — otherwise one might easily figure Herb Hill, by his jobs, by his life's work, by his publication titles, and his values, and his complete identification with black people, and by his strong, unswerving, and empathetic advocacy of racial equality, was himself an African American. Indeed, in his speeches (all of which I read, some

of which I had to privilege to witness) I recall that Herb Hill never talked about blacks as they or those people; he said, "We," meaning we blacks, we Negroes, we African Americans, WE are fed up with discrimination on account of our skin color.

And, so it was that a white man was not the least bit paternalistic, not the least bit ashamed or hesitant, much less afraid to speak as if he were of our race — indeed, Herbert Hill (long before Toni Morrison said of another Caucasian that he is the first black president) was the African-American labor director of the NAACP. But he also transcended race. He was living proof that we all belong to one race — the human race.

Then and now, being black was not enough. Herb Hill was also a scholar. He was a fiery orator and excellent writer. He was not the kind of person who talks down or who looks up in the air when talking to you; rather, he spoke plainly, directly at your soul, eloquently, knowledgeably and convincingly. To me, every word he said and wrote was blunt and right on, and insightful. Yet his speeches and writings angered so many people inside and outside of the NAACP, especially those from organized labor, including those labor leaders who served on the board of the NAACP.

Being the impetuous youth, I admired and followed Herb's lead and example in raking staid fiefdoms with straight talk. Herb Hill was a masterful straight talker. Indeed, John McCain's Straight Talk Express had nothing on Herb Hill.

Herb called you out — whoever you were, if you were a foe of freedom, if you messed with Roy Wilkins, if you were anti-black. He meant it when he said, "I cannot be friends with the enemies of black people."

I remember one such bold and plain speech when he described with footnotes how organized labor in America was anti-black. And I remember, too, how the labor contingent on our board

MICHAEL MEYERS delivered these remarks at the October 27 memorial for Herbert Hill. He is the executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition.

pressured Roy Wilkins to silence Herb at NAACP conventions and otherwise — but Wilkins never caved into such pressures. Neither did Herb Hill. He kept right on talking. He would just get on his soapbox, whenever he found one, and just stood his ground when a soapbox wasn't around, and explained how organized labor was being anti-black, how seniority systems and the last-hired being the first-fired rules were anti-black.

Herbert Hill was leading the NAACP in favor of race-based affirmative action at a time some influential NAACPers were stroking race neutrality and preaching against quotas. Herb, along with Kenneth Clark, was making the case that Negroes were being quota'd out, and that there is a difference between inclusionary and exclusionary quotas. They objected to tokenism and to the quota of one or no blacks.

Herb Hill refused to knuckle under to those on the NAACP board who read convention policy in support of affirmative action as being neutral on the most important race question of the times. He defied his 64 other bosses on the board, and partnered with Roy Wilkins in championing a phrase I still use today, which I got from Hill and the NAACP chieftains of the 1970s: democratic unions.

Democratic meant fair, democratic meant racially non-discriminatory, democratic meant that unions had to be on the side of blacks' effort for jobs and justice to warrant the NAACP's support.

I shall not ever forget the likes of Herbert Hill. His passion for radical justice. His sharp mind. His compassion for those less fortunate. His centrality as a civil rights figure and legend.

But for me the highest compliment that can be paid to a fellow traveler on this earth is to say of him that he is a decent human being. Herb Hill was a decent human being. When there was envy and suspicion in the eyes of the others at the NAACP who feared that I might be Roy Wilkins' successor at the NAACP, Herb Hill had only welcome and "How may I help you continue this struggle?" in his eyes during our sit-downs. He was not in the least bit insecure about his position or his mission in life. He was sure of the connec-

tion between principled struggle and eventual success, between integrity of purpose and the earnest effort at getting blacks to learn what the white boys learn, and besting them at it.

Herb Hill's voice was powerful, factual, truthful, challenging, defiant, and loud, and he often did not need a microphone, not that he ever shied away from one. He was tall enough never to need a soapbox.

I WAS ALWAYS LEARNING from Herb Hill, so it was fitting that he became a professor. That was a side of Herb Hill's career that I did not know. Two years into my tenure at the NAACP, he left to become a professor at the University of Wisconsin. And so, my ears perked up when during a visit to the D.C. apartment of a former law school classmate, over dinner, my buddy's African-American friend, an undergraduate at the University started talking about this dynamic, wonderful, great, truth-teller of a black history professor at the University of Wisconsin. Being the civil rights fellow, I wanted to know the black professor's name, especially since the universe of black faculty at prestigious universities was so small at the time; I thought I might know the professor.

"His name is Herbert Hill," answered the student. His name was Herbert Hill.

Let us remember such a man, who, when he passed from this earth, left no debts to humankind because he had paid his dues in full to humanity; he had lived an uncommon life; he had used his superior intellect to advance us out of the dark past into the present and hopeful future. A man who, by his labors, made us proud; who showed us through deeds how to work tirelessly and with integrity, and to live with courage and the steadfastness of our convictions.

Born in 1924, died in 2004 — if, as Ben Hooks suggests, the measure of a man is what he did in the dash between those two dates, then count this man's life contribution as a truly prodigious, as truly one of the greats.

His name was Herbert Hill. Pray that we may see his kind again.

Herbert Hill and the ILGWU

GILBERT JONAS

NO NAACP EMPLOYMENT CAMPAIGN better demonstrates the growing chasm between organized labor and the Association than that directed by Herbert Hill against the discriminatory practices of the ILGWU, whose president, David Dubinsky, was an icon and a legend among liberals, socialists, and trade unionists.

During the mid-1950s, Hill and the NAACP had been working with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union to desegregate their Southern locals and to attract Negro members, especially during strikes. By the late 1950s, however, Herbert Hill and NAACP Executive Director Roger Wilkins were coming to the conclusion that the labor movement would never order and enforce a policy of desegregation from the top down and that the potential for overall Negro economic advancement through jobs and decent incomes was significantly obstructed by the practices and obdurate posture of the unions, especially the locals. Meanwhile, the New York-based NAACP headquarters was minutes away from the nation's foremost garment district, where blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos had come to comprise a majority of the union's base in New York, the largest component within the ILGWU, which claimed about 450,000 members in 1960. Yet, as Hill was to convincingly demonstrate, not a single African-American or Puerto Rican was an officer or executive board member of the ILGWU, nor a manager of any of the locals.

After scores of minority members of the ILGWU prevailed on the NAACP to intervene on their behalf against the union, Hill attempted to broker changes through negotiation with the union

leadership, only to be totally rebuffed by his previous allies. Given the importance of the ILGWU both in electoral politics (it controlled New York's Liberal Party) and within the AFL-CIO, Wilkins and the NAACP board urged Hill to move cautiously and deliberately, in hopes that the ILGWU would come around and begin to dismantle its own version of Jim Crow practices in New York City.

In 1961, a Korean War veteran and an activist in the NAACP's sit-ins in Savannah, Georgia, came to Hill with a very compelling case. Ernest Holmes, a black cleaner employed by Primrose Foundations, a New York City ILGWU shop, had also been working as a cutter's helper without receiving additional compensation or benefits that automatically accrued to other cutter's helpers, all of whom were white. On at least four occasions Holmes had been refused permission to join the cutters union, Local 10. At this juncture he sought the help of the NAACP. White union members with whom he worked had informed him that he was entitled to higher hourly wages and such benefits as medical coverage. Since his wife was pregnant with two young children at home and his take-home pay was meager, his family needs compelled him to press for the improved employment status.

Before filing a formal complaint, Hill called his long-time friend, ILGWU assistant president Gus Tyler, summarized the facts and asked Tyler to intervene on Holmes' behalf. Tyler told him he would look into it and phone him back. After several days without a response, Hill phoned Tyler again, who claimed he had been very busy and had not had a chance to follow up. But Hill was persistent; after another week, he phoned Tyler again. This time Tyler said he had spoken to the union's agent, and was informed that this was a situation in which, he suggested, that perhaps the local union official was "on the take."

"Herb," Tyler said, "my advice is to forget this one and don't make trouble. There's nothing to it." Hill assured Tyler he would not only *not* forget it; he would pursue it vigorously. Consequently, in early

GILBERT JONAS worked for many years as a staff member at the NAACP, where he served as a senior advisor to Roy Wilkins. He is the author of *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (2004). This article is adapted from chapter ten of *Freedom's Sword*, by permission of the author.

1961, Hill filed a complaint on behalf of Holmes with the New York State Commission for Human Rights, after an extensive investigation of Local 10 and other ILGWU practices. Hill charged that the union restricted its Negro and Puerto Rican members to low-paying jobs. (Cutters in the greater New York City area then received about \$125 a week, twice the amount of workers in the semiskilled and unskilled classifications.) Hill outlined how the local and other ILGWU unions worked out private deals with the garment employers to keep most of the better paying jobs for whites, often relatives of the union leaders, while preventing Negroes and Puerto Ricans from filling those jobs when they became vacant.

In Ernest Holmes' case, not only had the ILGWU representative denied Holmes membership in the cutters' local after he was assigned to that post, but also he continued to receive the lowest possible wage — \$1.25 an hour — even though cutters were supposed to receive twice that amount. In addition, he had been denied the union's health and welfare benefits, which went automatically with membership in Local 10, and which were especially crucial because of his wife's pregnancy. Hill's investigation of the Ernest Holmes case revealed unequivocally that the ILGWU — not the factory owner — controlled work assignments and promotions at most of its unionized plants. By denying Holmes membership in the cutters' local, the union was preventing him from rising above the bottom rung, which would not only have raised his wages, but also would have covered his family's medical needs.

At the same time that the state commission was weighing the evidence gathered from its investigation, Hill learned from an intermediary that the local union's manager, Moe Falikman, wanted to meet with him. A phone call revealed that Falikman felt it would undercut his authority for him to meet anywhere else but his own union headquarters. Hill agreed and met with Falikman in the presence of his union associates. In heavily-accented English, Falikman sought to explain the basis for the problem in Holmes' case by recalling that the garment manufacturer, a former ILGWU member, had been deluged with orders during the recent holiday season and had called Falikman to request additional workers because he was overwhelmed. He was informed that the local union had no unemployed

workers to refer to Primrose, the employer, who then asked Falikman for permission to utilize Holmes, "a black man," as a helper on the cutting tables. Falikman said that as a favor to an old colleague, he had agreed to the temporary employment of Holmes in the capacity. "So you see, Hill," Falikman said, "it was all a misunderstanding, nothing to get excited about. Better to forget it and don't make me trouble," he concluded hopefully.

Hill rose up to his full height of six feet and leaned over Falikman's desk, replying in stentorian tones, "But Falikman, you gave an employer permission to violate your own contract." Falikman, alarmed at Hill's observation, replied, "Hill, don't get excited, nothing to get excited about. Don't make me no trouble." Hill, seizing the last word, shouted, "Falikman, you don't know what trouble is. I haven't even *begun* to make trouble," after which he stomped out of the union leader's office, slamming the door behind him.

On July 1, 1962, after an extensive 15-month investigation by the state commission, ILGWU's Local 10 "was judged guilty of racial discrimination by the New York State Commission for Human Rights." According to a front-page report in the *New York Herald Tribune*, "the commission found the union lacked 'good faith' to comply with the state antidiscrimination law; was indifferent to a worker's charge of mistreatment; lacked a clear policy through which minority-group members could gain union membership; and showed 'reluctance' to disclose the racial composition of its membership to the investigators."

The commission ordered the union to provide Holmes with a job and pay equal to his skills on the cutting tables; to provide him with a written guaranty that if, after training, his skills were satisfactory, he would become a full union member; to instruct all of Local 10's supervisors and business agents to accept membership on merit alone; and to display the commission's work and rules in every one of the union's offices.

In response to the NAACP's charges, the ILGWU marshaled its public relations resources to attempt to counter the understandable embarrassment produced by the commission's judgment and the NAACP's publicity. The union's response was, in effect, to deny the charges, to claim the charges stemmed from Republican partisanship (Rockefeller was then New York's governor and the commission

appointees were his), and to do virtually nothing to remedy the situation.

Refuting the Commission

THE UNION'S DEFENSE WAS coordinated and led by its house intellectual — the venerable Gus Tyler, who held the title of assistant president but who had no union constituency or internal clout. It was Tyler's task to rebut the commission, to discredit Hill (and by indirection the NAACP), to generate union and other expressions of support, and to fill the pages of publications financially supported by the union, such as the *New Leader* and the *Jewish Daily Forward*, with apologia in the form of denials. NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins responded forcefully: "We do not feel that the general denials and outraged protests that have been the response of the ILGWU to our charges of discriminatory practices are in any way an adequate answer to those charges."

The union compounded its guilt by inventing statistics out of thin air. Local 10's manager, Moe Falikman, told *The New York Times* a few weeks later that his cutters local union had "more than 500 Negroes and Puerto Ricans" as members. Subsequently, the ILGWU reduced that total three times, until it had been reached 200. Writing in *New Politics* in 1963, Gus Tyler claimed that, "In Local 10, there are 199 Negro and Spanish-speaking members." He later explained that his included members from a variety of Central and Latin American nations. Two decades later in a book of reminiscences, he asserted that there were 275 Negro members of Local 10 at the time of the confrontation with the NAACP. The ILGWU in late 1962 distributed a reprint of a newspaper column which asserted that Local 10 had "250 Negro and Spanish-speaking cutters." As Herbert Hill was to conclude 30 years later, "The evident disparity in these numbers and their apparently arbitrary nature needs no further comment."

Many years later, Herbert Hill discovered a highly vindicating document in the ILGWU archives at Cornell University. It was an internal memorandum from a key union staff member, Will Chasen, dated October 23, 1962, to ILGWU vice president Charles Zimmerman, who was the highest ranking local New York City leader of the union as manager of the union's New York City joint board. Chasen wrote in reference to a letter Hill had sent to the American Jewish Committee, "The awful thing about Hill's letter is that, on the whole, it is

probably an accurate summary, and it exposes the awful idiocy of the way the situation was handled."

At the NAACP's insistence, an *ad hoc* subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor held hearings on the racial practices in the garment industry in September 1962. Harlem's representative, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., presided and later was charged by the ILGWU with seeking vengeance because the union had not endorsed him for reelection. The charge was so absurd that no person of political significance repeated it because, first of all, Powell regularly won by huge majorities; second, there were almost no ILGWU members in his district; and third, the union's political franchise in New York was the so-called Liberal Party, which, although it had no presence in Harlem, had chosen to run its own candidates against Powell.

The hearings proved so damaging to the ILGWU that it expended serious political capital to have them recessed, never to be reconvened. The lengths to which the ILGWU would go was revealed during the hearings when a black female member of the union testified that she had been warned by an official of Local 55 that if she testified, she would never again work in the garment industry. The union was true to its word; the woman was fired a few days later and was never again able to find a job in the industry.

In addition to the substantiated charges of racial discrimination, the most damaging evidence revealed by Hill was the dictatorial manner in which Dubinsky had come to control the union. In his testimony before the House subcommittee on August 18, 1962, later published in the *Congressional Record* and other publications that same year, Hill described in detail how Dubinsky controlled every aspect of the union, thwarting the democratic process at each significant juncture. Hill noted that although 120,000 union members were Negro or Puerto Ricans, almost one-third of the national total, not a single minority member held a national or local leadership position, including those in the New York locals, of which 52 percent were then non-white.

As the all-powerful union president, Dubinsky successfully throttled any minority voice — either political or racial — from arising by employing an array of manipulative measures built into the union's constitution and by-laws. Article three of the ILGWU constitution, for example, requires that a candidate for the general executive board must have

been a delegate to the current convention, a member for five years and a paid officer for at least three years, effectively barring all but 300 of the 450,000 members from running for the governing board. To run for union president or secretary-treasurer, a member must have been a delegate at the current convention and a member and paid staff for at least 10 years, thereby reducing the number of eligible individual to less than 200 individuals, or less than one-twentieth of 1 percent of the membership. In addition, the union constitution barred members from any internal political activity, including caucuses, except for the three-month period prior to the biannual union convention, thereby preventing any meaningful opposition from recalling support for its positions.

As if these measures were not sufficient to maintain tight control over the union, Dubinsky required all officers, board members, and local leaders to submit a signed and undated letter of resignation upon their appointment or election. Since virtually all of these posts were paid jobs by which each individual supported himself and his family, it was highly unlikely that any officer or staff member would buck "D.D.," as Dubinsky was commonly known. Even the retired member, all who voted in the union's elections, were controlled by the tight administration of their pensions, medical and other benefits dispensed completely by the union's headquarters.

As a result, there were very few rebellions among the officers or members of the ILGWU. Even less likely to challenge the internal system were Negroes and Puerto Ricans, most of whom believed in the 1960s that they were completely without power or influence, and that they had few if any political levers to pull on their behalf. They looked at the leadership of their union and saw no faces like their own in any positions of responsibility or authority.

Even after the NAACP took the necessary initiatives to challenge the union's practices, very few ILGWU members felt comfortable in challenging any injustices they had experienced. These injustices included the failure of the union to enforce its own contracts, to perform the basic responsibilities of any legitimate trade union in protecting the rights of every one of its members. As the NAACP had amply demonstrated, the union had been collaborating with many employers to exploit the Negro and Puerto Rican members of its union to ensure that

they were low paid and remained that way, and to deny them any chance to advance beyond the minimum wage or a few cents an hour above it. The union's white members, especially those well-connected or related to any level of leadership, were accorded all of the privileges and opportunities to move upward and to fill the best paying jobs, both in the workshop and in the union.

One of the ILGWU's defenses was the oft-repeated line that the "union is not an employment agency." When Local 10 manager Moe Falikman sought to make this point before the House subcommittee investigating the NAACP's charges, Representative James Roosevelt contradicted him on this point, asserting that "you are" an employment agency. "I'd have greater faith in you [the ILGWU]," FDR's son stated, "if you would face the situation honestly and say, yes, this needs looking into." For public relations purposes, Falikman grudgingly agreed to do so.

As the ILGWU's efforts to defend itself became less and less effective, particularly in respect to so many false claims of minority membership that it could not document, it resorted to a tactic commonly employed by oppressors when their backs are up against the wall; it accused the NAACP, and especially Hill's statements, of being anti-Semitic. Never mind that Hill himself was Jewish. On December 10, 1962, the *Jewish Daily Forward's* J. Fogel accused Hill and writer Paul Jacobs, who had written an exposé of the ILGWU's practices in *Harper's*, of "spread[ing] anti-Semitic poison against the ILGWU and against President Dubinsky." The article noted that both men were Jewish. However, neither Hill nor Jacobs had raised the issue of religion in their critiques. The charges were a low mark of desperation for the union and its subsidized supporters.

Through another surrogate, the Jewish Labor Committee, the ILGWU continued the campaign to discredit the NAACP's efforts and Hill's leadership, by formally charging anti-Semitism in a letter to Roy Wilkins dated October 31, 1962. Wilkins responded to Jewish Labor Committee Executive Director Emanuel Muravchik in the clearest of terms:

We assert with the greatest emphasis that nothing, absolutely nothing, in Mr. Hill's recent or more remote statements can be construed as

anti-Semitic. This is a grave charge to make. It requires more substantiation than your flip reference in a part of a statement. We do not design to defend ourselves against such baseless accusations. Its inclusion in the resolution, as well as in the statements to the press by Mr. Zimmerman [Charles Zimmerman, the union's top official in New York City and earlier the leader of the Communist faction within the union] is unworthy of an organization like the Jewish Labor Committee, which in the very nature of things, must be conversant with the seriousness of such a charge and with the evidence required to give it substance. No such evidence has been submitted in this case beyond the citation of the use by Mr. Hill of one word, "ethnic," out of a total of 4,500 words in his testimony before the House subcommittee. The relevance of his comparison of the ethnic composition of the membership and the leadership of the ILGWU can hardly be questioned in this context.

Most of those close to the civil rights and union movements recognized the union's move for what it was: a craven and dishonest last-ditch effort to justify the stranglehold with which whites strove to continue to control a union fast becoming nonwhite. It was also a cynical effort to intimidate the national black leadership if the latter wanted to keep the larger coalition of labor unions and civil rights organizations together. The ILGWU was actually implying that if the NAACP continued to pursue its attacks on the union, the coalition with organized labor would crumble.

Despite the thousands of hours invested in building this important coalition by Walter White, Roy Wilkins, and Clarence Mitchell, despite the not insubstantial sums that it cost the NAACP to sustain the labor-civil rights coalition, and despite the vital importance to the NAACP of labor support in the halls of Congress for major civil rights legislation, Wilkins was not prepared to sacrifice the black and Puerto Rican minimum-wage workers in the garment industry. Indeed, he escalated the stakes by letting organized labor know through his reply to Muravchik that the NAACP would not abandon the interests of rank-and-file workers in the union:

We reject the proposition that any segment of the labor movement is sacrosanct in the matter of practices and/or policies that restrict employ-

ment opportunities on racial or religious or nationality grounds. We reject the contention that bringing such changes constitutes a move to destroy "unity" among civil rights groups unless it be admitted that this unity is a precarious thing, perched upon unilateral definition of discrimination by each member group. In such a situation "unity" is of no basic value and its destruction may be regarded as not a calamity, but a blessed clearing of the air.

Wilkins had no hesitation in telling the ILGWU, and if necessary, the AFL-CIO, where they could go if they sought to bargain their support of civil rights legislation in exchange for the NAACP's turning a blind eye to union racial practices. In his letter to Muravchik, he concluded by reaffirming his support for the work of Herbert Hill:

[I]t is well to reiterate a facet of this discussion which appears to have escaped the attention of various reviewers and resolution writers. It is that Herbert Hill, our labor secretary, has but one duty and that is to serve the interest of the Negro workers through the NAACP. Other groups, including trade unions, have powerful machinery to protect their principal interests. Mr. Hill is employed to maintain antidiscrimination work in the employment field as his top and only priority. He is not for trade unions first and Negroes second. He has no divided loyalties.

No more stirring testimonial could have been written for any civil rights activist. That this was written by the preeminent black civil rights leader of the era about a white staff member was both fitting *and* remarkable, given the role that Hill played. It is of some importance to note the effort by the ILGWU's respected Washington lobbyist, Evelyn Dubrow, to suggest to House members and their staffs that Hill was not only anti-Semitic but also a Communist bent upon stirring up racial tensions. Coming from a left anti-Stalinist background with a long record of attacking the Communist Party, Hill was, to any knowledgeable person of the times, the least likely candidate for Stalinist activity or behavior. The ILGWU demonstrated that, eight years after the censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy, it has no qualms about employing McCarthyite methods to discredit its critics.

Forestalling Rebellion

THE UNION GRADUALLY MADE some cosmetic changes as here and there as a black or Puerto Rican face emerged on the executive board of the local or joint board, and finally on the national executive board. However, real change came much more slowly and only when Dubinsky stepped down at the age of 80 in 1966. That the union had barely changed its spots was best demonstrated by the suit filed by Violet Putterman against the union's knit-goods Local 55 in 1983, again charging the union with gender and racial discrimination. Dozens of complaints before the EEOC against ILGWU locals were filed during the 1970s and 1980s with the help of the NAACP.

As a result of the NAACP's exposure of the garment workers' racist practices and the widespread publicity resulting from it, the union was also compelled to cancel substantial annual support for a Workmen's Circle home for retired union members in the Bronx that excluded black union members. The union had invested \$1.3 million in the construction of the home in 1960-1961. In another dispute, nonwhite union members rose up against the union leadership at that time because the union had also constructed the residential East River Houses for its white members, excluding blacks, Hispanics, and Chinese members. The union had invested \$20 million in membership funds in this project. The nonwhite members filed suit in federal court before Judge Robert L. Carter (the former NAACP general counsel), whose decision found that there was a

pattern of unlawful racial exclusion by the union in the East River Houses.

After the passage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the NAACP filed scores of complaints on behalf of ILGWU minority members before the EEOC and federal courts, usually succeeding in proving racial and gender discrimination by the union. As a result of this pressure, and despite the ILGWU's prolonged resistance to the changes sought by the NAACP and often demanded by the law, the two-decade campaign by the NAACP did force the garment makers' union to appoint a black woman and a Puerto Rican man to the national general executive board; to actively solicit black and Puerto Ricans to join some skilled locals, such as Local 10 cutters' union, which resulted in immediate employment at double the bottom wages for the new members; and, finally, to actively recruit black Puerto Ricans and Asian-Americans as white collar professional, secretarial, and clerical headquarters staff members.

These acts served to widen the doors of opportunity for hundreds of minority workers who were eventually able to earn a halfway decent wage in the skilled trades and in the union itself. None of these measures, of course, seriously diminished the power of the white leadership. A not disingenuous observer could well argue that these changes helped to forestall a rank-and-file rebellion and thereby to prolong the grip of the older white leaders over a union, the majority of whose membership was now comprised of men and women of color.

The Trade Union Leadership Council Black Workers Respond to the United Automobile Workers, 1957-1967

CORNELIUS C. THOMAS

IN THEIR RECENT DEBATE the labor historians Herbert Hill and Nelson Lichtenstein critiqued each in Hill's dissection of the latter's biography of United Automobile Workers President Walter Reuther, a rejoinder and a rebuttal.¹ They took issue over Reuther's work regarding racial discrimination in the automobile industry and union movement. Hill has consistently argued, and here I simplify, that the union leader's "race" record was spotty at best while Lichtenstein in his scholarship avers his subject's performance has been spotty at worst.

In his review of *Walter Reuther*, Hill puts it that "In the UAW, local unions were disciplined for violating organizational policy on a variety of issues, especially 'unauthorized' work stoppages, but not when the most blatant violations of the union's formal antidiscrimination policy occurred. The message was widely understood throughout the UAW: that the union's civil rights stance could be violated with impunity and that regional directors were never challenged by the Reuther leadership on this issue . . . Lichtenstein describes the rare exception . . . while ignoring the many other circumstances where it failed to act."

In response Lichtenstein vigorously defends his position but concedes that "Reuther was an opportunist, but not always in the worst sense of that term. He saw himself, at least subjectively, as one who challenged the status quo, but he nevertheless accommodated . . . the increasingly conservative institutional and social pressures that confronted the union movement."

Although Hill did not raise the issue of the Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC), an independent caucus of black activists in the UAW

that operated in Detroit, Lichtenstein clarifies his argument, saying "The UAW leader's complicity with the auto industry's system of racially-coded employment came under attack, within the UAW itself, when the Trade Union Leadership Council burst on the scene late in the 1950s. Led by articulate blacks such as Horace Sheffield and Willouby Abner, TULC successfully challenged Reuther's claim to speak as a principled advocate of black auto workers."

This essay explores the objectives TULC set itself and what it achieved in the decade 1957-67. It will endeavor to evaluate efforts to serve the needs of African-American members of the "most progressive union in America," the UAW, in the context of increasing union bureaucratization on the one hand and the escalation of the rights movement on the other. By case studying TULC, the essay will also test, albeit implicitly, if Reuther's record on race had been either as bad as Hill asserts or as good as Lichtenstein claims.

BY THE TIME THE postwar civil rights movement stirred into action around 1954-55, black labor had been forced to fight a rearguard action in its quest for democracy in the union movement and equality on the shopfloor.

An umbrella body speaking for black labor 1950-55, the National Negro Labor Council, ex-

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pired by the end of 1955 when the McCarthyite hunt for Communists basically blew it to shreds. The same year the relatively progressive Congress of Industrial Organizations merged with the conservative American Federation of Labor. The AFL-CIO executive in 1957 admitted the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and the Brotherhood of Railroad

Trainmen to membership even though they still maintained race bars in their constitutions. Reuther concurred. Only AFL-CIO executive committee member and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph, voted against their admission.² This development freighted the AFL-CIO with the racism that had been endemic to craft and skills based unions since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As such, black workers perceived their prospects in industrial America as bleaker than at any time since the formation of the CIO in 1935.

In its own house, the UAW insisted it operated as an egalitarian union that did not discriminate on the basis of race and therefore would not solve problems on the basis of “reverse Jim Crow.” This earned it the resentment of black workers who experienced particular racial problems in industry and society and who believed only special surgery could excise the cancer of racism. In this context, a black caucus, the Trade Union Leadership Council, emerged within the UAW.

Labor leader and kingpin in the black workers’ struggle in Ford Local 600, Robert “Buddy” Battle III described the germination of this caucus as follows: “The TULC idea developed in 1957” when “a group of union leaders sat down and looked over the situation of discrimination within the unions on certain jobs, and in certain international unions which actually did not admit Negroes to their unions.”³

In August of that year, Battle and Horace Sheffield, both veteran union leaders from the

foundry at the Ford River Rouge plant, met with a dozen other black leaders, among them Nelson Jack Edwards, a veteran union man at the Ford Lincoln plant, Willie Baxter of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and labor correspondent for the *Detroit Courier* Nadine Brown. They formed the TULC. This organization, although open, operated under

the black auto workers’ leadership. Battle, Sheffield, Edwards and other black labor leaders had been marching in the union movement close on 20 years and felt they could not be patient any longer. They represented a generation of black activists who were schooled in the 1940s under UAW tutelage; they believed they had the capacity to move unions, specifically theirs, towards being what they professed to be.

TULC in the first instance concerned itself with the erosion of black influence in the UAW in the period after Reuther had consolidated his leadership in 1948. In fact, the decline of black influence in the UAW started shortly after black leaders like Joseph Billups, Walter Hardin and Leon Bates had helped unionize Ford in 1941. The decimation of the National Negro Labor Council did not help black labor’s cause either. Therefore, as of 1957, the Leadership Council sought to strengthen the influence of black trade unionists, to increase union support for civil rights objectives, and to promote union causes in the black community.

TULC specifically sought to interpret the black community to the labor movement and the labor movement to the black community. The Council felt it had to impress upon the UAW that the times were changing and that detractors keenly eyed the labor movement for racism, favoritism, and Communism. In this regard it quizzed: “Do the so-called ‘most progressive unions’ appreciate the fact that everybody watches them and if they slip anywhere, this becomes an excuse for the laggards to continue to hold back.”

The McCarthyite hunt for Communists blew the National Negro Labor Council to shreds.

In its founding document TULC states its objectives were: (1) “to work at the problem of discrimination with pinpoint accuracy,” (2) “to insist on carefully planned clean-up jobs by the international unions beginning with the most important places . . . the employment offices,” (3) “to begin to use [its] influence so that the apprenticeable trades and technical classifications catch up with the march of progress,” and (4) to stand in opposition to “the fact that some of our international unions have a good public posture on the question of ‘civil rights and fair practices’ while, at the same time, they resist with every means at their disposal any effort to change the ‘lily-white’ character of their international executive boards.”⁴ In a softened tone it added: “We must work within the union among the Negro members to insure that along with our insurances on the justice of equal opportunity that we undertake the obligation of supporting our union.”

The new organization accordingly launched an educational drive to combat anti-unionism in the community and to promote civil rights projects.

The UAW did not welcome this development. It accused TULC of splitting the labor movement. But TULC countered the charge, stating in its founding document that earlier, Jews had formed the Jewish Labor Committee and Italians the Italian Chamber of Labor — both of which proved beneficial to those communities and the labor movement. The UAW did not have a problem with those formations.

In the Detroit city council elections of 1957 TULC worked with the UAW and supported a black candidate, William Patrick, Jr., against the AFL-CIO-supported George Edwards and the Teamsters’ favored candidate Charles M. Diggs. Patrick won. This way the UAW supported by the Leadership Council helped elect the first black person ever to this city council. TULC thus started its political life as a caucus fully cooperating with the parent union.

In 1959, however, the organization adopted an independent stance and sponsored its own black candidate in a Local 600 election at Ford’s River

Rouge plant. According to the *Detroit Times* the black candidate lost as a result of “race-baiting,” in an election that “was being fought entirely on racial lines.”⁵ When white unionists charged that TULC was to blame for the racial polarization in Local electoral politics the organization said:

We have been active union members for many years and we can say that throughout all of these years wherever and whenever an unscrupulous candidate for a union office felt that race-baiting the Negro would pay off, he race baited. This obviously, therefore, is no new phenomenon that TULC’s presence has brought into being.⁶

The Problem of Discrimination

SOME BLACKS DID VOTE against the TULC candidate for fear that they would polarize the Local. As James Geschwender points out in his book, *Class, Race and Worker Insurgency* (1977: 54), TULC afterwards “launched a strong attack against blacks who did not have the courage or sense to take an independent position, a position of black solidarity,” labeling them “Toms” who subscribed to a “plantation philosophy.”

TULC also considered the UAW Fair Practices Department ineffective in addressing the concerns of black workers. In 1960, it took these workers’ case to the United States Civil Rights Commission when this body held hearings in the Motor City. Sheffield informed the commission that blacks accounted for a fraction of 1 percent in skilled jobs such as carpentry and tool-and-die making and that the Rouge plant had only 250 blacks (3.5 percent) among its 7,000 skilled workers. This, he said, resulted in a racially hostile atmosphere in the plants.⁷

In October 1959, Sheffield served a serious notice on the UAW’s “race policy” at the union’s constitutional convention. He nominated Willoughby Abner, a Chicago-based black unionist for a post on the International executive board. Sheffield justified the nomination stating:

The statement was made . . . that one of these days a qualified Negro will come along and on the basis of his contribution to his Union he will be recognized. We reject that totally . . .

There is no other group in this Union that has to wait until some day in future to run for office, top office, if you please, in this union. I think that if we would follow that logic that we ought to suggest that Negroes defer paying their dues.⁸

Then Sheffield slapped the UAW with an indictment, saying "I think it is fairly evident to everyone here that it is not necessary to be a Rhodes Scholar to sit on the International Executive Board."⁹

Reuther, however, refused to allow a "token" election to the UAW's top body. Lichtenstein writes that "he once again asserted that 'the UAW is part of America' and could do little more than reflect the racial mores of the society." Reuther then asked the delegates to be patient, saying "There will come a time when a Negro will be qualified . . . and at such a time a Negro will be placed on the board."¹⁰

The nomination was not designed to succeed. As prearranged, Abner declined. TULC simply used the occasion to serve notice of its intention to the parent body.

Their frustration with the UAW's stance grew over the course of the convention. Reuther had promised to put civil rights on the agenda but "could not find time." Consequently, a Pittsburgh paper with an African-American focus reported, 45 black delegates, led by Battle, "walked off the floor denouncing the union leadership." The paper warned that "Walter Reuther, George Meany, and other union moguls had better get wise, and the sooner the better."¹¹ This perhaps showed a portent of things to come. Blacks showed they had had enough of Reuther's equivocation.

These developments did not in all probability sit well with the union leadership. Sheffield's charge that "no other . . . group has to wait" and his hint that maybe black union leaders "ought to suggest that Negroes defer paying their dues" contained tinges of rebellion.

UAW veteran Emil Mazey, considered a progressive labor man, and at the time, secretary-treasurer of the union, demanded that Reuther fire Sheffield; he could not countenance the indepen-

dent activity of Sheffield.¹²

TULC stormed ahead. Shortly after the convention a TULC delegation met with vice-president Leonard Woodcock and Jack Conway, assistant to president Reuther, and told them: "We intend to have world attention focused on this

The UAW accused TULC of splitting the labor movement.

problem [of electing a black to the UAW executive board], if necessary by 1962." Furthermore, the organization publicly pursued the matter of a black UAW vicepresident.¹³

If Reuther's record on the issue were to be used as a gauge, TULC would be unlikely to succeed. At the UAW's thirteenth constitutional convention in 1951, he had told James Watts of Local 600, who complained of the lily-white executive board, that "There is no organization in America today that has done more for the Negro people than the UAW-CIO."¹⁴ At the next convention the Officers Reports Committee resolved:

We concur with the view of the [Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination] Department that the problem of discrimination is not confined to any single racial or religious group, but is instead a vital matter affecting us all as American citizens, regardless of race, creed, color, sex or national origin.

The UAW in effect said discrimination did exist, but not only against blacks; and that the general problem of unfair discrimination militated against the union's principles. Black labor leaders disagreed with this view for under Reuther's leadership the UAW made no effort to integrate its lily-white executive. Reuther himself never championed black rights; as UAW president he spoke out only for workers' rights.

Going into the 1960s, TULC felt strong and confident. Sheffield wrote in the *Michigan*

Chronicle of May 28 that year that “Not one member has broken ranks and the organization has grown by the thousands.”

In 1961, this caucus, and some twenty international unions with substantial black membership, traveled to the AFL-CIO convention in Miami Beach. As a result of a four-hour meeting with George Meany, the international unions that constitutionally maintained color bars were told to take them out.¹⁵ This did not necessarily change discrimination, but it seems blacks did more in this regard at the AFL-CIO level than in the most democratic union in America.

In the build-up to the 1962 UAW Convention in Atlantic City, TULC worked hard on the issue of black representation on the UAW International executive. The UAW had meanwhile agreed to create three at-large executive positions to be filled by the executive itself. It intended one of the new slots for a black unionist.

TULC leaders sparred among themselves about who to tip for the one position. Extant manuscript materials show that many favored Sheffield; some unionists, especially in Chicago, tipped Abner; and traces of support surfaced for the elder black labor statesmen Furl Williams and Leon Bates.¹⁶ In a four-hour session at Freedom House, the TULC headquarters, a caucus of black and white militants endorsed Sheffield over the misgivings of certain whites who said he was “too controversial” a candidate.

In 1943, Sheffield had been the first black nominated as a candidate for the executive board of the UAW. The attempt failed, it having come at a time when blacks had not yet established themselves in the union. As of that time though, Sheffield served the union in various committees and posts, including educational director at Ford’s foundry unit. Ironically, the union had tasked him in this position with “education against racism.”

TULC’s endorsement of Sheffield soon drew support from community leaders, business people, and assorted dignitaries.¹⁷ Writing in the TULC paper, *The Vanguard*, of March 1962, Detroit’s interracial Commission on Community Relations praised Sheffield, saying:

No Negro in the UAW to my knowledge enjoys the confidence and admiration of the Negro people of Detroit or the nation, to the degree of Horace Sheffield. He has won the respect and esteem of the Negro people through his good works, noble ideals, courage, unselfish and rugged integrity . . . as a Board member of the UAW [he] will add lustre to that record and tighten the bonds that already exist between the UAW and the Negro people.

Concerns cropped up too. UAW Local 1050 accused TULC of “dual unionism.” It was a “figment of someone’s imagination,” it charged, “that only their candidates should be considered.”¹⁸ Black nationalist minister Albert Cleage worried that “if the usual procedure is followed, we will end up with a situation in which the two white board members will have real responsibilities, whether or not the duties are spelled out in the constitution, while the Negro board member has no responsibilities, no authority and no specific assignment.”¹⁹

Notwithstanding reservations, TULC intended the executive position for “a militant” who would push the UAW towards policy changes favorable to black workers.

Meanwhile, the Reuther machine, too, had been doing its homework, and in the end the president handpicked the moderate Nelson Jack Edwards as candidate for the position. Given the fact that the UAW had a majority of white members, that a black executive board member was a *fait accompli*, and that Reuther had endorsed a specific leader, Edwards duly got the nod at the Atlantic City convention, 1962. Reuther’s action can of course not be said to be racism, but it did smack of paternalism.

The UAW had thus met TULC’s demand, but without the insurgent organization realizing its objective. Battle afterwards explained that “the extent of the ‘victory’ remains to be seen. In summarizing being passed over, Sheffield wrote: “I’m bloodied but unbowed.”²⁰ At this point a gulf gaped between TULC and the UAW, and between TULC and Edwards.

Towards the end of 1962, having made only piecemeal headway against the UAW, TULC

trained its spotlight on the AFL-CIO. It charged the confederation with lagging behind the times. In an open letter to Meany the organization stated:

We have no wish to play the psychiatrist to look into the minds of the labor bureaucracy, but there is surely something amiss in those minds . . . What is it that continues to feed their conviction that labor is somehow a privileged section in our society — so privileged that when and where it does discriminate against Negroes it remains above criticism and attack?²¹

The letter continued that “the dream-picture the bureaucrats have constructed of a child-parent relationship with the Negro worker is forever finished,” and that “Mr. Meany and those about him are fooling no one but themselves and those outside the labor movement who find comfort and consolation in organized labor’s hypocrisy.” These remarks indicated that TULC would fight for full equality against any perpetrator of racial discrimination.

In addition to addressing the issue of race in the union movement, TULC also engaged in non-union but worker-related issues. Eighteen months after its formation the organization broadened the scope of its operations. The leadership felt that it “could not separate the problems of the union from the community, because basically the union people are the community when they are at home.”²² Battle said, “We figured that the problem of job discrimination and discrimination within the unions were problems that should be dealt with within the community as well as within labor.” The organization thus lifted the requirement that only union members were eligible for membership. Shortly after it had started, therefore, TULC became a community organization.

TULC rented a building on Grand River Avenue as “headquarters for the 1960 Kennedy election.” Members renovated it with their private money, labor donated. The sturdy building they later dubbed A. Philip Randolph Freedom House; it eventually became the organization’s permanent headquarters.

With regard to the election, TULC released a press statement in August endorsing the

Kennedy-Johnson ticket for the presidency because it believed “the chances of the Negro people for greater progress in achieving first-class citizenship everywhere” were better if they were to “stick with . . . historic allies, [and] support the political party that is more responsive to people’s needs.”²³ It waxed critical about the Eisenhower-Nixon administration for never endorsing the Supreme Court’s *Brown* decisions (1954-55) and its record in race matters. It also pointed out that during President Harry Truman’s tenure black earnings rose 45 percent while under Eisenhower it went up only 10 percent.

Kennedy duly won, and the coalition looked forward to an improvement in labor, race, and social relations generally. As of 1960, then, the organization had handsome quarters and, with a liquor license obtained later, meetings there resembled a political club rather than a rambunctious labor caucus.

On the Kennedy candidacy, TULC and the UAW saw entirely eye to eye. This was not always the case.

TULC remained ever ready to push its liberal agenda and, having grown in numeric and organizational strength in 1958-60, the organization stood ready to participate in the 1961 Detroit mayoral election.

The UAW officially endorsed the conservative “law and order” incumbent, Louis Miriani, for re-election. Blacks disagreed with the UAW about Miriani. It is not known if the UAW knew of the depth of black disaffection with regard to Miriani.

A worker averred that in 1960 “Miriani [had] turned the police loose on the Black community, and they instituted a real reign of terror with arrests, harassment and intimidation.” Several sources show the police spared no black, however respectable, who happened to cross their blue line. Mackie Johnson, a black policeman in the city’s 13th Precinct, was quoted as saying “Every black who had a tie or a suit on, who drove a big car or something like that — that would really set off a lot of racist police officers. He would be brought out, against the wall, searched, then brought into

the station. If his attitude was wrong, he might even stay a couple of days.”²⁴ This brand of policing did not intimidate blacks; it only upped their ire at the indignity and brutality they suffered.

Parting with the UAW, TULC supported an obscure liberal lawyer, Jerome P. Cavanagh. The organization did so, not as a UAW caucus, but as an independent organization, using its own voice. It felt that the union, supposedly one of the most progressive constituents of the liberal-labor-black alliance, should have backed Cavanagh in the first instance. The black Cotillion Club, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and black churches also declared for Cavanagh.²⁵

A Progressive Coalition

IN THE RUN-UP to the election the local press gave the liberal upstart no chance. One daily opined, “Regardless of who wins the second nomination, he is not expected to give Miriani even a close race in the November run-off.” Later its political columnist added that it would be “some miracle” if Cavanagh were to be elected, adding “I doubt the town would go to you-know-where in a handbasket.”²⁶ A fierce election followed. TULC worked the election to the full and blacks turned out in droves and voted Cavanagh. The liberal lawyer licked Miriani.

One commentator claimed:

Considerable credit for Cavanagh's victory went to TULC, which mobilized the black community against Miriani, protesting his support of discriminatory police practices . . . In a post-mortem, the *Detroit Free Press*, which opposed Cavanagh, stated the he ‘owe[d] his victory to Detroit’s Negroes, blue collar workers and the

unemployed.”²⁷

The result reverberated on the east coast where an influential daily concurred: “The voting showed that some Negro precincts had gone to Mr. Cavanagh by as much as 5-to-1. In the solidly white neighborhoods the newcomer matched Miriani vote-for-vote and, in some areas, beat him solidly.”²⁸

TULC celebrated the outcome as a victory against racism, and against the UAW’s endorsement. It is possible that the UAW smarted from having been taken on and “beaten” by a minority caucus that was supposed to be “loyal” to

Every black who had a tie or a suit on, who drove a big car or something like that — that would really set off a lot of racist police officers. He would be brought out, against the wall, searched, then brought into the station. If his attitude was wrong, he might even stay a couple of days.

the union.

A few years after, in 1968, George Crockett Jr., one of Detroit’s celebrated civil rights leaders, long-time union man and later, recorder’s court judge, reflected in an interview:

The UAW feels that it has . . . the Negro community in its pocket. It is no longer concerned with how the Negro thinks — it feels it can tell the Negro what you support and what you shall not support. And they continued to do this throughout the Miriani campaign. Well, Miriani’s record on the issue which was pretty close to stop and frisk now, was so bad, Negroes would not sit still for that. When the UAW said, “We endorse Miriani,” the Negro said, “This is the parting of the way.”

TULC at this time considered itself a firm feature of the labor-liberal-black coalition, and indeed considered itself “espousing the most progressive view” in the partnership. Despite the existence of this “progressive” coalition the voting pattern in Detroit showed that whites voted only for white candidates while blacks voted across the color line.

In the 1962 election a black candidate ran against the incumbent white congressman, John D. Dingell, for the 15th Congressional District seat. According to Sheffield, TULC argued that “if you say that a white man can’t represent Negroes then you must also say that Negroes can’t represent white people. We don’t buy that theory.” He added that “fortunately we were able to convince most leaders of the Negro community he deserved re-election.”²⁹ With the organization’s support, Dingell retained his seat.

This trend also manifested itself in the Detroit municipal elections of 1964. In this election TULC supported Philip van Antwerp rather than the black candidate, Jackie Vaughn III — while no whites, it seems, endorsed or supported Vaughn. This voting pattern prompted the black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance to propose a boycott of the white candidate in the election. Albert Cleage, leader of the Black Christian Nationalists, sounded a “Vote Black” campaign that said “Vote 4 and No More.”³⁰ This meant vote for the four black candidates only. The Wolverine Bar Association and the NAACP later joined the boycott campaign. At this time, however, “TULC . . . condemn[ed] the boycott declaring it was not in the best interest of the black community. The boycott movement was crushed,” and politics returned to the familiar clientage style.³¹

In the years 1962 through 1964, TULC also supported the broader civil rights movement in the South and participated prominently in the 1963 Freedom March down Woodward Avenue in Detroit. It did so independent of the UAW, which similarly supported various civil rights campaigns.

Unlike the middle class operations of the sit-ins and freedom rides, the Albany Movement for Civil Rights grew as a grassroots movement of poor blacks in Georgia. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. responded, and so did TULC. Nelson Davis, a black Ford worker and columnist for *The Illustrated News*, and Battle prodded the organization into active support of this movement.³² It organized fundraising projects and dispatched consignments of food to Albany to relieve the plight

of the black townfolk. It also contributed to the material needs of the Mississippi freedom workers in support of the voter registration campaign there, and sent cash to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In addition to reaching out to Southern campaigns, TULC conducted voter registration in Detroit. When in 1962 Albert Cleage accused it of being captive of the UAW, Sheffield rebutted the charge, but added, “I would suggest to the Rev. Mr. Cleage that he join us in the fight for Negro civil rights — help us get the voters registered . . . we would welcome him to become active in our fight.”³³

Labor’s participation in the civil rights campaign on the other hand, though generally applauded, occasionally drew caustic criticism. This especially as AFL-CIO president George Meany refused to endorse the March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington D.C. in August 1963. Also, Reuther was “displeased” with the prepared text of a speech to be delivered by the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee’s John Lewis, 23.³⁴ Lewis refused to change the text. There are two versions of how the situation was resolved: one credits Reuther, the other Randolph. “It took a personal appeal from Randolph on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to convince Lewis to change the text. Randolph “appealed to me and said, ‘John we’ve come so far together, let’s stay together. For the sake of unity make these changes . . . Delete the reference to Sherman? And you couldn’t say no to A. Philip Randolph.”³⁵ (The Sherman reference alludes to Civil War General Sherman and could be construed as a call to violence.) Reuther however did urge the civil rights leader to vote on the Lewis speech, because he had to get back to the Catholic prelate for Washington DC, Patrick Cardinal O’Boyle, who had threatened not to do the invocation and participate in the event if the speech remained unaltered.

Some considered the auto boss’s position politically prudent, others found it overbearing and smacking of paternalism. Later, after the height of the movement in 1965, labor’s suspect role in black affairs incensed civil rights leader Hosea Williams, who, according to Sheffield, on occa-

sion said: "I didn't see no organized labor when I went across the Edmund Pettus (bridge in Selma, Alabama) and I didn't see any organized labor on my way to Montgomery . . . But now when we've got 250,000 Negroes registered and time came to vote I did see organized labor — to hell with organized labor."³⁶

Labor's role in bolting against Section VII of the Civil Rights Act — which outlawed employment and union practices based on race, gender, religion and so on — and then on claiming credit for the promulgation of the act as a whole also suffered some scholarly flak.³⁷

In the same period, TULC continued its participation in electoral politics. In 1964 it led a fight against the UAW's effort to block the creation of a second "black" congressional district. Robert Millender, a black lawyer, had put forward a plan that would create two congressional districts with black majorities in Detroit. The UAW bolted, supporting instead a redistricting plan that would combine the city's black population of 400,000 into one congressional district.³⁸

The Millender plan, however, won when "pro-labor" black representatives voted for it — over the union's opposition. In the subsequent congressional election, however, TULC is said to have split the black vote. Consequently, one argument goes, it "lost influence after 1964 . . . when its congressional candidate in the newly created and largely black 1st Congressional District, Richard Austin, was narrowly defeated by John Conyers, member of a faction that had broken away from the TULC on that very issue [of whom to support]."³⁹ Edwards led the faction that had broken with TULC. This faction formed another caucus, the Metropolitan Detroit Labor and Community Association (MDLCA).

As TULC veered from union issues, the organization offered the black community several service programs. Staff photographer Raleigh Jones, for instance, held photography classes at Freedom House. Starting in March 1964, the organization, in conjunction with Wayne State University and the University of Michigan's Institute of Industrial Relations, sponsored typing classes.

Also in 1966, TULC and other organizations launched an intense boycott campaign against inner city merchants. The issues were overpricing, goods of inferior quality, and the lack of common courtesy to customers. It also took parents under its tutelage. Early in February 1966, Philip C. Sims, president of the TULC Young Adults, announced that parents would receive instruction in teaching their pre-school youngsters to read in a new program at its Educational Center on Grand River, and the organization also announced a leadership course.⁴⁰

TULC displayed savvy in its nonpolitical endeavors and gradually fashioned itself into a social elite. It sponsored functions that enhanced its standing in Detroit; it obtained a class C liquor license, and operated a restaurant where the only black political club, the Cotillion Club, met. It held annual freedom balls to finance its programs. These balls served also to cultivate wholesome relations with the liberal white community. Furthermore, it cemented its relationship with the UAW through the TULC Education Foundation — which, incidentally, operated independently of the "mother" body. Finally, the organization also persuaded General Motors, Chrysler, Ford, and Michigan Bell to become "regular contributors" to its Education Foundation.⁴¹

The Foundation enhanced TULC's stature by conferring awards like the A. Philip Randolph Award on Walter Reuther and the Eleanor Roosevelt Freedom Award on Jackie Robinson. Liberals like Reuther and Cavanagh, and judges, councilors, and glitterati frequented TULC functions as guests and speakers. These outreaches offset the stridency of the organization's earlier rhetoric and welded it tighter to the UAW.

With regard to shopfloor issues, TULC not only railed about the skilled trades' exclusion of blacks, but also worked to eliminate the pretext for this discrimination — that there weren't enough skilled blacks. In this regard the organization convinced government agencies that skills discrimination should be tackled through apprenticeship programs rather than criticism and appeals to conscience. In June 1967, it made a break-

through. The U.S. Department of Labor announced that TULC would thenceforth “start a cooperative program in the Motor City to prepare and train some 200 Negro youths for apprenticeship programs under the Manpower Development and Training Act.”⁴² For this purpose TULC’s Battle and William C. Webb, regional director of the Bureau of Apprenticeship Training, signed a contract worth \$94,980. A bonus to the breakthrough came with winning the active cooperation in the program of the conservative Detroit and Michigan Building Trades Councils. The program eventually enabled its “graduates” to compete for skilled jobs.

But meanwhile, in late December 1965, Roy Reuther, director of the UAW Citizenship Department, had informed Sheffield that he was to be transferred to Washington D.C., there to work on voter registration. The young Reuther requested Sheffield to inform the UAW of his decision on January 10, 1966.

After this date, Sheffield announced that he had not accepted the assignment and that he would not do so, and should he be relieved of his union position, he stood ready to return to the shopfloor — in Detroit, his hometown.⁴³

According to the young Reuther, Sheffield had initially accepted the assignment and would even take his family with him but later changed his mind. Roy added that “At no time has the union insisted or directed Horace Sheffield to move his family from Detroit.”⁴⁴

TULC however considered this a maneuver to move Detroit’s most militant black unionist from the corridors of power in Solidarity House, the UAW headquarters. Battle charged through the *Detroit News* that “Nelson Jack Edwards . . . was one of the instigators to get Horace Sheffield . . . exiled from Detroit’s Negro community.” Later he told the same paper:

The decision to shift Sheffield was made at a meeting called by Roy Reuther before Christmas which Edwards attended. The meeting was called to re-establish the Negroes and the white liberals in labor elements, fractured in last fall’s election campaign [when the Wayne County

AFL-CIO endorsed Louis Miriani while TULC favored Jackie Vaughn III]. Members of TULC were not invited to the meeting . . . although other civil rights groups attended.⁴⁵

It seems Battle’s ear hung on the community grapevine. Civil rights leaders and black laborites, including Edwards and Stepp, did indeed attend a meeting called by Reuther in December 1965. Whatever the nature of the discussion or the reasons for the UAW’s intention, neither TULC nor the subject had been invited to the meeting or consulted.

When the story broke, the community rallied around Sheffield using the radio and other means of communication. The *Detroit News* of January 21, 1967, editorialized:

How the UAW can solve its internal problem we do not know, but if its solution requires getting Horace Sheffield out of Detroit, for Detroit it will not be a good answer. To the UAW this Trade Union Leadership Council may be a troublesome labor caucus, but to many Negroes it is a source of pride and self-help, and a useful tool for prying performance from labor and politicians on matters about which the spirits are willing but flesh tends to be weak.

Notwithstanding Sheffield’s resolve and the public support he enjoyed, President Reuther insisted that the assignment be accepted because, he explained, “staff members cannot pick and choose their assignments for such an arrangement would make it impossible for the UAW to carry out its many functions and meet its responsibilities . . .” After a meeting on January 24 Reuther announced that Sheffield had “agreed to accept the new responsibilities to which I assigned him and he will be based in Washington, DC.”⁴⁶

Sheffield submitted to the prerogative of the UAW president, albeit with reluctance and perhaps bitterness. A few days after accepting his assignment he wrote: “I have sought to close the gap between the labor movement’s promises and its fulfillment. This has brought on my present difficulties because there are people who feel that I am challenging them.”⁴⁷ Union treasurer Emil Mazey, for one, felt Sheffield put the UAW in a

bad light. In reference to Sheffield's column he wrote:

These kinds of unwarranted and unprincipled attacks damage the relationship between the Negro and white community because Sheffield continues to say . . . 'I, Horace Sheffield, am protecting you against white labor bosses who wish to treat you improperly!' How much longer is Sheffield going to be permitted to make these slanderous, libelous attacks against the union leadership?⁴⁸

Reuther probably gave Mazey's concern due attention but did not feel it warranted further action. He had taken care of business.

Reconciled to the UAW

AFTER THE STANDOFF, Battle curiously claimed victory, stating: "When we got into this fight, our main concern was to see that Sheffield was not banished from Detroit. The original intent of the UAW . . . was that Sheffield and his family had to move out of town permanently." He credited the community for preventing this. "This happened," he said, "because so many people spoke out and said what they thought was good for the community." The old labor war horse then pointed out that the community used letters, telegrams, editorials, and columns to tell the union they opposed all attempts to remove Sheffield permanently from his hometown.⁴⁹

At this point, early 1966, with the Voting Rights Act in place and Sheffield "reconciled" to the UAW, one can only say TULC had been disciplined or, to allow Lichtenstein a point, contained.

In 1967, Edwards appointed Sheffield his administrative assistant. This way he ended a divisive rivalry and paved the way for unity. They formed TULC-MDLCA in 1968. In the new arrangement, TULC, with some 9,000 members to MDLCA's 2,000, served as senior partner. In October 1968, TULC-MDLCA held a rally in Olympia stadium — to organize campaign workers for voter mobilization.⁵⁰ This was an admirable goal in itself, but it came at a time when black militants locally and nationally had refocused

on economic or human rights.

Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of union politics, TULC achieved many of its objectives. Early in its career the organization proclaimed it wanted "to energize the labor movement," to awaken the community to its responsibility, and also to be a "general force within the labor movement that revitalizes it."⁵¹ While the labor movement was not particularly energized, it did respond to TULC and worked with it on several occasions to benefit black workers. As TULC, its transition to community activities bore much fruit — in education, politics, and in building bridges. It also contributed generously to civil rights campaigns in Detroit and down South.

By the time of the 1967 Detroit riots there remained no appreciable difference between TULC and the UAW, and between Sheffield and Edwards. One newspaper observed, "Their personal disagreements came to be overshadowed by the threat to all established leaders in the ghetto rebelliousness."⁵² On the second day of the insurrection, Edwards, Sheffield, and Battle issued a joint statement, denouncing the mobs as a "relatively small number of hoodlums and hate mongers" who hurt the "total community," saying:

One day of violence threatens to destroy years of effort to build a community Negroes and whites could be proud of. We have been far from satisfied with the conditions which have confronted Negroes generally in the community but none can deny substantial progress was made.⁵³

But other problems lurked because, as one scholar put it, "Whereas the clients of the labor unions and the black middle class were being elected and appointed to offices, the underclass struggled with poverty and the police."⁵⁴ And while black leaders scaled these heights, shopfloor workers still battled discrimination, dangerous work conditions, and the bureaucracy.

Midway into the second half of the 1960s, black leaders like Marcellius Ivory admitted that TULC had a two-way communication problem. The white leadership did not listen to their demands and neither did the angry young blacks in the plants. With the latter, TULC did not enjoy

an organic link, and it had little appreciation for the grassroots proclivities of the SNCC-Black Power generation. TULC never developed into a shopfloor movement and that “failure” left a vacuum in the black workers’ continuing struggle. Ironically, TULC vexed over the alienation between union and workers. As early as 1961 Sheffield had declared, “One would have to be blind not to recognize that today there is a growing alienation between a large segment of the Negro community in our industrial centers and the labor movement [with its] cautious take-it-easy-don’t-go-too-fast mood.”⁵⁵ For political and ideological reasons TULC could not mediate the growing chasm.

By 1966, a corner had been turned in the black workers’ struggle to get attention focused on both general and shopfloor discrimination. When the UAW held its convention in Long Beach, California, in the summer of 1966, they found black workers of Local 887 of the North American Aviation plant picketing the convention to protest discrimination by their Local union against blacks, women, and Mexican Americans. In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr., under the auspices of Operation Breadbasket, attempted to launch a boycott against GM because the auto giant, in his opinion, had not done enough for civil rights and had not hired blacks in sufficient numbers. He appealed to the UAW to support this call. Leonard Woodcock, UAW vice-president and chief UAW-GM negotiator, reportedly answered “that General Motors had made an honest effort to practice nondiscrimination and offer opportunities to Negroes.”⁵⁶

In the course of 1967-1968 the kind of direct action on the West coast spread to Newark and Detroit. Fledgling organizations, both white and black, on the periphery of the unions now orchestrated direct action activities, focusing on human and shopfloor rights.

These developments concerned the old guard black union leadership. The TULC-type caucus soon enough transformed itself. In 1968, after the Dodge Revolutionary Movement had burst on the scene, a new “nationwide black caucus” emerged.

This caucus, headed by Battle, called itself the National Ad Hoc Committee of Concerned Negro UAW Members. It claimed through the *New York Times* of October 1, 1968, that it “represented Negroes ranging from the most moderate union

Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of union politics, the Trade Union Leadership Council achieved many of its objectives.

activists to black revolutionaries.”⁵⁷ The Battle generation clearly panicked before the new insurgency and tried to make itself more relevant.

By 1968 black shopfloor workers had impatiently and angrily begun to frame their own responses to union and management. In an Orwellian twist, an upstart revolutionary dubbed Freedom House, which had started off professing to combat Uncle Tomism in the UAW, “Tom House on Grand River Avenue.”⁵⁸ But even if TULC did not meet the rigorous ideological standards of the new insurgency, it had arrived in its own time and played its role, for the most part, on its own terms. And, the radicalization of the black struggle notwithstanding, TULC as a community organization had contributed greatly to a broadening of the civil rights movement.

In answering Lichtenstein’s rejoinder, Hill did not touch on TULC itself. However his critique of the labor movement seems to be supported by the scenarios sketched in this essay.

As for Lichtenstein claiming TULC as evidence of how progressive the UAW was, this paper shows TULC emerged because they saw their union as unprogressive and hypocritical. Although a caucus within UAW, TULC did not speak for the union. It spoke for itself — as the several partings with the union and Reuther illustrate.

This essay shows that TULC spoke out against the UAW both from within union and

from the community, always wanting to expose its hypocrisy, racism and paternalism. It is also clear that TULC understood its limited leverage contextually and often curtailed its criticism or made strategic withdrawals or adjustments. It could have been harsher on the UAW but prudently restrained itself.

The TULC decade also shows, as the organization put in its open letter to Meany that something was “amiss” in the “minds of the labor bureaucracy,” and that Reuther’s approach proved insufficient to change “encoded racial practices” and “engrained racial prejudices.” Given the black experience in the union movement and under the UAW in particular, one can agree with Lichtenstein that “Reuther was an opportunist,” but neither TULC nor more militant black workers would concur with his rider — “but not always in the worst sense of that term.”

NOTES

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2. Ray Marshall, “The Negro and the AFL-CIO” in John Bracey, August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick (eds.), *Black Workers and Organized Labor* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1971), 202; AFL-CIO, *AFL-CIO Executive Council Minutes*, December 5 and 9, 1955 (New York: AFL-CIO, 1956), 11-12.
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5. Jack Crellin, “The Labor Front,” *Detroit Times*, August 5, 1959.
6. TULC Executive Committee to UAW Negro Representative, August 5, 1959, UAW President’s Office: Walter P.

Reuther, Box 157, Folder 9. References where Box and Folder numbers are not cited are from Box 157, Folder 9.

7. United States Civil Rights Commission, *Hearings: United States Commission on Civil Rights, Detroit, Michigan*, December 14-15, 1960 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 56-65.
8. Quoted in Dick Bruner, “The Negro Bids for Union Power,” *The Nation* (March 5, 1960), 209.
9. UAW, “Proceedings of the Seventeenth Constitutional Convention,” 362-63.
10. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 376-377.
11. Editorial, *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 31, 1959, clipping in UAW President’s Office: Walter P. Reuther, Box 69, Folder 4; *Michigan Chronicle*, January 23, 1960, in Vertical File: Biography, A-Z: Battle, Robert (Buddy).
12. B.J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 149-150 and 156. The UAW could charge Sheffield with dual unionism and demand his resignation from the “rival” organization.
13. Quoted in Dick Bruner, “The Negro Bids for Union Power,” 209; *Michigan Chronicle*, August 15 and October 24, 1959.
14. United Automobile Workers, *Proceedings. Thirteenth Constitutional Convention UAW*, 45.
15. Interview with Battle and Sheffield in “Trade Union Leadership Council: Experiment in Community Action,” Battle answering.
16. Numerous letters, UAW President’s Office: Walter P. Reuther, Box 69, Folder 3 and Box 157, Folder 9.
17. Letters and telegrams urging the election of Sheffield, UAW President’s Office: Walter P. Reuther, Box 69, Folder 3.
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Herman Benson and the New Unity Partnership

PAUL BUHLE

ANYTHING HERMAN BENSON WRITES on the labor movement is provocative and useful for discussion — even if on occasion, in my view, it also happens to be somewhat skewed. When organized labor faces the prospect of a turning point as potentially large and also as disappointing as that of ten years ago, the implications loom before all of us.

Benson's "The New Unity Partnership: Sweeney Critics Would Bureaucratize to Organize" (*NP* 37) reflects on the scant progress made since the passing of the Meany/Kirkland/Shanker era of failure and disgrace. He correctly observes that organized labor has fewer members and not more, contrary to oft-repeated hopes and would-be rallying slogans. In June, UNITE and HERE carried through the merger of what is now to be the most vigorous and most progressive corner of American labor with the non-acronymic name, UNITE HERE. By Benson's reading, shared with many long-running reformers, size counts, but bigger (bargaining units, that is) may not be better and may very well be worse.

We don't know what will happen between now and the summer of 2005, when John Sweeney may retire instead of seeking re-election, or obligingly accept a re-election with the quiet promise of early retirement — or hold out for the continuation of his team, possibly provoking a breakaway move. One suspects that the leading characters are altogether uncertain themselves whether this is a poker move or something more. What else happens may very well depend upon the character and actions of the politicians newly elected or

returned to office.

Among the plentitude of voices chiming in on the assorted issues around labor's squabble, Richard Hurd's essay, "The Failure of Organizing, the New Unity Partnership, and the Future of the Labor Movement" (*Working USA*, September, 2004) is thus far the most thoroughgoing and balanced. Hurd observes sagely that the driving notions of the NUP are altogether consistent with the unfulfilled aspirations of the AFL-CIO leadership since 1995 to jump-start organizing by devoting more resources and attention toward it. SEIU and UNITE HERE have no apparent social agenda in common with Laborers International Union of North America, let alone the Carpenters. But they all share a sense of urgency about organizing rare within the mainstream AFL-CIO unions — with the marked exception of the Communications Workers.

Is it an urgency that signals a potentially disastrous move ahead? That's certainly a good question. Benson closes his essay with a tease — the new partners of labor leadership may just do to Sweeney what he and his allies did to Kirkland not so long ago. But hold on here, Brother Benson. The deck has been so thoroughly stacked (according to my own reading, all the way back to Sam Gompers' mean swing rightward against Chinese immigrants, industrial unionists and democratic dissenters) that we cannot simply ignore the dead hand of the past upon the present. Arising from slumber with the world's biggest hangover, the labor movement has been so ruined since the glory days of the 1930s-1940s that desperate proposals unlikely a short time ago are more than understandable, and desperate measures worth considering.

Let me apologize in advance to Benson for guessing that his suspicions of SEIU and UNITE

PAUL BUHLE is a sponsor and a regular contributor to *NP*. He would like to thank several close readers, but especially Bill Fletcher, Jr., and Steve Early, for their comments.

HERE have at least some of their origins in an old quarrel with the New Left and the antiwar movement. Benson's ideas of union reform did not always coincide with theirs, but more important, his long-time alliances frequently ran in the opposite direction. The Association for Union Democracy has done splendid work, but within what always has seemed, to many close observers, sharp political limits. With the further passage of time, that limitation seems to be easing. In my view, it still colors Benson's perspectives on the NUP among other matters.

The issues of union democracy can never be, and have certainly never been, separate from larger perspectives on race and gender, not only nationally but globally. To paraphrase UNITE HERE president Bruce Raynor, an all white (and all male) building trades local in a Southern city is not "democratic" even if all its members should vote night and day. It is more a job-holding agency for sons, nephews and other relatives than it is a "union": in short, just the sort of unit that gave the thuggish George Meany his craft beginnings and set his mentality for all time. The ferocious hatred of affirmative action that still percolates through the officialdom of the United Federation of Teachers and assorted other unions (David Dubinsky may have been its last notoriously open hater among the fading needles trades) comes from here and is based firmly upon the same premise: democracy for us unless, of course, it gets out of hand.

Things are naturally not quite so simple. Gompersism opened the doors a bit, in the rush toward unionism during the First World War, with thousands of industrial workers joining the AFL. But Gompers simultaneously slammed the doors shut on the IWW, joining the Wilson government in its suppression and using secret government funds to launch a Latin America network that evolved, in later generations, into the oily operations of the American Institute for Free Labor Development.

All this now seems to have happened a long time ago. But ask certain pro-war union officials today, high or low, about their vision of American

labor's future and, in a candid mood, they will provide a perfectly Gompersian (or Shankerian) answer. The U.S. military and economy must and will dominate the planet, using up its human and natural resources for our own purposes, and labor, if loyal, will reap its share of the rewards. That's the strategy. That has always been the strategy, long before Godless Communism, and no blather about "civil society" and "democracy" in recent, post-Communist times makes the reality any different.

CAN THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT break from this logic at the moment when transnationalism has become the imperative for its own survival? Less than a decade has passed since criminal involvements in human rights abuses by labor officials were both widespread and highly rewarded, and a shorter time since hints of a similar involvement have turned up in regard to Venezuela. It's not an easy question.

Due to labor's many past misdeeds, as well as a host of other factors, it has not yet been able to turn around a century-old reputation of hostility towards immigrants, legal or illegal. The SEIU seems to have been the most successful, along with UNITE HERE, LIUNA, the Communication Workers of America, and a very few others that we could name (the United Farm Workers obviously have the will, but have not found the way). The rest are treading water or going down, not only because industry is fleeing the United States for other shores. As a state labor official laconically observed to me recently: all the white people around here who want to join unions already belong to them; and so far we're no good at reaching the immigrants, the minorities, etc.

Unions are also losing in part because they are still stuck in nostalgia for those long-gone happy Cold War days (as James Rorty has written so admiringly), when George Meany was about to abolish social classes, and the nation's leading intellectuals (Rorty's favorites, like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., also happened to be high rollers in the CIA's heavily-funded cultural operation, but never mind) were confirmed Meany-Reutherites.

Sorry, Professor Rorty, the past was never all that good; and not all the dirty bombs in the Pentagon arsenal can make The Plan work for labor now.

So: what are the alternatives? If the UNITE HERE/NUP proposal is a mistaken or limited one, a mere rerun of Walter Reuther's badly limited and doomed Progressive Alliance, then let's hear what someone else, including Herman, has in mind to revive labor and enroll the millions left out of labor's old imperial strategies. And let them tell us how it is going to be carried out against the weight of both capital and the imperial unionists still hanging like a millstone around labor's collective neck.

We need a much larger vision, as everyone knows. What Bill Fletcher has dubbed a long-awaited paradigm shift, to labor as a social movement of working class interests across gender, generational, racial, ethnic and geographical borders has been waiting too long. Continued stagnation and/or split offer bad alternatives that could only get worse if labor's Old Right successfully rallied backward-moving forces within a weakened federation, taking control and precipitating the col-

lapse of the AFL entirely — and that may be the one strongest objection to the NUP.

Today's antiwar movement in labor, with all its limitations, promises to return to the historic point, two generations ago, when the AFL-CIO failed miserably: the utter hostility of its chiefs, those aging white men, toward the peace, environment and feminist movements of the 1960s-1970s, emphatically including an unwillingness to correct labor's own continuing racist practices even while lobbying Congress to take action. One cannot prove a negative, and a movement based in idealism rather than the cynicism of Meany, Kirkland, Shanker, and so on, would have surely faced rough sledding. But at least it would have encompassed the poor of the planet — many of them the new workforce streaming to the United States — and faced up to the dilemmas of ecological exhaustion. In short, it might well have captured the imagination of the largest radical generation since the 1930s.

It might even have evoked the Wobblies. Perhaps its successor still can, before time really does run out on organized labor.

Does Buhle Ask Union Democracy to Save the World?

HERMAN BENSON

IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW just what Paul Buhle is driving at; it's even more difficult to figure out what relevance his remarks have to what I wrote in *New Politics* about the undemocratic leanings of the New Unity Partnership. As best as I can make out, what he intends to say is this: Because the advocates of the New Unity Partnership seem to be fine people, and because they are zealous about organizing the unorganized, and because they may harbor views on American foreign policy akin to his own, they should be immune from criticism even though they seem convinced that union democracy is an impediment to organizing and even though they think it necessary to reorganize the labor movement in an authoritarian straightjacket to achieve their worthy ends. In any event, if he feels that my comments that follow here are off base, it is simply that I have trouble reading him in any other way.

For the benefit of those who have surely forgotten what I wrote in *New Politics*, or never read it, let me sum up very briefly what I said in the previous issue.

The leaders of five unions [now down to four through merger] joined together into a caucus called the New Unity Partnership. One of their aims is to force John Sweeney out of office as AFL-CIO president. Sweeney, they argue, has failed to deliver on his promise to organize the unorganized. Since, they insist, the labor movement must organize or die, they intend to put vast resources into the job and they propose to reorganize the whole AFL-CIO toward the same goal.

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A cadre of idealistic young organizers has been enlisted in the cause.

Organizing the unorganized, the classical goal perennially proclaimed, is truly more urgent now than ever. Every supporter of the labor movement should be gratified to see the banner raised again for immediate action; they will be encouraged when more than words, when real money and manpower are devoted to it; they will wish for every success and join in trying to achieve it. We could only applaud if only that was involved. But it is not. The trouble is that the ideologists of the New Unity Partnership see union democracy as an annoying obstacle to their aims. They insist that in order to organize, it is essential to further bureaucratize the labor movement. They would intensify every tendency toward authoritarianism that already exists in the labor movement; and they would undermine the counter tendencies toward union democracy.

In this, the basic philosophy of the New Unity Partnership is self-defeating. If the organized labor movement is to make the massive breakthrough that it requires, there must be a change in the balance of social and political power in America. A labor movement that is presented to the public as an organization in the bureaucratic grip of an authoritarian officialdom, however well-meaning, can hardly serve that aim. A labor movement that can come forward itself as a democratic grassroots movement of free people has the potential to help move the country in the direction of social justice. In a few words: Union democracy means a stronger labor movement.

All this is abstract. What does the NUP look like in practice?

Some of the NUP program is purely hypothetical and would take years — if ever — to ef-

fect; but its very presentation reveals the state of mind of its proponents. They would eliminate the autonomy of city and state AFL-CIO federations by giving the international unions the power of appointing all representatives and ending election by locals. They don't want unions to represent a disparate membership: no more nurses in an operating engineers union; no more court clerks with longshoremen. Their remedy is to dissolve, merge, and redirect unions — especially smaller ones — into a few massive centralized unions with closely defined jurisdiction by industry. No more competition over members; strict guarantees against raiding.

But to begin with, these physicians would have to heal themselves. The Service Employees, a big NUP power, is itself a huge disparate federation; it organizes janitors, federal and local government employees, doctors, scientists. The Laborers union, another NUP affiliate, takes in a mint of money by organizing U.S. Postal employees.

But all this is music of the future. Meanwhile, the NUP has demonstrated in grim reality what its vision of a new labor movement would look like. The Carpenters union has already reconstructed itself in the new mold. This union is the most aggressive of the NUP combine; it has already done what the others only threaten: it has disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO. The Carpenters union reveals the NUP, no longer in theory, but in practice.

All locals of the Carpenters union are now combined into regional councils that take in many locals and cover geographical areas so large that members of one local never meet members of another. The locals themselves have no role in collective bargaining; they are more like social clubs because all collective bargaining is controlled by the region. Locals are not permitted to pay any of their local officers; they may not hire any staff except clerical help. Locals are deprived of the main source of construction income, the hourly work tax, which goes to the region. All business agents are appointed by the region; all grievances handled there. The top regional officer, the Executive Sec-

retary Treasurer [EST], is armed with total power. No person can hold any paid staff position, local or regional, and not even any paid regional clerical position, without the approval of the EST. It is true that the Executive Secretary Treasurer is elected by delegates from the locals. But, since every delegate, like every member, is dependent upon the EST for a paid union staff job, it is obvious who controls whom.

It is true that an effective organizing program probably does need a certain measure of tightening up, a degree of central authority. But here, the NUP is utilizing that need as the occasion, or as the pretext, for eviscerating the union's democracy. Precisely because some element of centralization is necessary, all the offsetting rights of democracy must be preserved: the right to elect officers, the right of these officers to play a meaningful role in union affairs, the ability in practice to run for office, the right to vote on contracts, the right to elect business agents, and more.

When the NUP calls for a vigorous program of organizing, it is on solid ground; when it proposes a deeper bureaucratization of the labor movement, it goes off the edge.

Paul deals with hardly a word of all this (and I say "hardly" just to be on the safe side.) He ignores the NUP's vision of a bureaucratized labor movement. He is really engaged in a totally different, only distantly related, unfocused, discussion. Disappointed at the sorry state of the world, and for lack of anything else, Paul looks to the NUP for reassurance that better days are coming.

And so Paul diverts the discussion irrelevantly into his own favorite subject: his literary factional campaign against Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, Al Shanker and others identified as "labor fakirs" by Daniel DeLeon. Nothing wrong with discussing some other subject as long as we remember what we are talking about.

(Here an odd question pops into mind. Paul is so harsh in his treatment of dead "labor fakirs," how come he is so sympathetically gentle toward the living leaders of the NUP? In looking for an answer to that question, we get some idea of what's

bothering him and of his need for someone, or something, with real power to look up to for assurance.)

Like any decent-minded radical of the left, Paul would like to have, and to have had, a labor movement that resists the idea that “The U.S. military and the U.S. economy must and will dominate the planet.” Some of the current NUP leaders have a reputation as good progressives; there is even a rumor that they may privately share Paul’s anti-imperialist leanings, although these reputed sympathies have no practical expression and make no impact on political life. On the other hand, Douglas McCarron, Carpenters president and a pillar of the NUP, has flirted on-and-off with President Bush and at one point the NUP was seeking out ties with Bush’s Republican Party. Good or bad as a practical device to facilitate organizing, these tactics hardly flow from an anti-imperialist fervor. Paul is under an illusion, but he seems grateful enough even for that illusory hope to receive the NUP as an ally in his anti-imperialist campaign against Gompers and company. That explains why he is so uneasy over my discussion of the NUP. Apparently, he wants to shield it against criticism, even criticism from the standpoint of union democracy.

IN ONE RESPECT his enthusiasm for his new allies is preposterous. He touts the merger of HERE and UNITE as an admirable sign of great things to come. But what is it really? For one thing, it is a merger that violates the holy principles enunciated by the NUP itself that calls for the end of mixed unions of disparate memberships and their replacement by a few unions with clearly defined jurisdiction. Clothing was forced to take refuge in a forced marriage with Hotel. UNITE was an independent union which had virtually ceased to exist in its assigned industry. The HERE-UNITE merger joined together a dying union endowed with a staff and money with a union with actual members. It was probably indicated as a practical measure for them to merge. But as an expression of some grand new principle or as a sign of a new road to labor salvation it is an absurdity.

At one point, Paul even allows the NUP contempt for democracy to infect his own mood. “An all-white (and all-male) building trades local in a Southern city,” he writes, “is not ‘democratic’ even if all its members should vote night and day.” And therefore what? Abolish the right to vote? Does that depressing fact justify the action of the NUP’s Carpenters union in depriving union members of the right to elect their regional officers? What is the point of those derogatory quotes around ‘democratic.’

Paul’s state of mind cannot evaluate movements for union democracy apart from the battle against American imperialism. Here is how he understands why the Association for Union Democracy, under Benson’s tutelage, fell short of his exacting standards: “. . . His [Benson’s] suspicions of SEIU and UNITE/HERE,” he writes, “have at least some of their origins in an old quarrel with the New Left and the antiwar movement.” Actually he has it wrong, all wrong, upside down in fact.

I had no particular quarrel with the New Left or antiwar movements. They had no interest in union democracy and little in labor, while I was preoccupied with the subject. My quarrel, from the very beginning, was with the supporters of George Meany, especially those social democrats who were ready to sacrifice union democracy in the interests of their ideology.

These partisans of the labor establishment were upset because demands for union democracy were directed against the Meany-Kirkland combination. (Gompers was no longer around.) When AUD wrote in favor of the miners’ movement against the murderous Tony Boyle, the social democratic *New America* ascribed the killing of Jock Yablonski to violence-bound traditions in the mining industry, as though sociology was the assassin. When AUD supported the right of Steelworkers to honest elections, *New America* white-washed the union. AUD was denounced for backing “counter-culturists” against mainstream labor. Why? Most of our critics were good people, well-meaning, ordinarily defenders of fair play in society. But their political line made them leery of

demands for fair play in unions. Paul, I know, detests them and all they stand for. But their kind of disquiet over the “limitations” of union democracy resembles his in methodology: Different politics but a similar downgrading of union democracy.

It seems that Buhle would impose a heavy political burden on movements for union democracy. I say “seems” because the relevance of any one statement to any other in his comments is never clear. We must speculate. “The issues of union democracy,” he writes at one point, “can never be, and certainly have never been, separate from larger perspectives on race and gender, not only nationally but globally.” And two paragraphs later, presumably with some connection, he chides the Gomperses and Shankers who, he insists, maintain that “The U.S. military and the U.S. economy must and will dominate the planet...” And he decries the cold war and “criminal involvement in human rights abuses by labor officials ... in regard to Venezuela.”

Must a union democracy movement be expected to try to correct all that? If such is not the demand that he is making upon any union democracy movement, what is he talking about? Not one of the major union democracy movements that fought so hard to freshen up our labor movement in the last 50 years could meet his criteria. Not the painters, not the miners, not the steelworkers. If the reform movement in the Teamsters union, in the 34 years of its existence, has ever centered its efforts around his radical demands, I must have overlooked it.

In sum: Buhle sets radical political standards, so like his own, for any union democracy movement. But he makes no union democracy demands upon those who he only thinks — or hopes — share his political views. From the NUP, he seems satisfied with the wisp of a rumor. They don't even

oblige with a ringing resolution. Two of the NUP powerhouses, Carpenters and Laborers, can hardly be taken seriously as candidates to lead the war for freedom in the world.

But why heap so heavy a load on our embattled union democrats? We don't place that kind of burden on other social movements with important, though limited, aims. We don't demand that environmentalists, gay rights activists, right-to-choose advocates, civil libertarians, defenders of social security and universal health

care, etc., fight to free the world from the evils of American imperialism. Each in its own corner campaigns for fair play. None by itself has to take on the burden of saving the world, but taken together they are the hope for a world of social justice.

However, there is one crucial difference between all these other causes, on the one hand, and movements for union democracy, on the other. Only the partisans of union democracy are ever sharply pitted against union leaders. By its very nature the quest for union democracy comes into conflict with union officials, not only with “labor fakirs,” whom Paul detests, but with progressives, whom he may admire or view as political allies. Perhaps this is the key to Paul's misgivings and explains how everything he writes on the NUP fits together. And so, let us pose a question: If labor leaders express their sympathy for all the required radical views — or seem to! — do they gain immunity from the demands of union democracy?

In a way, this discussion poses a test for the democratic labor left. Its distinguishing mark has been its insistence that in the battle for social justice we depend upon the power of the people below not upon any bureaucracy, however well-meaning, above. Along comes a group of union leaders who, in essence, say: get the workers off

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our backs and give us the power to make the decisions, and we will find a way to save the labor movement. Some of them — but not all! — may, from time to time, accompany their claims with reassuring declarations of their radical sympathies. Are those reassurances enough to induce the democratic labor left to suspend its own most basic principles?

A lesson of the past 80 years is that the prob-

lems of bureaucracy and workers' rights, in unions, in society, and even in a putative workers state transcend ideology and political line. Paul Buhle admires *New Politics* because it "will not yield an inch to bureaucracy." In delving into the annals of the past, as a respected radical historian, Paul sees the roots of the problem clearly. Now the point is to recognize it right in front of our eyes.

IN MEMORIAM

WITH SADNESS AND A PROFOUND SENSE OF LOSS, we note the passing of Stanford Lyman on March 10, 2004, at the age of 69. A native of San Francisco, Stanford became one of the pioneers of Asian American studies. He received both his B.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, and his dissertation was later published under the title *Chinatown and Little Tokyo: Power, Conflict, and Community Among Chinese and Japanese Immigrants in America* (1986). The hallmark of his intellectual project was that he resisted the prevailing tendency to romanticize ethnicity, and his political orientation led him to examine race in relation to class stratification and labor. In 1986 Stanford published his first article in *NP*, "On Race and Organized Labor." In 1999 he wrote on "The 'Chinese Question' and the New Labor Historians," followed a year later by "Engels Was Right! Organized Labor's Opposition to Chinese in the United States." Stanford and lifelong friend, Herbert Hill joined the battle to hold organized labor accountable for its complicity in racism. By terrible coincidence, both men died within a year of each other. On the one hand, this signifies the passing of a generation. On the other hand, it represents an inspiration and a challenge to continue their tradition of engaged scholarship and political advocacy.

THE LYMAN FAMILY has established the Stanford Lyman Memorial Scholarship Fund to honor Stan's memory. The Fund is administered by the Mid-South Sociological Association, an organization Stan helped found. The scholarships will go to graduate and post-graduate students of sociology working in such fields as sociological theory, race relations, symbolic interaction, law, and ethics. For those who wish to contribute to the Fund, please make your check out to the Mid-South Sociological Association (marked for the Stanford Lyman Fund) and send your tax-deductible contributions to:

Sahadeo Patram
Secretary-Treasurer, MSSA
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Voting

I am writing regarding Stephan R. Shalom's article, "In Defense of Tactical Voting (Sometimes)." In the article, Shalom gives two criticisms of Gabriel Kolko's position that our best hope for fundamental change is for things to get worse.

First he says that even if Bush's actions are self-defeating and may serve to help bring down the empire, they are also too dangerous both militarily and environmentally, and "we can't afford too many disasters." He then asks, "... do we really want to take the chance?"

My answer is a firm, "Yes!" I think Shalom is underestimating the critical point that our nation and world are in right now. As far as environmental issues are concerned, as Gus Speth explains in his book *Red Sky at Morning*, efforts to protect Earth's environment are not succeeding. He says that there may still be time to do what is necessary to save the planet, but we need to take decisive action very soon. In my opinion, what Kerry and the Democrats propose does not even come close to addressing this issue. Even Dennis Kucinich, who proposes aggressive measures such as a renewable energy portfolio of at least 20 percent by 2010, does not go nearly far enough. Then there is the issue of terrorism. Sooner or later terrorists will obtain either nuclear or, more likely, biological weapons. They will be less likely to use these weapons only if the United States changes its imperial policies in the world, especially in respect to Israel. Hatred against the United States is rising daily in the rest of the world, and the only way to stop this is to change our policies quickly. The Democrats will not change any of this to any great degree. The occupation of Iraq and Palestine will go on, and we will continue to overthrow every government who challenges our hegemony in any way. In addition to all of this, there is also the possibility of our perpetual wars leading to a nuclear war.

Fighting for single issues through the two party system has made some progress in U.S. history, but we have progressed only a few steps in a

journey of many miles. We are now at a time when real change needs to happen very soon. Real change cannot be brought about quickly through strategies such as "tactical voting" and fighting over single issues.

It is true that hoping Bush's policies will lead to a real upheaval in U.S. politics is taking a chance. But plodding along at a snails pace with the Democrats will not lead us anywhere fast enough. I'd like to take my chances through Bush destroying everything and hoping we can fix it correctly rather than hoping any other strategy will do anything fast enough to avoid catastrophe.

His second criticism is that this strategy "... requires us either to be extremely dishonest (publicly opposing war and violence while secretly welcoming every unilateral U.S. bomb dropped) or to appear extremely lunatic (publicly calling for reckless military adventures)."

I do not see how voting Democratic solves either of these issues. By voting for Kerry, you are not opposing war, violence, or reckless military adventures any more than if you vote for Bush. This is the area where the two candidates are nearly identical, as Shalom points out himself earlier in the article. It may be appropriate to use this argument on issues where the two candidates differ, like abortion. So you may appear dishonest by being pro-choice and voting for Bush. Maybe so, but I certainly would not feel honest by voting for Kerry either. I will vote for Kucinich as a write-in and feel very honest. I will also hope for Bush to win so he can continue to screw things up and by doing so remove the United States from its dominant position in the world. After he tears it down, maybe real progress can be made. I think it's the only real chance for the world.

DAVE JANOWICK
Cambridge, MA

Thomas Harrison's fantastic article, "The Dead-End of Lesser Evilism," summarized a number of excellent points too often ignored in the ongoing debate over the place of progressives and third parties in this upcoming election, not the least of

which are the unique visibility brought to issues in a presidential campaign such as Ralph Nader's. However, Harrison's dismissive assumption that Nader cannot fulfill his aim of taking votes away from Bush is misplaced. Nader's positions might currently be most attractive to liberal voters currently planning to vote for John Kerry, but every modern campaign targets certain audiences that may not be completely receptive to its ideas. Nader's interest in defeating the sitting president is genuine, so we should grant that he intends to do so by appealing to all sorts of voters. His June 21 interview in the *The American Conservative* is an example of how serious he is.

Also, Harrison says, "If Nader is allowed on TV to confront Bush and Kerry, his arguments... will appeal mainly to Democratic voters." But this depends on adhering to the limiting idea of a strictly left-right ideological perspective. Many voters could change their minds, but regardless, many do not strictly fit these categorizations. If Nader can portray NAF TA as a scourge to sovereignty, industry bailouts and military budget redundancy as attacks on small-government libertarianism, gay marriage as reinforcement of the institution, or the war in Iraq as a sacrifice of our children for welfare-drawing multinational corporations, then perhaps some traditionally Republican (particularly single-issue) voters would be convinced of the need for American regime change. And Kerry proved to be a great co-opter in the primaries ("fair trade," war opposition, campaign finance), perhaps he would latch on to an issue or two which made Bush appear weak.

Several polls seem to indicate that Nader is beginning to succeed in these aims. A few weeks ago, a prominent anti-Nader web site began calculating a "Nader Factor" for a number of national polls, which compared results to poll questions and subtracted the percent of votes Nader "takes" from Kerry from those from Bush. He was drawing more from Kerry, but the results were consistently less than the margin of error. Also worth noting, for those polls which are administered regularly, there is a consistent trend for lower "Nader Factors": eight of twelve national polls listed indicate Nader demonstrate a lower "Nader factor" than when Nader was added to the questioning in March/April, and two more were the same. This is a far cry from hard evidence, but it could mean that Nader is doing what he said.

Perhaps those of us who are supportive of

Nader's run ought to give him the benefit of the doubt on his aims.

MARK ZIPKIN
Somerville, NJ

In his article "In Defense of Tactical Voting (Sometimes), Stephen Shalom writes regarding Instant Runoff Voting: "The advantage of this procedure is that it allows voters to vote their consciences without throwing away their vote (and helping a Bush to win). This is a reform every democracy ought to institute and we should support it."

However, in some fairly typical cases, voting your conscience in IRV can result in the greater evil winning.

Example:

- 1000 vote for Nader, then Kerry
- 700 vote for Kerry, then Nader
- 300 vote for Kerry, then Bush
- 1500 vote for Bush, then Kerry.

If you rate Nader ahead of Kerry, then Kerry will be eliminated, his votes redistributed, and Bush will defeat Nader 1800 to 1700. If you vote for Kerry over Nader, then Nader will be eliminated, and Kerry will defeat Bush 2000 to 1500. You may say this situation is unrealistic because Nader wouldn't outrank Kerry. But if the left is ever to supplant the Democrats, this situation must arise first.

Some voting systems like Approval voting (yes/no for each candidate) don't have this problem. For more information on these subjects, you can read Wikipedia:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instant-runoff+voting
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Approval+voting
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting+systems

DAN KESHET
Seattle, WA

Hello Stephen,

Thank you for your excellent article. You are proposing a logical approach to voting for the least criminal/incompetent candidates . . . Kucinich, Bush, Kerry, Nader . . . I think there are more.

Well . . . the system and how it is understood are not logical, not honest..I propose . . . throwing out into the world . . . by voice, by articles . . . explaining how the system by the wealthy, for the wealthy, represented by the wealthy, enforced by the wealthy . . . is not designed to work for people who are not wealthy . . . and who also have no

interest for such a debilitating system that requires relinquishing one's humanity.

Voting becomes an opiate for one not dealing with any attempt to transcend to an advanced consciousness . . . it becomes the blind faith, that a god provides for many.

The political system needs changed desperately . . . systemic change will not happen with the stupid authorities more than willing to receive plaudits from the wealthy elite . . . for bashing the citizens' brains in for protesting too loudly . . . !

We can only expose this pathetic Neanderthal mess as much as possible . . . focus on the poor . . . since people have to be poor [slaves] free/cheap labor to benefit the wealthy . . . class-discrimination . . . a wise lady once said, "if your not sure what kind of society you live in, get a job on an assembly line" . . . expose how social evolution is blocked by the "authorities, wealthy class," expose everything . . . and pay attention to your personal self . . . to stay healthy to write more atrocities created by this sick system . . . that has never stopped slaughtering people since the invasion of American Natives . . . Keep writing . . . and I will continue to attempt becoming conscious . . . !

JOE CIARROCCA
Maine

Combating Terrorism

I just wanted to write to applaud Thomas Harrison's efforts in writing his work, "Only a Democratic Foreign Policy Can Combat Terrorism." I first became aware of the mentioned piece in my Intro to Political Science class at Nazareth College. The essay was part of a collection of accepted works on a variety of topics. I was curious to read the complete and uncut version of Harrison's work and found it at your website.

I was amazing at the detailed critique concerning U.S. foreign policy failures and how they contribute to extremist Islamic terrorism. The ideas that Harrison outlined in his work were amazing, ideas that I myself have thought about and argued with other people time and again, its good to find someone who shares a new vision for American foreign policy, I look forward to reading more works from Harrison and others like him.

As long as people like him exist perhaps there is hope for the United States, hope to change the path our current bankrupt foreign policy has cre-

ated and towards a new policy, one that is congruent with our democratic principles and values, one that represents the true face of America. Thanks again.

ADAM SAMPSELL
via e-mail

Disability Rights and the Welfare State

BETTY REID MANDELL'S ARTICLES in *New Politics* are consistently insightful and passionate in urging a mobilization of activist energy on the much-neglected and misunderstood issue of poverty. Her extended review article of Gertrude S. Goldberg and Marguerite G. Rosenthal's anthology, *Diminishing Welfare: A Cross-National Study of Social Provision*, (NP 37) is no exception and this time extends her ambit from the United States to a number of industrialized countries, pointing out the relatively miserable performance of the U.S. welfare state in providing for its impoverished even as other countries move, at a faster or slower pace, toward neo-liberalism. I cannot resist adding as an aside that her synopsis of the decline of the Canadian welfare state is a powerful corrective to the minor error in Thomas Harrison's otherwise compelling and Draperesque article on the politics of lesser-evilism that wrongly states Canadians have a system of free higher education (we have always paid tuition fees and they have escalated massively in the last decade).

Nevertheless, I feel compelled to point out a lacuna that appears in Mandell's review and elsewhere in her writings. Whereas disparities with respect to gender and race receive close and careful attention, as they most certainly should, the sobering reality of disabled people, a group with among the highest poverty rates, appears nowhere except in the context of the provision of caregiving, a benefit that would paternalistically accrue to able-bodied people. This is all the more troubling because it reinforces stereotypes of disabled people as inevitably outside of the labor market. And, by omission, it leads advocates to fail to see their poverty and unemployment as a very real social problem rooted in the structural oppression of and discrimination against disabled people in many areas of life from the labor market to housing to education and beyond.

In the worst cases, some anti-poverty advocates have marginalized disability issues because

disabled people are absurdly seen as a non-stigmatized group, a point with which I imagine Mandell would sympathize given her principled commitment to breaking down barriers between different segments of the poor. Still, an explicit focus on the politics of disablement and welfare policy is badly needed and much ignored by theorists of the welfare state. It would require asking, at a minimum, difficult questions such as whether the Japanese “supported” education for disabled children that she mentions has been on an integrated basis or not. It would mean envisioning housing options for people with mental health disabilities beyond the dichotomy of prisons or hospitals. And it would mandate seeing disabled people as potential workers rather than mere recipients of care.

In the context of unionizing personal care attendants (also known as home health workers), regarding their clients as potential brothers and sisters in the trade union movement casts an entirely different and less paternalistic conception of the dynamics of such organizing campaigns.

As well, I also have to say that I think her otherwise excellent review is somewhat marred by her discussion of the Italian case and the "Italian mentality." Such generalizations, even in the context of a review, are hardly appropriate in a journal such as *NP*. More importantly, they are profoundly inaccurate given the lessons the American labor movement could learn from the Italian trade union movement and a consciousness that suggests a highly sophisticated mentality. Despite these flaws, Mandell has yet again provided us with much food for thought.

RAVI MALHOTRA
Toronto, Canada

Reply To Malhotra

Ravi Malhotra raises an important issue in his helpful letter. The linkage between disability and poverty is often overlooked, as he suggests. I also accept his point about the “Italian mentality.”

BETTY REID MANDELL

Refine your reading

EPO

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e. e. cummings
Umberto Eco
Sidney Fairfield
Manny Farber
Leslie Fidler
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Arguing Comics
Literary Masters on a Popular Medium
Edited by Jeff Hearn and Kent Worcester

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What Happened to *Brown*?

A REVIEW ESSAY BY REGINALD WILSON

MAY 17, 2004, MARKED THE fiftieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the year 2004 witnessed an outpouring of celebrations and commiserations, with achievements loudly proclaimed and disappointments duly noted. The bare demographic facts of the period are stark in the simplicity of their statement: Public schools in America that were over 50 percent African American declined from 76 percent in 1968, to 63 percent in 1972, but had risen to nearly 70 percent in 2000. For Hispanics the rise and fall of public school segregation was even worse. The schools for African Americans and Hispanics were inferior to white schools in physical plant, books, certified teachers and curriculum. Despite some improvements, this was true before *Brown* and continues to be

true today. Indeed, some schools are now more segregated than before *Brown*.

Nearly all the observations focused on the court decision as the signal legal event of the century that ended the apartheid decision of *Plessey* (1896). But the court decision only symbolically marked the end of one era and represented the culmination of years of carefully planned litigation, political maneuvering and the witnessing of cataclysmic events of national and world significance that impinged on or were actively initiated by the African American plaintiffs, in their struggle for full participation in the nation. Without understanding this context one cannot truly understand

Brown or what it represents.

A mere 20 years after the Civil War, African Americans founded the Afro-American League in 1887, with the signal intent of supporting the *Blair Education Bill* which was before Congress and whose mandate was to provide equal Federal

BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ESSAY

After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School Desegregation

CHARLES CLOTFELER

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004
216 pp. \$24.95

The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream

SHERYLL CASHIN

New York: Public Affairs, 2004
320 pp. \$26

All Deliberate Speed: Reflections on the First Half Century of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Charles J. Ogletree, Jr.
New York: Norton, 2004
416 pp. \$25.95

REGINALD WILSON is a member of the New Politics editorial board. His article "Affirmative Action — 2003" appeared in NP 36 (Winter 2004).

funds for black and white schools while maintaining segregation — anticipating Professor Derrick Bell's (*Silent Covenant*, 2004) despairing suggestion by over a century. Some Southerners accepted this plan but most Southerners (and a few Northerners) rejected the plan. In 1891, after much debate, it went down to defeat. This defeat had enormous implications for black empowerment in the South and one black spokesman said that the "failure [of the Blair bill] would be a disaster for the whole country, especially to the black race." But the bill was defeated despite this foreboding and eventually led to the demise of the Afro-American League in 1908.

The downfall of the League led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. The NAACP and its legal defense arm maintained as its principal objective the same motivation as that of the League — the ending of segregated public schooling in the South. But this time, its primary strategy would be through the courts rather than through the legislative process.

Charles Hamilton Houston was the main strategist of the legal program of the NAACP. Houston and his colleagues thought that the courts were less susceptible to the vagaries of the political process and more open to the presentation of facts, rather than being swayed by emotion or ideology. Ultimately they were to learn otherwise. The NAACP embarked on the complex and tortuous journey that began with graduate schools and law schools, and ultimately public schools that culminated in the *Brown* decision of 1954.

Brown stood in 1954 like a bright light emerging from the Stygian swamp of the decades preceding it. For example, 1925 in Detroit, a so-called liberal northern city, there were 35,000 registered members of the Ku Klux Klan. Charles Ogletree notes that "between 1890 and 1930 an estimated 3,220 African Americans were lynched in the South alone, 7 in the Northeast, 79 in the Midwest, and 38 in the far West." It was not just the existence of segregation itself, but the pall of oppression that permeated every aspect of life and

affected the psyches of blacks and whites in their complex relations with each other to the present day. That this way of life was sanctioned by the nation's highest court and ignored by Congress, gave it a special resonance and permanence.

However, black GI's were returning from WWII in 1946 with the belief that they had been fighting two wars: over the enemy abroad and over segregation at home. Segregation was already being chipped away at the edges before *Brown*. The armed forces were integrated by Harry Truman's Executive Order in 1948 — over the objection of Dwight Eisenhower. Major league baseball was integrated by Jackie Robinson in 1947 — over the objection of Southern ball players. The whole world was changing; the Bandung Conference of 1955 brought African and Asian countries together to discuss throwing off the shackles of colonialism. It was in this postwar atmosphere of revolution and change that the *Brown* decision was rendered. *Plessy* could not have been overturned just a decade before. In the United States in 1935 the nation was a very different place.

The decision of 1954 was freighted with special implications beyond its immediate application to public schools. The African-American community instantly realized its logic would inevitably bring into question not only other segregated institutions but would profoundly (and perhaps permanently) change American life. The decision, it was expected, would lead to the inexorable crumbling of some of the barriers of that life — but not willingly and not without massive struggle, riots, demonstrations and the bloodshed of African Americans and many others allied with them: the murders of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney — three civil rights workers; the bombing of a Birmingham church causing the death of four black girls; the police brutality against dozens of peaceful demonstrators at the Edmund Pettus Bridge; and on and on. These people paid the price to implement *Brown*.

II

BROWN WAS A COMPROMISED decision to begin with. To obtain a unanimous decision to announce

such a break with history and tradition, Chief Justice Earl Warren was compelled, despite the decision's lofty language, to be quite vague about its implementation. This vacuum subsequently led to *Brown II* (1957), which was ostensibly to give guidance to beleaguered district judges, who were hearing all kinds of dodges to prevent integration. But *Brown II* contained the poisonous and infamous phrase "with all deliberate speed." This phrase, much to the plaintiff's lawyer Thurgood Marshall's profound disappointment, and unleashed a storm of delaying maneuvers: states passed interposition and nullification used (which has been outlawed over 100 years before), gerrymandered attendance lines, shifts of public funds to private schools, separate racial tracks within schools, refusal to levy for public education, and sometimes outright defiance (the "Southern Manifesto" of Southern leaders is an example). With the exception of cases such as *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) and *Bush v. Orleans-School Board* (1960), there were the no cases that reached the Supreme Court by 1964. Thus, the decade from 1954 to 1964 saw almost no progress in school desegregation.

In 1964, and 1965, two measures were passed by Congress that dramatically changed the pace of desegregation: The Civil Right Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Act, with its threat of the withdrawal of federal funds was instrumental in spurring enforcement of desegregation orders. This act, in conjunction with favorable court decisions *Green v. County School Board* (1968), and *Swann v. Charlotte - Mecklenberg* (1971), gave powerful tools to the courts to insist that school district obey their orders, and that eventuated the Southern schools ironically becoming the most integrated schools in the nation. And the Voting Rights Act, which empowered blacks to vote, gave Southern lawmakers pause before committing acts that violated black rights. Again, it is reflected in the dramatic shift in the numbers that the decade from 1964 to 1974 saw the greatest progress in desegregation. Charles Ogletree, then a student at Stanford, realized the importance of the profound impact

these decisions had on the politics of the Congress and on the courts. Ogletree describes "the push for civil rights, the protest against the Viet-

Brown stood in 1954 like a bright light emerging from the Stygian swamp of the decades preceding it.

nam war" and recognized quite rightly that attending an elite, predominately white university, we were . . . the beneficiaries of *Brown*." However, Lyndon Johnson said prophetically after the Civil Rights Act passed, "We have just lost the South." He meant with the passage of the Act, the South would become Republican as, indeed, it did under Nixon and Reagan, and with the appointment of over 300 conservative federal judges the courts would be more reactionary.

In 1974, *Milliken v. Bradley* sounded the death knell of desegregation and forecast the gradual resegregation of public schools. *Milliken* was a Detroit case that ruled that students could not be bused to surrounding suburbs unless the suburbs were officially involved in segregation. The suburbs, however, did not have to adopt an official policy of segregation. Their history did that for them. Charles Clotfelter notes that, "Racial zoning was declared unconstitutional in 1917, but some cities continued to enforce it into the 1950s. Clotfelter goes on to quote Douglas Massey who documented that "over the past ninety years, segregation patterns in the United States have consistently evolved to satisfy one overriding principle — the minimization of white-black contact." Moreover, following World War II, the explosion of the suburbs was abetted by the GI Bill's housing provision that contained the admonition that "traditional racial housing patterns were to be maintained." This provision guaranteed that the suburbs would be racially restricted. This was compounded by "white flight" which was accelerated

by the Court ordered school integration.

The public schools in the 25 largest cities in the United States have populations that are majority minority, indeed overwhelmingly, regardless of the overall racial population of the cities. Sheryll Cashin summarizes the result today: "Black and brown public school children are now more segregated than at any time in the past thirty years."

The rationale for striving for integration in the first place was to give minority students access to better resources, therefore, improving their academic achievement as well as improving their self-concept. Numerous studies have been done of the effects of desegregation on academic achievement, far fewer on the complex topic of self-concept or intergroup relation.

Looking at a review of 48 studies of desegregated schools (Weinberg, 1977) the author observes "that a majority of the studies conclude that desegregation has positive effects on the achievement of African-American students." The majority of studies had been done on black students' achievement because they were the primary focus of desegregation. However, the few studies of Hispanic children reveal that their academic achievement is also enhanced in an integrated setting. The studies also found the "achievement of white students was not lowered in a desegregated setting." Moreover, there was a positive effect on black students in their later life choices. For example, college choice and college completion rates were higher for blacks who had attended desegregated elementary and secondary schools. These are some of the losses that are occurring with resegregation.

III

THE THREE BOOKS WE look at in this essay discuss where we have been and where we have come to in the fifty years since *Brown*, and they represent a cross-section of the hundreds of book, conferences and symposia proceedings that have been issued in observance of the milestone in desegregation. Charles Clotfelter's study, *After Brown* (2004), is an excellent mostly statistical study of (according to his subtitles) "the rise and retreat of

school desegregation." In numerous tables he documents the physical and social separation in schools of the races in 1954 and traces the evolution of that separation to the year 2000. He makes an important point: "the fact at the heart of both the apartheid practices in the American South and the *Brown* decision that ruled it unconstitutional was the physical separation the races." In other words, he surmised that the Court took a look at both the residential segregation and the state mandated separation in the schools as dually contributing causes of school segregation. But the Court chose the easier path of only seeing state action as requiring federal intervention and "left unsettled by *Brown* . . . was whether racial segregation in school [was] brought about by segregated residential patterns . . . (and whether it) is might not also be vulnerable to constitutional challenge." The broader challenge and its more fundamental consequences was, alas, never addressed by the Court, but Clotfelter does observe that during the period 1968 to 1972, as a result of vigorous action by the federal government schools in the South progressed "from the most to the least segregated in the country."

Contrary to Clotfelter, Charles Ogletree, although born in 1952 — a "*Brown* baby" as he describes himself — spends much more time in his book describing the condition of black people prior to 1954. In the South, "African Americans were removed from the voting rolls . . . [and] were excluded from jury service . . . [and African Americans] suffered not only economic and political oppression but also violent repression by whites, most notably through lynching." He mentions "the Chicago riots of 1919" as well as "the Tulsa, Oklahoma riot of 1921 by whites." He further describes that period as witnessing the founding of black organization businesses and newspapers that provided some solidarity and protection to the black community.

Sheryll Cashin spends little time on America before *Brown*, but she performs a valuable service by describing the present state of race relations and stating that "racial segregation is still pervasive and class segregation seems to be the

accepted norm.” Cashin, a middle-class law professor, describes her personal commitment to integration and her desire to live in a racially mixed community. But it is her description of class barriers that impressed me as providing the most insightful contributions to understanding the difficulties confronting the attempt to build a truly integrated community today.

Cashin provides five reasons that contribute to the maintenance of segregated communities.

One, “blacks face integration exhaustion . . . they prefer places that are recognized as being welcoming to blacks and seem less willing than in the past to be integration pioneers.” Two, “whites place a premium on homogeneity. Whites are less likely than blacks to want to live in diverse neighborhoods.” The other barriers have to do with racial steering, discriminatory dealings of real estate agencies and biased practices of financial institutions. Although official barriers no longer exist, there are considerable pressures from unofficial but pervasive, sometimes illegal, barriers that contribute to maintaining segregated neighborhoods.

In her description of class differences in white and black communities, I believe Cashin makes the most original contribution, of the books discussed here. Clotfelter mentions class only in passing as it affects ability to pay for college. Ogletree is aware of class since he grew up in a working-class black family, where he was the first member to go to college, but he mentions class only offhandedly. Clotfelter quotes Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina writing in defense of segregation: “Racial segregation . . . results from the exercise of fundamental American freedom — the freedom to select one’s associates . . . man finds his greatest happiness when he is among people of similar cultural, historical and cultural background.” Taken out of the realm of racial segregation, this definition seems to serve quite comfortably defining the

social class separation of whites and social class distinctions of black as well.

Cashin makes an astute observation that seems to follow quite naturally from the foregoing statement: “Because the black elite have choices about where to live, work, learn and spend their money, blacks are no longer forced to depend upon one another . . . interdependence was the key to viability of black communities in the era of Jim Crow.” Whites are

fleeing to the suburbs to escape, among other things, integrated schools, and the black middle class is seeking to separate from the black lower class equally for better schools as well as better housing choices. Saying this is not meant to guilt-trip middle class blacks but it is just a statement of fact. That Cashin makes this observation is due to her keen insight, and simply confirms the observation that blacks operate in accordance with their class interest: nonetheless, they are not to be viewed as a monolithic blob as is the usual practice with social commentators. This class interest serves to cause middle class blacks today to ask not “does it serve the black community?” but rather “does it serve me?”

Cashin does go on to add: “Black professionals who have chosen to live in separated neighborhoods but opt out of the public schools, or who harbor a classism toward other black people, pay for it in the long run.” Perhaps they do, but they, like middle class whites, are willing to amok that payment. The problem is, do middle class blacks, like middle class whites, look on the academic achievement potential of lower class blacks as trapped by their social and economic circumstances? To answer that question we have to briefly review the history of the immediate period of the 1950s leading up to the present.

American society became more conservative during the Cold War years, seeing the specter of

All children have the capacity to
excel as learners and as citizens
when provided with a rich,
supportive, and stimulating
education environment.

Russia and Communism as the devil incarnate. And the Reagan and Nixon administrations solidified this by their conservative appointments to the federal courts and particularly to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the country's economy shifted from a manufacturing base to a technology and information base and demanding that its workers be better trained and educated. Where less than 30 percent of American high school graduates in the 60s went on to college, by the year 2000, the number had increased to 44 percent.

The pressure on higher education saw a greater reliance on SAT testing as a sorting device to separate the admission winners from the losers. The intense competition for the most desirable slots in higher education, at elite schools, is causing whites to be less supportive of affirmative action. And mandatory testing has spread like the plague down the educational ladder to middle schools and elementary schools, down to George Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative that requires that testing be conducted by as early as the fourth grade. If students do not perform up to a specified standard, the school may be threatened with closure. The Bush administration has not fully funded the program, which demands equal standards for still unequal schools, particularly schools serving poor students of color. Many commentators see NCLB as a program that was designed for failure. Monty Neill of Fair Test says, for example, "that making adequate yearly progress toward that [testing] goal is such that virtually no schools serving large numbers of low-income children will clear these arbitrary hurdles."

Alfie Kohn (*Phi Delta Kappan*, April, 2004) predicts that the result will be to "segregate schools by ethnicity . . . (and) segregate classes by ability." School resegregation by mandated tests will only compound the trajectory of what is occurring with white flight and black ghettoization. We observe that there is no systematic and sustained outcry from progressive and leftist whites and, with some exceptions, progressive blacks, who see the connection between the nationwide organized attack on affirmative action at the higher educational

level and its ties to the systematic attacks on public schools in the name of "reform" or "leveling the playing field" or "raising standards" or "race neutral" or any other euphemism that means pushing out the lower class, impoverished youngsters of color. Education is all one system — to suppress one part affects all others. The outcome will be: the ghettoization educationally of poor blacks and Hispanics.

Charles Ogletree mentions how he and his wife are involved in several excellent projects and they discuss others efforts to improve education for blacks and Hispanics in Cambridge and elsewhere such as Robert Moses Algebra Project in Cambridge, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in the District of Columbia and the Benjamin Banneker Charter School in Boston. The name Benjamin Banneker was selected by the organizing committee who felt that Banneker, born of slave parents, but nevertheless went on "to excel as an astronomer, mathematician and scientist," could serve as a model to black children locked in "schools [that] have much higher concentrations of poverty and much lower average test scores. Ogletree also served as chairman of the board of a remarkable program called the BELL Project, a rigorous tutoring and mentoring program for low-income elementary school students. These programs had the audacity to "believe that all children had the capacity to excel as learners and as citizens when provided with a rich, supportive, and stimulating education environment."

THE BELIEF THAT ALL children "had the capacity to excel" is the essence of my intent in this essay. What is missing in the current literature is a call for a national effort to raise the achievement level to excellence for all students, black and non-blacks, elementary, high school and college, lower class and middle class. There are already excellent individual projects; some of which are powerfully described by Ogletree that educate a hundred here, a thousand there, very well. Cashin speaks eloquently of a more inclusive vision when she says, "Such possibilities are achievable if the majority of people who now suf-

fer under American separatism would organize and act to reclaim democratic processes.” But her vision is directed primarily at the black middle class to help lower class blacks. However, I am thinking more broadly of a national effort led by the left that states as its goal “excellence for all” as an achievable goal, and takes the initiative along with other groups, such as those mentioned above, and perhaps with the NAACP and La Raza, to begin to implement a program for all of the children crushed by the system regardless of race. That is a project worth of the left’s collective effort. Perhaps a dream, perhaps not.

I am reminded of the dozens of eager young teachers who I observed in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in the mid-1960s who came south to teach young blacks who had been without education for five years because their public schools had been closed rather than have them integrated. I am further reminded of the hundreds of youths who volunteered in the most dangerous of circumstances, in Mississippi and Alabama, to register blacks to vote. I am reminded of the outpouring of young people — college students, people who had never voted before — to rally for Howard Dean when he was a presidential candidate and was the only one speaking out against the immoral, illegal and unconstitutional Iraq war.

There is a vast reservoir of talented people in our population who are eager to be mobilized for some progressive, advanced, indeed revolutionary, cause if only they were given leadership. But, I suspect that will probably not happen for a complex of reasons.

Although the idea that *all* children are capable of excellent academic achievement has been demonstrated over and over through the decades, it is doubtful that behaviorally, the left or, indeed, most middle class blacks believe it. Understandably it is a difficult concept to act on in a society that is arranged hierarchically and rewards are allocated disproportionately to the top and sparingly, if at all, to the bottom; and with those at the top believing the rewards are their due.

Benjamin Bloom, professor of education at the University of Chicago, after extensive research

in the 1960s concluded that “most students become very similar with regard to learning ability, rate of learning, and motivation for further learning-when they are provided with favorable learning conditions” (*Human Characteristics and School Learning*, 1976). He added, “[these] are not matters of abstract theory or faith. They depend on easily observed evidence readily obtainable in most of the classrooms of the world or in educational research laboratories.” Jaime Escalante taught mathematics to Hispanic ghetto youths at Garfield High School in Los Angeles and raised their achievement in mathematics on the PSAT to such heights that it aroused the disbelief of the Educational Testing Service. James Comer, professor of psychiatry at Yale University, began his innovative program with the 99 percent black, single parented students in two New Haven schools and raised the two schools achievement levels to nearly the top scores in the city. Barbara Sizemore, reported similar excellent outcomes with the poor black school children of Pittsburgh. Ruben Donato with the language minority Academic Services Program had poor Hispanic youngsters achieving at the top of their age group despite English being their second language. Uri Treisman formerly of the University of California at Berkeley, had his black students achieving above white and Asian students in calculus, regardless of SAT scores; in fact in some cases blacks with the lowest SAT were performing above whites with the highest SAT. All of these programs were not transitory or one time achievements but were systematically studied and published in respected journals such as: *Scientific American*, *The Journal of Negro Education*, *Harvard Educational Review* and *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Why, one may ask, didn’t education leaders, mainstream or progressive and left, jump on these programs excitedly and say, “these are models which can revolutionize education, and indeed, lift achievement for every class of students.” They didn’t, I believe, because, no matter their protest to the contrary, they believe that “demography is destiny.” That is, poverty, poor housing, single parents, etc., are barriers that stand in the way of

children breeching them, and thus, never to allow lower class children to equal the academic achievement of middle class children. I am very much aware of all the educational literature agreeing with this conclusion, but I have witnessed the obverse in my years of teaching emotionally disturbed youngsters at the elementary school level and teaching undergraduate and graduate students in the university.

Here is one example: Texas passed the 10 percent plan when its affirmative action program was declared unconstitutional. That is, the top 10 percent of the graduates from any Texas high school must be automatically admitted to any public university in Texas. Some education experts said that plan was doomed to fail because if the top 10 percent of graduates from the poorest high schools had to compete with the top 10 percent of graduates from the best high schools, the poor graduates would inevitably fail. The fact is, after some years in the program, the poor high school students are doing as well as the students from the

best high schools. And they are excelling equally at the University of Texas at Austin, the flagship university in Texas.

WE MUST, AS SOCIALISTS, demand the best outcome for the greatest number of people; we cannot ask for less. We must not be seduced by the usual perception of seeing elite education as being only for those who have gone to good public or elite high schools. With the decline in integrated schools, the judicial failure of *Brown* and the wealth gap increasing for blacks and Hispanics, there is the danger of throwing up our hands and abandoning those who are the focus of our efforts. We may have lost the force of *Brown*, at least for the foreseeable future. We must not lose the people whom *Brown* was intended to save. The question might be asked: "what is the nation to do with all of these educated, intellectually alive people from the lower strata of society if these programs were enacted?" Good question, and the answer is the subject of another essay.

A Magnificent Mirage

REVIEW BY STEPHEN STEINBERG

OVER THE PAST YEAR the nation has indulged in a spectacle of hoopla and fanfare commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Though ostensibly a celebration of the triumph of democracy over the forces of racism, in this national revelry we can discern the fabrication of a national myth. It runs something like this:

Brown was the finest hour of American law, demonstrating the self-rectifying mechanisms embedded in democratic institutions. *Brown* also vindicated the liberal faith — famously enunciated by Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma* — that the United States would eventually bring its racial practices into accord with its democratic creed. Indeed, *Brown* dealt a judicial deathblow to Jim Crow, and this watershed event marked the beginning of a new era where blacks have made steady progress and assumed their rightful place in American society. To be sure, racism persists and too many blacks still languish on the fringes of our society. Nevertheless, *Brown* provided the catalyst for changes that have transformed American society.

On this view, the hoopla and fanfare are not only justified, but they are also salubrious. Like the elevation of Martin Luther King from protest leader to national icon, the anniversary celebrations of *Brown v. the Board of Education* function as a purification rite, purging the nation of past sins and signaling national rebirth.

In *Silent Covenants*, Derrick Bell punctures this celebratory mood, and he does so with his unique blend of legal erudition, critical thinking,

and uncompromising devotion to the ideal of racial justice. These qualities lead Bell to challenge

the prevailing liberal orthodoxy on race. His dissent does not rely only on the sobering fact that most black children still attend segregated schools, and that segregation is even more pronounced in the

North than in the South. For Bell, even the promise of *Brown* was illusory since *Brown* was decided on false premises that predestined school integration to ultimate defeat. Still worse, *Brown* provided justification for the very racism that it purported to repudiate. In short, far from being a solution, *Brown* has been part of the problem. This leads Bell to a startling conclusion: that the cause of racial justice would have been better served had *Brown* affirmed the principle of separate but equal and meant it — by ordering massive public investment in “black schools” to eliminate the vast inequalities in education.

Bell did not come easily to this iconoclastic and searing judgment. In 1957, after graduating as the only black in a class of 140 white males at the University of Pittsburgh Law School, he took his first job in the newly formed Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice. Soon after, at the invitation of Thurgood Marshall, Bell moved to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, where he supervised most of the southern school litigation. Bell writes: “For the first decade of my legal career, I, like most civil rights professionals, believed with an almost religious passion that the *Brown* decision was the Holy Grail of racial justice.” Like most other civil rights activists, he was optimistic that in the wake of *Brown*, the walls of segregation would come tumbling down. How is it that this erstwhile champion of racial integration fell

Silent Covenants: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform

Derrick Bell

New York: Oxford University Press, 2004
256 pp. \$25

STEPHEN STEINBERG'S "Nathan Glazer and the Assassination of Affirmative Action" appeared in NP 35 (Summer 2003).

into such cynicism and despair that he now dismisses *Brown* as “a magnificent mirage”?

The fact that Bell’s biography and intellectual trajectory dovetail with the shifting currents of history makes for riveting reading. According to Bell, the promise of *Brown* was subverted by a number of “silent covenants” — understandings that were never codified but that destined *Brown* to ultimate failure. Indeed, Bell is not even willing to concede that blacks were the intended beneficiaries of *Brown*! In his view, *Brown* was the product of “racial fortuity,” a concept that Bell borrows from contract law. For example, if a man contracts with a florist to send a bouquet of flowers to his wife, and the florist fails to do so, he can sue the florist, but as an incidental party to the contract, his wife has no such right. As Bell sees it, blacks were an incidental party to the *Brown* decision in that it never intended to make restitution for the wrongs suffered by blacks. Both the timing and the substance of the decision turned on the fact that segregation had become costly to white society, especially in terms of Cold War politics. Here Bell relies heavily on Mary Dudziak’s book, *Cold War Civil Rights*, showing that the shameful treatment of African Americans had become a liability in terms of competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for the hearts and minds of peoples in the Third World. Not only was *Brown* calibrated to serve white interests, but whites have also been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights reform. For example, affirmative action has benefited white women more than any other group. It also democratized the process for hiring and promoting workers, thus benefiting all workers regardless of race.

As a corollary to Bell’s “interest convergence theory,” black rights are protected only so long as doing so serves white interests. Indeed, the lesson of *Brown* is that once these rights no longer serve white interests, they are gradually abridged or abrogated. Thus, *Brown* struck the perfect balance between the need for change and the lack of political will to enact fundamental change. As Michael Seidman has argued, *Brown* brought about a transformation without real change.

What if? What if *Brown* had been decided with blacks primarily in mind, and not merely to remove this blemish from American democracy or to burnish our national image for the sake of Cold War politics? Here we arrive at Bell’s most damaging criticism: “*Brown v. Board of Education* was a dramatic instance of a remedy that promised to correct deficiencies in justice far deeper than the Supreme Court was able to understand.” By treating racism as “a fixable aberration,” the Court displayed little comprehension of the scope or depth of racism. Here we are talking about the oppression of an entire people through all of American history, under the protective umbrella of the hallowed Constitution. The Court did not have the resolve to order a complete dismantling of Jim Crow in all of its nefarious forms. Indeed, the Court equivocated when it came to enforcing its own ruling, leaving the door open to decades of stonewalling, circumvention, and legal wrangling. *Brown* placed the nation on a historical treadmill: transformation without real change.

Clearly, the Court did not anticipate the depth or virulence of the white backlash that ultimately subverted efforts to integrate schools. Bell cites John Boger’s argument that the Court applied the logic of tort theory, implicitly assuming “another otherwise unblemished world of racial equality marred only by discrete, individual, redressable incidents of violation, rather than a near-seamless national web of constitutional injury.” Thus, *Brown* was predicated on a sorely deficient conception of racism. Furthermore, by proclaiming that separate was inherently unequal, the Court absolved itself of further responsibility for the glaring racial inequalities in schooling. Thus, by its single-minded focus on “separate” and its sorrowful neglect of “equal,” *Brown* paradoxically provided legitimation for the racial gap in schooling, and by extension, other spheres of life. As Bell writes, “*Brown*, then, served to reinforce the fiction that, by the decision’s rejection of racial barriers posed by segregation, the path of progress would be clear.”

This is the logic that leads Bell to ponder whether the cause of racial justice would have been

better served had *Brown* affirmed the separate but equal principle, and meant it: by mandating that “black” schools be brought up to the standard of “white” schools. Bell is mindful of the immense social costs of school integration: of busing traumatized black students into white neighborhoods and schools where they were at best an unwanted presence, and at worst, subject to violence. Of schools that responded to the black influx by creating tracks that amounted to internal segregation. Of massive white fight that resulted in the resegregation of schools that had previously been integrated. Of the gradual unraveling and revocation of school integration policy by judicial fiat. Of the ultimate failure of this policy, despite great expenditure of political capital and material resources, to achieve its laudable objective: of using the public school as the instrument for integrating the black and white children of this nation. Against this background, can Derrick Bell be faulted for invoking “racial realism” to say that it was foolhardy to think that we could use buses to override residential apartheid, rooted as this was in an equally intractable system of occupational segregation and class stratification?

Bell’s reluctant embrace of the separate but equal doctrine, even as a position of last resort, is his most controversial and vulnerable point. Does this amount to a capitulation to racism? What guarantee is there that once the Court affirmed “separate,” it would deliver on the promise of “equal”? Would the cause of racial justice be better served had the Court ruled according to Bell’s alternative iteration of *Brown*, presented in Chapter three? Whatever its limitations, didn’t *Brown* relinquish Jim Crow to the trash bin of history, and isn’t this cause for celebration?

Lawyer that he is, Bell engages the arguments of his intellectual adversaries: that *Brown* became a legal landmark; that it removed the mantle of legitimacy from state-sponsored racism; that it provided an inspirational spark for racial protest, culminating with crucial civil rights legislation; that by affirming the full equal status of African Americans as persons and citizens, *Brown* brought an end to apartheid and black subordination in pub-

lic and private life; that even though blacks were far more concerned with occupational discrimination, school integration was “the only game in town.” These are powerful arguments, and Bell gives them their due. However, he remains adamant in his view of *Brown* as “a magnificent mirage.” Fifty years after *Brown*, we still live in a society riven by race where “separate” is the rule of the day. Thus, for Bell, the choice was never between integration and segregation, but rather between segregation with or without a commitment to equalize schooling for black and white children.

In the wake of the failure of integration, the question remains the same one that Martin Luther King posed in his 1967 book: *Where Do We Go From Here?* Bell devotes an entire chapter to “Searching for Effective Schools in the Post-Brown Era.” He weighs the argument and evidence for charter schools, “inner city” independent schools, specialized public schools, supplemental school programs, and even tuition vouchers. He also makes a case for “desegregating the money” through suits that challenge the scandalous disparities in school funding between affluent and poor communities. Bearing as he does the scars of past civil rights battles, Bell is inclined to put ideology aside, and to do whatever will expand opportunity and address the urgent needs of black children.

In his penultimate chapter, Bell quotes a gospel song that asks: “What do you do when you’ve done all you can and it feels like it’s never enough?” Bell started out as a champion of civil rights, and he has had half a century to think about “the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform.” His intellectual trajectory mirrors that of W.E.B. DuBois, who led the struggle for political rights, but when confronted with intransigent racism, also sought to build on the moral strengths and social assets of a resilient black community. Bell tells us that the answer to the gospel song is “Just stand,” meaning to remain steadfast, “to not give up in the face of seemingly fruitless struggle.” Clearly, this has been the credo of Derrick Bell’s remarkable life, and this is the message and meaning of *Silent Covenants*.

The Human Rights Agenda

REVIEW BY JOHN FEFFER

IDEALISTS AND PRAGMATISTS have long fought over the soul of U.S. foreign policy. The shimmering ideal of the “city on the hill” has competed with a tough-nosed, “let’s get the job done” ethos — Jefferson vs. Hamilton, Wilson vs. Lodge — since the founding of the republic. Since the creation of the international order in the wake of World War II, this debate has been increasingly couched in terms of “human rights.” The idealists have assembled an impressive pedigree. Eleanor Roosevelt expended considerable efforts to pull together an international consensus for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Jimmy Carter privileged human rights over traditional geopolitical concerns; Ronald Reagan shook his fist at the Berlin Wall; Bill Clinton declared human rights a priority of his administration and brought Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright on board to push this agenda.

But even these high points in the institutionalizing of human rights — the triumph of the idealist strain in U.S. foreign policy — succumbed to the pressures of *realpolitik*. Roosevelt was not able to get the United States to fully back the social and economic bill of rights at the UN, Carter ended up ignoring Idi Amin in Uganda and failing to integrate human rights in multilateral loans, Reagan only cared about the human rights violations of “totalitarians” and not “authoritarians,” and Clinton backed down on a range of issues from Bosnia to China. For every principled articulation of human rights there has been the accom-

panying concession to “reality.”

Instead of viewing this oscillation between idealism and pragmatism as either an ad hoc process or the inevitable pull of compromise in international relations, Julie Mertus has identified a more coherent, systemic approach to the politicizing of human rights within U.S. foreign policy. In her valuable new book *Bait and Switch*, Mertus argues that many U.S. citizens have

Bait and Switch: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy

Julie Mertus
New York: Routledge, 2004
250 pp. \$19.95

contributed enormously to the human rights movement and the U.S. government has gradually incorporated human rights language into foreign policy. Ultimately, however, the United States continues to assert its own sovereign right to align itself with rights-abusing regimes and, through the overwhelming power of the military, undercut whatever progress has been made at the diplomatic level. Most importantly, the United States has refused to apply its own human rights arguments domestically. In other words, the U.S. government has pushed other countries to adhere to an institutional framework on rights that it has steadfastly refused to apply to the U.S. legal system. For instance, U.S. negotiators worked long and hard to create a strong Convention on the Rights of the Child only for the Clinton administration to refuse to send the treaty to the Senate for ratification. U.S. ratification would have been rendered meaningless in any case by a host of reservations that have conditioned U.S. adherence to other multilateral accords.

The problem Mertus identifies, then, is not with a particular leader (Reagan’s fondness for the Contras or Clinton’s preference for Russia over Chechnya). It is American exceptionalism that prompts every U.S. administration to push hard for strong language on human rights only to turn

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around and deny its applicability on the home front. “To the extent that the United States is leading the world on human rights by example,” she writes, “it is leading the world in the wrong direction.” After all, if the United States is not willing to compromise its sovereignty in the interests of general human rights — to embrace its professed ideals instead of falling back on utilitarian considerations — why should any other country make such sacrifices?

One of the most useful aspects of *Bait and Switch* is Mertus’s analysis of the way the military establishment has absorbed the rhetoric of human rights to bolster its image and support in the post-Cold War era. Without a clearly defined enemy in Europe, NATO has redefined itself, however absurdly, as a humanitarian organization that often becomes involved in “non-traditional” operations. Other changes in the overall security environment have also had an impact on the military’s reception of human rights — the incorporation of a human rights component into U.S. training of foreign soldiers and officers, the increasing subcontracting out of military operations to private firms, and the development of more “humane” technology meant to avoid civilian casualties (“smart” weapons). Controversial humanitarian interventions in Somalia and Bosnia, followed by the first war fought on behalf of humanitarianism in Kosovo/Serbia, brought all of these new components into play and established the dynamics that shaped subsequent actions in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11. Although the military continues to ignore or abuse human rights — particularly in wartime — Mertus argues that the presentation of its goals and activities in a human rights context ultimately bolsters human rights norms.

As these military examples demonstrate, the institutionalization of human rights norms has entailed the transmutation of idealism into pragmatism, what Weber in another context called the routinization of charismatic authority. With institutional backing, such ideals begin to “make sense” in the real world. Adherence to human rights norms becomes, then, a practical accom-

modation to new realities, such as maintaining a good public profile in host countries or sustaining public opinion back home. At the same time, when lofty ideals turn into grubby realities, the moral clarity dissipates. Supporting Vaclav Havel and his band of dissidents seemed to be an unambiguous good. When the U.S. military uses human rights language to justify a “smart bombing” campaign, it is hard to say whether this represents a victory or a defeat for human rights advocacy.

Mertus’s arguments concerning the impact of civil society, which she presents in the last chapter to sweeten the pill of her foregoing critique, are both the most inspiring and the most problematic part of the book. Yes, Helsinki Watch and Amnesty International have made great progress in holding governments accountable for their crimes, both individual and collective. Human rights lawyers have made great strides in creating the human rights-respecting architecture that, as it is built, will incrementally provide the basis for durable collective security at a global level. Mertus clearly sees how the U.S. government politicizes human rights. Perhaps in order to end on an unambiguously positive note, she is less willing to critique civil society.

For instance, *Bait and Switch* mentions only one crass civil society manipulation of the human rights agenda: the religious right’s effort to win passage of the International Religious Freedom Act. But on a host of issues, conservative and neo-conservative organizations have used the language and sometimes the content of human rights to advance very specific non-human rights agendas — unraveling the chances of a security agreement with North Korea, demoting China from strategic partner to strategic adversary, maintaining the blockade against Cuba, undermining leaders such as Hugo Chavez. Here, the ideals mask a rather cynical pragmatism. Portions of the American left certainly have been guilty in the past of jettisoning ideals for “realist” goals by supporting the breaking of a few eggs to make the Soviet or the Vietnamese or the Cuban omelet. But the same process that Mertus identifies as transforming the language and content of foreign policy in the last

twenty years has also put human rights at the center of most progressive platforms. The left is not immune to cynicism on this issue, but the left is virtually powerless in the United States. Now that it is ascendant politically, however, the conservatives deserve more scrutiny of their human rights programs, from Freedom House to the Hudson Institute to the nominally neutral but covertly neocon National Endowment for Democracy.

Mertus ends with a discussion of how strengthening a human rights culture in the United States can eventually anchor norms so thoroughly in our institutions that eventually the United States, too, will ratify, adhere to, and genuinely

promote on the home front all of the various human rights accords that have been developed. “American double standards in human rights policy weakens the United States’ claim to lead globally through moral authority and undermines the legitimacy of human rights norms,” she concludes. True, but it may well be impossible to “lead globally” — in a real political sense as opposed to by example — and adhere to the letter of human rights law. The double standard that the U.S. government maintains on human rights is not simply a result of American exceptionalism. It is a necessary byproduct of U.S. presumption to lead by any means necessary.

American Millennialism

REVIEW BY JACK STUART

JOHN JUDIS'S TITLE ALMOST tells it all, that this is going to be a book about good presidents and bad presidents, and that it can be dismissed by leftists as the fantasy of a liberal Democrat, now a senior editor of *The New Republic* and formerly an editor of *Socialist Revolution*. But let's slow down a minute, because this book should be seen as a useful exploration of how intellectuals construct American foreign policy and by implication, an argument that imperialism is not simply a reflection of "matured" capitalism's need to export investment capital. Since Judis spends very little time dealing with the theoretical structure of imperialism developed by J.A. Hobson and none at all on Lenin's version, we can save some of these matters for another day and focus on those issues that are directly dealt with by Judis and how he treats them.

He does deal with the way in which a group of political heavyweights, including Theodore Roosevelt and Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, created an imperialist ideological structure on the eve of the Spanish American War — at a time when investment capital was flowing *to* rather than *from* the United States. He appropriately compares them to the neoconservatives that concretized an intellectual justification for the invasion of Iraq. He further points out that imperialism can be an intellectual tradition that carries a good deal of weight even after apparent revolutionary change. Thus he quotes Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin's foreign minister, writing "My task as minister of for-

eign affairs was to expand the borders of our fatherland."

Only George W. Bush initiated a war to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein, not his father and not Bill Clinton, so it would appear that there was nothing *automatic* about the United States initiating such a war. This is not necessarily to argue that there are "good" presidents and that John Kerry would have likely been one of them, as the

The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn from Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson

JOHN B. JUDIS
New York: Scribner, 2004
245 pp. \$24.00

logic of this book suggests. Surely there is a line to be drawn between the Iraq War and less oppressive and dangerous expressions of American foreign policy. But caution is advised. After all, while still serving as Clinton's Secretary of State, and in connection with Iraq, Madeleine Albright said: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America! We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall, and we see further into the future." This is not quoted in the book.

One of the most important points that Judis keeps coming back to is that of Americans as a "chosen people," wherein the Puritans of the seventeenth century were expected to create a "city on the hill" that would set an example for the rest of the world. This was followed by Jefferson's pursuit of "an empire for liberty." Neither of these plans included any Native Americans as active participants, but when the United States grew it was at was claimed to be "extending the area of freedom." These notions of American "destiny" have remained with us and go a long way to explain why so many Americans have no clue as to why the United States is not loved throughout the world. If our troops are not greeted as liberators by Iraqis, it is thus because they are at fault and

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have somehow not developed a love of freedom. Instead they have been won over to the forces of evil. But the Manichean outlook of George W. Bush is well founded in the millennialism that has infested this country from its beginning. Judis is very strong in arguing that in Vietnam and the Middle East, Americans were fundamentally misguided in thinking that they could arrive in the footsteps of the European imperialist powers and not be perceived as enemies of self-determination.

Judis is at his weakest in dealing with Woodrow Wilson. Because Wilson moved away from traditional colonization of the sort that this country subordinated the Philippines to, Judis tends to take at face value the anti-imperialist sentiments contained in Wilson's 14 Points and overlooks the significance of Wilson's bringing the United States into World War I. Wilson's arrogance in acting as if his entering the war would suddenly change the nature of the conflict, revealed a great deal about Wilson's perception of himself as a Christ-like figure destined to bring peace to the world and his assumption that the United States could guilelessly reorder the world as it saw fit. The Wilsonian version of American millennialism has always left room for radical nationalists and neoconservatives to come forward and seize the tradition for their own purposes. The American intervention in Siberia by Wilson after the Bolshevik seizure of power cannot be so simply distinguished from the actions of Britain and France as Judis would have it. Wilson was a staunch defender of capitalism, not merely an exponent of Western principles of constitutionalism.

Admittedly the neoconservatives themselves distinguish between the two versions of the millennialist tradition. As William Kristol, son of two former Shachtmanites and editor of the *Weekly Standard* put it, they rejected "the utopian multilateralism of Woodrow Wilson and Bill Clinton" in favor of "the muscular patriotism of Teddy Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan." Many of the neocons see themselves as "radical democrats," but how far they will go with this remains to be seen and should be clarified by further events in

Iraq. Just as the American commitment to democracy was often an ideological sham during the Cold War, it is likely once again to be subordinated to the drive to expand and maintain American power, especially in the Middle East.

At least since its initial intervention in Iran in 1953 the United States has been attempting to play a major role in the Middle East and to exercise some control over the oil market, but this has become more problematic in recent times and Judis has pointed out that the oil companies seemed "leery" of the intent to invade Iraq. Once the United States had been forced out of Iran by the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah in 1979, the search for a new client state was on. So committed to punishing Iran for its perfidy, the United States was willing to semi-covertly back Iraq — then as later under the despicable rule of Saddam Hussein — in its war against Iran.

Judis could have benefited from a careful study of the work of historian William Appleman Williams, who argued that the Monroe Doctrine and the Open Door Policy toward China became part of an "imperialism of anti-imperialism," wherein the U.S. would keep open and available areas for economic penetration without the burdens of traditional colonialism. None of this ruled out direct intervention in Latin America and then later on in the Middle East.

Judis himself concedes that Franklin Roosevelt, one of his favorites, clung to the basic version of American millennialism, and claimed that "There never has been — there never can be — successful compromise between good and evil," which he points out is not terribly different from Bush's defense of the invasion of Iraq by noting that, "Liberty is both the plan of Heaven for humanity, and the best hope for progress here on Earth." Perhaps then this whole tradition needs to be challenged and not just its use by the "bad" presidents, as Judis would have it.

While Bush was instinctively sympathetic to the nationalists in his administration and had decried "nationbuilding" during his 2000 campaign, the neocons finessed the issue by convincing him that "democracy" could be installed in Iraq on the

cheap. This was encouraged by exiles such as Ahmed Chalabi and favored “experts” such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami.

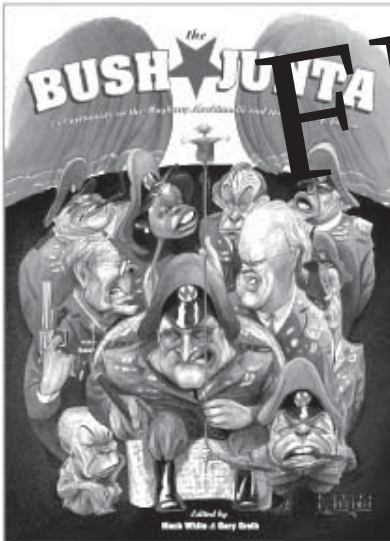
While rejecting Judis’s conclusion that “Woodrow Wilson didn’t merely change American foreign policy; he changed its underlying millennial framework,” we can still hail his contribution to understanding the mystique that continues to surround American foreign policy, today in a still more virulent form. When George W. Bush visited the Philippines, he was oblivious to the legacy of the United States as the false emancipator of 1898 that had vainly expected its troops to be welcomed as liberators rather than occupiers. But he is unlikely to learn anything from that history or to even study any. It remains for others to relearn the lessons of the Philippines,

Iran and Vietnam and someday free the United States from its deadly self-deception. As Judis puts it finally: “When America goes out alone in search of monsters to destroy — venturing on terrain upon which imperial powers have already trod — it can itself become the monster.”

MORE AMERICANS — OF VARIOUS political persuasions — need to reflect upon this, and need writers like Judis to stimulate their thinking. And perhaps someday the American people can emancipate themselves from the ideology so well expressed by the great progressive senator Albert J. Beveridge, who insisted a century ago that “of all our race He has marked the American people as his chosen nation to finally lead in the redemption of the world.”

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Initial Steps

REVIEW BY HEATHER LAUREN HUGHES

IN *ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE IF...* Susan George explores on what terms and under what conditions the world could be transformed in response to the global justice movement. Addressing her readership as “we” — and acknowledging that this pronoun is unstable — George lays out a sobering list of tasks. Successful execution of these tasks, in George’s view, could make saying “another world is possible” a “serious proposition” and not “just another phrase to keep up the morale of the troops.”

In the course of advising us to “Know What We’re Talking About” (Ch. 1), to “Salvage the Planet” (Ch. 2), to “Identify the Actors” (Ch. 3), to “Target the Right Adversaries” (Ch. 4), and so on through Chapter 10, George provides a wealth of information. She explains clearly the origins of institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. She provides useful information on the nature of the global justice movement and on contemporary understandings of globalization itself. Anyone looking for a well-written, informative primer on global justice and injustice should read this book.

George’s voice throughout *Another World is Possible If...* is truth telling and myth debunking. She prefers reality to fiction and believes in a distinction between the two. She writes that reform will happen when, among other things, the lies of conservatives and myths of globalization are exposed and when activists “abandon rhetoric” and “cherished illusions” and take up critical, reasoned analyses.

HEATHER LAUREN HUGHES is an assistant professor at the Florida International University College of Law.

Another World is Possible If...

SUSAN GEORGE

London: Verso, 2004
288 pp. \$16

For example, George reports that “some transnational public relations firms . . . specialize in worldwide antigreen PR campaigns” and are “under contract to tout genetically manipulated crops.” Corporations hold conferences and issue publications on “Corporate Social Responsibility” — a concept designed to protect reputations and valuable brands. George finds these

corporate activities a thin veil for retaining the power to self-regulate.

George writes that the “World Bank has tried to prove that the number of people worldwide living in ‘absolute poverty’ has been steadily falling, thanks to [neoliberal] policies.” She proceeds to cite scholarship on the methodological flaws in the Bank’s *World Development Report* indicating that the Bank seriously underestimates and underreports the extent of world poverty. George rejects the myth that neoliberal globalization is a “historical force sweeping all before it.” To the contrary, according to George it is the intended result of a series of specific policy choices and regulations of the U.S. government, the World Bank, and IMF to facilitate profit seeking without regard to human dignity.

George insightfully points out that “the word ‘deregulation’ is a trap.” Many rules and regulations must exist to govern corporate activity and international trade. As George states, “Plenty of rules are still in place and more are being made every day; it’s just that they tend to favor the needs of capital and transnational corporations, not the planet’s need to restore itself.” The term “regulation” seems to apply only to rules that limit corporations’ ability to exploit labor and natural resources. Rules that exist to make these activities possible are not recognized as “regulation.” When

George calls for regulation of corporate activity, she is not calling for an increase in the quantity of regulation that exists. She is calling for a qualitative shift towards regulations that protect the poor and the earth — parties that do not have the power to protect themselves from the effects of corporate activity.

Aside from her insight on regulation, however, George does not in this book critique distinctions between “public” or government systems and “private” or corporate, individual, non-government systems. In terms of social theory, a public/ private distinction is difficult to sustain. The myriad contracts that comprise any market require a system of enforcement that is almost always a governmental system (i.e., courts). The term “privatization” makes little sense to describe a process involving intense preoccupation with government on creation and enforcement of so-called private rights. George appears to harness this difficulty to the advantage of the global justice movement when she speaks about regulation. But she then resorts to a simpler — perhaps more accessible — view in later parts of the book where she refers uncritically to “private actors” and states that “public services should be by nature outside the market.”

George’s dismantling of pretenses used by international trade organizations and transnational corporations deserves applause. But her approach could leave one wondering: How useful are fact reporting and disillusionment in an ideological conflict? A large portion of the public is all too eager to hear stories of the benevolence of transnational corporations and institutions in power. Fiction is not separate from truth and is in many instances more powerful. The posture — common to many on the left — of debunking conservative myths with facts, statistics and rage, can reinforce disadvantage. Transnational corporations and organizations are telling stories of success, wealth, and development. To excavate these stories for accuracy requires restating their simple and attractive propositions only to present complicated and disappointing facts. Counter-stories and alternative fictions are perhaps a more direct way

for the left to attack the storytelling that the author finds corporations using to perpetuate socially unjust and environmentally fatal practices.

That said, the purpose of George’s book is to set out actual conditions that could yield an equitable distribution of wealth and sustainable relationship with the environment. Realization of some of these conditions seems to be within the power of the global justice movement. Realization of others seems a function of external forces. For example, George advises people within the movement to educate themselves and to abandon illusions about the incentives of the powerful, about the possibility of change through dialogue with adversaries, about causing large-scale change through altering our individual habits as consumers. At the same time George finds the answer to whether another world is possible to be “indissolubly joined to the nature and future of Europe.” If we are to have a chance at another world, citizens and nations of Europe need to unify in support of socialist values and to consistently oppose policies of the United States that aggravate social injustice.

In the middle of *Another World is Possible If...* George takes up the question of what another world might look like. Her tone is largely pragmatic. She writes that “for perhaps the first time in history, the world really could afford to provide access to a decent life for every person on earth . . . as set out in the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.” The money for such decent life would come from regulating the activities and profits of mega-corporations and financial markets, various taxation schemes, and debt cancellation. She writes of programs to grant small amounts of property to the poorest individuals to create incentives for individual and team improvement and self-determination. She notes the importance of strict and effective environmental regulation. And she emphasizes the value of modes of social recognition and success that are not related to material gain.

George’s vision involves a Keynesian-type program of taxation and redistribution as an initial step towards another world. Once such a social program, administered democratically, is in

place, it would “create more political space for people to determine what kind of economy and society they want.”

George implies that affirmative visions of the good will arise after various groups have an opportunity to develop them while living under conditions than meet basic standards for decency. Providing a basic level of decency for the poor will create the space for self-determination. It would be inaccurate to imply that George lacks moral vision. However, it is important to keep in mind that a reader who does not already identify as part of George’s “we” may find that her approach feels relativist in the face of the neoliberals’ unwavering conflation of justice and capitalism.

George does demonstrate commitment to democracy as a substantive good. She writes that “every society should be able to determine independently what constitutes a public service [to be

kept outside of the market] on its territory.” “The point,” she states, “is that democratic debate should determine what’s in and what’s out.” But it is unclear in this book, at least, how people would judge when a “democratic debate” and independent determination have occurred. How would George respond if, for example, the outcome of that debate were an election to sell water rights to a transnational corporation with unfettered discretion to determine rates? Does she think such an outcome is impossible in a society free of poverty? Why? George’s vision is respectful of difference and self-determination. Is it, therefore, the most extensive, morally defensible vision a global justice activist can hold right now?

These questions and criticisms should only underscore how interesting and informative a book Susan George has written.

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Wrangling over Zionism

REVIEW BY JASON SCHULMAN

If God as some now say is dead, He no doubt died of trying to find an equitable solution to the Arab-Jewish problem. —I.F. STONE

THIS WORTHY COLLECTION is long overdue. Perhaps no issue save the Holocaust arouses Jewish-American passions like the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and those of us who decry Israeli state terror and support Palestinian self-determination are invariably deemed “self-hating Jews” by the majority of Zionists, no matter how much we might condemn Palestinian suicide bombers. The party line for American Jews — even amongst most liberals — is, as Kushner and Solomon put it, that the survival of the state of Israel “requires nothing less the disappearance of Palestinians, at least figuratively, and for some, who openly advocate transfer, even literally.” We are told repeatedly that Israel has no one to negotiate with; the Palestinians are a non-people or, at best, a people submerged in a culture of death; former Israeli Prime Minister Barak made generous offers of land that were selfishly rejected; the Palestinians’ continued suffering is all the fault of Arafat and Hamas; and so on. And, of course, the tensions between Israel as a democracy and Israel as a Jewish state are glossed over or deemed nonexistent.

It’s worth picking up *Wrestling with Zion*, then, if for no other reason than to read essays that date as far back as 1891 and question the wisdom of the Zionist enterprise, at times from

within the Zionist movement itself. Ahad Ha’am notes how Israeli colonialists “deal with the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, trespass unjustly, beat them shamefully for no sufficient reason, and even boast about their actions.” Early Zionists such as Judah L. Magnes and Martin Buber find cultural and spiritual Zionism to be incompatible with “militarist, imperialist, political Zionism.” Many of the contemporary essays concern matters that are surely familiar to many: Israel’s relations with the United States; the outsized influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee

(AIPAC) on U.S. policy towards the Middle East, as well as that of the lesser-known Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA); the U.S. corporate media’s anti-Palestinian bias and its blackout of the death of the American Palestinian solidarity activist Rachel Corrie by an Israeli bulldozer; and the “unholy alliance” between the fundamentalist Christian right and right-wing Zionists, both American and Israeli. As Phyllis Bennis aptly puts it, “The intersection of . . . pro-Israeli right-wing ideologues, the arms industry, influential institutions and powerful people in government make the question of who are the dogs and who wags the tails essentially moot.”

But some essays offer surprises. Michael E. Staub provides a history of the forgotten 1970s organization Breira, a nationwide, feminist, left-center alliance of “prominent American Jews . . . that sought to challenge what they perceived al-

Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

EDITED BY TONY KUSHNER
AND ALISA SOLOMON

New York: Grove Press, 2003
378 pp. \$12.95

Let Justice Well Up Like Water: Progressive Jews from Hillel to Helen Suzman

BENNET MURASKIN
New York: Center for Cultural Judaism,
2004, 255 pp. \$12

JASON SCHULMAN is a member of the New Politics editorial board. His article “The Life and Death of Socialist Zionism” appeared in NP 36 (Summer 2003).

ready at that time to be the rightward drift of American Zionism.” Internally contentious (and openly so), for its four brief years of existence, Breira tried to be a dovish alternative to AIPAC and far-right religious Zionism, supporting Israeli negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and a self-determining Palestinian state. Though it defined itself as Zionist, the larger Jewish organizations denounced Breira, as did Jewish journals such as *Hadassah*, *American Zionist*, and *Commentary*. Breira crumbled under this assault, leading *Dissent* editor Irving Howe to “remember why I had nothing to do with the Jewish community all these years.”

The book offers a fair range of views. Esther Kaplan celebrates the current Palestinian solidarity movement, accepting that the path to the end of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip “will be littered with e-mail postings that are a bit strident and flyers that are insensitive to Jewish history . . . a handful of . . . placards that read ‘Zionism = Nazism’ . . . And so what? This new wave of activism has healthy roots . . . not [from] ancient wells of Jew hating.” Contrast this with the “anti-anti-Zionism” of Ellen Willis, who refuses to accept “the intemperate tone of left anti-Zionist rhetoric” even as she endorses the generally-accepted two-state consensus. In my view, both writers have blind sides. Kaplan is right that the fact that Jews “don’t own this movement anymore” isn’t innately bad, but an irredentist movement that says that all peoples have the right to self-determination except for the Israeli Jews is not going to win over the majority of Americans. And if it were to do so, it would — intentionally or not — be through appeals to Christian anti-Semitism. (Consider the recent Pew Research Center report that found that roughly a quarter of all Americans believe that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ.) Willis, for her part, gives too much ground to past Israeli governments, failing to note the continued expansion of settlements during the Barak-Arafat talks and claiming that “the occupation . . . came about as a result not of aggressive settlement but of defensive war,” which appears to not be the case.¹

To be expected, there’s commentary in *Wrestling with Zion* about anti-Semitism — the essay by Judith Butler, doyenne of postmodern feminism, is perhaps the most lucid thing she’s ever written — but there’s little explicit debate about Zionism itself and what it means today. Does it merely connote a defense of the right of Israel to exist? Or is it inextricably tied to Jewish chauvinism? Only Joel Kovel begins to bring up the question. But there is, at least, a debate on the Israeli Law of Return, which gives automatic Israeli citizenship to any Jew. Some contributors argue that Jews should renounce their right of return, as it is a benefit that rests on the back of wrongs done to Palestinians. Others claim that the Law is a Jewish affirmative action program, a needed compensation for centuries of Jewish oppression. Letty Cottin Pogrebin thinks that the Law is justified if Israel acknowledges the Palestinian right of return, but for her this means Israel paying reparations and helping a Palestinian state “absorb some of its own diaspora within its own borders.” This might be acceptable provided that Israel, as Pogrebin wants, admits that “the displacement of another people was a by-product of establishment of the Jewish State.” But it still seems hardly fair that, to use the oft-cited example, a Jew from Brooklyn can automatically become an Israeli citizen while an Arab born in pre-Israel Palestine cannot. Quoting David Ben-Gurion does not bolster her argument.

A good companion volume to *Wrestling With Zion* is Bennet Muraskin’s *Let Justice Well Up Like Water: Progressive Jews from Hillel to Helen Suzman*. The majority of those profiled are secular Jews who still “dedicated their lives to the development of Jewish culture and/or progressive social causes.” In other words, historically important Marxist Jews (Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, et al) aren’t here — though Ernst Bloch and Issac Deutscher do show up, as do lesser-known American Communists (including Moissay Olgin of the Communist Party’s Yiddish paper, the *Morgn Freiheit*) and the anarchists Gustav Landauer and Rudolph Rocker. Muraskin could have used a proofreader, and one could

quibble with some comments that he makes, but his overall Jewish Labor Bund-derived political perspective is solid, as is the book.

NOTES

1. "Israel's supporters argue that although Israel fired the first shots in this war, it was a justified preventive war, given that Arab armies were mobilizing on Israel's borders, with murderous rhetoric. The rhetoric was indeed blood-curdling, and many people around the world worried for Israel's safety. But those who understood the military situation — in Tel Aviv and the Pentagon — knew quite well that even if the

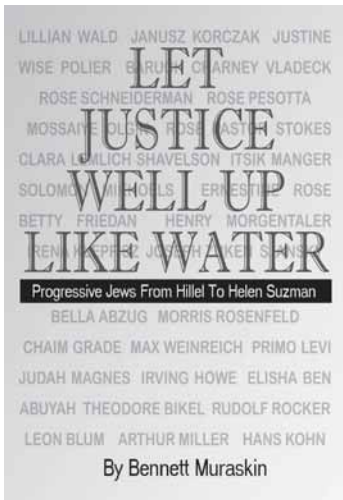
Arabs struck first, Israel would prevail in any war. [Egyptian President Nasser] was looking for a way out and agreed to send his vice president to Washington for negotiations. Israel attacked when it did in part because it rejected negotiations and the prospect of any face-saving compromise for Nasser. [Right-wing Zionist] Menachem Begin, who was an enthusiastic supporter of this (and other) Israeli wars, was quite clear about the necessity of launching an attack: in June 1967, he said, Israel 'had a choice'. Egyptian Army concentrations did not prove that Nasser was about to attack. 'We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.'" Stephen R. Shalom, "Background to the Israeli-Palestine Crisis," www.zmag.org/shalom-meqa.htm.

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Islam and Modernity

REVIEW BY GREGORY ZUCKER

NOT ANOTHER BOOK ON ISLAM! Ever since 9/11, the media has inundated the public with books, television programs, and articles on the subject. Whether it was Bernard Lewis' *What Went Wrong*, Karen Armstrong's *Islam: A Short History*, the PBS documentary *Islam*, or the new edition of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, the publishing and educational markets had found a new hot topic, which was guaranteed to make a quick profit. In shamelessly equating Islam with terrorism, "experts" on the subject crowded the airwaves to weave their descriptions of terrorist tactics with analyses of Islam and especially *Jihad* (e.g. Steve Emerson, author of *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us*, and a regular commentator on cable news networks). Nothing helps the marketability of a once specialized field than fear — and the more simplistic the answers the easier they were to market. Nearly everyone was asking, "What went wrong?" and "Why do they hate us so much?" Meanwhile, it seemed that those who were not asking these questions were trying to sell their own answers to them.

In response to the many questions, it has been presented as an indisputable fact that the only way the United States can improve its worsening relationship with the Islamic Middle East is by introducing an ambiguous definition of democracy to the region. Even though this answer hardly addresses the questions, its proponents promise that, as a result of its application, all of our troubles will be solved. Hence, the discourse has shifted

from an attempt to understand the Middle East and its brand of Islam to a discussion of the proper way of imposing democracy (which in its protean definition implies both freedom and the free market) on the region.

A few of the books that enjoyed enormous popularity following 9/11 had a tremendous impact on the development and public acceptance of this "answer," even if the ideas

expressed in them date back to long before 9/11. Take for example the historian Bernard Lewis, who has avoided engaging the dynamism and complexity of Arab Islamic history. In so doing, he has painted a picture of spiraling decline that has made the Arab Islamic world more and more different from the West. In a like-minded infatuation with cultural distinctness, for Samuel Huntington, extreme differences amongst cultures inevitably leads to opposition and conflict between them, as illustrated by his notion of "the clash of civilizations."

Huntington justifies the righteousness of the West's position in "the clash" using the theory of "the end of history," or rather the final empirical triumph of Western liberal democracy over all other forms of government. Lewis, in a sense, provides the first step of a two-step approach to understanding the Islamic Middle East by emphasizing how problematically distinct it is from the West. Huntington answers with step two: correcting distinctness by allowing Western liberal democracy to triumph. Thus, both men have collaborated to depict a threateningly primitive and savage Middle East. They have ignored the universal qualities of civilizations and look only at distinct features to assert the irreconcilability of differences and the necessity of privileging one

Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity

Edited by Michael J. Thompson
New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003
188 pp. \$24

GREGORY ZUCKER is the managing editor of *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture* (www.logosjournal.com).

difference over another.

A new collection of essays edited by Michael Thompson, *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity*, brings the dialogue on Islam back to the foreground, but with a new approach. In so doing, it also responds to the vast array of material that emerged, or, in some cases, re-emerged during the panic-stricken months following September 11th. Thompson does not seek to examine Middle Eastern Islam as a secluded phenomenon, but to show its dynamic relationship with the West and modernity. He demands of his contributors mixed analyses that do not privilege any single perspective through which Islam and the Middle East can be interpreted. Each of the contributors is able to explicate the interrelationship of religion, culture, economics, politics, philosophy, etc. in creating the region's current dilemmas.

The picture they paint is not one that sees Islamic history leading toward the abyss, however. Part of the book's ingenuity lies in each author's ability to discern the incipient trends toward modernity within each of the aforementioned aspects of society (i.e., religion, culture, economics, politics, philosophy, etc.) and how they interacted with the anti-modern forces that persisted just as vibrantly. In this Hegelian-influenced analysis, the dialectical relationships, both between parts of society as well as each part's internal elements, are examined. Through this intellectual structure, the book avoids current tendencies on both the right and the left to attribute the current manifestation of Islam and its social and political effects on the Middle East solely to materialist historical conditions or to the influence of ideology. Thompson's book not only overcomes these tendencies, but also seeks to radically change the dominant methods of critically analyzing the Middle East and Islam by exploring the many facets of modernity.

In addressing the problems of modernity, the articles work within the framework of modernity. For Thompson, modernity does not simply imply materialist innovations, but the development of certain moral-political ideas. The most novel arguments in the book are those that deal with this

aspect of modernity. By doing so, they allow the discourse to expand into the much richer investigation of "modern" ideas and their universalist qualities. It is through this critical lens that the affinities between the West and the Middle East are most clearly elucidated and most intriguingly expounded.

Thompson's article looks to the Golden Age of Islam and the conflict between the *falasifa* — a rationalist movement within Islamic philosophy which looked both to the work of Greek philosophers and the *Qu'ranic* law (sharia) to derive a rationalist understanding of the world — and the growing religious sects of the twelfth century that advocated dogmatic fundamentalist readings of the *Qu'ran* and religious tradition. In this war between rationalism and irrationalism, which the fundamentalists eventually win, Thompson recognizes the struggle of the Western Enlightenment's thinkers and their promotion of the ideas that have shaped Western modernity. To this effect, a universal rationalist impulse is asserted and acknowledged as a quality of modernity.

In contrast to Thompson's focus on the Golden Age, Wadood Hamad's analysis extends over the whole of Islamic history to offer a deconstruction of the religion. He mixes a Marxist critique of the religion, while also identifying its sociological function in pure Durkheimian fashion. Both the modern and anti-modern trends within Islam are exposed, but the discussion focuses on the reinvigoration of the modern revolutionary and emancipative effects of Islam (which he traces back to the religion's earliest years) on mass Muslim Society. Thus, Hamad explicates the capacity for social change by not divorcing the religion (as others have done) from the society with which it is intertwined. Continuing the sociological approach and guided by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, Farzin Vahdat explores human subjectivity within Islamic history, culture, and theology to conclude upon the ways that democracy and civil society could develop in the Middle East.

What these three singular articles have in

common is that, for the purposes of this endeavor, they treat modernity primarily as an organic phenomenon borne of tendencies in ideas, but ideas that have a direct relationship to the improvement of institutions. The capacity for this type of modernity is shown to be inherent to Islam and does not necessitate the imposition and dominance of the Western philosophical tradition to grow, although a dialogue between the two strains would seem worthwhile. Even so, these articles explicitly reveal the tendencies that make a uniquely Middle Eastern Islamic modernity possible.

The other articles in the book are a bit more typical in their form by adopting a much more historically minded course for their inquiry. Nevertheless, they expertly trace different economic, social, religious, and political developments that helped to shape the current situation. In this capacity, these articles fill the vital gap left by the three aforementioned ones by contextualizing the materialist elements of the discourse. Each informs the reader's ability to identify both the impediments working against modernity and the venues through which it might be realized. Haroun Er-Rashid discusses the development of the polarizing perceptions of the Orient and Occident toward one another, while Ömer Çaha examines democracy's troubled history in the Middle East. Lauren Langman and Douglas Morris offer the more thorough historical analysis as they cover the entirety of Islamic history in order to identify the sequence of events that led to the current state. With equal thoroughness, Sandra Halperin chooses to take a daring approach to the question of Islamic historical development by comparatively looking to the West's own complicated relationship with modernity. Lastly, Nissim Rejwan delves into the disparate arguments over the question of the "westernization" of the Islamic Middle East. In so doing, he includes valuable insights into the perspectives of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington.

A pleasant surprise is the inclusion of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Second Letter on Algeria*. In this never before translated work, Tocqueville questions how the French government was defining

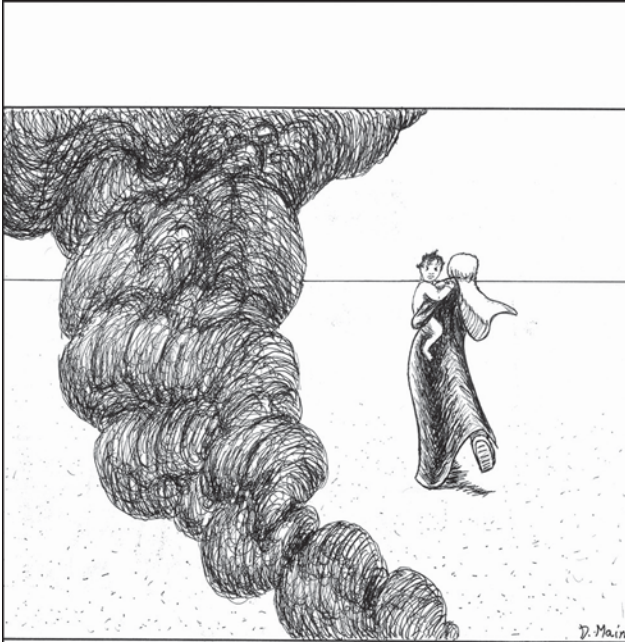
its relationship with its then new Algerian colony. Although still written with a degree of the expected imperialist mindset, the piece does reveal Tocqueville's prescience. Despite his argument against the united organization of the Algerians under one leader, so as to ensure their weakness, Tocqueville shows uncanny insight by advocating a non-oppressive rule of law derived from pre-existing laws in the region. In addition, he supports the gradual melding of French and Algerian culture, so that the colonists and native Algerians might live together peacefully. Such being the case, the piece reveals the distinctive failures of the imperialist project, as well as proposes optimistic suggestions toward the co-existence of two still radically different cultures. Such conjecture is useful even today in our rapidly globalizing world.

Especially due to the unique insights into modernity offered in the pieces by Hamad, Thompson, and Vahdat, the one failing of the other authors becomes more pronounced. Many of the other authors fall into a much too common tendency on the left, by reinterpreting Arab Islamic history to show it in a more favorable light. Although necessary, this is not the point where the discourse on the left has been deficient. Hamad, Thompson, and Vahdat have shown that they recognize this fact. To put it bluntly, while the left has its share of historians playing the role of a Bernard Lewis, it lacks the equivalent of a Samuel Huntington. The key is to take the historical interpretation, draw conclusions from it, but then turn it into something meaningful toward an actual program for change. It is not enough to prescribe a solution for the problems of the Arab world; one must look for the foundations upon which lasting institutions can be built. In this respect, the three authors I have singled out have provided the reader with arguments worthy of deep consideration, whereas the other authors more or less provide a list of historical facts.

Because of the richness of difference among the contributors' perspectives combined with the fact that their theses do not conflict with one another, the volume easily functions solidly as a

whole. In the wake of the simplistic, easy-to-read literature on Islam, Thompson's book contributes a complex, yet more persuasive means by which the layperson can comprehend the current dilemmas. The volume's uniqueness is that it includes a

variety of perspectives on a complex phenomenon, each one examining the different factors that have affected the Islamic Middle East, and ultimately presenting us with a fuller picture of Islam's dynamic existence.



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"...brilliant...ghoulish hilarity for these grim times..."

-Ted Rall

"An ABC to keep us... protesting, questioning and doing something about it!"

-Katherine Arnoldi

THE IRAQI TINIES

by Derek Mainhart

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Alternative Unionism

REVIEW BY STAUGHTON LYNDE

THIS RICH COLLECTION of writings by the late Stan Weir invites friends, rank-and-file workers, and radical intellectuals to reconsider their assumptions and to recommit themselves to the struggle.

I met Stan Weir about 1970. He was turning fifty and teaching in a workers' education program at Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. He lived at the time in Danville, Illinois, where a group of eager young people surrounded him.

A first product of our friendship appears in this collection, the edited transcript of an interview conducted by my wife, Alice Lynd, and myself for our book *Rank and File*. It is entitled "The Informal Work Group" but is actually a miniautobiography. Therein Stan Weir describes how as a young merchant seaman during World War II he was educated by ex-Wobblies and other veterans of the 1934 general strike. "On that ship," Stan told us, "I finally found a cause and a vehicle for pursuing it."

Later, when Stan and fellow longshoreman Robert Miles founded Singlejack Books, I wrote two books for them. The first was a "little book" that could be slipped into a hip pocket or a blouse, *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer*. The book was organized around an idea suggested by Stan and mentioned several times in this collection, namely, that when a worker punches in, he or she leaves in the glove compartment of the car the constitutional rights that a citizen takes for granted. *La-*

bor law for the rank and filer is then the effort to recreate these same rights in the workplace by

other means. Thus, in a particularly bold and imaginative flight, Stan suggested that in a unionized workplace a discharged worker has a right to see his or her union representative before leaving the plant, and this is the workplace equivalent to the right of *habeas corpus* on the street.

In 1982, Singlejack published my account of the closing of Youngstown's steel mills, *The Fight Against Shutdowns*. This was a case study of a problem that necessarily preoccupied Stan Weir, because it underlay his unjust exclusion from his craft as a longshoreman: the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy. As a "B man" in West Coast longshore, Stan and other B men were given the work that was left over after the regular "A men" took their pick of jobs, and were unable to protest because they were not allowed to join the union. In effect, they were temporary workers allowed to make a living only during the time it took the industry to implement "containerization" and, thereby, cut in half the number of longshore workers permanently needed.

My last sustained contact with Stan was in the mid-1990s. I had set out to edit a book of essays on the "alternative unionism" of the early 1930s: the local industrial unions, and horizontal networks thereof, organized from below at a time when there was as yet no National Labor Relations Act and no Congress of Industrial Organization. Stan called me up. Why had he been left out? he asked. I haltingly explained that the authors were all young academics, publishing their research for the first time. That didn't satisfy him. I felt ashamed, and the result was his essay,

Singlejack Solidarity

STAN WEIR

Edited and with an afterword
by George Lipsitz

Foreword by Norm Diamond
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Minnesota Press, 2004
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"Unions with Leaders Who Stay on the Job," which became the final essay of my book and is also included in this collection. Stan wrote it, so he told me, with tears running down his face.

II

SO WHAT ARE THE big things to remember about this extraordinary man?

First is his sense of humor. An essay in this volume, "Whatever Happened to Frisco Jeans?," offers several examples. Stan (in California) would telephone me (in Ohio) for no other purpose than to share a new joke. Nor was this a superficial mannerism. Stan viewed humor as an essential element of any subculture of ordinary people who felt confident in confronting the world and in improvising solutions to the world's problems. When he heard in 1956 that Hungarian workers in a bicycle factory were making bicycles for themselves, he decided that this revolution must be for real and began to imagine something similar happening at his Chevrolet plant (199-200). He would often begin a workers' education class by asking, "What is the funniest thing that ever happened where you work?"

Second, Stan broke with both the concept of a Leninist vanguard party *and* with bureaucratic business unionism. This was unusual. Only a few others, such as the late Marty Glaberman, chose the same lonely path. Far more common was the transformation Stan reported in 1956: "The capable people who had built the Workers Party's auto fraction in the industrial Midwest had become UAW staffers. They had lost their identity as radicals." One sees the same thing today even among members of the IWW.

Stan long wanted to write a comprehensive critique of the vanguard party, and did not live to do so. The fragments lovingly collected here convey the gist of what he wished to say. It comes down to certain relatively simple insights: Radical intellectuals who consider that their task is to bring theory to the workers (as Lenin advocated in *What Is To Be Done?*) will never attract workers to a radical movement. Rather, the intellectual needs to listen to workers and learn from them at

the same time that the intellectual shares his or her own insights. Further, what needs to be created is not a single, vertical structure, but horizontal networks of informal work groups and local unions "that cross traditional union lines."

As to bureaucratic business unionism, it is hard for me to untangle the ideas I took from Stan Weir and those I developed for myself in abrasive encounters with Steelworkers, Auto Workers, and Teamsters. Here are sample statements by Stan:

"The failure of the union officialdom cannot be solved by voting 'the old guys' out." With these words Stan set himself at odds both with the Communists who worked so hard in the 1930s to capture offices of influence in the CIO and its affiliated national unions, and with the Trotskyists and ex-Trotskyists who labored in efforts such as Miners for Democracy, the Sadlowski campaign, and Teamsters for a Democratic Union half a century later.

"When working people mobilize to control their working conditions, they rid themselves of the old vertical structures and turn to horizontal forms of organization . . . anticipating the need for an alternative unionism that draws its strength from solidarity agreements rather than cooperation with employers."

About what happened to the labor movement in the United States after World War II: "The goal of the peacetime [labor] policy was to eliminate strikes in support of grievances during the life of contracts." Real change in the labor movement must begin by reclaiming the right to direct action whenever workers perceive it to be needed.

Thus, Stan Weir stood four square for at least the last thirty years of his life in advocating a qualitatively different kind of labor movement. In place of the mainstream unions of Germany before World War I, criticized by Rosa Luxemburg, or the "new men of power" like Walter Reuther who appeared so quickly at the head of CIO unions, Stan visualized a unionism closer to the ground and to the workplace, accountable to the shop stewards and informal spokespersons who rose from the ranks, and committed to archaic notions like "an injury to one is an injury to all."

And he found this new labor movement.

Many commentators of like mind, such as myself, have pointed to agreements to share and share alike when workers confront layoffs. The seniority system so often lauded by labor historians does not express the idea that an injury to one is an injury to all. New hires, often women and minorities, are put on the street with nothing, while white males in their fifties continue to work overtime. However, there are old and new instances of workers disregarding seniority to share what work is available equally, at least until the work available does not decrease below, say, four days a week.

Stan saw in the longshore hiring arrangements won by the 1934 general strike a similar egalitarianism in apportioning daily work assignments. These arrangements were based on “longshoremen’s control over daily hiring in the dispatch hall” and a “commitment to work opportunity equalization.”

Of course, the degree to which West Coast longshore from the 1930s to the 1960s approximated an egalitarian vision made it doubly painful to be thrust out of that work at the same time that these hard-won institutional arrangements were scrapped. Indomitably, brother Stan found an even fuller expression of his beliefs in the practice of a Spanish longshore union, “La Coordinadora.” Attending a meeting of the International Harbor Workers in Denmark in 1982, Stan met delegates from La Coordinadora and thereupon went to Spain to have a look. Like Lincoln Steffens, he could thereafter say that he had seen the future — a union larger than the West Coast longshoremen with no more than a single paid staff person — and it worked. La Coordinadora remained, for the next twenty years, the closest approximation he knew of to the hoped-for shape of the future.

III

“DEATH DOESN’T END relationships,” Stan writes in the first essay in this book about his friend James Baldwin. Maybe. But I think to keep the relationships alive, when the other person can no longer speak up, we have an obligation to be ruthlessly self-critical.

Stan once made a special trip to Youngstown to urge me not to submit to publication an essay by John Lippert. At the time Lippert was working in a Detroit automobile factory, and had written a riveting account of a wildcat strike. Stan’s point was that the account might give management some indication of who had been the movers and shakers in the wildcat, and subject them to discipline. One doesn’t snitch. However exciting the article, he argued, it should not appear.

At a memorial for Stan at the Socialist Scholars Conference, I met persons who had known him as a member of the International Socialist group in, I believe, the early 1970s. This was at a time when IS was trying to be a Leninist vanguard party, all the way to telling people — no matter what the hardship — how they should spend their time and plan their days. Stan, I was told, protested. This was the origin of his break with the last radical group to which he belonged and the basis of the isolation expressed in the essay “I Am Lonely.”

Finally, I think I should testify that the loneliness Stan Weir experienced was to some extent — perhaps only a small extent — expressive of the fact that people who leave vanguard parties sometimes carry with them certain vanguard attitudes that are hard to shake. I recall Stan once saying, “We believe, don’t we . . .” It was as if there was an organized “we” that had certain ideas and Stan was checking to make sure that he and I both shared them. To say the same thing in another way, Stan had certain ideas in which he believed strongly and he tried very hard to cause other persons to accept these ideas.

In conclusion: If there is such a thing as a worker-intellectual, Stan Weir was it. He read Hobsbawm (I recall his excitement in discovering Hobsbawm’s concept of “organic intellectuals”). He read George Rude. He read all sorts of writers of whom I have never even heard (see page 32). He was a warm, humorous, decent human being, who never cut himself off from whence he came. As Mark Anthony said of Brutus: The elements in him were so co-mixed “that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, This was a man.”

Inside the House of Labor

REVIEW BY GENE CARROLL

WHILE THE LABOR MOVEMENT in the United States is a beacon for democracy, too often it fails as a beacon of democracy. Herman Benson makes this clear in his remarkable personal memoir, *Rebels, Reformers and Racketeers: How Insurgents Transformed the Labor Movement*.

In this account of a lifetime of support for the advancement of democracy inside the house of labor, you'll find the better-known characters and their stories of labor misdeeds, such as United Mine Workers President Tony Boyle and the coal miner he had murdered for challenging him, Jock Yablonski. But the compelling stories of lesser knowns who took on crooked unions, like Dow Wilson and Lloyd Green of the San Francisco Brotherhood of Painters — both of whom were murdered for their courageous efforts — are a treasure trove of historical narrative about union politics, human frailties, and true grit that form the largely untold dark drama of U.S. labor history of the last half century.

This book is about individuals, including Benson himself, who had the courage of their convictions. It is also about the cynic-inspiring tenacity, and the sometimes criminality, of so-called union leaders who fought rank-and-file insurgents at every turn. This includes the deeply troubling

role of the AFL-CIO throughout much of the history covered in Benson's book.

Benson was present at the rebirth, so to speak, of the U.S. labor movement in the first half of the twentieth century. He was imbued with social democratic and trade union principles when he joined the Young People's Socialist League as a teenager and witnessed the mass upsurge in union organizing that took place in the Great Depression era of the United States. After working in

Rebels, Reformers and Racketeers: How Insurgents Transformed the Labor Movement

HERMAN BENSON

New York: Association for Union Democracy, 2004
216 pp. \$17.50

various blue collar jobs, he eventually helped edit *Labor Action*. During the 1950s he became increasingly aware of and deeply concerned about trade union rebels and reformers who were harassed, beaten — and sometimes murdered — when they voiced concerns about undemocratic and authoritarian union rule, missing union funds, and corrupt collusion with employers. Soon after, in 1960, he launched *Union Democracy in Action*, which was, as he writes in his book, “a one-man-band newsletter to break the story of the lonely union reformer.” Benson, supporter of the often isolated union rebel, began his new career in the mirror image of those he championed. He spent the next dozen years as a lonely crusader supporting union insurgents' efforts to apply the provisions of federal legislation adopted in 1959 designed to enforce basic democratic rights in unions, the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA).

Benson brought attention to the courageous union members who stood up to labor union thugs and gangsters — union leaders in name only — who controlled jobs, colluded with employers, tolerated no internal union dissent, threatened and

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carried out violence, and used the union treasury as a personal piggy bank, also known as stealing. Despite this corruption that threatened to undermine public confidence in labor unions and the future growth of organized labor, all of which Benson fought so hard to expose, the AFL-CIO did nothing.

Twelve years after he launched *Union Democracy in Action*, Benson had succeeded in developing a network of rank-and-file union activists. He wanted to do something larger, but he had no money and remained isolated from funds that might be secured from sometime supporters — social liberals with means, civil libertarians and labor progressives and intellectuals. While feeling discouraged, his vision and tenacity inspired support from an unlikely source. An old YPSL friend, now with money, donated nearly \$40,000 to help Benson launch the Association for Union Democracy in 1972.

Through law suits, public campaigns, education classes, and its newsletter, *Union Democracy Review*, the AUD under Benson supported labor movement reformers fighting to gain control of their unions by strengthening union democracy and eradicating corruption in campaigns against entrenched power in unions large and small, but notably the Civil Service Employees Association in New York, Steel Workers, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the construction industry, International Longshoremen's Association, United Mine Workers of America, and of course, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

Benson describes with satisfaction how the U.S. Justice Department's consent decree imposed on the Teamsters in 1989 facilitated the election of reformer Ron Carey to the office of Teamster General President in 1991. Carey subsequently had the IBT rejoin the AFL-CIO, whose votes made the crucial difference in the 1995 election of upstart John Sweeney as president of the labor federation, the first contested election in the then 40-year history of the AFL-CIO. Sweeney's election created a sense of hope that it was a new day for organized labor in the United States — hope

that labor's advancing decline could be halted and that a reinvigorated effort to "organize the unorganized" would lead eventually to millions of new union members at the dawn of a new century. Was this unique democratic moment — a palpable demand among unionists for accountability in the life of this otherwise long-entrenched bureaucracy — fueled by the cumulative effect of AUD's efforts, especially with regard to developments within the Teamsters? Benson believes that it was.

But nine years later it is hard to recall that sense of hope spawned by this democratic moment. Herman Benson's book arrives at a time of great unease about the future of organized labor in the United States. The condition of the U.S. labor movement has worsened considerably since 1995, threatening a transformation of the labor movement different from the hopeful vision suggested in the title of Benson's book. The increasing disconnects between collective bargaining and union power are widening: wage increases are smaller, health care and pension benefits are less secure, and the right to strike and the right to organize are functionally legal fictions. These conditions will only worsen given the reelection of George W. Bush.

There is insufficient evidence that a democratic transformation of the labor movement continued to develop following the change at the top of the AFL-CIO in 1995. Service Employees International Union President Andrew Stern released a discussion paper on the future of organized labor, *Unite to Win*, just after the November election. To his credit, Stern is promoting a discussion about the need for restructuring the labor movement in significant ways so that unions can better represent workers, organize more workers and win better contracts. Though the issuance of the discussion paper is itself a refreshing democratic act by a major labor leader, the substance of the document mentions the word democracy only twice. Stern's six-page paper is constructed around ten key points, important all, but not one specifies the need for more democracy at all levels of the labor movement.

From my perch, the biggest internal threat to

the labor movement is apathy and lack of involvement by rank-and-file union members. To organize the unorganized, and to organize the organized, requires member involvement because labor's power lies in the mobilization of its members. Involvement and mobilization are indicative of and the result of a union that reflects the more democratic society we want to create. As Benson writes eloquently in his closing chapter, "The Power of Democracy,"

The existence of democracy does not eliminate the need for intelligent leadership nor does it automatically supply constructive policies; but it does serve as a means of finding that leadership, arriving at those policies, and rallying public support for them. Meanwhile, the discussion, the debate, the political and social battles continue while we search for answers. It is not absurd, in fact it is the essence of realism, to suggest that an infusion of the spirit of democracy in its own internal life will make the labor movement a more powerful force and give it moral authority in the defense of social justice as the battle over social policy continues.

All too often, the power of information, ideas, access to people, shared leadership, collectively developed vision and strategies are in the hands of a few, often the senior elected officers and senior staff, rather than dispersed across the organization and its members. If we demand equality, fairness, and democracy, we must practice it within our labor organizations. If we do not practice our core values, then why would anyone want to join us in our pursuit of economic justice and democratic participation?

When Benson, now in his mid-eighties, launched the Association for Union Democracy in 1972, he surely had no idea that such a little-funded and small operation would still be operating more than thirty years later, but AUD, now based with a small staff in Brooklyn, continues today. But still today, among many in official union circles, AUD is looked upon with the same loathing as a union buster. Why this is so surely has much to do with Benson's views on "the divided soul of American labor leadership." Benson writes that "the labor movement . . . stands on the side of

the people against the privileges of wealth, for workers rights against corporate power. But on all of the issues that involve the rights of workers inside their unions, that same labor movement, as represented by most of its top officials, stubbornly defends limitations, restrictions and repression."

To help soothe, and enlighten, the divided soul of American labor leadership, Benson's book could have strengthened its noble message by exploring what are the deep roots of U.S. trade union corruption and discussing the problems of democracy:

- Organized labor in the United States developed in the context of a particular capitalist country since the civil war. How has this shaped the nature and extent of our nation's union corruption?
- How does the amount of and nature of union corruption in the United States compare to union corruption in other countries?
- What is the importance of democracy in unions relative to other essential components of building organizational power? For example, if a union has many of the forms of democracy without the substance of power — if technological change and plant closings have drastically reduced union density and bargaining power, or the number of signatory employers is in decline — what is the meaning of democracy in this context?
- Running a union is very difficult even in the best of circumstances because a union must be, as A.J. Muste wrote more than 70 years ago, an "army and town meeting." Because both features are permanent, the conflicts within unions to forge both power *and* community may be a sign of life and strong leadership and not an indication of a lack of democracy.

Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* 40 years ago in an article entitled, "Democracy Is Inevitable," Philip Slater and Warren Bennis argued that "democracy becomes a functional necessity whenever a social system is competing for survival under conditions of chronic change." If their proposition is true and relevant to the U.S. labor movement today, and I believe it is, then Herman Benson's book and its emphasis on democracy as a strategy for labor's revival could not be timelier.

Hearts and Minds Redux

KURT JACOBSEN

NO FEAR HAUNTED George W. Bush's Iraq invasion more so than what the White House derided as the perfectly silly idea that its high-tech juggernaut just might bog down in distant deserts into "another Vietnam." Oh, that was then; this is, irrefutably, now. Only nervous nellys and pinko pacifists were so witless as to imagine that the U.S. military with all its overpriced bells and whistles and frills from hell could get entangled with another supernaturally stubborn enemy in a grisly guerrilla war in which an entire people opposes the self-styled liberators. That's a classic recipe for atrocities. Even after our frat rat flyboy leader postured beneath the infamous "mission accomplished" banner, and there was this troubling uptick in casualties, the prim denials persisted. Iraq is nothing like Vietnam. John Kerry, who Lord knows waged a deeply flawed campaign, seemed faulted above all by a prissy pundit corps for overplaying the tiresome old Vietnam veteran card (and by others of us for underplaying his antiwar past). What a bore. How irrelevant. Because Iraq isn't Vietnam. It just isn't. Yet at its height, as a revival tour of Peter Davis' Oscar-winning 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds* trenchantly reminds us, Vietnam wasn't widely regarded as "a Vietnam" either.

Parallels are frightfully plentiful. In early December, the Pentagon's Defense Science Board finally admitted that coalition forces not only were losing the battle for, as it unblushingly put it, Iraqi "hearts and minds," but "may also have achieved the opposite of what they intended." This refreshingly candid appraisal heroically assumed, of course, that U.S. leaders gave a damn what any Iraqi thought who deviated one iota from their own best-laid plans. A bit earlier, a Lancet study

found that the Iraqi civilian deaths were triple the highest official estimate, well into a horrendous five figures. One might be tempted to resort to the quaint sixties term "credibility gap," but the sly U.S. military did not lie exactly inasmuch as they scrupulously avoided toting up such hideous statistics in the first place. All the while, U.S. authorities angled to get a handpicked candidate elected in Iraq to form a pliant governing coterie and thereby help to reduce — but not remove — an inherently and indelibly provocative American presence. Iraqi sad sacks instead were supposed to carry the burden, and the bulls-eyes, on their backs. This inspired stab at "changing the color of the corpses" long ago was termed, lemme see now, "Vietnamization," wasn't it?

Witness a casually dogmatic U.S. president with an unpleasant drawl who doggedly portrays a tormented third world nation as the front line of a perpetual war against an indescribably evil international conspiracy. The ballyhooed bond between Saddam Hussein and the crazed 9/11 kamikazes was, if anything, more preposterous than the concocted Tonkin Gulf "incidents" of 1964. Inasmuch as all's fair in any fight against popular insurgents, Fallujah, like Hue or Ben Tre in 1968, gets razed down to dust particles in the fiery course of driving out wily insurgents, only for them to pop up elsewhere or sneak back in. And what of that overeager or overly cautious U.S. soldier who was filmed finishing off a wounded Iraqi? Well, there's no need to go to Vietnam for ample counterpart cases. Let us, gentle readers, hark back to the ungrateful Philippine insurrection about which Mark Twain in 1901 mused, after chiding high spirited American boys for running bayonets as a matter of military policy through wounded Filipinos, that,

Having now laid all the historical facts before the Person Sitting in Darkness, we should bring

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him to again, and explain them to him. We should say to him: "They look doubtful, but in reality they are not. There have been lies; yes, but they were told in a good cause. We have been treacherous; but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil.

True, we have crushed a deceived and confiding people; we have turned against the weak and the friendless who trusted us; we have stamped out a just and intelligent and well-ordered republic; we have stabbed an ally in the back and slapped the face of a guest; we have bought a Shadow from an enemy that hadn't it to sell; we have robbed a trusting friend of his land and his liberty; we have invited our clean young men to shoulder a discredited musket and do bandit's work under a flag which bandits have been accustomed to fear, not to follow; we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world; but each detail was for the best. We know this.

The Head of every State and Sovereignty in Christendom and ninety per cent of every legislative body in Christendom, including our Congress and our fifty State Legislatures, are members not only of the church, but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. This world-girdling accumulation of trained morals, high principles, and justice, cannot do an unright thing, an unfair thing, an ungenerous thing, an unclean thing. It knows what it is about. Give yourself no uneasiness; it is all right.

If history repeats itself as farce, Twain might have asked, what do we call it the third or fourth or nth time?

The staying power of *Hearts and Minds* stems from how incisively Peter Davis tapped into, and examined, this seamy pseudoreligious mentality at work during the Vietnam war, situating it in a long lethal procession of American expansionist escapades blazing ever Westward until ending up smack dab in the inhospitable Far East. *Hearts and Minds* retains its keen critical edge precisely because it picks assiduously away at the same recurrent propagandistic guff as Twain did when lampooning the "blessings-of-civilization trust," with all its pious members gussied up in Sunday school duds yet armed to the teeth, insatiable and insanely sure of themselves. Davies' documentary

still packs plenty of punch not only because it plucks the wretched web of lies that tied America to that particular war, like Ahab to the whale, but because it scandalously probes the self-satisfied torsion of (not only) Red State "middle American" hearts and mind-sets.

SO BRING ON bathetic scenes of sweaty high school football ("we're number one") rituals, and an Independence Day parade replete with manic baton-twirlers and with school bands twitching and jerking like a palsied Busby Berkeley chorus line, and so darn well disciplined as to make any veteran of the old *Wehrmacht* nostalgic. I vividly recall our head varsity football coach, once a sleek Notre Dame halfback, chomping on a stogie and motivationally taunting us about the tough yellow fellows whom we soon might have to grapple overseas. For clues, movies, as Davis puckishly appreciates in strategic clips, were about all we had to go by. Cut from a lugubrious pep rally to a gawky soldier dutifully flicking his Zippo lighter to ignite a Vietnamese hut as frightened and furious villagers are herded away. What's up? John Wayne never did that sort of thing.

Colonel George Patton, son of the World War II soldier-slapper, enthuses, in that sickeningly sentimental style that so many nasty bastards adore, about the "reverence" and "determination" of his well-honed young troops but ecstatically gushes that, at the same time, they are a "bloody good bunch of killers." It takes all kinds. No one, not Mark Twain nor a distinct minority of other malcontents, with any acquaintance with unabridged U.S. history would be the least bit surprised at Patton's macabre remark. *Hearts and Minds* smartly wields its inquisitive insolence in exposing official hokum and borderline nuttiness for what they are. Beyond the grim ghostly reach of a war that seems almost as ancient to the young today as Troy, Davis' documentary remains a compelling cultural touchstone, and a sober illustration of how heedless superpowers can go awry.

Stock footage is cunningly used to splendid atmospheric effect: the French lose Indochina in newsreels but not before an off-camera offer (re-

fused) of a few American atom bombs; Senator Joe McCarthy blathers about stinking reds under our beds and in the cabinet; J. Edgar Hoover recites made-up statistics on incorrigible commie infiltration; snide snippets from *Bataan*, *My Son John* and *Objective Burma* tweak public attitudes; Eisenhower anoints the domino theory; and a 1950s mock-Soviet “round up” in a small town is performed by volunteer Legionnaires, a performance which looks nothing so much as a John Ashcroft wet dream. My, don’t those burly Legionnaires have a knack for the dirty task? LBJ, sagging jowls and mournful brow, vows in 1964 that we first must win the hearts and the minds of imperiled Vietnamese if we are to save them from the ravenous Reds.

Switch tracks to Senator William Fulbright in 1971 dryly observing that for all the obligatory pussyfooting that journalists and politicians do when encountering official deceit, a “lie is a lie” — and that is what LBJ’s administration did in spades to shore up a failing dictatorial regime in South Vietnam. On succeeding Robert McNamara as Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, initially a hawk, tells of learning through elementary lawyerly questioning in 1968 that requested troop escalations couldn’t turn the tide. Only after the Tet offensive did Vietnam become Vietnam “the quagmire.” A besieged and bewildered LBJ declines to run for reelection. Pick your own black magical moment.

Hearts and Minds builds up thematic steam through its seamlessly edited juxtapositions and by highlighting terrible ironies of which people on screen are usually oblivious. Take the festive 4th of July ceremonies where an earnest lecturer in eighteenth century battle garb explains that the American War of Independence was itself a civil war as well as one fought against a mighty empire. His

Hearts and Minds builds up thematic steam through its seamlessly edited juxtapositions and by highlighting terrible ironies of which people on screen are usually oblivious.

solemn audience is reluctant and, in some cases, too scornful to draw distressing parallels to Vietnam: “Oriental politics? You’re putting me on, man.” Racism imbues just about every frame. A Native American, enthralled by tribal tales of noble warriors, enlists in the Marine Corps “to go kill some gooks” and finds himself labeled nothing but a “blanket ass,” and worse. Davis daringly linked home-grown indoctrination in its infinite variety to a certain aptitude to act as LBJ’s or Nixon’s willing executioners. An ex-CIA agent recalls how black pajama prisoners up in helicopters got hurled out whenever they failed to please their English-

speaking-only interrogators. That’s surely turning racism up a notch. Domestic indoctrination daunts an excruciatingly nice upper middle class couple who cheerfully affirm how wonderful Nixon is while grieving over the death of their handsome helicopter pilot son. You share their suffering — and you wonder if their son knew about the odd antics in the back of his chopper.

As for juxtapositions, consider two Navy pilots: one chastened, the other hopelessly gunggo. George Coker, former POW, makes a fascist temperament seem kind of wholesome when he appears ingratiatingly at home town rallies, clubs and classrooms: “If I did well it is only because Lyndon did well in bringing me up.” Say what, George? America taught him what it was to be a good German, er, American. The utterly insidious martial core of the early post-war American culture — where kids grew up expecting to go to war someday, and some even hankered for it — is flushed out in *Hearts and Minds* in a potent matter-of-fact style. Coker, for one, will do whatever his trusty government bids him to do. Anything. In a primary school class, Coker, emissary from the hallowed land of kill ratios and body counts, blurts that Vietnam would be very beautiful ‘if it

weren't for the people." Cut to spidery blossoming bomb blasts of flesh-eating white phosphorous.

Countering Coker is bedraggled, longhaired, bearded and blue jeaned Randy Floyd who reminisces contritely on his 'technical expertise thing' as a combat pilot and about the tidy disconnection he felt from the agonies and the pyres he wreaked daily below. Cut to a tiny wiry Vietnamese carpenter chiseling petite coffins for children, remarking on a casket shortage in the free fire zone countryside and about the poisoning, incidentally, of his own children by dioxin-laced Agent Orange. The wizened survivor swears his people will not cease resisting foreign occupiers or their puppets. One might venture to say that that being ruled by your own bunch of thugs isn't much of an improvement over rule by, or on behalf of, foreign thugs — but one revolution at a time, is likely to be his reply.

NO SINGLE FIGURE SPARKLES like Daniel Ellsberg, the riveting RAND maverick who cut through the thickets of convenient noble lies we all learned (and some, like he, took seriously) and emerged with a fierce yet well-tempered wisdom. Ellsberg encapsulates the lies of six administrations in a sprightly minute flat and his tart retort demolishes Walt Rostow's dumbass assertion that Ho Chi Minh could not get elected dog-catcher in Vietnam. Rostow, whose prickly arrogance reminds one instantly of Don Rumsfeld, was another "best and the brightest" luminary

exuding a pugnacious confidence in the collective Southeast Asian delusion. Behold, too, General William C. Westmoreland, as if cued by Rush Limbaugh and his dittohead brigades, saying out loud in his serene schoolmasterish way that, you know, Asians do not value life like we in the West do, and that Vietnam is like a child who must be nurtured and guided until the infantile folks there see it is in their own best interest to imitate, and be dominated by, guess who. I defy anyone to take statements like that out of context.

Davis stalks a pair of Air Force servicemen on the prowl in Saigon for bargain consumer goods and pleasingly cheap hookers, and who, in their even dimmer-witted ways, spout the same baloney as Westmoreland together with a medley of John Birch Society-style sound bites. Yet Davis insistently underscores what pawns even these unlikely critters are by accompanying their sordid rambles with the poignant lyrics of "Five Hundred Miles From My Home" — saturating scenes with a pathos the boys themselves, gauche and gormless, don't remotely seem to deserve. The implicit upshot is clear enough: even if some soldiers are jerks and worse, it's not the troops who are to blame: it's the elite people who sent them to war, stupid. Nothing sums up *Hearts and Minds* so succinctly and with such painful resonance as Ellsberg's wry observation: that it is a tribute to the American people that their leaders perceived they had to lie to them, but that 'it is no tribute to them that they were so easily lied to.' Yet here we go again. *Hearts and Minds* is still a must-see.

Labor Party Questions

REVIEW BY JOHN WILLOUGHBY

ERIC CHESTER HAS QUIETLY BECOME one of the most important contemporary historians of the U.S. left. In the past several years, he has written four books on topics ranging from investigating socialists' views on electoral politics, to the role of progressives in the establishment of the International Rescue Committee to the American suppression of a moderately progressive government in the Dominican Republic in 1964.

Chester's work is characterized by careful scholarly analysis of below-the-radar screen topics that seem to have escaped the notice of professional academic historians. In nearly all cases, Chester has explored the crises and strategic dilemmas that socialists have faced in different historical conjunctures. While Chester's analysis does not really celebrate popular struggle, he attempts to analyze the historical resolution of political dilemmas and leave the politically engaged reader with a clear strategic perspective on how to attempt the construction of a socialist movement.

Chester's latest book, *True Mission: Socialists and the Labor Party Question in the U.S.*, returns to the issue of electoral politics that Chester addressed in *Socialists and the Ballot Box*. Here, he examines the "labor party question." By looking at the historical record, Chester asks whether it is necessary to build an electoral formation with close links to the trade union movement (a "labor party") in order to lay the basis for the rebirth of mass socialist politics in the United States.

True Mission: Socialists and the Labor Party Question in the US

ERIC THOMAS CHESTER

Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004
360 pp. \$24.95

Chester shows that Marxist luminaries ranging from Friedrich Engels to Vladimir Lenin to

Leon Trotsky have all wrestled with this issue. In general, the received wisdom has been that the formation of an American labor party would be a positive transitional step for anticapitalist radicals. Even

though trade unions are almost by definition reformist organizations with little interest in the fundamental transformation of capitalism, the argument is that trade unions are one of the few working class institutions in a capitalist country that consistently challenge capitalist prerogatives. It is also common for unions to support political actions that both decommodify the provisioning of social services such as health care and place restrictive regulations on corporate capitalism. Moreover, the argument goes, because the American working class has such a weak attachment to explicitly socialist ideology, a labor party would be able to introduce members of the working class to perspectives that would eventually lead to socialist politics.

Chester takes issue with this perspective on a variety of grounds. Perhaps most important is his presentation of the historical record. In no case can it be demonstrated that the commitment of socialists to the building of a labor party has actually facilitated the building of such socialist political movements in the United States. Rather, Chester argues that the adoption of such a politics has actually weakened socialist political action and made it less likely that socialist politics could survive to articulate a vision of a capitalist alternative and inform a politics that focuses on the engaged, radical political activity of the working class. The reason is that attempts to persuade

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progressive trade union leaders to consider forming a labor party normally forces political radicals to weaken their own political agenda. The drive to create a larger, “more relevant” organization can kill socialist politics altogether.

Chester concludes his book with a short but withering critique of the Green Party and the Nader campaign of 2000. Unlike much of the left that has excoriated Ralph Nader because his presence on the ballot allegedly threw the election to George Bush, Chester argues that Nader’s campaign represented the latest in a series of pallid “progressive” political campaigns that failed to offer a critique of the capitalist order and drained energies away from such an effort. His preference would have been for the left to use the electoral arena as a tool to attract disaffected antiwar and antiglobalization activists to independent socialist politics.

The main difficulty I have with Chester’s analysis is this conclusion. Running through *True Mission* is the unanalyzed premise that the construction of a mass socialist party would somehow inoculate activists against opportunistic compromises with the capitalist political order. This might be a tempting lesson to be extracted from the history of the American left, but such an argument certainly fails if one examines the enormous failings of European socialism. We have certainly learned by now that political leaders who are trained as Marxist socialists are also liable to construct tortured reasons for supporting an imperialist war or backing a liberal or social democratic candidate who has no intention of fulfilling progressive promises made in the heat of the campaign or becoming the trusted political aide of such opportunistic candidates.

One reason for this depressing reality is that the material incentives in the forms of income and power that the established order offers are extraordinarily powerful. The other reason is that no political movement can survive for long without engaging in reformist campaigns that require compromise and cooperation with liberal or social democratic allies. The evidence suggests that in most cases those most involved in the leadership

of such campaigns become especially prone to the sorts of compromises that Chester decries. As *True Mission* notes, the administrative leadership of the Socialist Party in the early twentieth century successfully pushed the Socialist Party to embrace labor party politics even though the majority of the party resisted such attempts to liquidate the Socialist Party’s independence. The failure of Eugene Debs to effectively stop this process is telling. It is as if there was no real alternative leadership available that could have guided its militant membership effectively.

CHESTER’S BOOK LEAVES THE READER in a rather depressing quandary. On the one hand, his critique of the demoralizing effects of submerging the construction of a socialist political movement to the task of building a labor party is convincing. On the other hand, Chester’s suggestion that the “way forward” is to avoid such reformist compromises in the electoral arena and focus on creating an independent and militant socialist party is not compelling. If such a movement were effective, we can expect the same problems associated with the building of a labor party. On the other hand, to the extent that socialists remain marginalized, then little is accomplished. It will be therefore very hard to hold talented young activists (whatever their class background) in this movement given the lack of positive reinforcement that such a political commitment brings. (Probably a good number of these activists will find refuge in academia like I did! While careful academic research can lay the basis for informed critiques of the capitalist order, radical professors have rarely promoted mass political action.)

The classical Marxist tradition has always fallen back on an analysis of the logic of capital accumulation to rescue the left from this drifting away from effective anticapitalist politics. Engels and Kautsky could counsel the construction of reformist political movements because they believed that capitalist crises would constantly create generate revolutionary socialist politics. Kautsky, as we know, was far more passive and quiescent than

Engels, but it is also clear that Lenin and especially Trotsky depended on the coming capitalist crisis to build a revolutionary socialist movement. This view, as Chester points out, was never particularly credible. Economic crisis certainly produces militant political movements, but the contents of such movements depend on the articulation of a political vision that is both inspiring and plausible. The great strength of nineteenth and early twentieth century Marxism was that its proponents effectively argued for both the desirability and the inevitability of democratic socialism. This vision attracted many who never wholeheartedly subscribed to all of Marx's arguments.

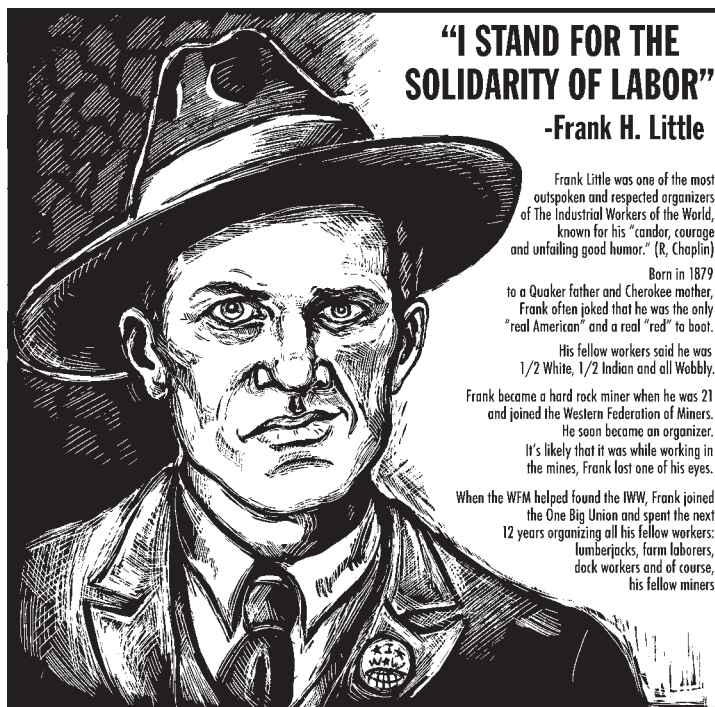
We are now in a post-Marxist age in which the credibility of socialism has been diminished by the vigor of capitalism, the failure of Communism and the demoralizing practices of European social democracy. It is not clear to me that radi-

cals gain much by holding onto the name socialism. Despite Chester's legitimate critique of the Green Party's reformist politics, I would propose that any effective anticapitalist movement fighting for egalitarianism, popular economic control, and sustainability must make environmentalism a central rallying point for the movement.

Every generation needs to construct its own empowering vision of a better future. Chester's critique of the movement to construct a labor party is effective because he notes how pallid this vision of political economic reform is. On the other hand, Chester's alternative advocacy for the construction of an independent radical movement built on explicitly socialist politics is not persuasive. Unfortunately, I am not able to offer a "third way" between reformist and revolutionary politics that would be any more convincing.

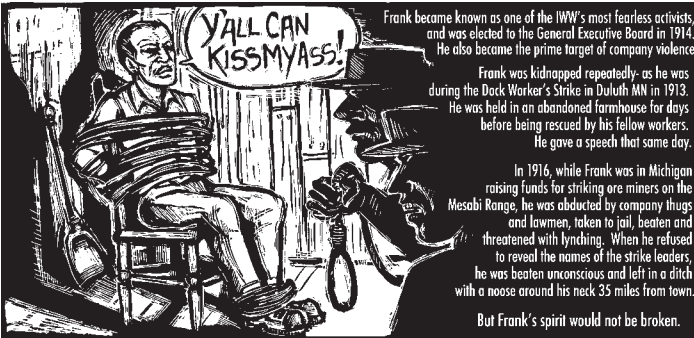
WORDS & PICTURES

NICOLE SCHULMAN'S graphic retelling of the Frank Little story makes available, for a new generation of readers, one of the great sagas of labor and radical martyrdom. As we watch television and newsprint images of mainly religious crowds elsewhere in the world holding aloft the images of dead heroes gone days, months or centuries, we may need to be reminded that the martyr is very much part of our own extended socialist legacy. For fifty years after the tragedy of 1886, the visages of Haymarket anarchists could be found in Mayday events from the United States to Mexico and sections of Europe with anarchist influences; only



Sacco and Vanzetti, the next anarchist victims of similar stature, seemed to displace the original, with the Wobblies sandwiched between stories of sacrifice, courage, and loss.

Schulman's piece is taken from a book entitled *Wobblies: A Graphic History* (Verso, 2005). As one of the volume's two editors, she has been self-consciously engaged with a memorable experiment in art as well as in history. A handful of the artists featured in the book — the names of Spain Rodriguez, Trina Robbins, Jay Kinney, and Sharon Rudahl may ring a bell with aficionados and older readers — can be traced to the underground comics



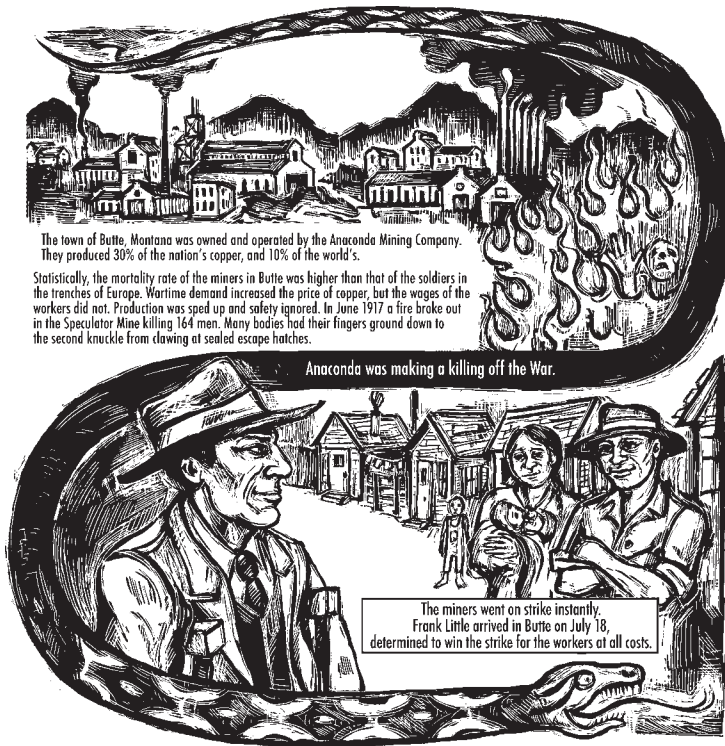
make free use of traditions from many points of the artistic compass, and it would be folly to attempt to trace them all. Besides, computers in the hands of skillful artists can make a perfect "wood cut" or practically anything else in the older artists' crafts look "natural," and this is not a criticism. Schulman has done something extremely remarkable in what I like to think of as a popular version of expressionism. An unrelentingly set of images, combined with

of the 1960s-70s. Most of its artists arrived on the scene at a later date, some during the last few years.

World War III Illustrated, launched in 1979 but strengthened by a steady infusion of fresh blood, might well be credited with shaping as well as exemplifying the work of the post-underground, politically-minded generation. Seth Tobocman (along with Peter Kuper, best known in recent days for taking over "Spy vs Spy" in *Mad* magazine) likes to say that *WWIII* is to antiglobalism what the old *Masses* magazine and its Ash Can artists were to the Wobblies.

The styles of the *WWIII*ers





terse text in dialogue bubbles and in sidebars, make for a visual package as severe as any iconic expression, whether painted diorama or printed page, of suffering without any happy ending or hint of religious redemption. It seizes us, as a series of drawings, not so much for what it claims as because of what it is.

The daughter of a Manhattan commercial artist and herself the graduate of an art school education, Schulman notes that she was inspired by Art Spiegelman's "MAUS" show of 1995, based on his Pulitzer Prize-winning Holocaust volume. The show suggested to then-adolescent Schulman that

she could be, as a cartoonist, a real artist of a new kind. Pretty soon she found *World War III* and was eventually pressed into service as an editor. And so she remains artist and editor, a considerable talent at what seems to many of us readers an early age. What you see here is a small segment of her work as well as that of *Wobblies: A Graphic History*. Look, enjoy, and appreciate the artistic force behind this creation.

PAUL BUHLE

