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From the Editors

“I AM AN AUTO WORKER,” an interviewee told CBS News just before the 1972 election. “I never dreamed that I would vote for a Republican. But the blacks and the kids need a kick in the ass.” This statement struck us as a key reason to understanding George McGovern’s crushing defeat. Having begun with the murder of black and white students at South Carolina State, Kent State, and Jackson State, reaction was setting in and it was intensified by the United States’ defeat and rout in Vietnam. (This should not surprise us when we consider what happened to France after Waterloo and to the Weimar Republic after the German defeat in World War I.) Add to the civil rights and the peace movements the subsequent struggles of feminists and gays. And the backlash again. (To resist a future backlash, we must build a politics that is anti-war, defends the rights of gays, women, blacks, and immigrants and at the same time challenges corporate power and the attack on wages and benefits of so many.)

Perhaps surprisingly, many of our main gains have not been overturned, despite strong efforts by the Right wing. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and abortion are still in place (although some of these have been whittled down, one — assistance to low-income parents — almost destroyed and another — abortion — seriously threatened, and improvements in

the lives of the vast majority of African-Americans have been rolled back to an alarming extent).

Now we may be witnessing a major sea change. The 2006 elections were overwhelmingly a vote for peace, though the Democrats seem set to betray that vote. Recently a prominent conservative clergyman, Rev. Gene Carlson, said, “The religious right peaked a long time ago. As a historical, sociological phenomenon, it has seen its heyday. Something new is coming.” (*NYT Mag.*, 10-28-07).

Is the nearly forty-year period of reaction coming to an end?

It is fortuitous that this issue of *New Politics* features a special section on Latin America, perhaps the only continent where people are fighting back with some success, the only continent where the word socialism is taken seriously. Other articles and reviews range widely: the Palestinian crisis, the U.S. labor movement, the failure of U.S. efforts to win hearts and minds in the Near East, immigration, the French political situation, feminism, civil rights, ecology, etc. None of these articles claims a clear victory for progressives, but all of them show keen awareness of forces struggling to beat back the reaction.

Something new is indeed coming.

MARVIN AND BETTY

SILENT AUCTION

NOTICE: Silent auction for benefit of *New Politics* . . . The highest bidder will receive a week’s vacation at a house on Cuttyhunk Island, MA during Spring & Fall 2008. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, April 1, 2008. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500

MARVIN AND BETTY

Adoption

BETTY REID MANDELL'S "ADOPTION" (Vol. XI, No. 2) is a comprehensive contribution to many issues in adoption, but reaches flawed Orwellian conclusions, such as seeing an advantage to "breaking away from the obsession with biological reproduction."

Lessening the stigma of "unwed" parents and those who relinquish children for adoption is best accomplished by not using outdated and discriminatory language. Parents who are not married are "single parents."

Most importantly the article ignores the fact that adoption in the U.S. is a largely unregulated \$6.3 billion/year industry that exploits and coerces mothers and redistributes their children to paying clients. The line between unscrupulous baby brokers, unlicensed, untrained adoption "facilitators," entrepreneurial adoption "agencies," and reputable adoption practitioners is invisible, leaving all parties to adoption at risk. Children are adopted by anyone who can afford one and have thus been placed with murderers and pedophiles.

Adoption causes post-traumatic stress and lifelong grief for the families who lose their offspring and feelings of abandonment for the adoptee resulting in adoptees being overrepresented in all mental health and criminal facilities.

Adoption should be about finding homes for children, not solving infertility. In consumer-oriented cultures there is a belief that one "deserves" to have anything one can afford. As a result white infants are commodities in demand. As long as people are willing to pay tens of thousands dollars for one, they will steal, kidnap, coerce, traffic, and exploit to fill the demand.

MIRAH RIBEN

Author of The Stork Market: America's Multi-Billion Dollar Unregulated Adoption Industry

"Anti-Semitism and Socialism"

AS FAR AS CAN BE DISCERNED from Sherry Gorelick's review of Mario Kessler's *On Anti-Semitism and Socialism* (New Politics 43, Summer 2007), neither Professor Gorelick nor

Kessler appear to be aware of two essential sources on the subject, which I would like to bring to readers' attention.

The Marxists and the Jewish Question. The History of a Debate, 1843-1943, by the Italian Marxist Enzo Traverso (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994) covers the difficult history of European Marxists' efforts, far from fully successful, to comprehend what "The Jewish Question" was about. The one-sided assumption that Jewish life and religion were a historical anachronism, something that would naturally disappear with the end of their specific economic function in the development of capitalism, also implied that the medieval legacy of Jew-hatred would vanish as well.

It wasn't only the fact that the Jewish population in Eastern Europe was a distinct though non-territorial nationality that was obscured by this theorization. The possibility of a new and even more virulent, racist revival of Jew-hatred — anti-Semitism — was also overlooked by thinkers and parties who envisioned an inevitable evolution toward socialism.

In the Russian context, Traverso emphasizes the contribution of the Bundist leader Vladimir Medem, who argued that genuine international solidarity was not antagonistic to the consciousness of specific nationalities, but arose from their development and mutual recognition. (It should be remembered, however, that the Bund's split from the all-Russian socialist movement arose from the Bundists' unacceptable demand for a monopoly on the organizing of Jewish workers.)

On these matters Kessler appears to cover similar territory, and from what I've seen of his work his specific contributions on the politics of East German Communism are important.

However, regarding Karl Marx's writings "On the Jewish Question" and his purported anti-Semitism, Professor Gorelick has it almost all backwards and completely wrong. For a full unraveling of this all-too-conventional mythology it is essential to consult Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution. Volume I: State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press,

1977), specifically Chapter 5 (“Implementing the New Direction,” on the Jewish emancipation controversy) and the appendix Special Note A, “Marx and the Economic-Jew Stereotype.”

The first critical point missing in Prof. Gorelick’s discussion is what Marx’s debate with the Hegelian “leftist” Bruno Bauer was about: Marx was fighting for full political and civil rights for Jews, which Bauer opposed. For Marx, this was quite consciously a cornerstone of the struggle to separate religion from the state — to make religion a private matter having no bearing on citizenship — and in turn part of the struggle for democracy. (This is what Draper means by “the new direction,” i.e., the recognition that the struggle for socialism runs through, not against the battle for democracy — in short, what led Marx to Marxism.)

Bauer’s position against “Jewish emancipation” rested on two shifting arguments. First, as a “left” posture he proposed that it wasn’t just Jews who needed political emancipation, but everyone who needed emancipation from religion in general. After Marx disposed of this drivel, Bauer presented the view that Jews and Judaism were a particularly evil “huckstering” entity that didn’t deserve rights. It shouldn’t be surprising that Bauer shortly evolved from left-Hegelianism to a reactionary and anti-Semitic politics. It was against this view that Marx, although employing the Hegelian rhetoric from which he hadn’t quite yet “emancipated” himself, argued in “On the Jewish Question” that Jewish “huckstering” was now part and parcel of “Christian” (i.e. bourgeois) society. In short, demonizing Jews in the name of Christian superiority was a bankrupt argument.

By pulling out quotations along these lines without reference to the politics of the debate or the confusing contemporaneous terminology, post-facto commentators constructed the absurdity of Marx’s “anti-semitism” and even, in a vague rendering of the self-hating Jew smear, a myth that “Marx’s personal biography predisposed him to anti-Semitism.”

The second critical point is that what we would now consider abusive references to the Economic-Jew stereotype were universal in the discourse of the 1840s. This was true not only among people who didn’t like Jews and Judaism, but equally so among gentiles who liked and admired Jews, and among Jews themselves — including, in particular, Jewish proto-nation-

alists like Moses Hess, the progenitor of Zionism. Draper documents this reality with full details that can’t be reviewed here.

The fact that this view of Jewish history and economic functioning was warped, and that it was already dissolving via class differentiation among Jews and the general development of capitalism, doesn’t negate the fact that it had some historical basis in the emergence of capitalism from feudal Europe. But as Draper stresses (KMTR v.I, p. 608): “The real issue of the time had nothing to do with the use of language about Judaism based on the universally accepted Economic-Jew stereotype. The real Jewish question was: *For or against the political emancipation of the Jews? For or against equal rights for Jews?*”

“This was the Jewish question that Marx discussed, not the one that dominated the minds of a sick society a century later.”

That Marx disliked religious Judaism — a medieval rabbinic Orthodoxy through which religious authorities (with state approval) exercised a quasi-totalitarian, even Taliban-like control over Jewish communities — is beside the point. A growing sector of middle-class German Jews were rejecting it as well, turning to the new movement of Reform Judaism; but as Marx had no interest in Jewish affairs *per se* he wouldn’t have paid much attention.

According to Professor Gorelick, Mario Kessler criticizes Marx’s inattention to the rise of racist anti-Semitism in Europe and the 1881–82 Russian pogroms, and the emergence of a Jewish labor movement in Eastern Europe; but this is anachronistic as these developments emerged either after his death or in the final year of Marx’s life when his health gravely deteriorated. It is hardly surprising that Engels took up these subjects vigorously in the following decade.

No doubt Karl Marx failed to anticipate twentieth century genocidal Nazism (only a tiny handful of people, like the poet Heinrich Heine, had an instinctual premonition of such possibilities), as well as relativity theory, quantum dynamics, nuclear weapons and global warming. Nor could he imagine that his 1843 polemics on Jewish emancipation would someday be read through the prism of late 20th and early 21st century identity politics. I don’t see how he can be severely faulted on these counts.

DAVID FINKEL

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Planetary Citizen

Kurt Vonnegut, 1922–2007

GREGORY D. SUMNER

IN HIS FINAL COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, *A Man Without a Country* (2005), Kurt Vonnegut lamented that the “priceless gift” of African-American blues music, the product of such historical suffering, was “now almost the only reason many foreigners still like us at least a little bit.” As the Age of Bush unfolded into a second catastrophic term, at least people around the world could still “love us for our jazz,” he wrote. “And they don’t hate us for our purported liberty and justice for all. They hate us now for our arrogance.” With his passing this year, at 84, the world has lost yet another reason to admire the expansive, humane face of America. In a literary career spanning half a century, Kurt Vonnegut presented, in tragicomic form, a devastating diagnosis of the pathologies of his culture — racism, greed, violence, Social Darwinist worship of power and contempt for those without it — that will stand the test of time.

But like Mark Twain, his was a critique rooted in a broken heart, in a sadness that the utopian, democratic possibilities promised by the Bill of Rights, and fought for by Lincoln, Eugene Debs, and Vonnegut’s own generation of World War II veterans, was perhaps irretrievably lost in the twenty-first century.

Vonnegut was born into the fourth generation of a close-knit, spectacularly successful German-American community in the middle-western provincial city of Indianapolis. His family already was in the process of disintegration, however, pounded by the successive blows of

World War I xenophobia, the Prohibition laws of the 1920s (which closed the family brewery, one leg of its prosperity), and, finally and most fatally, the stock market crash and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Young Kurt’s eyes opened early to the contradictions of the mythos of self-made men, as he observed the psychic pain of his parents and so many others whose self-worth evaporated with their bank accounts and jobs. Despite the atmosphere of loss, Vonnegut as a child was lucky to live in a house full of books, and found solace in the comedians he heard during the golden age of radio. He encountered socialist ideas of economic justice, and learned a skepticism of organized religion, race categories and other received truths from his freethinking family. And he remembered, absorbing deeply the idealistic civic religion of American democracy in the public schools of Indianapolis:

America was an idealistic, pacifistic nation at the time. I was taught in the sixth grade to be proud that we had a standing Army of just over a hundred thousand men and that the generals had nothing to say about what was done in Washington. I was taught to be proud of that and to pity Europe for having more than a million men and tanks. I simply never unlearned junior civics. I got a very good grade.

Then came the Second World War. Vonnegut left Cornell University, where he had devoted energies to journalism rather than his chemistry classes, to enter the army, which trained him as a reconnaissance scout. Like Stendhal’s Fabrizio in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, Vonnegut was an awkward, unlikely warrior, and his experiences in Europe in 1944–45 were not the stuff of heroic fantasies. As he recounted a generation later, in his most famous novel, *Slaughter-*

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terhouse-Five (1969), he knew only defeat as his group of hungry, lost and frightened young soldiers found themselves captured in the chaos of the German counteroffensive that winter. In the novel Vonnegut, as the alter-ego of callow, gangling “Billy Pilgrim,” joined “a Mississippi of humiliated Americans” shuffling through a frozen valley, toward railroad boxcars that would transport survivors to an unknown fate in the East. He ended up with a hundred other prisoners on a work assignment in Dresden, a baroque treasure of a city incinerated by Anglo-American bombs on the night of February 13, 1945, despite its lack of strategic importance. “Everybody is supposed to be dead” after a massacre, Vonnegut observed, but he and his fellow P.O.W.s emerged, miraculously alive, from the safety of the underground slaughterhouse where they had been kept. They numbly surveyed the destruction, then worked, at gunpoint, on corpse disposal for the next few surreal weeks.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, these experiences left Vonnegut with a jaundiced view of war and the credibility of governments. (Americans heard, read, and knew almost nothing of the Dresden firebombing, he discovered to his surprise after his return home.) By the time he was a professional writer in the early 1950s, Vonnegut’s ground-level humanism made him a self-conscious member of a Generation of 1945, an international cohort of infantry veterans that includes such figures as Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, James Jones, and the German Heinrich Böll. Like them, Vonnegut attracted a youthful mass audience rebelling against the Vietnam War and other establishment depredations in the 1960s and 1970s. His satirical works like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), and *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) of-

“I don’t think people give a damn whether the planet goes on or not,” Vonnegut agonized.

ten used the distancing techniques of science fiction, with time travel and perspectives from other planets and alternative civilizations. They addressed in stark and darkly funny tones the dislocations of modern life and the brutalities of concentrated power. A warmth shines through for characters who, vulnerable and damaged as they are, act decently in inhumane circumstances. There is a lot of slapstick hilarity in his fourteen novels, elaborate jokes and wildly ironic wit, in a distinctively American voice. But beneath the storytelling and the humor, the judgments are uncompromising, and retain their bracing impact. Here, from *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), is Vonnegut as angry moralist, describing late nineteenth century “robber baron” capitalism, corrupt in ways that lead directly to the inequities of our time:

Thus did a handful of rapacious citizens come to control all that was worth controlling in America. Thus was the savage and stupid and entirely inappropriate and unnecessary and humorless American class system created. Honest, industrious, peaceful citizens were classed as bloodsuckers if they asked to be paid a living wage. And they saw that praise was reserved henceforth for those who devised means of getting paid enormously for committing crimes against which no laws had been passed. Thus the American dream turned belly up, turned green, bobbed to the scummy surface of cupidity unlimited, filled with gas, went *bang* in the noonday sun.

Elsewhere Vonnegut concluded that America, with its rootless mobility and radical individualism, was an experiment in “impossibly tough-minded loneliness” for most of its citizens, who substituted romantic stories and harsh ideologies for genuine human contact, extended families, and other networks of community and support. Such people, isolated, insecure, averse to facing reality, were dangerously open to the

nostrums of charming strangers, and too often retreated into addictions of various kinds — machines (especially television), alcohol, consumerism. “We thought we could live without families,” Vonnegut, who studied anthropology at the University of Chicago after the war, once commented. “Well, we can’t.”

Vonnegut’s later novels, though less well known than his works of the sixties, lost none of their satiric bite, none of their compassionate protest on the side of the little person against the gigantic, dehumanizing forces of history. In *Jailbird* (1979), Vonnegut painted a witheringly funny portrait of Nixon-era political crimes; in *Galápagos* (1985) he saw human beings as a tragic misfire in the processes of evolution, doomed by the technological and other ingenuities of their “too-big” brains; and in *Hocus Pocus* (1990), we follow the struggles of a traumatized Vietnam veteran, sent abroad as a youth by his country on a mission of “vainglorious lunacy,” now attempting to survive in a post-Reagan America of looted public treasuries, foreign debt, overflowing prisons, and uncontrolled environmental damage.

In *A Man Without a Country*, Vonnegut’s late-life gloom, echoing Twain’s a century earlier, reached its depths. “I now know there is not a chance in hell of America becoming humane and reasonable,” he wrote, “(b)ecause power corrupts us, and absolute power corrupts us absolutely.” Leaders like Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld were “Pathological Personalities,” people without doubts or consciences who gained control “by means of a Mickey Mouse coup d’etat,” and then proceeded to “disconnect all the burglar alarms set by the Constitu-

tion.” In the Iraq debacle, Mr. Bush stubbornly continued to treat American soldiers “as I never was, like toys a rich kid got for Christmas.” On a larger scale, Vonnegut warned that industrialized nations remained addicted to fossil fuels, despite the irreparable effects on the atmosphere, oceans, and topsoil. Still in denial, citizens sit back while our leaders “commit violent crimes to get what little is left of what we’re hooked on.” “The biggest truth to face now — what is probably making me unfunny for the rest of my life — is that I don’t think people give a damn whether the planet goes on or not,” Vonnegut agonized. “I know of very few people who are dreaming of a world for their grandchildren.”

Kurt Vonnegut remained a voice of dissent and activism (including involvement with the writers’ group PEN) to the end of his life, and it is cheering that his work is still gaining new readers among the young, many of whom do still “give a damn whether the planet goes on or not.” They sense the crisis we are in and are eager for mature guidance about how to move things in a different direction. Vonnegut’s now quaint “radicalism,” available globally in the many translations of his novels and other writings still in print, reflects what he learned in public school in Indianapolis during the more innocent and optimistic days of his Depression-era youth. Those lessons about “decent behavior in a strikingly indecent society,” about limited government and human rights, about the horror and shame of war, will live on, as a guide to the ethic of “planetary citizenship” he so urgently championed throughout his life.

Making Sense of Latin America's "Third Left"

MARIE KENNEDY AND CHRIS TILLY

EMIR SADER EMBODIES, to the extent any one person can, the trajectory of Latin America's left movements. A Marxist sociologist with a long track record of studying Latin American politics, currently Executive Secretary of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), Sader is Brazilian by birth but fled Brazil at the end of the 1960s as the dictatorship tightened its grip. In Chile, he then participated in the electoral path to socialism preached by Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government, until the 1973 coup forced him to flee again. He then worked in Cuba with a government that had come to power through guerilla war and urban insurgency. Finally, he returned to Brazil, where Workers' Party President Lula da Silva, the principal thorn in the side of the rich countries in the World Trade Organization and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, has proclaimed "Zero Hunger" to be his primary goal, but has followed neoliberal-inspired budget-balancing that precluded the burst of growth so many of his supporters hoped for. When Emir Sader speaks about the future of Latin America, it is worth listening.

So what is he saying? "The old strategies of reforms promoted by Latin America's lefts have been left behind. Same thing with guerilla warfare. Resistance struggles against neoliberalism, by moving from social to political struggle, have forged a new strategy for the left of the continent.... It would be difficult for

this post-neoliberalism to become socialist, but it definitely can and should be anti-capitalist."¹

As Sader argues, the left in Latin America is treading new ground. In describing what is new about today's Latin American left, the easiest thing may be contrasting it with the "old" left approaches that have dominated for the last five decades. One such approach was the armed guerilla movements, inspired by the Cuban revolution, but now largely extinct (with Colombia as the main exception). The other was the mass populist movements linked by patronage or party discipline to left or center-left electoral parties. While the *guerrilleros* have declined, left parties much like the traditional ones, far from disappearing, have surged in the last several years across much of Latin America.

Both of these lefts have helped make positive changes in Latin America — challenging inequality, attacking illiteracy, improving services to the poor, redistributing land, and mobilizing ordinary people to defend their rights. But neither has had a strong tradition of bottom-up organizing. The military model at the core of the guerilla insurgencies and the model of charismatic leadership at the core of electoral leftism are centralized, top-down models — structures that can represent the interests of poor majorities, but usually without directly involving them in the decisions that affect their lives.

But amidst the revival of familiar strains of left populism, there is a third left stirring in Latin America. Like the other two, it makes demands for economic justice and human rights. But even more centrally, it strives for the trans-

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An earlier and shorter version of this article appeared in *Progressive Planning* magazine in 2006.

formation of people — “self-management, independent thought, and self-construction,” in the words of social psychologist Maiqui Pixton, who works with housing cooperatives in Buenos Aires. The third left avows autonomy from the state rather than pursuing state power and promotes bottom-up decision-making. Latin America's third left has received far less attention in Northern media than the first two. But its accomplishments — and the difficult choices it faces — hold important lessons for those of us in the North trying to create and sustain progressive movements within hostile policy environments.

The Incredible Shrinking State and the Rise of Autonomy

THE BOUNDARIES OF THIS THIRD LEFT are debatable. We would definitely include Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), Argentina's *autonomista* current of workplace and community organizations, Mexico's Zapatista movement, and the Federation of Neighborhood Councils (FEJUVE) in the indigenous metropolis of El Alto, Bolivia (next door to La Paz), a grassroots community organization at the center of the strikes and protests that brought down two governments and carried Evo Morales to power. (Some other Bolivian organizations have a similar flavor, as Nancy Romer explains in her article in this issue.)² But beyond these high profile examples, the political current includes varied other groups in just about every country in Latin America.

The military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes that dominated the region in the 1980s have given way to competitive elections and relative freedom to dissent (again, Colombia is the key exception). At the same time, U.S.-backed neoliberal policies of free trade, balanced budgets, privatization, and reduced government intervention in the economy continue to fuel the “incredible shrinking state.” (A current exception is Venezuela, where oil wealth is allowing a left government to expand the state.)

The two older lefts emphasized making demands on the state with the goal of taking it over. But in the context of states with shrunk

When Lula won, the MST challenged him with an accelerated program of land occupations.

capacity, this approach falls short. The third left instead pursues autonomy — still making demands on the state, but with much more focus on organizing people to do things for themselves. This includes economic, political, and cultural autonomy. In the economic sphere, MST settlements in Brazil farm previously unused agricultural land they have occupied. In Argentina workers take over and run bankrupt enterprises. Mexico's Zapatistas carry out subsistence agriculture as well as producing fair trade coffee and indigenous crafts for sale. The Bolivian FEJUVE neighborhood councils pool community resources to purchase land and install infrastructure, and regulate the buying and selling of land and homes. All seek to link scattered productive projects into a broader “social economy” prioritizing human needs rather than profits. In many cases, environmental sustainability is part of the package: for example, many MST settlements are successful models of organic and agro-ecological production and in 2005, along with La Via Campesina (an organization that brings together movements involved in the struggle for land from all over the world), the MST established the Latin American School of Agroecology which will graduate its first class this year.

Political autonomy means independence from the state and political parties. The degree of independence varies. As Lula wound up his successful 2002 run for the presidency, MST organizer Jonas da Silva in 2002 told us, “We

are critical of Lula, but we're campaigning for him. What matters is not the election, but democratizing the media and breaking up the large land-holdings." When Lula won, the MST challenged him with an accelerated program of land occupations. Similarly, in Bolivia and Argentina, third left organizations have generally supported Morales and Nestor and now Cristina Kirchner, but have not let up on making independent criticisms and demands. In contrast, the Zapatistas declined to support center-left populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the recently concluded Mexican presidential elections, arguing that his program simply put a kinder face on a brutal system. The MST demands government funding to buy agricultural inputs and create community infrastructure; FEJUVE likewise presses the government for financial assistance for community development — including joining the successful struggle to establish a public university in El Alto. On the other hand, the Zapatistas refuse all government aid (instead "taxing" the government and NGOs for projects they carry out on Zapatista turf) — though they led the long and (so far) unsuccessful struggle for legislation guaranteeing stronger rights for Mexi-

can indigenous people to control their land, resources, and lives. Other organizations walk a fine line: for example, Argentina's Unemployed Workers' Movement (MTD) of La Matanza seeks government funds for projects, but refuses the patronage-linked welfare checks that have "destroyed many organizations," in the words of activist Soledad (who prefers to be identified only by her first name). All of these organizations couple building broad alliances with maintaining independent politics, including the right to criticize any party as well as the state itself.

To build cultural autonomy, Latin America's third left places enormous emphasis on education. The MST and the Zapatistas both take over the schools in their communities, train their own teachers, and implement their own curriculum. *Autonomista* workplace and community organizations in Argentina typically require members to take classes in principles of cooperativism, and quite a few of the worker-run businesses host adult education classes and community cultural centers. Activists from Haiti to Chile use low-powered, local FM radio stations to promote discussions about social justice and give voice to the voiceless.



Marie Kennedy

Bottom-up Decision-Making

IN ADDITION TO AUTONOMY, the other axis of Latin America's new left is *horizontalidad*, a word that translates rather poorly as "horizontality"—in contrast with the top-down *verticalismo* that continues to characterize much left activity in Latin America (and elsewhere). This means "having everybody decide," says Argentine social psychologist/activist Pixton. The specifics vary. The Zapatistas use village-wide meetings to decide local issues, rotate regional leaders, and use intensive consultation to reach movement-wide decisions. The MST uses a more traditional set of pyramidal elected councils (with some less traditional aspects, such as mandating an equal number of women and men representatives at every level). Argentina's worker-run companies typically combine frequent workplace-wide assemblies with an elected management council that has executive powers. Housing cooperatives in Argentina bring together coop members and skilled professionals (architects, psychologists, and others) in participatory design and planning. But in every case these organizations are committed to broad participation, bottom-up decision-making, and transparent governance. This is participatory planning in practice, with plenty of imperfections but a genuine effort to shift power downward, and a goal of empowering people to move beyond the immediate project to tackle other issues in their lives. Again, education is a key ingredient: activists seek to give people the tools to participate meaningfully — to break dependency and transform themselves into decision-makers.

Horizontalidad is an ongoing experiment. Soledad, of MTD of La Matanza, recounted, "When a small group of us was dreaming about a community center, we had a lot of prejudices. We doubted that the community would accept the values and principles that we had agreed on. But we were wrong — the community was able to contribute." She laughed, "When we formed the 'educational community' to govern

our day care center, we feared that the parents wouldn't speak up. The other day, one of the mothers said, 'Now, you can't get us to shut up, can you?'"

Autonomy and *horizontalidad* complement each other. Fewer strings leading to the economic and political centers of power means more room for input from people at the base. On the flip side, autonomy is a hard road, and mass participation increases the chance of success. "None of us alone is as good as all of us together," declared Soledad, quoting a movement slogan.

Three Options Within the Third Left

LATIN AMERICA'S THIRD LEFT is not consistently rooted in the proletariat, nor in the established peasantry that provided the support base for many guerrilla insurgencies. Reflecting the fracturing and displacing effect that neoliberalism has exerted all over Latin America, it draws its energy from constituencies that historically did not capture much left attention but now represent widespread experiences throughout the region: laid-off workers in Argentina, displaced-peasants-become-slum-dwellers in Brazil, miners and *campesinos* driven from the Altiplano in Bolivia as a result of Bolivia's neoliberal structural adjustment policies, indigenous communities left on the margins of development in Chiapas (home turf of the Zapatistas), and so on. By the same token, this left current's political strategies vary widely, with neither the benefit nor the limitation of a numbered International to provide guidance, with varied class roots, and building on diverse local traditions in a context of decentralization and local autonomy. Reacting to the World Social Forum's slogan that "Another world is possible," the Zapatistas called for "A world within which many worlds will fit."

Within this range of variation, new movements on Latin America's left have taken three political directions. First, some have gravitated toward the more totalizing visions of the

guerrilleros and the traditional left parties—seeking to solidify unity in action by subordinating autonomous movements to a single ideology and organization, often with a goal of pushing the state or contending for state power (or consolidating state power after an electoral victory). Venezuela's Bolivarian left has some of this tendency, as documented in the interview

with Orlando Chirino in this issue. "Venezuela has a politically mobilized population, but it is a population that has been mobilized by [President Hugo] Chávez himself," remarks left Venezuelan historian Margarita López Maya.³

A second thrust has been withdrawal from national politics as such, deepening autonomy but limiting impact. When we asked a rank-and-file Maya activist of the Zapatista movement why the Zapatistas so rarely take part in broader alliances, his answer made it clear that for him the word *alianza* was a negative one connoting back-scratching politics. Emir Sader noted the limits of the "*Que se vayan todos!*" ("All of them [politicians] must go!") slogan of the the *piqueteros* (unemployed movement) and other dissidents in Argentina. "Faced with the election [of 1995], their main slogan was '*que se vayan todos*,'" he observed. "Well, 'they' did not leave, and the movements ran the risk of getting Menem" — the Peronist president who brought neoliberalism to Argentina, and who was indeed re-elected in 1995.

The third option, which we find the most promising, is to maintain a creative tension between attempts to build national-level power in order to influence or — in increasing numbers of cases — manage the state, and a continuing commitment to autonomy and participation. This describes the tense but productive relationships between the MST and Lula da

Silva, or between Argentina's recuperated business movement (in which workers form cooperatives and take over shuttered businesses) and

outgoing President Nestor Kirchner. Bolivia's vice president, Alvaro García Linera, distanced himself from a centralizing model when he recently declared, "We as a government do not seek to lead the social movements, we seek to be led

Bolivia's vice president, Alvaro García Linera: "We as a government do not seek to lead the social movements, we seek to be led by them."

by them."⁴ Conversely, when we commented to Lee Young-soo of the Korean Peasants League, which has a close working relationship with Brazil's MST, that the MST keeps its distance from state power, he smiled and replied, "The MST wants to take part in running the state in Brazil — they just want to take part in building and running a different state."

In actuality, even in instances where third left movements have shifted in one of the first two directions, a productive tension persists. Hugo Chávez's drive for a single, unified socialist party is tempered by the presence of supportive but often critical independent organizations: "The fragmented social movements that predate Chávez have not abandoned their existing structures," reports Venezuela-based journalist Jonah Gindin.⁵ And though the Zapatistas passed on supporting a candidate in Mexico's 2006 presidential election, they took the occasion to launch the Other Campaign, an attempt (still continuing) to build a broad — dare we say it? — alliance "from the left and below" across Mexico.

Lessons for the North

IS THE IDEA OF TRANSFERRING some of this third left energy to Northern countries such as the United States just a pipe dream? In fact, many of the ingredients are present in the North as well. Traditions of autonomy and participa-

tion in the United States extend back to early cooperative movements and the New England town meeting. These traditions enjoyed a revival in the 1960s and 1970s in settings ranging from food coops to the black liberation movement, and activists and organizations with roots in that seedbed are still around. The U.S. anti-globalization movement in its many forms has made autonomy and participation its watchwords.⁶ We may not have laws that endorse expropriation of land or factories not being put to productive use, as in Brazil and Argentina, but eminent domain laws — the tool the government used to displace tens of thousands of poor people from suddenly valuable land in the urban renewal program of the 60s and 70s and again much under attack recently for misuse on behalf of large corporations and developers — embody the principle that the public can take property for the social good. And one hidden asset is millions of Latin American immigrants who have been exposed to the third left in their home countries.

Indeed, faced with neoliberal federal and state governments rolling back many of the gains of the 1930s and 1960s waves of reform, new experiments are sprouting. Local groups are pushing participatory planning and budgeting. Community-supported agriculture projects promote local food self-sufficiency, and con-

sumer and worker cooperatives pursue self-management. Neighborhoods declare themselves "empowerment zones" without funds from the federal government, and community organizations fight for "moral site control" in a way that echoes Latin American land takeovers. If we want these initiatives to survive and spread, we should build stronger ties of communication, learning, and solidarity with Latin America's third left.

NOTES

1. Luis Hernández Navarro, "El posneoliberalismo será anticapitalista, no socialista," Interview with Emir Sader. *La Jornada* (Mexico City), October 12, 2007, p.7.

2. Our analysis of FEJUVE is based primarily on Emily Achtenberg, "Community organizing and rebellion: Neighborhood Councils in El Alto, Bolivia," *Progressive Planning*, Spring 2007. Our analysis of the MST, the Argentinean *autonomista* movements, and the Zapatista movements, are primarily based on visits and interviews with movement activists and others in 2002, 2005, and 2006, respectively. See: Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilly, "Dancing to a different samba: Brazil's grassroots groups look beyond the election," *Dollars and Sense*, September-October 2002; "Participatory democracy: Argentinean grassroots movements at the crossroads," *Z Magazine*, October 2005; "Chiapas: Counter-campaigns and autonomous communities — The Zapatistas' new fight," *Against the Current*, July/August 2006. We thank Grassroots International for their assistance in making contact with some of these movements.

3. Fred Rosen. "Breaking with the past: A 40th anniversary conversation with Margarita López Maya," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol.40, No.3, May/June 2007.

4. Speech at the Latin American Studies Association, Montreal, September 6, 2007.

5. Jonah Gindin. "Chavistas in the halls of power, Chavistas on the street." *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol.38, No.5, March 2005.

6. Amory Starr and Jason Adams. "Anti-globalization: The global fight for local autonomy," *New Political Science* Vol.25, No.1, 2003.



Venezuela's PSUV and Socialism from Below

Interview with Orlando Chirino

ON MARCH 24, 2007, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez announced to a gathering of about 3,000 supporters that he was creating a Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The following interview was conducted (by the Venezuelan group *aporrea*) on April 13, 2007, with Orlando Chirino, national organizer of the UNT (Union Nacional de Trabajadores — National Union of Workers). Chirino is the leader of C-Cura—the United Autonomous Revolutionary Class Current — within the PSUV. Originally on the Venezuela left Web site *aporrea.org*, the interview was translated and posted on the *International Socialism* journal web site, www.isj.org.uk.

UNT was formed after the main union confederation CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers) attempted to dislodge President Chávez from power. Katie Cherrington says in *Znet*, "In 2002 CTV supported a Washington-backed military coup that kidnapped Chávez and put Pedro Carmones, the head of Federcameras (the Chamber of Commerce) in as president, before popular protest forced the collapse of the plot, and Chávez's return to the presidency. In December of that year, CTV collaborated with bosses and Federcameras to lock out oil industry workers, in an attempt to cripple the economy. For many workers, CTV's failed call for a strike in support of the bosses was the absolute final straw, and the struggle against the lockout had radicalized many workers, and given them confidence in their ability

to organize — even without the CTV. In May 2003, workers from nearly every sector of Venezuelan labor came together in Caracas to form a new confederation — the National Union of Workers (UNT)."¹

The International Socialist Journal says, "We do not want to repeat the sad history of the CTV, which was converted in the course of years into a bureaucratic structure where the leading group held on to their positions and never respected the right of free union elections."²

Diana Barahona writes in *Counterpunch*, "For 40 years the historically dominant CTV had an undemocratic structure and union bureaucrats collaborated with management to quash the struggles of rank-and-file workers. Democratic union activists were fired and even murdered while union bosses looked the other way."³

Q: Orlando, what is your assessment of the issues posed by President Chavez when he launched the proposal for forming the PSUV on 24 March?

A: The great virtue of the discussion that President Chavez has set in motion is that it gives us an opportunity to discuss the nature of the Venezuelan revolution, the project for creating the PSUV, the role played in the revolution by different social sectors, and in particular the working class; it's a debate about how you build an organization and it raises a whole series of questions which we should discuss openly, publicly,

and with complete honesty.

What is most worrying is that the president ended up by doing exactly what he criticized; he criticized the political cannibalism that characterizes the organizations of the left, but then he went on to say that anyone who does not share his views is a counterrevolutionary. I think this is a serious mistake, because far from encouraging debate it closes it down and encourages the sectarianism that the president has said he is anxious to fight.

Q: What do you think are the most important is-

sues?

A: There are lots of issues to discuss, but let me address two in particular. The president says, for example, that the reformists are a danger — and I agree. And yet it is my view that the program the president is putting forward rests on a reformist conception, and that there is no per-

The president [said] that anyone who does not share his views is a counterrevolutionary.

spective for a break with the logic of capital. Let me explain.

After the great neoliberal offensive of the 1990s, we are seeing again multimillion dollar investments by international capital in strategic sectors of the economy such as oil, mining, coal, construction, and infrastructural projects. International consortia from China, Russia and Iran are exploiting our workers more than ever. I don't believe that some multinationals are better than others. They are all essentially concerned with monopolizing production and trade, exploiting workers, pillaging the natural resources of nations, and intervening politically in the economic decision-making processes of those countries. This strikes at the heart of the kind of economic model we are building.

The president represents investment by the multinationals as a step forward. I see it as mortgaging the revolution. For me the first step towards socialism is the break with multinational companies and corporations. What this government is doing on the other hand is promoting concentration into larger and larger economic groups; the purchase of CANTV* and the Elec-

tricity Company of Caracas are examples. There's no question that the recuperation of these enterprises by the state is a step forward, but the business sector were so pleased with these developments that they made a public announcement of their support for the move.

Equally worrying is the President's announcement that Sidor (Orinoco Steel) will not be nationalized because it is being run by "good capitalists." In fact this company was privatized under the 4th Republic** and is owned by a multinational consortium headed by Techint of Argentina. Our understanding is the President took this view because the company is based in a country governed by a "friendly" president, namely Kirchner. But we wonder when we began to speak of "good" and "bad" capitalists?

The president is currently making a lot of public reference to China. We would ask him not to do that, because capitalism was restored in China a number of years ago, and today it is the country where the working class is most exploited. They are modern-day slaves, led by a rotten party that calls itself Communist but is in fact completely subject to the multinationals. To cap it all, the Chinese have just introduced into the constitution the right to private property. China is hardly a good example.

Another important issue is the role of social classes in this revolution. You don't have to refer to Marx, Engels, Lenin, or Trotsky to know that the only way to overturn capitalism, a system in which a minority imposes its will on the majority, is that the working class and the people, we who are the majority and the producers, take the lead in expropriating the enterprises and place them under our control. In that sense, what we mean by socialism is very simply stated.

Yet that is becoming more and more difficult in Venezuela. We workers are not in that

*Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfono de Venezuela. A telecommunications company, which has been nationalized.

**There were four Republics in Venezuela up to 1998. The 4th Republic was anti-Bolivarian and opposed the Chavez government. Chavez created the 5th Republic.

position in the key sectors of the economy to contemplate even joint management, let alone workers' control. The government will not consider the possibility of co-management in strategic sectors.

Our comrades at the Constructora Nacional de Válvulas (today called Inveval)* had to undergo real physical hardships and hunger, and fight like hell before the government finally listened to them and agreed to expropriate the company. The workers of Venepal (now Invepal) — (a paper and cardboard manufacturing company) — had to fight for ten months before they beat the capitalists — while the government looked the other way. And now we have the case of Sanitarios Maracay** where the workers are in the fourth month of occupation for nationalization — but the government still seems less than interested in nationalizations like this.

This suggests that the government's program does not include expropriation, nor will the PSUV's. But if this doesn't happen we will not be moving towards socialism, but only towards some kind of state capitalism with a developmentalist perspective. This leaves private property untouched, and means that capitalist exploitation and the accumulation of profit by a very few will continue.

Q: And what about Chavez's view on the independence of the trade unions?

A: This is a really important issue. The president can't change history and argue that those of us who are fighting for the independence of the trade union movement have somehow been

“poisoned” by the experience of the 4th Republic. On the contrary, trade union autonomy is the key antidote to bureaucratization; that's why the revolution was saved in 2002 and 2003 and as long as it continues it will be the key safeguard of the revolution.

The CTV sold its soul to the old two-party system and the governments it produced. For 40 years the Venezuelan trade union movement lived through its worst period, because workers were puppets in the games played by the old parties (Copei and AD)*** and the bosses' organizations. Venezuelans still remember how AD (Democratic Action) decided the fate of workers, bought and sold contracts, and worked with the government to control the unions and the CTV. We should remember that the bosses' strike of 2002-3 was led by CTV and Fedecamaras (the bosses' organization) working hand in hand. The *raison d'être* of the new UNT union is exactly the opposite: to fight for trade union autonomy, and organize the workers to fight against any attempt to submit them to political control or give in to compromises.

The president needs to remember that during the trade union elections of 2001, when as we all know the CTV orchestrated an enormous

***Copei (Comite de Organización Política Electoral Independiente, Committee of Organization of Electoral Independence, also called socialcristiano, Social Christian) and Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) shared power in governing Venezuela for four decades. Lee Sustar, writing in the *International Socialist Review*, explains their politics as follows:

“The fall of the military dictatorship of General Pérez in 1958 was followed by a political power-sharing deal between the nominally center-left Democratic Action Party (AD) and the conservative Christian Democratic Party (COPEI). The agreement created a duopoly that excluded the Communist Party (PCV), then dominant in organized labor. The Communists were also expelled from the Confederation of Venezuelan Labor (CTV), which was soon dominated by the AD and became a vehicle for U.S. imperialism to subvert organized labor across Latin America.” (“Where is Venezuela Going?” www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=2097)

*The valve factory Inveval was nationalized in April 2005 by the Chavez government and is now functioning under workers' control.

**Sanatorios Maracay produces ceramic bathroom products. The previous owner had closed the factory after several years of unending conflict with the workers. Workers occupied the factory and restarted production for the local community. In December 2006 workers marched to Miraflores Palace to demand its nationalization.

electoral fraud, many workers did not support the alternative slate led by Aristobulo Isturiz precisely because he was seen as the government's candidate. The president has to understand that because of what we call the class instinct, and the levels of class and revolutionary consciousness, as well as because of their relationship with the bosses, the behavior of workers is different from that of peasants, communities or students.

The worst thing about the president's comments, however, is the suggestion that by fighting for the independence of the working class movement we are playing a counter-revolutionary role. That is not true. With other comrades we have built a national trade union current which as well as fighting against bureaucracy and for socialism, is also committed to a fierce defense of trade union autonomy. The 2nd Congress of the UNT was proof of what I am arguing. What happened there was not just about five different factions or currents fighting or some leaders squabbling with each other because we have personal disagreements, and President Chavez is wrong to describe it that way. In fact for the last two years "the mother of all battles" has been under way between two conceptions — on the one hand those who want to tie the trade unions to the government, and on the other those of us who are fighting for the sovereignty and independence of the trade union movement.

We have 30 years of trade union work behind us and we have never compromised with the bosses or the government, let alone with imperialism. And we have no intention of giving way now because the president has described us as "the poisonous residue of the 4th Republic"! We have fought tirelessly within the trade union movement for class principles, democratic methods and an integrity born of proletarian morality. As PST-La Chispa* we are proud to have been the first political organization to sup-

port Hugo Chavez's presidential candidacy. He will remember the first meetings we organized in the La Quizanda district of Valencia and with the textile workers of Aragua. So our history is unimpeachable.

We are the forefront of the struggle against the CTV, we supported the creation of the FBT** and we are enthusiastically behind the UNT. We joined the best activists in resisting the coup of April 11, 2002, and we were centrally involved in the recovery of the oil industry during the bosses' lockout of 2002-3. Our record is an extremely honorable one.

Q: Yet Chavez quoted the great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg in support of his case. How do you see that?

A: The president has tried to use Rosa Luxemburg's writings to support his arguments against trade union independence — but we have to see her positions in the particular political and historical context in which she put them forward. When she discussed the question of trade union autonomy she was referring to the German Social Democratic Party and arguing against syndicalist and bureaucratic tendencies within the unions. But as a Trotskyist I have to recognize that Trotsky was wrong when he argued that the trade unions in Russia should not be autonomous shortly after the Bolshevik victory. Luckily Lenin participated in the debate and he argued for autonomy. Trotsky's arguments had real force, given that this was the time of the war economy, when there was hunger, civil war, physical assaults against working class and trade union leaders and a confrontation with the holy alliance of the imperialist counter-revolution. Yet even so he was wrong while Lenin was right.

**Bolivian Workers Federation. According to Roberto López Sánchez of the UNT, they promoted the elimination of UNT as a Bolivarian union organization and aimed to construct a bureaucratic parapet that could be controlled by the "true socialists and revolutionaries (as they proclaim themselves to be)." (*New Socialist*, www.newsocialist.org/index.php?id=1309)

* Party of Socialist Workers — The Spark

This should tell you that we are not dogmatists, that we study reality and engage critically with our own history. It was not a coincidence that years ago the Stalinists described us as counter-revolutionaries because we were fighting for a new revolution that would sweep away the bureaucracy that had seized power in Russia.

Q: What effect has this discussion had on trade union independence?

A: It has had major effects. We haven't yet been able to hold the UNT internal elections, for example. The argument last year was that we had to give priority to the presidential elections. We were not against calling for a vote for Chavez, but we argued that the best way to campaign for that call was that it should come from a legitimately elected leadership. Unfortunately it did not happen.

The other reality is the tragedy that public sector workers and oil workers are living through at the moment. If the trade union movement were not autonomous and we had to accept what the government or their functionaries were saying, we would have to accept the contract negotiated by Fedepetrol* and the other federations which were not just illegitimate but in fact were part of the group of imperialist employer saboteurs against the industry. Thanks to our independent struggle we prevented that outrage.

The same is true of public sector workers. The current minister is busy making deals with the trade union leaders, who have no authority and are in a minority. Their power stems only from their control of the apparatus and the support they get from government.

And there is another issue related to autonomy. The FBT and the Labor Ministry allege that the UNT is not fulfilling its historic role and should therefore disappear. At the same time they are talking about setting up parallel

structures and put forward a series of proposals which will decimate the trade union movement. It is crucial that these proposals are seriously and carefully discussed by the working class.

It is because we are independent that we are able day in and day out to express without fear or favor our views on the errors, sometimes the appalling errors, that the government is

We wonder when we began to speak of "good" and "bad" capitalists?

committing. Public sector workers cannot be left waiting for 27 months for their contract to be negotiated. And it seems that the oil workers will face a similar fate. The key question is whether it is right to struggle for the independence of the trade union, and whether our exposure of these issues makes us counter-revolutionaries.

Of course this is not just about trade union autonomy. It is also about the relationship between the PSUV and the government. Will all PSUV members be obliged to support the decisions of the government and its bureaucrats? Will the new party be more than just an appendage of government?

I imagine an oil worker who risked his life risking the bosses' sabotage participating in a meeting where the minister will order him to accept a collective contract negotiated with the people who organized the coup . . . ! These are important issues that need to be discussed.

Q: Do you feel you were properly represented by Osvaldo Vera, who spoke at the launch meeting of the PSUV as a representative of the workers?

A: Not at all; he did not raise a single issue of concern to the working class. He just spoke in generalities. And I have to ask myself who de-

*Federación Trabajadores Petróleo — Union of Oil Workers

cided, when and where that he should speak in the name of the Venezuelan working class? For me this is the key question. How is the PSUV being built? I want to express my solidarity with the thousands of my compatriots who went to Caracas to take part in the event and who were not only excluded but mistreated and beaten into the bargain. On television we saw governors, mayors and deputies who do not have mass support occupying the first rows.

There were bosses and bureaucrats present who have defended the bosses, and a number of people who have been accused of corruption and the defense of policies that did not reflect the interests of the people. That is why there is so much discontent — because people know that this process has begun in a very questionable way.

We in C-Cura believe that we have to be clear in our class allegiance. We cannot give space to bosses, landowners, bureaucrats or those guilty of corruption. But it would be completely wrong to exclude the grass roots or those who disagree with the president. Everyone knows that Vera does not represent the working class. The FBT is a minority within the UNT, yet he stood and spoke in the name of all workers. That is why we are fighting for the PSUV to accept internal currents without conditions or disqualifications. Nobody should be forced to dissolve — that would be completely arbitrary and designed to stop discussion before it could begin. And we need to know what the position of the president and the organizing committee is on these matters.

Q: How do you see the future of the PSUV project?

* Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement). The party of Chavez, founded in 1997 as a coalition of non-partisan politicians from all extremes of the political spectrum promoting the Chavez presidency.

** Fatherland for All

*** (We Can). Both PPT and Podemos are left-wing groups. Chavez sought their support.

A: We have to recognize that the people have placed great hopes in it; indeed it is seen by many as a real political victory over the leaderships of the old parties like the MVR*, PPT**, Podemos*** and all those other organizations that for years have fed a tiny group of fat bureaucrats while the majority grew thinner by the day.

However, I must say to you that the way it has been presented by President Chavez will not succeed in bringing in the real class fighters, the honest revolutionaries working within the trade union movement. And that is why we insist on taking part in this debate. We have a view of how to build a revolutionary party in Venezuela, which is imperative if the struggle for a revolutionary process is to continue and develop to the point where it can seize from the capitalists their economic, political and military power. Until now, we have seen nothing of that in the discussion about the PSUV.

What is important is that the debate is open and that all say clearly what they think and what kind of party they want, what its program should be and how it should be built. We are part of that debate and we will not allow anyone to discredit our contribution or accuse us of anything. We will speak honestly, openly, and listen to others in the debate. Our views are different from those put forward by the president and the Organizing Committee. We will make sure that they hear our view and visions for the Venezuelan revolution.

For a thorough description and analysis of the history of Venezuelan politics, see Lee Sustar's article in the *International Socialist Review*, "Where is Venezuela Going?" www.venezuelananalysis.com/articles.php?artno=2097

NOTES

1. "Venezuela: Workers taking back control," June 28, 2005), www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=8183.
2. "Analysis: The battle over Venezuela's union" www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=212%issue=111.
3. www.counterpunch.org/barahona10222005.html.

Bolivia

Latin America's Experiment in Grassroots Democracy

NANCY ROMER

A NEW ALLIANCE OF DEMOCRATICALLY-elected governments with a range of socialist programs is sweeping Latin America. New trade agreements that embrace the possibility of pan-regional alliances are being forged. Venezuela, Ecuador, and to a significant extent Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, and Brazil articulate some policies of uplifting the poor and challenging U.S. and neoliberal hegemony. Other nations are making their way to this list.

Among these synergistic movements, no country in Latin America is better positioned to become a democratic socialist state than Bolivia. It has all the potential elements of a powerful bottom-up people's movement, rich in cultural and organizational forms. It has the poorest and most indigenous population in South America, has overthrown more governments than any other nation in the hemisphere, and has sufficient if yet untapped natural resources, if distributed fairly, to dramatically improve the lot of its people. It likely has the most varied and effective grassroots, egalitarian organizations in the world.

In December 2005, that movement elected its first indigenous president, Evo Morales, and a national assembly majority organized through the electoral party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS — movement toward socialism). Many Bolivian activists speak of a “radical humanism” rather than a strictly class-based society, a multi-

leader, multi-movement power and “pluri-national” society that derives ideas and strength from its multiplicity; many seek a movement that exerts control rather than a party or government that seizes control. All of these goals are contested.

The struggle for the future of Bolivia poses the most fundamental questions facing socialist transformation. Will the grassroots movements succeed in being independent of the government, continuing to exert power from the bottom and succeed in winning the nationalization of natural resources, economic development, redistribution of land, basic changes in the constitution, expansion of the public sector? Can these changes occur in the face of intimidation and threats (and potential military incursions) from the national elites representing the interests of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and U.S. Embassy? Can the varied visions of a socialist project, articulated by the indigenous, workers, peasants, urban, rural, and varied regions, join together in sufficient solidarity to prevail against the forces of reaction as well as left sectarianism? Can there be sufficient diversified economic development to create the material conditions of a decent standard of living for all? These are the big questions, answered in small and large ways by each of the movements, political actors, and policies in Bolivia. The direction of the story line will have an enormous impact on the nature and outcome of the overall socialist project in Latin America.

Neoliberalism's Assault on the Bolivian People

LATIN AMERICAN LEFTISTS CALL neoliberalism “capitalismo salvaje” (savage capitalism). This

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project of the international corporate class started in 1973 with its frontal attack on the welfare state of Chile, installing Pinochet's fascist, neoliberal government. Its kickoff assault

If a revolutionized, perhaps a revolutionary, state that serves its people through the control of the workers and peasants is the goal, then gradualism may not work at all. And what would become of it given world forces today?

in the first world was the NYC Fiscal "Crisis" which succeeded in crushing the labor movement and signaling the decline of the public sector. During the 1980's, Reagan and Thatcher further refined the ideology and applied it relentlessly to the developing world and Latin America in particular.

The goal of the neoliberal program is to squeeze money from the bottom to the top, from the poor to the rich. It forces a pro-business climate by changing the laws to allow the corporations to simply take over land and industries and lay off the workers. It drives small farmers off the land and creates massive farms using chemically-based agricultural practices harmful to the land, workers, and consumers. It eliminates and/or privatizes government services and denies social rights that the people previously won in struggle. It deepens the misery of darker-skinned people and uses racism as a means to create social divisions. It buys and sells governments and makes them obey. Collaborating media giants convince the rest of us that "there is no alternative." As David Harvey's theory of capital accumulation by dispossession asserts, they institute a wealth creation program for the rich and an unjust program for all oth-

ers, a program where the rich harvest all the gains and the poor catch all the liabilities. They pray to the god of the "market" and convince us that this makes "common sense."

Bolivia's "Perfect Storm"

LANDLOCKED BOLIVIA HAS BEEN A NATION OF great natural wealth (silver and tin historically, and now natural gas) and great political oppression. Like other colonized peoples, the indigenous and later mestizo peoples of the region saw the profits from their labor and land go to the first world, initially through monarchies, then through corporations that stole their natural resources, captured their governments, and created local mestizo elites to do their bidding. Most of these elites were lighter-skinned Bolivians, but not always.

The powerful use of racism by capitalism has been a constant theme in Bolivia's history. With its large indigenous population, most Bolivians who consider themselves mestizos are also dark-skinned; the culture, the national monuments and treasures, the music and dance, the foods, the methods of political protest, are rooted in their indigenous heritage. While indigenous peoples have been consistently repressed, oppressed and exploited, their cultures have remained substantially intact and have served as sources of ideas, solidarity, organizing methods, and power. But still, as in almost all nations of the world, the darker-skinned people have the least power and status and are significantly more likely to live in poverty.

Since the 1980's, structural adjustments imposed by the IMF-World Bank-U.S. Embassy to pay off debts, meant massive firing of public workers, in education, health, utilities, transportation, and sanitation. With international barriers to capital eliminated, the flight of capital from less profitable labor markets like Bolivia to places with more docile workers like China, further laid off 35,000 unionized factory workers. Plummeting tin prices and the militancy of the politically powerful miners union motivated

the lay-off of thousands of miners: in 1985 there were 30,000 miners, in 1987 there were only 7,000. The new “pro-business” laws allowed land to be bought up by foreign and local agribusiness as well as permitting local markets to be flooded with cheap U.S. government subsidized agricultural products from the United States. This made small scale, even subsistence farming impossible. Newly privatized public service jobs in energy, transportation, and utilities led to multinational corporation control over vital parts of the economy and the further lay-offs of an additional 14,000 workers in these industries. In a population of just under 9 million, over half under 18 years, these layoffs had enormous impact. Pushed off the land and out of their workplaces, unemployed people searching for ways to earn their living flooded the cities and created impoverished makeshift communities immediately adjacent to them. Most of the jobs they eventually got, often at levels way below subsistence, were in the informal economy, selling in local markets, often sitting at stalls for 8-12 hours a day with pitifully little to show for it. Many worked in tiny family enterprises doing contract production work. The real income of Bolivians dropped significantly during this period. Bolivian migrant labor in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, the U.S. and Spain, provided remittances that kept many families alive. The majority of people caught in this historic sweep, were the indigenous.

The bold moves of the government elites representing the interests of the U.S.- and European-based corporations, created a reaction and a unity among key elements of society that ended in a “perfect storm” for revolution in Bolivia. The segments of the population key to riding out this storm and turning it in their favor were the indigenous peoples, unions and marginalized workers, coca growers, landless peasants, women, and students uniting in a “re-articulation” of left-indigenous forces. Organizing to defeat the sources of shared oppression, each sector rose up non-violently and unified

in the period between 2000 and 2005.

While neoliberals would rather rule by economic and political power, when those fail they turn to violent repression. But government murders of hundreds of demonstrators and activists only strengthened the activists’ resolve. Their unity across sectors was based on their shared analysis of neoliberalism with racism as its handmaiden. The poor and working class, the darkest-skinned people in the society, unfettered by a government which had so long ago stopped serving their needs, joined together to take charge of their own government and lives in what became the first revolutionary movement of the 21st century, ending in an election of a self-described socialist-leaning government. We will briefly look at each of these sectors in turn and then examine the dynamics yielding accomplishments and failures, of both the new government and the people’s movements, since that election.

Indigenous Peoples

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTOR in this narrative is the huge, displaced, and poverty stricken indigenous populations that amassed around the big cities over the last 25 years. With these changes in employment and urbanization came shifts in the fulcrum of political agency, from class-based organizations, i.e., unions, to territorially-based organizations often focusing on racial/ethnic exclusion and natural resources. These organizations were inspired by and interdependent with indigenous-campesino as well as workplace-based unionism.

La Paz has a population of 800,000 and is perched 12,000 feet above sea level. El Alto is located immediately above La Paz, right below the international airport, at an elevation of about 14,000 feet. In 1950, El Alto’s population was 11,000; by 2001 the official census was 650,000 but many estimate El Alto’s population at closer to 1 million. Its geographic location between the capital city and the international airport is strategically crucial, and provides a ready tactical site

— the “bloqueo” or roadblock stopping all traffic on major roads — and thus a direct source of power to the mostly indigenous population of El Alto. El Alto’s residents’ close ties to their indigenous roots and their pueblos or rural home communities, their social isolation from much of the rest of La Paz and Bolivian society, the discrimination and racism they experience every day, has toughened the people of El Alto and made them depend upon their own leadership, their own visions for the future.

Over the last 20 years, the people of Bolivia have suffered a great decline in their standards of living and the break up of their historic communities and families. Now in El Alto, 67 percent live below the poverty line, 60 percent have no sanitary facilities in their homes, 60 percent of residents are under 25 and only 10 percent over 50; Sixty-nine percent of the adults are in the informal sector or contingent work, commonly in family enterprises, and 43 percent of them are wage-workers mostly in manufacturing and services often in the home — the highest percentage in the nation: they are a poor, uncomfortable, displaced, young and somewhat desperate group. Their homes and markets are incredibly densely packed; their commerce, mostly informal, dominates community life. They bring back and forth anything they can to their rural and urban communities and families and most are tightly connected to their pueblos. Many mayors of these pueblos reside mainly in El Alto, indicating the political and economic flow between El Alto and the mostly Aymara Altiplano (Andean highlands). When problems arise in a particular pueblo, Alteños (those living in El Alto) have sprung into action in defense of these towns. These solidarities are part of the social and political networks that unify both identity and political action within the nation.

Raul Zibechi describes spread out, horizontal, extended-family dwellings and streets as in El Alto, that create new forms of living/productive/social/political spaces from which the

previously marginalized or “subaltern” peoples organize. New urban activism emerges from the power of being outside the grip of the corporations and the state, outside their hierarchical structures of wages and social control, outside the geographic grid unifying the capitalist cities. The fierce resistance Alteños present is demonstrated repeatedly. Alteños destroyed the pedestrian overpasses from which the repressive military would spy and fire upon residents. Thus the military could only enter the community through the streets and be confronted directly by the people.

Zibechi points out that the logic of the factory and of capitalism is the homogenization and hierarchical organization of the working masses. After capital flight, massive layoffs, and abandonment of the factory and welfare state model, we then see a shift toward heterogeneity and horizontal structures and relationships. In El Alto, the 400–550 neighborhood organizations have a tight representative and service delivery structure (Federation of Neighborhood Assemblies — FEJUVE), parent councils connected to schools that have parallel local and city-wide organizations, and participation that builds broad experience and local “organic” leadership. A system of “rotational democracy” has developed in which participation within each family, block, or neighborhood to the higher level of organization may be frequently changed or rotated, insuring very broad involvement and political education as well as frequent turnover of leaders. Multiple leaders are seen as sturdier and less likely to be bought or killed off. Unlike unions that tend to replicate the hierarchical structure of the capitalist workplace, decision-making and power in these neighborhood structures are much more horizontal. Attendance is required but once the meeting starts a deep democratic vision is reported to transpire.

Alteños had long ago stopped relying on the Bolivian government on every level and had a parallel government to the official one: they collect taxes and provide direct services to the

people. They even have a local, indigenous and extra-legal structure in which they try criminals according to indigenous values, not written law, and have gone so far as to lynch people they see as having committed crimes. This is the base of the power of the El Altos of the world — the people that capitalism and racism exploit and abandon and the spaces and organizations they create to resist and rebuild. Zibechi posits that Marxism alone cannot explain the way forward; rather a new amalgam of theory, ideas, and, moreover, practice, will prevail in leading and explaining the movement. Real challenges rarely come from organizations that mirror capitalist organizations; perhaps they can only come from structures that are formed by an altogether different physics.

With these tight organizational structures, internal education, and political solidarities that are often unseen or unnoted by others, El Alto has effectively flexed its political muscle frequently over questions of autonomy, exploitation and government policy. Using the tactic of “el bloqueo,” tens of thousands of their people organize to collectively exert their power in forms that are rooted in their cultural histories and their visions of the future. The Katarista movement, named after the 18th century indigenous warrior Tupak Katari, began in the mid-1970’s and joined an analysis of indigenous exploitation and exclusion to that of social class. This influence helped to forge indigenous-worker alliances.

“Black February” 2003, massive street demonstrations of workers, indigenous, progressive professionals and bourgeoisie, university students and teachers, was initiated by high school students in El Alto and then joined by their counterparts in La Paz. They cried out against further taxes on wages and the illegitimacy of the old government. Rising up again in “Red October” 2003, that same coalition ultimately ousted hated President “Goni” Lozada, and demanded the nationalization of the country’s gas reserves and a process to create a new con-

stitution recognizing indigenous rights and organizations.

In 2005 these same united forces participated in a general strike led by the indigenous *Alteños*: they surrounded La Paz and blocked its roads around the question of nationalization of gas. These actions led to the resignation of President Carlos Mesa and a new election for president. Confrontations with the Bolivian military were constant, but often mitigated by indigenous women spreading the indigenous flag as a tablecloth on which they shared meals with the soldiers, symbolically both welcoming them to join with their people and showing their own dominance in the struggle. United with parallel organizing in other parts of the country, this kind of massive coordinated struggle, drawing over two million protesters out on the streets and roads, many for days on end, resulted in the fall of two pro-neoliberal governments and ultimately the election of Evo Morales, the nation’s first indigenous and socialist president.

These scenes echoed Bolivia’s iconic symbol of challenge to colonial rule: in 1781, Tupac Katari (like his counterpart Tupac Amaru, both Andean indigenous revolutionaries) and Bartolina Sisa massed the Aymara around La Paz and held it under siege for weeks. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, scholar of Bolivian revolutionary movements, suggests that “The nightmare of the Indian siege continues to disturb the repose of Bolivian Creoledom.” Fear of the “dark masses” plays upon the minds of ruling elites, reflecting intense racism and the obvious reality of numbers on the side of the indigenous. They may fear the revenge they might deserve.

Union Militancy

BOLIVIA HAS A LONG HISTORY OF UNION power and organization. Since the 1930’s a wide range of leftist groups were in the leadership of a militant trade union movement that defined the left wing of Bolivian politics. In particular, the miners’ union was extremely strong, ideological, often utopian socialist, and served as the lead-

ership for the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), Bolivia's workers federation. They, along with indigenous farmers, were the core activists in establishing a democratic revolution in 1952. This revolution, organized by the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) succeeded in wresting control from the oligarchy through an alliance of the middle class, professionals, urban dwellers, workers and peasants that accomplished a number of important reforms. It nationalized the mines and Standard Oil in Bolivia, creating local participatory structures, and establishing some land reform. Lack of implementation of the improved laws, exclusion of indigenous peoples from positions of power, and continued economic domination by U.S. and multi-national corporations ultimately reunited the people's movements in continuous waves of rebellion. However, it created an historical memory of the possibility of revolution for workers and campesinos and thus informed their alliances and politics.

Since the 1950s the main organizational form in Bolivia had been the union: the blind beggars had a union, ice cream vendors had a union, retirees had a union, and of course workers in every sizable workplace and campesinos had unions too. In addition to bargaining contracts for their members, they played an enormous role in the broader social and political struggles — the activists were mostly social unionists who understood the need to fight the bigger wars of the people in order to win victories in the battles for workers' rights. The miners and the teachers union in Bolivia, both heavily influenced by Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky as well as utopian socialists, were major players in the historic labor movement that evolved in Bolivia. The organizational and ideological

grounding of the union movement has affected all other progressive movements in Bolivia today.

But since the 1970s, workplace-based labor unions began their steady decline both in the size of their memberships and in their importance to the political life of the nation. By the 1990s, the combination of the flight of capital to more compliant labor markets and structural adjustments, mass layoffs occurred and the people became deeply impoverished. The great labor movement that resided in the miners' union in Potosí and Oruro fragmented as their workforce and source of power drifted to the cities and to the agricultural Chapare to search for any work.

By 1990, 9 out of 10 new jobs were in the informal economy. Furthermore, changes in

labor legislation in the 1990s prohibited labor unions in workplaces with fewer than 20 workers. These forces created a "new working class," one that looked different from earlier incarnations, but a working class that was able to be organized and politically vibrant.

By the mid-1990s some Bolivian unionists, such as Oscar Olivera, former shoe factory worker and president of Cochabamba's Central Labor Council, took stock. After studying the changes in the workforce, they concluded that very few workers labored in sizable factories or workplaces, that most were part-time and/or temporary workers, and that the major site of work had become their own homes in family units, in their local communities, and the informal economy. They further concluded that organizing workers into traditional unions would not work. For unions to stay relevant and retain their historic role of defending the working class, they had better do their organizing in the communities where the political action was

The blind beggars had a union, ice cream vendors had a union, retirees had a union, and of course workers in every sizable workplace and campesinos had unions too.

likely to occur. They decided to use their skills and capacities to create a new venue and organizational form to represent and lead the impoverished working class.

Water Wars — Territorial Organizing for Pachamama — Mother Earth

LIKE MANY MOVEMENTS IN THE GLOBAL south, a major fight in which labor and other sectors participated was about water. In Cochabamba, as in much of Bolivia, the water system was built and maintained by individual families and communities, especially in the poorer communities, and later unified by the city itself. When the old government announced that they would sell the water system to a private company, a Bechtel subsidiary, Aguas de Tunari, the people rose up. The people were even prohibited from collecting rainwater as it competed with the privatized water system!

In the struggle that began in 1999, a “Coordinadora” or people’s assembly was organized to lead what the Bolivian people called “the water war.” By 2000, the Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (the coordinating committee in defense of water and life) had grown into a movement with representatives from the various neighborhoods in Cochabamba, as well as the unions, churches, universities and schools, nearby farmers, and NGOs. The local citizens, Cochabambinos, knew that privatization of the water system they had built with their own hands and given to them by their ancestors and Pachamama. would mean higher costs for water that they could not pay.

The Coordinadora became the locus of the struggle that united tens of thousands of Cochabambinos in a horizontal, non-hierarchical structure. The Coordinadora held meetings, mostly outdoors, with hundreds and sometimes thousands of people debating strategy and tactics, voting in very loosely defined representation, achieving consensus, and then releasing the participants to return to their groups and act. The structure and implementation of deci-

sions was loose but powerful because people felt the importance, seriousness, and agency of their efforts. No micromanagement here. No checking with the leader. Meetings often went on for many, many hours, sometimes for days, with constant reinforcements of food, etc.

The Coordinadora signaled the necessary unity between urban and rural political actors, strengthening the hand of each. This rural-urban, multi-class “territorially-based” alliance involved “new social subjects,” specifically not labor unions or even just neighborhood associations. Alvaro García Linera, now Vice President of Bolivia and a sociologist, described the new forms of organizing such as the Coordinadora: they “do not create a border between members and nonmembers in the way that unions used to do.” Susan Spronk suggests that “According to this view, trade unions with their struggles over legal contracts, closed membership and hierarchical leadership structures no longer represent the interests of the majority of the population, especially those engaged in informal types of work . . . the Coordinadora . . . is a better vehicle for organizing the working class because the only criterion for membership was active participation in the daily struggles.”

Massive peaceful civic strikes and road-blocks shutting down the region around Cochabamba were met with violence (over 100 people were injured) and arrests of leaders by government forces. Mass demonstrations continued and were further echoed by campesinos in the Altiplano (including La Paz and El Alto) and the Chapare (farm region close to Cochabamba). Ultimately the government capitulated and rescinded the privatization scheme in the face of this resilient and complex movement to protect the natural resources that the people painstakingly developed by themselves.

This process of mass organizing through a Coordinadora was repeated in Cochabamba, and in other parts of Bolivia again in 2003 with the “gas war” in which the Bolivian people rose

up against their misery and demanded that the great wealth of the nation, now natural gas or hydrocarbons, provided by Pachamama, be returned to the people: they demanded the nationalization of gas. This demand was echoed across the nation and led to a national referendum supporting the nationalization of gas and the fall of hated President Lozada.

The issue of privatization of water reverberated again in La Paz in January 2005, as the prices for the privatized water rose dramatically and as service to surrounding areas of El Alto was denied altogether. A general strike in El Alto, organized primarily by the federation of unions (COR) and neighborhood organizations (FEJUVE) yielded the return of public ownership of the water system. Territorially-based organizations demanding control of natural resources, the “price of fire,” of the necessities of life, intensified.

Coca Growers (Cocaleros)

THE COCA GROWERS or cocaleros from the nearby Chapare, Bolivia’s most fertile and temperate region, were allies of unions, workers, and community residents from Cochabamba. The population of the Chapare swelled as privatization and then closing of the mines forced mass migrations of politicized, mostly indigenous, miners into farming one of the few cash crops — coca. Chewing coca leaves has been a sacred and social tradition of indigenous peoples in Bolivia since pre-colonial times. They use it like caffeine: it keeps you awake, allows you to work for long hours without food, curbs your appetite, keeps you warm in the cold Andean climate, and gives you energy. Bolivians take a large number of dried coca leaves, chew them intensely for hours into a wad, extract the juice, and enjoy.

During the years of neoliberal-inspired economic decline, masses of laid off miners and other workers made their way to the Chapare in order to farm coca. Ex-miners received \$150 as severance pay and many spent half of that on

coca seeds to begin to grow this sustaining crop. Cocalero unions grew into muscular power bases in the markets and the communities; they established armed self-defense committees that protected their families from coca eradication programs enforced by the Bolivian military or counterinsurgency forces supported by the United States. The six major cocalero unions ultimately united into the organization, the Confederation of Campesino Workers’ Unions of Bolivia (CSUTCB); it was seen as a prime leader of national resistance to neoliberalism. The coca growers union opposed the use and sale of coca for export as cocaine; the market they defended was domestic and multifaceted. However, some cocaleros did participate in the world traffic in cocaine for the United States and other markets. The U.S. government’s “war on drugs” gave the Bolivian government a ready excuse to repress the growing movement of agricultural workers who were demanding the right to earn a living on the land as well as a right to own and grow what they wished on it. Coca leaf production was one of the few viable crops and the coca farmers were not going to let it be taken from them. To them, the U.S.’s “war on drugs” was a war on the farmers; it certainly was a war on the leadership of the farmer’s movement as they jailed many of the leaders, including many who are now government officials. Like the United States’ “war on terror”, the earlier “war on drugs” offered a way to destroy any political opposition to the local elite government. The United States even objected to coca use for food, clothing, and medicinal purposes.

In classic contradictory fashion, the neoliberal expansion of local resource exploitation (e.g., in logging and rubber tapping) increased the national demand for coca by Bolivian workers in these industries. The unification of the federated grassroots organizations of cocaleros, women farmers, and indigenous groups created the Assembly for the Sovereignty of the People (ASP), which elevated two major

cocalero leaders, Filipe Quispe and Evo Morales. The cocaleros' proven organizational effectiveness and numbers, plus their willingness to defend themselves, united indigenous, labor and national sovereignty issues into a powerful whole. They formed the electorally-based Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) which lost its first national election in 2002 by a margin of just 2 percent. In 2005, MAS successfully organized the electoral victory of Evo Morales, the nation's first indigenous president and a symbol of Latin American independence from U.S. hegemony.

Landless Peasants Movement

GEOGRAPHICALLY AND ORGANIZATIONALLY close to the cocaleros were the landless peasants organized into the Movimiento Sin Tierra — MST — people without land. Internationally organized through Via Campesina, or "peasants' way," with Brazil's MST being the strongest branch of this hardy tree, peasants have shared experiences of global capital under neoliberalism taking their land, making them homeless, and destroying their livelihoods and ways of life. MST-Bolivia is primarily organized in central Bolivia — in the Chapare — and in the east — around conservative Santa Cruz.

MST-Bolivia engaged in intense land occupations, mass demonstrations and marches across the country, enjoying the support of other progressive forces in demanding agrarian land reform with full implementation. On the very day that MST activists completed their cross-nation march and arrived in La Paz, November 28, 2006, the Bolivian Congress passed new agrarian land reform, beginning a process of transferring land not being productively used by present large landowners to landless farmers. Of course this has touched off enormous controversy and fear among the landowners.

Recently, the MST-Bolivia campesinos have attempted to establish farmer cooperatives and collectives in which they share the various processes involved in agricultural work. These

experiments in collective farms are small scale and deeply democratic in process. These farming communities lack basic services and are far away from markets, making life very difficult indeed, and they are the frequent targets of violent attacks by thugs and right wingers. Their creative popular education, based on models of Italian Antonio Gramsci and Brazilian Paulo Friere, is building the political infrastructure and community necessary to advance peasant interests. Again, they mirror similar strategies in Brazil and other nations with strong peasant movements.

The Bolivian Women's Movement

AS IN MANY OTHER DEVELOPING NATIONS during the 1980s and 90s, NGOs of many sorts spread over Bolivia's political scene, some productive, others less so. NGOs modeled after Western liberal feminist organizations attempted to create a women's movement that would increase women's lot via representational rights. Often allied with the politics of the Bolivian elites and UN power structure, they ignored or tried to represent the interests of Bolivian women without their deep participation. Autonomous Latin American feminists refer to this phenomenon as "gender technocracy." While some middle class and professional Bolivian women connected to these NGOs, most working class, poor and indigenous women did not.

However, a range of more authentic women's organizations emerged in response to the patriarchy and exclusion Bolivian women experienced. Based on a politics of decolonization and radical democratization, women's organizations articulated a varied mix of pro-indigenous, pro-worker, anti-neoliberal, anti-patriarchal politic. Women were key actors in all the movements that braided together to form the new government and played particularly strong roles in the neighborhood councils and campesino/a movements; they gained experience and confidence as their roles expanded.

Anarcha-feminist Mujeres Creando (women rising) saw itself as autonomous but aligned with the other progressive parts of the movement. Mujeres Creando seeks a dialogue that exposes everyday experiences of women as a reflection of the structural problems and exclusions of the society. Their creative street actions and communications have expanded awareness and militantly nurtured women's broader participation. They have helped to identify patriarchy in the

Right now the country is deeply polarized, east vs. west, indigenous vs. mestizo, rich vs. poor. There is talk of a civil war.

movement; while in its early stages, it has been widely accepted, at least theoretically if not in action, by the broader movement.

The Feminist Assembly, joining indigenous and urban organizations, is a parallel organization to the Constituent Assembly movement, and hopes to press for fuller representation of women in the new constitution and a greater focus on women's role in society. It also seeks to challenge how colonialism is internalized and reproduced in society. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a prominent feminist leader with strong indigenous ties, sees the creative power of women in a wide range of organizations and movements, but identifies the "left mestizo perspective" represented by Vice President Linera, with a liberal vision of women's citizenship, as not nearly transformative enough.

Students, Teachers, Universities

BOLIVIA'S EXTENSIVE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC higher education, historically enjoying political support from the unions and other progressive forces, has suffered the de-funding and privatization schemes seen all over the hemisphere and be-

yond. The largest public university in La Paz, Universidad Mayor de San Andreas, is dramatically underfunded, lacking in everything from computers (only one in each department) to desks and chairs. The students are poor and working class and scrappy enough to hang in for long periods of time — commonly 10 years — to finish their coursework for degrees. More privileged Bolivians send their children to either private universities or go abroad. By charter the large public universities in the cities across Bolivia are self-governing and supposedly off limits to government intervention. Major policy and leadership are determined by a council of students and faculty, organized through their respective departments.

Unions of faculty, unions of administrators, and student federations are all linked to national organizations and play varied roles at different times and places. The bureaucratization and ossification of unions in Bolivia in general is particularly true of those in universities. Zibechi explains that the union bureaucracy mimics the organization of capitalism and renders it impotent to challenge the system it claims it wants to change. Student federations, mostly Trotskyist-led, with much further left analyses, have generated little fire. Perhaps because of their somewhat privileged class position, university activists are likely to follow along only after a struggle is already in full swing. This was less true of students in El Alto, who, through the Movimiento Jovenes de Octubre (movement of youth of October 2003), fought for and won the expansion of the Universidad Publica El Alto that provides an intellectual and organizing link between its students and faculty and the community around them.

During the period of structural adjustments in the 1980s and 90s, Bolivian public universities suffered greatly, with endless cutbacks in faculty, staff, salaries, and the imposition of student fees that did not exist. In the past, faculty, staff, and students had previously been much

more involved in community life — in politics and service — but the neoliberal influence shut that down. High stakes tests were imposed and competitive admissions policies established that were open to corruption. The government attempted to influence the curriculum to address corporate rather than community needs, and casualized the teaching workforce so that now 80 percent of courses are taught by part-timers. This mirrors the patterns throughout the Western Hemisphere if not the world. Despite the “autonomous” structure, there is plenty of indirect government influence. During the upsurges of 2000, 2003, and 2005, there was a great deal of student activism and radicalism; faculty and staff tagged behind but did join. University people participated in the Coordinadora in Cochabamba and neighborhood councils in El Alto and beyond. During the 2005 upsurge, the Universidad Autonoma de San Simon in Cochabamba hosted major conferences and meetings of the Coordinadora and others, serving as a site of communication and struggle, welcoming the masses to their own public universities that should serve them. Frequent strikes marking the first five years of the century made it hard to complete course work.

But the universities became safe harbors rather than battleships. In contrast, the public school teachers’ union (primary and secondary teachers) whose work lives are much more proletarianized and whose students are significantly poorer, have been highly significant political actors on the Bolivian stage left. They have played the repeated role of teacher unions throughout Latin America that identify with the interests of their charges, are often embedded in their own working class communities, and fight with ideological intensity. Similarly, high school students, particularly those from El Alto, have demonstrated a more aggressive and sustained political presence compared with their more privileged college compañeros. The new government has begun to invest in rebuilding the public school system: its needs are enormous.

Evo Morales has promised to apply 30 percent of the proceeds from the nationalized hydrocarbons to the public universities to be spent equally on infrastructure, research, and community outreach programs. This rebuilding of the public sector, and especially linking it to service to the communities, further challenges the neoliberal policies that diminished the public universities. So the faculty and staff are fairly hopeful and pleased with the new government at least for right now.

Regional Difference and the Right Wing Response

BOLIVIA HAS SEVERAL DISTINCT REGIONS that have yielded very different political and social alignments. The Andean Altiplano, including La Paz and El Alto (with 1/3 of the total population of the country) is mostly poor and indigenous. This includes the major mining areas, such as Potosí and Oruro. The Chapare and Cochabamba, in the hills of the middle of Bolivia, are also heavily indigenous. Both regions have suffered the most economically and have spawned militant, progressive people’s movements.

The lowlands, in the tropical eastern part of the nation, has a different history. It is the nation’s wealthiest region, with the greatest oil and gas reserves, fertile land, and with what little manufacturing is left in Bolivia. It is also the location of the largest latifundias or mass industrial farms owned by the oligarchs who remain. Santa Cruz, the largest city in this region, which identifies itself as the most mestizo, has been the heart of the right wing reaction to MAS and Evo Morales’s presidency. Culturally it seems closer to Miami than to La Paz and openly denigrates people from “the west,” meaning indigenous people from La Paz, El Alto, Potosí, and even Cochabamba. As a region they rejected the candidacy of Evo Morales, elected representatives from right wing parties, and have resisted reforms proposed by the new government.

The Cruceños (those who live in Santa Cruz) have demanded “autonomy” from the rest of Bolivia, wanting to keep the proceeds from their rich oil and natural gas reserves under their regional control. This would undermine the future of the national economy. They are also demanding that the congress achieve a two-thirds vote for any change of law — that would give the right wing capacity to block any changes they did not like. There are constant rumors that “los indios” are vengefully taking over and that Evo is encouraging the wholesale expropriation of everyone’s land and homes by the landless. Using the militant methods so common on the left, the right wing Cruceños have staged hunger strikes, mock lynchings of indigenous people depicting “Evo” and “Línera,” and mass demonstrations of up to a million people right before Christmas, staged at their massive statue of El Cristo, to oppose Evo’s administration and their reforms. Organizations such as the Unión Juvenil Crucenista (youth organization) and the Comité Cívico Pro-Santa Cruz play major roles politically and sometimes sponsor violent interchanges with western, indigenous, pro-MAS people. Oscar Olivera asserts that the right wing has two interrelated goals: to destabilize the new state and to spread fear. This is supported by the right-leaning mass media.

Right now the country is deeply polarized, east vs. west, indigenous vs. mestizo, rich vs. poor. The economic dimension seems to hold the greatest weight as always, whereas the other dynamics, especially that of race, are more of a foil or deflection to drum up support for the right among the Cruceño poor and working class. Nicole Fabricant, on the ground in Santa Cruz one year after Evo’s election reports, “The country is completely polarized. Cruceños (from Santa Cruz) who were supporting Evo’s administration and held powerful positions, recently resigned. There is talk of a civil war, paramilitary groups are walking up and down the streets monitoring indigenous organizations, left-wing

NGOs etc . . .”

The New MAS Government: Initiative, Contradictions, and Missteps

ANYONE WHO HAS PARTICIPATED in a successful movement for official power, whether a union leadership or government, knows that proposing and pressuring for change is much easier than actually carrying it out. Formal power brings with it the weight of the law, and raises the questions of if and how to balance forces to buy some political space in which to maneuver, and if and when to rid the system of its old power structure in order to shepherd in a new one. Alliances and actions, in small and large ways, are critical; and a window of opportunity stays open just so long before forces of right and left begin to act upon the formalized power. Knowing which forces form the true base, the movements the new power serves, goals, and ideology of the leaders will inform a strategy of the new power. Times of formalized power are exhilarating but hard ones, indeed, for all the actors in this grand and important drama.

The goals of the people’s movements that brought Evo into power are: 1) empowerment of indigenous peoples previously denied; 2) recovery of natural resources, e.g. water, gas, oil, forest, land, for the common good not commodification; and 3) restructuring the political system to create equality, respect for differences, and transparency. In order to achieve these grand goals nonviolently, the government must constantly mobilize the people’s movements and minimize attacks by the forces of reaction. Quite a balancing act — and perhaps an impossible one! This is all made harder yet with a party that is mass-based but does not offer sufficient space for true debate of strategy and tactics. The relative newness of MAS, its many competing forces, and its political heterogeneity makes clear direction difficult. The debate on both the importance and specific role of the party, in this case MAS, as an electoral

not a vanguard or political party, is endless but crucial in defining a way forward.

Evo's inauguration in January 2006 signaled his dual loyalties to the indigenous movement (a ritual at Tiwanaku, the ancient site of indigenous power) and the Bolivian nation (official La Paz swearing in). Traditionally dressed, Evo welcomed the movement into the state, promising transformation. But soon after that glorious prelude came an ominous sign. In February/March 2006 airline workers of the privatized LAN in La Paz went on strike to nationalize a failing airline. At first Evo was supportive, but when the airline workers moved to take over the airline, they were stopped by the military. The LAN workers saw this as Evo's refusal to break with legalities in order to support social justice. Others saw this as the government's public commitment to the rule of law: if the law doesn't serve the people then change the law. But that must await the future. This theme repeats itself frequently. Olivera reports that "Evo is in a house that is not his" . . . rather, he is heading a government enforcing capitalist laws.

The legacy of neoliberalism and the intense poverty of the people have created some painful divisions in the working class. There are contradictory interests held by the "new working classes" intent on controlling public services and natural resources and getting the most for their collective money. But this often comes into conflict with the demands of workers in these industries, the "old working classes," who want more jobs in these industries with higher pay and benefits. Poor people in the "new working classes" often feel that public service workers make so much more than average workers. Deals cut between public service workers unions and privatizing forces have notoriously undercut class unity. This contradiction is further complicated by the continued lack of government funds for certain public services. The "people" end up administering an inadequate system that tries to shortchange its workers!

In contrast, Evo has expanded economic support for the military and police. Unlike Chavez who came up through the Venezuelan military, Evo Morales has been seen as "the other" by the Bolivian military. He was the leader of the forces that the military was ordered to crush. Though some elements in the military supported the MAS, some advisors feared that the military could be prime actors in creating alliances with right wing forces for a coup. So early on, Evo invested in relationships with the military by retiring 28 of the most right wing officers and promoting those from intermediary ranks. He opened the military academy to indigenous candidates and constructed new barracks. Evo located the military as central to the nationalization of the gas fields and tin industry and put them in charge of twenty-five new technical centers serving industrial development, thus creating an alliance between the military and the people's movement toward nationalization of natural resources. He created alliances between the military and campesinos in crowd control so that they could, together, lead a victorious parade ushering in the constituent assembly process and re-arming the campesinos.

Another example of these contradictions is provided by the miners. During the years that the mines were partially privatized and tin prices were way down and thousands of miners were laid off, individual miners formed small cooperatives to work the tin mines while a small number of miners stayed with the union and continued to work for the smaller still-nationalized mines. Now that international tin prices are way up and tin mining seems more possible, the competition between the cooperatives and unionized miners has been so intense that in early October, 2006, a violent battle between these two groups ensued in Huanuni in the state of Oruro, leaving 17 dead and dozens wounded. Federal police were called in to end the bloodshed, some say to repress activists. Both groups of miners were Evo and MAS supporters, but

both feel abused by Evo's desire to appease both sides. Where jobs are scarce and very difficult (miners usually die from lung disease or accidents within 10 years after entering the mines) and there are few alternatives, groups that might be allied under other circumstances can fight to the death for the chance to work and therefore survive.

Furthermore, Evo's practice of appointing movement leaders to official positions can complicate matters. The first minister of mines was the president of the cooperativas' union and later replaced by the unionized miner's leader. The latter was wise enough to advocate for the hiring of 4,000 cooperative miners to the newly opened nationalized mines, thus beginning to forge some peace.

The use of sectoral leaders in government roles has additional shades of difficulty. Very few new government appointees had any experience to support their transition to government leadership, which can work both ways. But Evo has felt it necessary to bring in, as reinforcements, many of the old more experienced government functionaries, many of whom are white or mestizo. Vice President Linera, a white, highly educated Bolivian with a radical history, had led the push toward a more effective government that has angered many of the movement leaders who feel pushed out. Other movement leaders, such as trade unionist Oscar Olivera of the Cochabamba Water Wars, have stepped aside from government roles, believing that the role of movement leaders is to continue to organize the people and to exert pressure on the government from the left. Replacements of the replacements in government positions have made it hard to implement needed changes. Meanwhile, the fragile government, attacked by the right, reels from criticisms on the left and the perceived need to keep order.

Challenges for Evo Morales and the MAS

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR EVO, the MAS, and

the electoral revolution are the critical issues of real land reform, constituent assembly, regional autonomy, nationalization of natural resources, and expanded economic development. The demands of the administration, brought to power by a movement of the indigenous, the landless, the workers, the promise of a constituent assembly that would change the constitution to better represent the poor and working class, especially the indigenous, to involve their organizations, and to spread decision making among them, are very hard to achieve. Even some supporters believe that the Constituent Assembly process is just a historical illusion that delays the revolutionary changes that are necessary such as land reform, nationalization of natural resources and industries, and dramatic increases in public services including education and health. The first eight months of the Constituent Assembly process were squandered on bickering over procedure and rules and many believe it may be permanently derailed. It is continually haunted by issues of autonomy raised by the right.

While the sharply increased proceeds from the nationalized gas and oil industries as well as the tin mines will provide some of the needed capital, it is likely that the Bolivian economy will need to become much more productive and diversified to be able to improve the quality of people's lives. Many of the indigenous and labor activists fear that Evo's negotiations with the multinationals will allow more neoliberal policies to continue to hold sway. But he feels he must, on some level, negotiate with capital and make some compromises in order to keep some capital in the country, at least on a temporary basis. Many Bolivian activists criticize Evo's weak results in negotiations: ownership of 51 percent of the gas reserves but little capital to make real changes, i.e., pipelines and infrastructure to harvest the gas, and thus continued dependence on capitalist partners. Proceeds from the nationalized gas have skyrocketed and are projected to grow. But what exists

now is a far cry from what many expected would be a wholesale takeover of the gas industry.

As well, much expanded and variegated economic development must take place to provide jobs to Bolivians, make the economy more productive and active in the global economy, and staunch the hemorrhaging of Bolivian workers to Argentina, Brazil, the United States, and Europe in search of work.

Vice-President Alvaro Linera has put forward the concept of “Andean Capitalism” and suggested that their administration avoid radical discourse in order to allay the fears of the right and the corporations. Despite his historic left credentials, the real politic of running a government that is being watched very carefully by national and international elites, has shifted his position. President Evo Morales presents himself on the world stage as a soft-spoken, humble farmer, critical of U.S. policies but willing to work with all. He is in sharp contrast with Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who does verbal battle with Bush as often as possible. Perhaps this mild style will serve them well, as long as it is backed up by real strength in policy serving the needs of their people.

Legislation enacting land reform was passed, albeit very contentiously, in the congress, but the process by which this occurred and the constant threats from the eastern lowlands make implementation of the law treacherous. In December 2006, the landless peasants celebrated their congressional victory but by now they are worrying about Evo’s negotiations with the right wing lowlanders. Will he stand strong against these enemies of more equal land distribution? To appease these forces, the new government has granted the large landowners a 7-year window in which to develop their fallow plots, giv-

Bolivian gallows humor has it that the only good thing about the war in Iraq is that George Bush can’t invade Venezuela or Bolivia: he can’t open another front.

ing them a great deal of political space and preventing the landless from receiving that which they fought for and desperately need. The U.S. government is again using coca eradication strategically to bring Evo’s government to its knees. Bolivian military forces have been used to enforce small but significant amounts of coca

eradication, particularly in national park lands where it is prohibited; this was seen as outrageous by the cocaleros in Cochabamba.

All of this raises the question of whether a socialist society can be built peacefully and

transitionally out of a capitalist framework and if it can be how quickly can it be accomplished. Keeping the base forces of the indigenous, the workers, the farmers, the landless together while moving forward “a socialismo” (toward socialism), will be a herculean feat indeed. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui points out that the power of the state and the media empowers the electoral party and the single leader, not the movement. If the goal is social democracy, Scandinavian style (Andean Capitalism), then perhaps that is possible. This might be sufficient to lift the masses out of deep poverty and to honor the indigenous peoples, if it were permitted by the present international power structure. If a revolutionized, perhaps a revolutionary, state that serves its people through the control of the workers and peasants is the goal, then gradualism may not work at all. And what would become of it given world forces today?

The International Context

BOLIVIANS COMMONLY say that the U.S. Embassy wants Evo and the MAS to fail, to fail, to be destroyed. U.S. support for the attempted coup in Venezuela 5 years ago and the successful one in Chile 35 years ago as well as the end-

less misery inflicted upon the Central American's people's movements in the 1980s and 90s by the U.S.-supported military dictatorships and death squads, and so many others over the years is proof positive to them that the U.S. government is perfectly willing to aid those who would overthrow a democratically elected government in Bolivia.

With Hugo Chavez galloping ahead, with his Socialism for the 21st century, inspired as he says by Jesus, Marx, and Trotsky as well as Castro and Galbraith, the elections of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, and Lula da Silva in Brazil (despite its tilt toward neoliberal accommodation with its payments of debt to the IMF and joint projects with Washington, DC) — all create a left mosaic in Latin America. Bolivia, and Venezuela have announced a joint venture on gas and oil. Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador have announced the formation of a Bank of the South, that would serve as a progressive alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. There is a proposal for a land and river trade link from the rainforests of the Amazon to the Ecuadorian Pacific Coast — a new “Panama Canal.” Telesur, a pan-Latin American TV channel, has been launched in Venezuela and should decrease Latin America's dependence on the corporate media for their news. MERCOSUR has been formed as a South American trading block and in a December, 2006 meeting in Cochabamba, the major South American leaders set up a process to explore creation of a European Union-type structure, ALBA, Alliance for a Bolivarian Latin America. All this points to the potential for a strong, left-leaning and united South America. Evo's announcement that Bolivian soldiers will gradually cease participation in the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WINSEC), formerly known as the School for the Americas, a crucial training ground for Latin American counter-insurgency that has been key to the implementation of U.S. foreign policy,

further severs those ties.

Bolivian gallows humor has it that the only good thing about the war in Iraq is that George Bush can't invade Venezuela or Bolivia: he can't open another front. But the United States can economically, politically, and organizationally support an attempted coup. The right wing, already so Miami-identified, is hoping and, no doubt, planning for it to happen. Now that the specter of Soviet-style communism no longer exists, the reality of a socialist South America will likely be fought against in any way possible by the U.S. government and multinational corporate interests.

But many Bolivian activists see the way forward as a process, a process that will include a great deal of class, race, and gender struggle as well as an acceptance of hybridity. They see the necessity of continuous organization of the base movements and a constant re-articulation of demands. Many know that all of this will take a long time and they are prepared for this long haul. To Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, tensions are a sign of vitality. To Oscar Olivera, the movement must move forward like water: transparent, in constant motion, and joyful.

Bolivians, significantly isolated by their poverty and geographical location (land-locked in the middle of South America) see international solidarity as so important. Support from U.S. activists played an important role during the water wars with mobilizations against Bechtel, the corporate giant that purchased the water system in Cochabamba. Working against this potential international solidarity is the relative ignorance of Americans and the American left of the revolutions brewing in the south. Bolivians and other South American left movements have a great deal to teach North Americans, particularly about merging the leadership and interests of indigenous people of color with that of the working class. Their methods of popular education have prepared their masses with perspectives on international and domestic political dynamics. They have developed cre-

ative organizational structures and ways of growing movements that capture the desires and the willingness of people to struggle for a winnable new world.

We need to educate our own people on the real role of the United States in building “democracies” internationally. We need to amplify the voices of our comrades when they ask for us to do so. We need to shine a light on any form of U.S. government aggression against these fragile socialist states in the south. They

need our support and modicum of protection; we need their knowledge, organizational skills and hope.

I would like to thank Nicole Fabricant for helping me travel throughout Bolivia, interviewing over 30 activists in a range of political arenas. The access, information, and perspectives she provided made this paper possible. Thank you also to Gerardo Renique for offering me perspective and suggestions for readings and ideas.

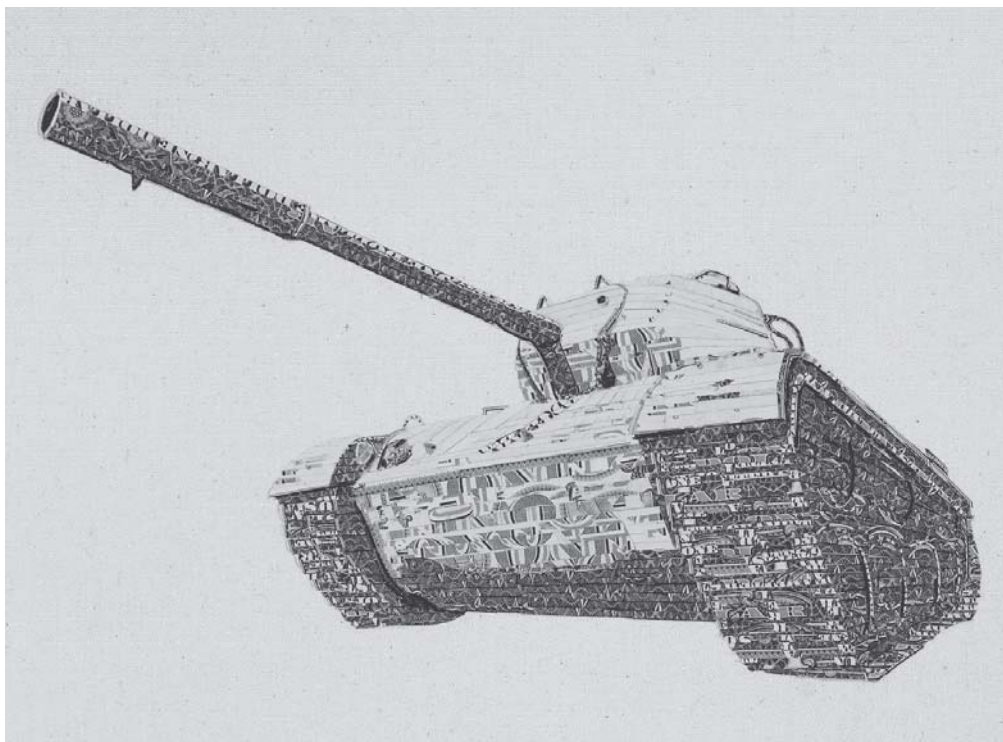
A fully footnoted version will be found on our website www.newpol.org

Defending the Empire

“[T]HE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE was deploying (in 2004) nearly 255,000 military personnel at 725 bases in 38 countries.”

— *Chalmers Johnson, The Sorrows of Empire (N.Y.: Verso, 2004)*

Since then, the number of known overseas bases has increased, and there are also secret U.S. bases abroad.



Chad Person, www.chadperson.com

Latin America: A Resurgent Left?

JOHN L. HAMMOND

LEFTISTS WON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 2006 across Latin America: starting (at the end of 2005) with the stunning victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia, through the election of Socialist Michele Bachelet in Chile, the predictable reelection of Lula in Brazil and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (though Lula, winning less than 50 percent of the vote in the first round, was forced into a runoff), and the runoff victory of Rafael Correa in Ecuador. An ambiguous leftist, the Sandinista Daniel Ortega, won the presidency in Nicaragua, and another, Ollanta Humala, was defeated in Peru, but only after winning a place in a runoff. Andrés Manuel López Obrador was narrowly defeated in a questionable election in Mexico. The winners joined incumbents Néstor Kirchner in Argentina and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay to form the largest contingent of Latin American presidents calling themselves leftist in many years, probably ever.

These victories have been hailed (and denounced) as representing a leftist resurgence in Latin America. While they do signal an important change in direction, this article is a caution against exaggerated hopes. I will argue that while all are on the left, there are great differences between the lefts of different countries and an even greater gulf separating them from the left of the past. These differences render moot any expectation of a common outcome.

Many from outside Latin America have too

readily assumed that past popular upheavals promised a dramatic change in domestic policies and the hemispheric balance of power, and some see the same promise today. In order to understand both the prospects and the limits of the recent left successes, we must put them in perspective. All these newly elected presidents, to one degree or another, owe their victories to a broad repudiation by their electorates of the neoliberalism prevailing in most of Latin America in the last two decades; most of them stand up against U.S. influence in the hemisphere.¹

But their politics are quite diverse. Some, like Lula, Bachelet, and Vázquez, submit to the pressures of the United States and the international financial institutions, voluntarily restricting their domestic policy options. Others, especially Chávez and Morales, have promised a major reordering of their social and economic systems and resisted the domination of international capital. Others are less clearly identifiable: Kirchner falls in between these positions, and Correa is too new in office to be categorized. These differences call into question the meaning of “left” in Latin America at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In my view, the term “left” must be defined in historically specific terms: the definition depends on the prevailing political conditions at any time. Even if the goals are common across time, historical changes in the political economy and international politics of the region and the world force a reassessment of the political programs that are feasible in a given conjuncture.

Further, the definition must be geographically specific, taking into account the domination of the United States over the whole region. It is not just Mexico that is “so far from God,

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so near to the United States.” To be “left” in the Latin American context means to reject the historical subordination of the region to the United States by asserting independence either within an individual country or in a pan-American anti-U.S. nationalism.

Three dimensions of leftism are particularly relevant: rejection of neoliberal economic policies; responsiveness to social movements demanding economic and social benefits for the poor and excluded; and defense of national independence and continental solidarity in opposition to the hegemony of the United States.

The most important element in the program of the left, common over time and between countries, has been opposition to inequality. Latin America is the region of the world with the greatest degree of economic inequality — not the poorest, but with the greatest disparity between the poor and the rich. Inequality, severe since the colonial period, is sustained in the present by a range of official and informal practices. The political system has always worked against the interests of the poor.

In the mid-twentieth century, different lefts promoted two main routes to greater equality, armed revolution, and import substitution industrialization (ISI). Each had both domestic and international implications. The revolutionary option did not succeed, except in Cuba and (temporarily) Nicaragua. ISI, intended to overcome subordination to northern commercial interests and to expand the internal market, promoted the growth of a relatively strong organized working class and fostered the belief in an active state to promote economic growth, embodied in political projects as diverse as the structuralism promoted by the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Cuban revolution.

The World Has Changed

TODAY NEITHER STATE-LED DEVELOPMENT nor armed revolution inspires leftist movements in most of Latin America. The Cuban revolu-

tion of 1959 inspired many in Latin America, but those who took up arms were defeated everywhere except in Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas, assailed by a counterrevolution supported by the United States, were eventually unseated in a democratic election. Most on the

Most left parties emerged from the authoritarian period resolved to defend democracy.

left now regard armed struggle as unfeasible; at the same time, they have embraced democracy and believe that it must include (while not being limited to) respect for democratic electoral processes. The guerrilla remnants in Colombia and Chiapas are exceptions to the demise of guerrilla struggle, but neither is seen as a model for most of the continent’s left.

Authoritarian military governments took power in many countries beginning in the 1970s (1964 in Brazil) and ceded power to civilians in the 1980s, usually through pacts that limited the scope of democratic government. During the same period, globalization of the world economy was reinforcing the subordination of Latin America to the advanced capitalist economies and to international financial institutions. Neoliberal economic policies — adopting fiscal discipline to contain inflation, privatizing state-owned firms, removing protections from private industries, and reorienting most economies to export — have led to massive job losses in the private and state sectors. By the 1990s it was clear that neoliberalism was not going to spark economic revival. But it has meant smaller workplaces and weakened legal protection, making it much harder to organize the working class.

Ironically, these changes have occurred at the same time that political systems have returned from authoritarianism to formal democ-

racy. Democratization was expected to make economic policy more responsive to popular demands, but its effect has been slight, due to the limitations imposed on the new democratic governments. Presidents remain unaccountable to their voters. In Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, presidents were elected on platforms rejecting neoliberalism and austerity, but once in office implemented free-market austerity packages, disregarding the express wishes of the voters and their own campaign promises.

And two and a half decades of neoliberalism have brought about an ideological reorientation. The belief that the state can act as the dynamic engine of social change is much diminished if it has not vanished entirely.

Internationally, the collapse of the Soviet system has meant for some leftists the loss of the model they aspired to replicate; even those for whom it was not a model nevertheless saw it as a bulwark against the main enemy, the United States. In the 1990s the United States further strengthened its political and economic hegemony vis-à-vis its allies in the cold war alliance, and thereby its sway over the conservative governments of Latin America.

All these changes produce a very different context for left political activity, one which precludes returning to the progressive programs which were attempted in the past. There is no question that any left government must find new ways to achieve its goals, even if these remain unchanged.

Openings for the Left

IN SPITE OF THESE DISCOURAGING CONDITIONS for leftist transformation, self-styled leftists have won presidential office in the first years of the twenty-first century. The causes of left electoral victories are particular to each country; commonly, the specific failings of predecessor governments created openings of which particular left forces have been able to take advantage.

There is nevertheless a general common

element: the failure of neoliberalism, now widely acknowledged. Neoliberalism promised that reforms would spur economic growth by calling forth massive investment, including foreign investment, especially in export-oriented industries. That in turn would lead to growth of output and employment, and ultimately to an improvement in the income and standard of living of the population as a whole and a decrease in inequality.

In fact, the opposite has occurred. With a shrinking state sector and losses in the private sector to global competition, neoliberalism has not generally produced sustained economic growth. It has not generated rising employment or incomes. Instead it has brought massive unemployment, falling real incomes, and (in most countries) tremendous increases in inequality. It has exposed the majority of the population to greater risk: workers have lost pensions, protection from arbitrary firing, and eligibility for medical care, benefits that workers — at least those in public employment or large formal-sector firms — had enjoyed during the ISI period.

The modest revival of economic growth in the 1990s has produced benefits only for a very narrow slice at the top of the income distribution. Inequality has deepened as the employment and income prospects of the population as a whole have worsened. Though the basis for workers' collective action has been weakened dramatically, they have shown their rejection of neoliberalism in their votes for candidates with progressive platforms and promises of reductions in inequality.

Beyond the failure of neoliberalism, the left has gained ground as it has transformed itself. Most left parties emerged from the authoritarian period resolved to defend democracy — in part because it seemed the only alternative, in part because both the submission to authoritarian rule and the experience of their own vanguardist movements led them to believe that adequate representation of the interest of the

majority requires genuine democracy. Where the old left was uncomfortable with formal democracy, today's left has embraced it. As a result, they emphasize popular participation and citizenship.

The flourishing of indigenous ethnic identity has also strengthened left formations, especially in the Andean countries. Other social movements too have proliferated, though unevenly, throughout Latin America, among informal sector workers as well as the more traditional women's and residence-based movements. Broad-based popular protests challenged authoritarian governments. Uprisings against privatization, austerity policies, cost of living increases, and structural reforms have regularly shaken country after country since the impact of neoliberalism was first felt in the 1980s.

These movements have reached explosive dimensions in some countries, forcing the ouster of elected governments in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador (more than once in each country). The victory of these *pueblazos* or "popular coups," however, was usually short-lived, as successors to presidents unseated by popular uprisings in the 1990s generally moved rapidly to adopt the very austerity policies for which their predecessors were ousted.

In the new century, popular movements have been more successful at imposing candidates of their own choice or forcing new elections in which their candidates rode to power. Whether social movements have been instrumental in putting these governments into office has been an important determinant of their adoption of progressive policies, as I will show below.

Economic Policies

IF THE LEFTIST SURGE is largely due to the electorates' repudiation of neoliberalism because of declining living standards, the first test of leftism in government must be the adoption of policies that will improve general well-being and the distribution of income and wealth. Eco-

nomics conditions are relatively favorable: Latin America is enjoying stable, moderate growth, which allows a more flexible policy and improves the standard of living of the poorest.

But the governments differ significantly in their willingness to take advantage of these conditions, and in the instruments chosen. All claim to pursue poverty reduction and equalization but some emphasize direct intervention while others rely on the workings of the market in a growing economy to distribute wealth and income more fairly. Some governments give equalization and social betterment high priority, while for others it remains subordinate to the demands of fiscal stability and integration into the world market. The fact that some self-styled leftist governments seek to alleviate poverty through market-oriented policies illustrates how deeply the neoliberal idea has penetrated the realm of social policy.

Venezuela. The Chávez government has adopted a policy of populist redistribution based largely on oil revenues. Chávez has had the good fortune to consolidate his power (after a failed coup attempt supported by the United States in 2002 and a 2004 recall referendum which he handily defeated) when the price of oil was skyrocketing.

The national oil company PDVSA, while remaining state-owned, had been turned over to capitalist management, but Chávez has reasserted political control and devoted a large share of the windfall revenues to social programs. In 2007 he went further, demanding to renegotiate contracts with foreign concession holders and retain a greater share of ownership for the government. The government has created a number of social projects, known as *misiones*, to provide health care, education, job training, housing and urban infrastructure in the massive shantytowns, and subsidized food. Typically, each neighborhood is served by a committee of local residents to organize the activities of the *misión*. There are also programs to stimulate production cooperatives and pro-

vide training and employment to the poor and unemployed. Twenty thousand Cuban doctors serve in primary-care clinics in poor barrios, in exchange for oil sold to Cuba at subsidized prices.

Chávez enjoys enormous personal popularity, concentrated in the poor barrios of the cities, especially Caracas, but extending to at least segments of the middle class whose interests have not been fundamentally challenged and who are also benefiting from the oil boom. That popularity has been ratified in a series of elections since he was first elected president in 1998, including congressional and municipal elections, referenda on constitutional amendments, the 2004 recall referendum, and finally his reelection in 2006.

It has not yet been shown that the combination of oil-driven subsidies and political mobilization will support self-sustaining growth or lead to what Chávez calls “socialism for the twenty-first century.” Nevertheless, combined with a more progressive tax system, these programs do represent a promise not only of growth but of economic redistribution and political empowerment of the hitherto excluded.

Argentina. In Argentina a long-brewing economic crisis came to a head at the end of 2001 and inaugurated a period of political turmoil which culminated in the election of Kirchner in 2003. The government of Peronist president Carlos Menem pegged the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar in 1991, leaving no flexibility to respond to the Mexican and Asian currency crises, which set off the Argentine crisis and Menem’s defeat by Fernando de la Rúa in his 1999 bid for reelection. Under de la Rúa the economy continued to deteriorate — GNP fell by 72 percent in 2001, and unemployment was above 20 percent. To stem inflation, de la Rúa froze bank accounts in December, 2001. This move drove thousands into the streets in a new form of political protest, the *piquete* (road-block), which brought the country to a halt for weeks.

The popular slogan “*Que se vayan todos*” (“throw them all out”) expressed the demonstrators’ goal, and indeed, it appeared that they were succeeding: de la Rúa resigned, followed in rapid succession by three provisional presidents in two weeks. Then a caretaker held office until the presidential election of 2003, in which Néstor Kirchner ran against fellow Peronist Menem. Menem was ahead in the first round, but without enough votes to claim victory. Seeing that he would certainly lose in the runoff, he withdrew.

Kirchner has presided over a strong economic recovery, and among the new crop of leftist presidents, has been perhaps the most audacious, successfully negotiating with the International Monetary Fund a 70 percent reduction in Argentina’s international debt. The social benefits made possible by the strong economy and reduction in debt service are mainly distributed through traditional Peronist party patronage. Kirchner’s wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, handily won election as his successor in October, 2007.

Bolivia. The new presidential regime in Bolivia offers what is in many ways the most interesting case, even if its idiosyncrasies make it hard to classify. Bolivia is the Latin American country with proportionately the largest indigenous population, and it is the poorest country on the South American continent. The election of Evo Morales in December, 2005, followed immense popular uprisings protesting the threatened sell-off of natural resources to foreign investors — the “water war” in Cochabamba in 2000 and the “gas war” in 2003.

Morales’ election was an enormous breakthrough. He is not only the first indigenous president in Bolivia’s history, but a coca farmer and leader of the *cocaleros*’ movement, which for more than a decade has advocated the right of farmers to grow their traditional coca without interference from the U.S.-sponsored eradication program. He brought in an administration unlike any Bolivia has ever seen. The day be-

fore his inauguration in January, 2006, wearing an ancient ceremonial costume, he participated in an indigenous healing ritual, televised, to demonstrate his embrace of his roots. Some saw this as mere theatrics, but the symbolism was matched by the appointment of indigenous people and representatives of popular movements to cabinet positions. He has confronted three big issues, control of natural gas reserves, agrarian reform, and election of a constituent assembly to reform the constitution and secure more adequate representation for the indigenous majority.

His achievements, however, have been modest. His greatest success has been the renegotiation of natural gas contracts with the foreign firms that exploit the reserves, boosting the economy and driving government revenue up. The Constituent Assembly elected in July 2006 has been meeting but has been stalled because, while Morales's supporters won a majority, they lack the two thirds necessary to pass major amendments to the constitution. The heart of the opposition is the mostly European-descended population of the Department of Santa Cruz, which has promoted a secession movement.

Brazil. Brazil is the country, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva the president, that appeared to offer the greatest likelihood of a radical break when Lula was elected in 2002, in his fourth run for the presidency. A former factory worker, union official, and militant opponent of the military government, Lula was the main founder and leader of the Workers' Party (PT).

But though the PT still officially claims to be socialist, Lula ran on a platform that essentially renounced its historic program, and embraced neoliberal capitalism, pledging in his 2002 campaign to maintain the neoliberal poli-

cies of his predecessor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and in particular to honor Brazil's international debt and the IMF's fiscal conditions.

By some measures Brazil has the second highest inequality of income distribution in the world. Lula's main social welfare program, the Family Stipend (*Bolsa Família*) is a conditional cash transfer program, meaning that it is a means-tested benefit requiring compliance with behavioral

obligations (such as children's school attendance). Conditional cash transfers are in high favor with the economic planners of the World Bank, because they are targeted to the most needy and require behavior that increases the human capital of the poor. These goals, worthy in themselves, nevertheless assume that economic growth requires changes in individual behavior rather than structural change.

The *Bolsa Família* program is widely credited with having contributed significantly to Lula's reelection margin. In 2006 the geography of Lula's support shifted significantly to the poverty-stricken Northeast, while he lost ground in the PT's traditional strongholds, the South and Southeast.

Lula's accommodation to the demands of the international market has encountered relatively little political opposition. Even a major corruption scandal implicating leading PT officials, revealed in 2005 — the PT had bribed parliamentary deputies to win their votes for the governing coalition — apparently had little effect on the 2006 election. After falling short of a majority in the first round in 2006, he easily won the runoff with 62 percent of the vote.

Chile. Two Socialist presidents, Bachelet and her predecessor Ricardo Lagos, have presided over significant economic growth in the Chilean economy, and have relied on that growth to improve the living standard of the

To what extent can left-leaning governments change their relations with the United States?

population. But while poverty has declined, she has not done anything to reduce economic inequality, and in her campaign she promised (and has kept the promise) to respect the constitutional provisions guaranteeing the structural economic reforms dictated by neoliberalism.

While moderates who support Lula and Bachelet argue that external constraints prevent them from taking bolder measures, the choices made by Chávez and Kirchner show that the range of options is wider. Though far from revolutionary, they have stood up to international pressures and to their own domestic bourgeoisies rather than kowtowing to them. Their independence, moreover, has been a clear political asset.

Party vs. Movement?

A SECOND CRITERION OF LEFTISM is these governments' relation to social movements. The more leftist governments all in some measure owe their power to the social movements at their base: in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador, social movements brought down predecessor governments; in Venezuela the outpouring of popular support in the streets was an important factor in Chávez's victory over the 2002 coup attempt. These governments, which have rejected the neoliberal economic program, have also responded to the movements' demands rather than exploiting their support and then reverting to the policies that sparked the protest, as many of their predecessors had done.

Receptiveness to the demands of social movements is in inverse relation to the strength of parties. The regimes that are challenging the neoliberal consensus are all in some sense antiparty. In all these countries, the traditional party system is in disarray. The parties supporting the president are new or (in Argentina) divided, dominated by the leader; because the movements are intermittent and ephemeral, so is the leader's accountability to them.

Lula and Bachelet, on the other hand, have a base in a well consolidated party (though each

was elected by a coalition). The PT grew out of social movements that sustained democratic opposition through years of dictatorship, and parties making up the left wing of the Chilean *Concertación* also mounted strong opposition to its dictatorship. But their electoral victories are due more to the broadening of support among middle sectors than to those movements, and incumbents have curtailed their parties' historically radical programs in part because they believe that that support depends on their moderation. In office they have continued the policies of their predecessors, either pledging to maintain them (in Chile) or carrying them out as the previous government was not able to (in Brazil).

Chávez has created the United Socialist Party of Venezuela and called on the parties that support him to join it. Several parties that have supported him resisted joining the new party. It is difficult to predict what will come of this reorganization. Chávez has previously created party-like organizations, only to disregard them and retain a more direct, personal control over his movement — a control likely to be enhanced by the recently proposed constitutional amendment allowing unlimited reelection of presidents.

Right now the strength of institutionalized parties seems to act as a brake on progressive policies, but it is a double-edged sword. The absence of strong parties and personal leadership by a charismatic figure can substitute for the democratic channeling of demands from below; it must also eventually raise a succession problem. Support from a heterogeneous collection of social movements, each pushing primarily for its own agenda and all subject to inevitable fluctuations in the level of mobilization, offers little guarantee of policy continuity in future administrations.

And some social movements — though certainly not all — do not escape the influence of the neoliberal ideological reorientation prevailing in these societies, transforming them-

selves into formal nongovernmental organizations with professional staffs and seeking government subsidies to carry out their programs.

Leftist Internationalism

THE THIRD DIMENSION OF THE LEFTISM of Latin American governments consists of their international projection. Their international stances are inevitably conditioned by the long shadow of the looming colossus of the north. The question is, to what extent can left-leaning governments change their relations with the United States?

Latin American countries currently enjoy more freedom to distance themselves from the United States than usual — because so many progressive governments have arisen simultaneously, and because the Bush administration has done so much to alienate them. The 2002 coup in Venezuela, warmly applauded by the United States until it was obvious that it had failed, was immediately condemned by the Organization of American States. Chile and Mexico, the two Latin American members of the UN Security Council in 2003, refused (with the majority of the Council) to authorize U.S. intervention in Iraq (and the Mexican government was in no sense a leftist government). The Bush administration has given low priority to Latin America, leaving the countries of the hemisphere to enjoy a sort of benign neglect.

We can examine these countries' international behavior in three areas: trade, intrahemispheric relations among the Latin countries themselves, and rhetoric toward the United States. "Free" trade is the form imperialism has taken at the turn of the twenty-first century. Despite the Bush administration's push for a Free Trade Area of the Americas, a combination of popular pressure and government alliances has made it a dead letter, at least for now. Similarly, negotiations to expand the scope of the World Trade Organization have stalled, largely due to Brazil's leadership of the Group of 22.

Several leftist governments have promoted a Latin trading bloc free of U.S. hegemony, notably Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela. Chávez proposed the creation of a southern free trade area, the "Bolivarian Alternative for America" (its Spanish acronym, ALBA, not only means "dawn" but contrasts with ALCA, the Spanish acronym for the FTAA.) Venezuela has also joined Mercosur, the Common Market of the Southern Cone, and, along with Brazil and Argentina, endorsed its expansion to cover all of South America. Chávez has given substantial development aid to several countries of the region, both by purchasing their debt and by selling them oil at heavily discounted prices. He has further promoted hemispheric integration by proposing to build an oil pipeline to Argentina.

But as the members have expanded Mercosur and tried to strengthen it, some have also tried to make side deals with the United States: Uruguay is attempting to negotiate a bilateral free trade treaty, and Brazil appears to want to do the same, confounding the efforts to which it contributed so strongly to derail the FTAA and contain the WTO. Chile has remained outside the emerging trade consensus, and is already a full member of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

There are other tensions in intra-Latin relations. Morales' renegotiation of Bolivian natural gas contracts affected the holdings of the Brazilian oil company Petrobras, and the Brazilian government protested. (The dispute was later resolved.) Argentina has protested Uruguay's construction of a paper mill which threatens to pollute the Uruguay River, which separates the two countries. Chávez' overt support for presidential candidates in other countries, especially Peru, has been seen as unwelcome interference. Perhaps most important, Chávez and Lula have been rivals for leadership as often as they have been partners in the pursuit of greater Latin American integration.

Some governments are more conciliatory

toward the United States than others. Chávez is the most outspoken, embracing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, calling George W. Bush “Mr. Danger” (after the American villain of a well-known Venezuelan novel), and selling heating oil to community organizations in poor communities in the United States at generous discounts. He shadowed Bush on his March 2007 tour of Latin America, appearing in neighboring countries, to admiring throngs, at the same time that Bush was being protested in the countries he visited.² Chávez has also announced Venezuela’s withdrawal from the IMF and the World Bank. He has strong reason to be suspicious of U.S. intentions, because the Bush administration supported the coup of 2002, if it did not instigate it. But he is protected (at least so far) by U.S. dependence on the continuing flow of Venezuelan oil.

Tension between Bolivia and the United States centers on coca cultivation. Because of coca’s symbolic value in Bolivia’s indigenous culture, Morales resists U.S. pressure for complete eradication.

Anti-U.S. rhetoric is muted among the governments whose domestic economic policies have hewed more closely to the neoliberal line and that have entered (or are negotiating for) trade agreements with the United States. After the U.S.-backed coup in Haiti that drove out President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, Brazil and Argentina enlisted as leaders of MINUSTAH, the United Nations peacekeeping force. Brazil was the first, welcoming stop on Bush’s 2007 tour of Latin America. Together with Brazil’s discussion — however muted — of a bilateral free trade agreement, these are signs of the Brazilian government’s effort to conciliate the United States.

Governments that seek conciliation sometimes face the opposition of their own popular movements. Masses turned out to protest Bush at two major hemispheric summits, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in

Santiago, Chile, in 2004 and the Mar del Plata, Argentina, Summit of the Americas in 2005. While the host governments tried to contain the protests, they joined in opposing the Bush proposals and turned the meetings into diplomatic setbacks for the administration.

Conclusion

FROM THIS OVERVIEW, two salient conclusions stand out. First, the recent electoral successes of left-leaning candidates and parties are largely due to the economic conjuncture in which neoliberal economic policies of austerity, liberalization, and export orientation have accentuated poverty and inequality. Second, the “left” embraces a broad spectrum of political positions, and has offered a variety of responses, some of them challenging the failed policies more forcefully than others.

Mobilization against economic austerity does not automatically translate into sustained support for left programs. Opportunities for organization have declined: dispersed working and living conditions hinder mobilization. Old political parties are weakened or have gravitated to the center; the strongest parties have been the most moderate. The choice of a more progressive option depends on a leader with a strong personal following from a popular movement, but without a well-established organizational base. And even in the countries with more progressive leaders, the hegemony of neoliberal ideas is still strong enough to narrow options.

In evaluating the left’s political prospects, we face a paradox. On the one hand, these new governments — both the moderate and the more radical — have adopted policies which have measurably improved the living conditions of the victims of neoliberalism, especially the poorest. On the other hand, most of them have not undertaken nor proposed the structural transformations to sustain those gains — the moderates because they have accepted the domination of transnational capital and the institutions of the international economy, the more

radical because, except when they have oil, they are not strong enough, and because their power is largely personal rather than institutional.

This is not to gainsay the benefits that moderate progressive regimes have brought the people of Latin America. Some progress, however slight, has been made against inequality. None of these regimes will produce the exclusion and immiseration that their immediate predecessors brought.

I have couched this argument in terms of evaluating what is and is not “left.” Identifying leftist politicians, organizations, and programs is a convenient way to introduce comparisons between countries and with the past, in order to assess the possibilities of change. My real concern, however, is not to decide what label to apply but to determine whether these regimes offer viable political programs to overcome the subordination to which the people of Latin America are subject. We are called on to exercise pessimism of the intelligence and optimism

of the will. My caution against placing too much hope in the potential these new regimes offer for political change weighs heavily, rather more than I would like, on the side of pessimism. While we welcome the changes these new regimes have introduced, we should not overestimate them.

I appreciate the helpful comments of Lynn Chancer, Laura Kramer, and Karsten Struhl.

NOTES

1. In this article I will focus on the elected presidents. Some of the same forces were responsible for the close call in Mexico and the less close but still significant showing in Peru, but in the zero-sum game of electoral victory, it is the winners who will influence the course of events. I will pay most attention to the larger countries, saying little about Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay.
2. Bush’s tour was billed as a “We Care” tour, but as the residents of New Orleans and the U.S. veterans seeking medical care know, when the Bush administration announced that it cares, one can be sure that it doesn’t.

STALINIST BETRAYAL IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

THERE IS WIDESPREAD MISUNDERSTANDING — as witnessed by repeated items on the Spanish Civil War — which omit the role of the Stalinists in murdering Poumists and Anarchists. This was the first indication of the murderous policy of the Soviet Union toward anti-Stalinist leftists in places where they held power. A description of that policy can be found in George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* (Chapter 14) see link www.george-orwell.org/Homage_to_Catalonia/

In the next issue (Summer 2008) Barry Finger will review Pierre Broué’s *Revolution and Civil War in Spain, 1934-39* (Haymarket Press).

Attack and Burn!

ROBERT JOE STOUT

THEY GRABBED ME, THEY HIT ME, they yanked me by the hair and threw me in the back of a pickup. They sprayed me with tear gas and held a knife to my back. They said they were going to rape me and throw me in the ocean. They said other police were raping my novia (girlfriend) right then.

Mexican photojournalist José de Jesús Villaseca had driven with two companions to cover a demonstration outside the Miahuatlán state prison ninety kilometers south of the city of Oaxaca when state police, reinforced by non-uniformed paramilitaries, brutally attacked the relatives and friends of political prisoners being held inside the institution. They yanked Villaseca out of the car in which he was riding, and despite the fact that he displayed a press pass from a Mexico City news service they arrested him and held him in the prison until an Oaxaca non-governmental organization paid his bail.

He and the eight others arrested with him still have criminal charges pending against them. So do 141 other Oaxacans arbitrarily arrested on November 25, 2006, during a sweep by over 4,000 militarized police through the city of Oaxaca's centrally located historical district after a protest march. Like Villaseca all 141 were beaten, robbed and humiliated and all 141 were flown to federal prisons outside of Oaxaca without first being charged and tried.

ROBERT JOE STOUT has written about Mexico for a variety of publications, including *Commonweal*, *American Educator*, and *Notre Dame Magazine*. He was a member of two Rights Action emergency human rights delegations to Oaxaca and witnessed many of the events described. His books include *The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives and Why Immigrants Come to America, due out this fall from Praeger*.

During the past year, state and Mexican federal police have jailed over 400 citizens, many on charges that the justice committee of the state legislature has confirmed were fallacious. Death squadrons have assassinated at least 20, and an estimated 100 other Oaxacans have disappeared. The state has filed orders of apprehension for hundreds more, including human rights activists whom they have accused of inciting persons belonging to the Peoples Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO) to commit violent anti-government acts.

Political supporters of current Oaxaca gov-

Oaxacan authorities released the assassins and announced that they were going to file murder charges against one of Will's companions.

ernor Ulisés Ruiz beat a retired professor to death when he participated in an attempt to block a roadway near Huautla to prevent Ruiz from making a campaign appearance in 2004. Authorities then jailed the retired professor's closest friend on murder charges despite videos that identified the killers. When Oaxacan teachers declared a strike for higher wages and better school conditions and set up an encampment in the center of the city of Oaxaca two years later, Ruiz dispatched state police to break up the protest. The teachers fought back and forced the police to retreat. Various non-aligned NGOs and indigena groups backed the teachers and formed APPO.

Ruiz's government responded by subsidiz-

ing death squads that included former and current municipal and state police to attack and intimidate APPO members and human rights workers. To counter these nightly depredations, APPO supporters barricaded streets throughout the city, making transit virtually impossible after dark. Nevertheless, snipers hiding in the Hospital Santa María shot and killed José Jiménez during an APPO-sponsored march in August 2006. The husband of an activist teacher, Jiménez had taken part in a number of anti-Ruiz protests. Despite the fact that hundreds saw Jiménez fall, and despite the fact that autopsies showed that he had been hit by bullets of two different calibers fired from two different directions, Oaxaca's attorney general announced that he'd died during a drunken fight, which he had instigated.

TWO MONTHS LATER, armed off-duty municipal police attacked an APPO barricade in Santa Lucía del Camino, a city of Oaxaca suburb, and shot and killed American photographer Brad Will. Journalists photographed Will's killers as they were attacking and published this in both local and national newspapers, but Oaxacan authorities released the assassins and announced that they were going to file murder charges against one of Will's companions at the barricade.

That revelation so infuriated Oaxaca journalist Pedro Matias that he told a Rights Action emergency human rights delegation, "The department of justice changed the settings, changed the legal opinions, changed the investigations and after all that what's going to happen here in Oaxaca is that it's going to turn out that Brad Will killed himself. That's the kind of justice we have here."

For the past 80 years Oaxaca has been governed by a tight coterie belonging to Mexico's dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI for its initials in Spanish). Though PRI lost the past two presidential elections the party nevertheless remains strong and controls the

majority of governorships within the country. Both Ruiz and his predecessor, José Murat, have been under investigation for fraud and misappropriation of funds. During the November 25 federal police assault, a building housing the financial records of Ruiz and Murat went up in flames and the records were destroyed. State officials accused APPO members of setting the fire by throwing Molotov cocktails into the building, but a tour of the damage indicates that that would have been impossible. The fires were set from inside.

The arrests and detainment of APPO leaders, threats against human rights activists, and continuing disappearances of APPO supporters continue. On July 16th assembled state and federal police attacked demonstrators approaching the Guelaguetza auditorium and beat one of them so badly he was in a coma for weeks and no longer can walk, talk, or feed himself. Immediately Ruiz's prosecuting attorney issued arrest warrants for ten APPO leaders, two of whom were outside of the city when the incident happened, for inciting violence. Six weeks passed before five of the police responsible for the brutal beating were arrested. Their defense attorney insists that they merely were doing the jobs assigned to them.

"The government has taken the position that no changes should be prompted by popular movements," priest Juan Arias, the spokesman for the state's Catholic presbytery, told me, "and is criminalizing any attempts at change."

The state's propaganda station, Radio Ciudadana (Citizens Radio), attacked priests for providing medical aid and sanctuary to APPO members. "They practically said we're criminals for denouncing the violence and repression in Oaxaca," he told the Rights Action.

Announcers for the same station urged Oaxaca residents to attack and burn the facilities belonging to the Services for an Alternative Education because members of that group were APPO supporters.

Although the federal police force is under

the jurisdiction of Mexico's president Felipe Calderón and Government Secretary Francisco Ramirez, neither has made any effort to investigate the violent apprehension and torture of innocent civilians. Various officials from President Calderón's National Action Party (PAN), including Senator Felipe Gonzalez, have applauded the repressive actions, citing the need to show a firm hand against lawbreakers like the APPO protesters.

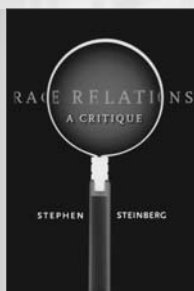
Despite Ruiz's insistence that everything is

under control and Oaxaca is a safe place for tourists to visit, teachers who supported the strike are yanked out of their classrooms, arrest warrants are filed against human rights activists, and the squadrons of death roam the streets knowing they can stop, detain, torture, and even kill anyone who disagrees with the status quo.

Oaxaca may be safe for tourists but it is not safe for Oaxacans. Especially not for those who protest.

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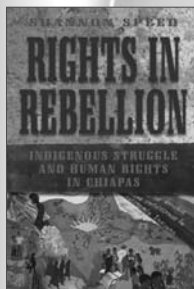
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The Question of Palestine

An Interview with Bashir Abu-Manneh

NEW POLITICS: *The year 2008 is the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Israel and of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. What do you see as the Israeli goal and has it changed over the years?*

Bashir Abu-Manneh: Israel's goal has been a constant: Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. Israel has always sought to expropriate as much Palestinian land as possible and to rule over as few Palestinians as possible. This has been the single most important ideological and political principle informing the practices of the dominant strand of Zionism which founded the Jewish State in Palestine against the wishes of the Arab indigenous majority. The year 1948 epitomizes this principle: 78 percent of Palestine was forcibly conquered and 750,000-840,000 Palestinians were systematically expelled and prevented from returning to their cities and villages (hundreds of which were completely erased) in violation of international law and of UN General Assembly resolution 194 safeguarding refugees' right of return.

Israel bears full responsibility for destroying Palestinian society and for turning most Palestinians into stateless refugees. No Israeli denial or American diplomatic summersaults can erase this nagging and unresolved fact. Pales-

tinians still constitute the largest refugee population in the world today: 70 percent of Palestinians, out of 10 million in all, are refugees (the American occupation of Iraq has produced around four million refugees and internally displaced Iraqis). For most Palestinians and Arabs, the Palestinian question is a refugee question and 1948 remains at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. If Israel wants real peace, it must rectify the wrongs it willfully committed in 1948, and do so in a way that is democratically acceptable to a majority of Palestinians (i.e., subject to popular referendum). There is no historical reconciliation or lasting peace without justice and national rights for the Palestinians.

Sixty years after the Palestinian Catastrophe, the complete opposite is now taking place: Israel is extending and deepening Palestinian dispossession and suffering, rather than alleviating them. Refugee rights are ignored and marginalized, and Palestinians are being pushed to accept besieged Bantustans for a state. After the political destruction of Arab nationalism in 1967 and the capitulation of secular Palestinian nationalism in Oslo in 1993, Palestinian refugees have been basically left to fend for themselves, with little protection or support from the Palestinian Liberation Organization or the Palestinian Authority (PLO/PA). We can see the consequences of this neglect in events like the depopulation and destruction of the Naher il-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon (once home to 31,000 refugees) over the summer and in the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from Iraq. Though the two cases are very different, and Iraqis themselves have suffered a catastrophic fate as a result of the American occupation, Palestinians are always deeply affected and hit hard by regional developments

BASHIR ABU-MANNEH teaches English at Barnard College, New York, and was educated in Israel and the UK. Among his recent articles are "Palestine: A Dream Deferred," *The Nation*, Dec. 19, 2006, www.thenation.com/doc/20061218/abumanneh, "Israel in the U.S. Empire," *Monthly Review*, March 2007, www.monthlyreview.org/0307abu-manneh.htm, and the just-published "Israel's Colonial Siege and the Palestinians," *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints*, ed. Leo Panitch & Colin Leys (New York: Monthly Review, 2008). He was interviewed in September 2007 by Stephen R. Shalom.

and externally induced insecurities. So they always suffer both as dispossessed Palestinians and as oppressed Arabs: no other Arab nation is

Israel intentionally induces high rates of unemployment and poverty among its Palestinian citizens to encourage their emigration

placed that way and carries that burden.

1991 is a good indicator of what it means to be a refugee: 350,000 Palestinians were unjustly expelled from Kuwait because Arafat stupidly supported Saddam's adventurism and his occupation of Kuwait. The New World Order was declared on the backs of Iraqis, who were killed in their hundreds of thousands, and on the backs of Palestinians, who had to suffer another exile. To be stateless is to be vulnerable to such ravages and be completely dependent on the whims and interests of others.

And this is only a part of the story. On top of political insecurity, there is discrimination and willful impoverishment. Take Lebanon as an example. To be a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon is to live without any political and civil rights, be legally barred from working in 73 professions, and suffer extremely high rates of poverty and unemployment. 1948 is far from over: Israel's expulsion is experienced daily as stateless wretchedness by Palestinians.

NP: 2007 was the fortieth anniversary of the June 1967 war. What is the significance of 1967 in this history?

BAM: 1967 was an additional historical injury. Occupying the West Bank and Gaza fulfilled Israel's colonial imperative to expropriate the remainder of Palestine. If before the June 1967 war Israel controlled 78 percent of Palestine,

after the war it controlled all of it, illegally occupying the remaining 22 percent. 1967 should really be understood as stage two of 1948, as outstanding Zionist business previously considered but delayed for tactical, not fundamental, reasons. 1967 was thus part of the ongoing pattern of the Israeli expropriation and dispossession of Palestine: only this time Israel managed to expel only a minority of Palestinians, 320,000. The majority couldn't be pushed out. So Israel was faced with what now people freely refer to as a "demographic problem," a racist designation which basically means that Israel was forced to rule over Arabs because it couldn't expel them en masse as before. For a settler-colonial state premised on exclusion not exploitation, incorporating undesired natives is indeed an issue. All of Israel's plans — from Allon's strategic settlement and land control to closure, Sharon's Wall, and his "disengagement" — are fundamentally about the fact that a Zionist Israel can neither incorporate Palestinians as equal citizens, turning Israel into a binational state, nor can it expel them all in one go (due to what many Zionists regard as "unfavorable international circumstances," i.e. international objection). And yet Israel still wants more Palestinian land. So: no expulsion, no incorporation, and no withdrawal. What Israel is left with is a powerful internal contradiction. A desired territorial expansion has led to an undesired demographic burden.

With the first Intifada of 1987, Israel's 1967 contradiction exploded in its face. Having severely weakened the PLO and expelled it from Lebanon in 1982, Israel expected quiet, a drastic lowering of national demands: submission. But what it got was a mass popular self-organized Palestinian revolt demanding the end of the Israeli occupation and independence. The Intifada left major population centers in the West Bank and Gaza completely free from Israeli control. It also left Israel, after the failure of brute force and massive repression, groping for a political solution. Oslo became Israel's

answer to the first Intifada, and was formulated to help Israel get out of the bind it had put itself into with the occupation of 1967, but without reversing it. So rather than granting Jordan control over “autonomous” Palestinian areas in the West Bank, as the original Allon plan had stipulated, Israel would now grant it to Arafat’s PLO. As Chomsky put it then, the PLO would become Israel’s “colonial enforcer,” controlling, demobilizing, and suppressing Palestinians for the benefit of their dispossessors and occupiers. So, with Palestinian elite consent, Israel remained sovereign, was allowed to build and expand Jewish settlements and roads, and control all borders. All UN resolutions requiring Israel to fully withdraw to the 1967 borders, dismantle all illegal settlements, and accept Palestinian statehood and independence were shelved and sidelined by Oslo. Zionism was victorious and the principle of Jewish sovereignty was reaffirmed. Israeli colonialism was also given further lease on life to encircle, suffocate, and slowly dispossess more occupied Palestinians.

1967, however, is not Israel’s only “demographic problem.” An internal population “time bomb” has also reared its head inside Israel. There, remnants of Palestinians from 1948, who managed by some historical fluke to stay behind after the mass expulsions of Israel’s founding, have slowly increased in relative number. In 1948 they numbered 150,000. Now there are 1.2 million, about 18 percent of the Israeli population, with nearly half living in the Galilee and only a small minority in “mixed towns” like Haifa, Lydda, and Jaffa. Israel refers to them as “Israeli Arabs” or “the minorities,” and has not only subjected them to 18 years of military rule until 1966, and discriminated against them systematically and by racist law from 1948 to the present, but it has also dispossessed them of most of their lands, treating them in exactly the same way it treated their refugee brethren. Their dispossession is still taking place even today: the Negev Bedouins have suffered the brunt of it in recent months. Many “unrecognized villages”

have been internally displaced and have had their lands stolen by the state.²

Worse still: Palestinians inside Israel suffer periodic massacres conducted by the Israeli army and police, some to facilitate flight. Kufr Kassem in 1956 was one such massacre: 49 Palestinian citizens were killed. On 30 March 1976, six were killed while protesting land expropriations in the Galilee as part of a national day of mass demonstrations and strikes, now annually commemorated as Land Day. In 2000, 13 were killed and hundreds injured when Palestinians inside protested against Israel’s massive repression of the second Intifada. Dispossession and occasional killing are compounded by political discrimination and endless repression, as well as economic suffocation and impoverishment. Israel intentionally induces high rates of unemployment and poverty among its Palestinian citizens to encourage their emigration and lessen their growing numbers. Recent Israeli National Insurance figures show that, as Ynet reported: “The percentage of Arab citizens is nearing 50 percent of the overall poor population in Israel as opposed to 40 percent in 2004,” and 400,000 out of 550,000 children who go hungry in Israel happen to be Palestinian!³

In addition, a new instrument of control and exclusion has recently been developed by the Israeli elite: the threat of population swap: Palestinian citizens in Israel for colonial settlers in the West Bank. This option has become subject to growing discussion and debate in Israel, both in the media and in strategic circles. It has also been recently aired in diplomatic discussions with Abbas and his team. Israel dubs it a “land-swap” or “population exchange”: Israeli settlers become *de jure* (not only *de facto*) part of Israel as some of Israel’s Palestinian citizens become part of the Palestinian Authority. A minor border adjustment in the Triangle area and Israel would miraculously lose around 200,000 of its Palestinian citizens. A stationary transfer/expulsion if ever there was one, and another looming danger to the Palestinian pres-

ence inside Israel.

So has Israel succeeded in achieving an Arab-free Palestine? Not yet, and hopefully never. But it has certainly been working hard on it.

NP: You have quoted Edward Said's judgment regarding the PLO elite that "No other liberation group in history has sold itself to its enemies like this."⁴ But why is this so? Surely other liberation movements had leaders with similar class backgrounds, with dubious friends and ruthless enemies. Many liberation leaders showed themselves to be cold-blooded and autocratic — but yet at the end of the day they tended to be fanatically committed to their national cause. What accounts for the uniqueness of the Palestinian leadership in selling out?

BAM: Edward Said's formulation is a correct description of Oslo: no Palestinian national rights were achieved in Oslo, neither sovereignty nor self-determination. The state that the PLO said it was working to create since 1974 in the West Bank and Gaza never materialized. If what Israel was offering didn't conform to Palestinian national demands, why did Arafat accept it? Opportunist self-preservation was, I believe, his strongest motivator. Arafat opted to exploit the Intifada in order to regain political and organizational hegemony over the Palestinians and cash those in with the Israelis. After Beirut 1982, the PLO was severely weakened and its cadres dispersed and fragmented. It lost organizational coherence. Edward Said then spoke of the "end of the Palestinian narrative," seeing the fall of Beirut as the destruction of Palestinian nationalism. With the New World Order and Arafat's unprincipled and disastrous decision in siding with Saddam, the PLO lost the substantial financial support of the Gulf States, weakening it even further. So by the early 1990s, Arafat was desperate and ready to trade in his nation for international recognition and a meager post.

There is, then, a combination of factors

pushing for capitulation and opportunism:

FIRST: SEVERE AND RELENTLESS ISRAELI brutality and force, shunning peace and equitable settlement. One can hardly emphasize this cause enough: Israel was always immeasurably more powerful than the Palestinians. It, thus, didn't only seek to rid Palestine of its indigenous population, but it also wanted to destroy any national movement they organized in order to retrieve their lost homeland. So on top of expulsion there was attempted political denationalization of the Palestinians, and this is an ongoing Zionist project. Palestinians are not seen as a group that has collective national rights, but are regarded as a collection of fragmented communities with particularist, local, or religious wants. So, for example, you start talking about things like: access to religious sites in East Jerusalem (anyway always severely restricted, in violation of free worship) rather than Palestinian national claims to Jerusalem; Arab neighborhoods rather than Palestinian sovereignty over land; or, finally, alleviating Palestinian suffering through humanitarian aid rather than ending the occupation. What Israel always rejects is the notion that Palestinians have national rights and that it is responsible for having violated them. Israel's is an extremist, rejectionist stance.

SECOND: AN INHOSPITABLE ARAB POLITICAL environment. This is another key structural constraint for a nation in exile like the Palestinians. The Palestinian national movement was subjected to severe repression and disciplining by Arab state actors. Jordan 1970-71 is the best example: an authoritarian, Western-backed regime liquidates the Palestinian resistance as other Arab states look on. It's a myth that Arab states wanted or want to liberate Palestine. 1948 is a great example of how little Arab states have done to help save Palestinians from national catastrophe.⁵ What this meant for the PLO is that it was never fully sponsored or aided enough by Arab states to become powerful enough to undermine the Zionist project. Con-

trast that with Hezbollah now. Because it's an organization embedded within its own people and territory (with strong and principled leaders), and because it receives tremendous amounts of external aid, training, and support, it did what no Arab country has ever managed to do: defeat Israel militarily. The Palestinians never had that. They suffered the reverse: banishment, persecution, and destruction. Of course they were also corrupted and de-radicalized by oil money: it's no joke that the PLO was the richest liberation movement in the Third World. The failure to liberate Palestinian should also be seen as part of what Abd al-Rahman Munif calls the "culture of oil."⁶

THIRD: THE SUBJECTIVE FACTOR. Though structural conditions increased the propensity for opportunism and defeatism, you needed an agent with sufficient national legitimacy that was capable of containing Palestinian aspirations and preparing them for settlement. Fatah's political elite performed this task, especially after Black September 1970. Many Fatah leaders believed that the Palestinian Revolution was unique in world history for being, as one of them put it: "the revolution of the impossible."⁷ As Abu Iyad acknowledged early on, Fatah leaders knew that they couldn't deliver liberation: they were just waiting for the Palestinian people to come round to this conclusion so they could safely settle with the Israelis and get a state. In the meantime, they made sure, through bureaucratic and authoritarian means, that they remained hegemonic within the PLO and that their political rivals were co-opted or weakened.

SO WHAT FATAH FAILED TO DO was empower Palestinians to act as independent,

The fundamentalist movement has out-organized both Fatah and the left, providing education, health services, and ideological sustenance

self-organized, and self-liberating agents, turning their refugeedom to their own advantage and utilizing it to better their own conditions and those of the whole Arab world. An Arab Revolution was necessary for Palestinians to have sufficient capacity and leverage to liberate Palestine. But Fatah was never revolutionary in that way. Ideologi-

cally and politically conservative, it had no interest in organizing and mobilizing Palestinian and Arab masses in their struggle for democracy and social justice against Arab authoritarian regimes. The Palestinian armed struggle was thus never wedded to social revolution: the fetishized gun stood in for serious social and political organizing and mobilizing. So Fatah ended up succumbing to the conditions it had refused earlier to overturn. At a certain point in its history, the burdens of Israeli rejectionism and the constraints of its Arab environment became unbearable: so its elite submitted.

And this is why Hamas constantly tells Fatah: make way if you're tired, we'll take over. There's really a lot in common between Hamas and pre-1982 Fatah. Both are socially conservative and suspicious of self-organized popular mobilization, with vast networks of philanthropic and social provision. Both are focused on ending the occupation and creating a sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza, being anti-colonial petty-bourgeois nationalist pragmatists not rejectionists. Both share the same conception of liberation as armed struggle, pursuing a policy of noninterference in and accommodation with Arab regimes and receiving Gulf money in return.

Important to remember, though, is that Hamas is a post-Fatah movement born under occupation. So it sees itself as having learned from what it regards as Fatah's mistakes, that:

a) recognizing Israel (as an ideological pre-condition for negotiation) gives you nothing, and b) depending on the United States is counter-productive and gets you nowhere. There are also significant political differences in social ideology and conception of a future state between a secular movement and an Islamic fundamentalist one. There's no question that what Hamas ultimately strives for is Islamic restoration. Its conception of the future is a reactionary utopia, and its social ideology is regressive: curtailment of freedom of congregation and freedom of speech; religion as the dominant social discourse; suppression of individual liberties; and, finally, recourse to force in internal Palestinian affairs. Only a small minority of Palestinians support this program; a majority supported Fatah's earlier secular program. It's important to keep this in mind. Many of the Palestinians who vote for and support Hamas do so because it fights against the Israeli occupation, not because of its religious project.

NP: What about the Palestinian left? Is there any left left? What explains its weakness?

BAM: The left was also subject to the same structural constraints of exile and dispossession as other Palestinian groups were. It was far too entangled with and dependent on Arab authoritarian regimes (at times even regarded as a stooge of Asad's Syria, Saddam's Iraq, or Gaddafi's Libya). And it suffered from lack of independence and lack of sufficient radicalism. But the picture is a mixed one. The Palestinian left experience did have some important positive dimensions.

Ideologically, the left had significant progressive positions. It saw the question of Palestine as intrinsically linked to the problem of underdevelopment in the Arab East. The loss of Palestine was an indication that the traditional Arab ruling classes were complicit with Western imperialism: Palestine was their shame. So they had to be discarded as leaders of the Palestinian national project. In the late 1950s and

early 1960s, they were replaced by petty bourgeois leaderships, then on the rise in the whole Arab world. When the Arab national project suffered Israel's death-blow of 1967, the Palestinians rose as a leading revolutionary force and emblemized the hopes of a defeated Arab nationalism. Here the Palestinian left made its most important contribution. The left understood that 1967 meant the failure of petty bourgeois nationalism as leader of the Arab revolution. Nasser's anti-imperialism was insufficient as a revolutionary force and incapable of releasing the potential of the Arab masses and completing the national tasks of democracy and independence. The Palestinian left also strongly believed that Palestinians were incapable of decolonizing Palestine on their own and needed Arab popular help. But they argued that Arab petty-bourgeois regimes were too weak and too uninterested in doing that. So their main theoretical and political innovation was raising the specter of a revolutionary alliance from below: Palestinians would revolutionize themselves and help revolutionize the Arab masses. They understood that their task as Palestinian revolutionaries was to help Arab masses free themselves from the oppressive hold of Arab reaction. This meant that the left clearly understood (unlike Fatah) that Western-backed Arab authoritarian regimes were actually their main enemies and couldn't be ignored or depicted as a "secondary contradiction." So their conception of liberation meant tackling three very powerful and interlinked forces: Zionist colonialism, Western imperialism, and Arab reaction. The stakes were very high.

Where the left clearly failed was in preparing for and organizing against a looming liquidation by the Jordanian regime in 1970-71, in which 5,000 Palestinian civilians and 1,300 guerrillas were killed. American imperialism and its regional allies were agreed on the fact that Palestinians were a radicalizing force in the region and had to be severely weakened, if not totally liquidated. This came in Black Septem-

ber, when left adventurism and hijackings were used as an excuse to crush the whole guerrilla movement in Jordan. This led to the strengthening of Palestinian bureaucratism and centrism within the Palestinian resistance movement and facilitated the growing hegemony of Palestinian conservatism, weakening the left even more. So a longstanding criticism that is made of the Palestinian left is that even though it did have a correct analysis of historical developments then and did in fact formulate correct ideological positions to tackle them, these never materialized into political organization and practice. It's not a theoretical weakness that is usually identified as the main failure of the left (though, as I indicated above, there are some) but a lack of a coherent and effective organizational strategy. The left was never politically organized enough to be able to lead the Palestinian nation to victory. They failed under the weight of what Ghassan Kanafani in 1971 called the "contradiction between the greatness of the task [of liberation] and the objective reality of the means available to us."⁸

To jump 40 years forward. In today's very different conditions, this political weakness remains a problem. The left today understands the nature of the Palestinian crisis and the threat of complete collapse and decay of Palestinian nationalism. It just can't seem to be able to organize against it. There's a tendency to think that slogans and speeches will do the work, but these are clearly no substitute for organization building. The Palestinian left today is organizationally weak and disengaged from the needs of the Palestinian masses both under occupation and in exile. The fundamentalist movement has out-organized both Fatah and the left, providing education, health services, and ideological sustenance. The weakness of the left is also compounded by internal factionalism: it's not clear why there should be four different left factions in the West Bank and Gaza. Though there is increasing coordination and cooperation between them, there is no unity of voice, no unity

of strategy, no combined mass mobilization. On top of that, all factions seem solely preoccupied with ending the political polarization between Hamas and Fatah. Ending the infighting is clearly important: but it can't be the primary thing that the left does. What if both factions shun unity? What then? And what if the unity realized doesn't achieve what's required today: a national strategy for liberation, as conceived in the majority-supported prisoners' document of spring 2006 advocating resistance, democracy, and safeguarding all Palestinian national rights.⁹ What then?

The Palestinian left today seems hesitant about competing with the two main factions for political supremacy, thus accepting that the struggle is between endless capitulatory negotiations and Islamic fundamentalism. Without left mobilization and organization, we risk continuing to either paint Hamas in red, pretending they are the redeemers of the Palestinian nation, or supporting yet another flawed "peace process," when what needs to be undertaken is an ideological and political struggle against both Palestinian subordination and its fundamentalist alternative. It is the job of radicals to fight against such ideological regressions in Palestinian politics and fight for social, not only political, emancipation. The cause of Palestine should again come to be associated with not only national freedoms but also Arab democratic and social rights. The word Palestinian should again come to mean Arab revolt for democracy, social justice, and unity, not only suffering and *sumud* (steadfastness). There is thus an urgent need for reinvigorating the Palestinian left and for educating a new generation of Palestinian and Arab activists about the history and politics of radical and national liberation movements, their failings and weaknesses as well as their universalism and internationalism. The object should be to create a new radical secular movement struggling against national oppression and armed with a strategy for Palestinian and Arab emancipation. This seems quite dif-

ficult now, but many Palestinians are completely fed up with both Hamas and Fatah and need an alternative. So the field is wide open.

NP: How do you assess the Israeli left, and what do you see as the prospects for joint "cross border" struggles involving Israelis and Palestinians?

BAM: THE EXPROPRIATION AND CONQUEST OF PALESTINE was organized and managed by self-identified socialists and labor bureaucrats. So being on the left, broadly defined, never has been a guarantee of concern for Palestinian rights.

Israel's mainstream peace movement, its nationalist left, and in particular Peace Now, the largest peace formation in Israel, has been far too entangled with the values and practices of labor Zionism to either act as an independent peace force inside Israel or to present a real alternative to government policies. Peace Now not only cheered Rabin and Barak on, but also legitimized their colonial policies, including separation and closure. Even though Peace Now's positions have evolved over the years, coming to accept and recognize (at least rhetorically) Palestinian rights of self-determination and statehood (mainly as a result of the first Intifada), the movement has remained far too committed to either an expansive conception of Israeli national security or to vague and inadequate notions of territorial compromise and mutual recognition. As a result, Peace Now never insisted or campaigned on the fact that, for example, 1967 is Israel's border and that full withdrawal and evacuation of all settlements is a necessary precondition for peace. This basically left the door wide open for unequal peace treaties like Oslo (which they celebrated), and allowed Israel to impose more and more conditions on, and extract more and more concessions from, Palestinian negotiators. So Israel's mainstream peace camp ended up serving rather than undermining or counterbalancing Israel's vastly superior power in relation to the Palestinians, guaranteeing unjust diplomatic out-

comes.

This has led many critics of the peace movement in Israel to argue that groups like Peace Now are essentially nationalist-colonialist. They are not only unprincipled and opportunist, but also regard American diplomacy in the region (including wars like the first Iraq War) as Israel's only salvation. More: they tend to be very active when Likud is in power, appealing for American controls over Israel, and very passive when Labor is in power or in coalition, merely pushing for minor reforms or adjustments in policy rather than putting forward real alternatives. Shulamit Aloni* offered this self-criticism during the Gulf War crisis in 1990, when the peace movement in Israel was cracking under its own internal contradictions, and when Palestinians became desperate enough to support Saddam Hussein:

Why should I be disappointed with the Palestinians? Did I do something for them? Did the Israeli left do anything for them? . . . the Israel left is a loyal part of the government and the establishment . . . we tried to raise a moral voice . . . de facto we did nothing. The government continued to control the territories, to deny human rights, to destroy and kill, and we are part of this because we did not declare a rebellion . . . we were the fig leaf of Israeli democracy . . . the Palestinians do not owe us anything.¹⁰

Very few groups in Israel have ever broken from such left complicity with state power and such indifference towards Palestinian suffering and suffocation.

The most significant formation historically has been the revolutionary socialist group Matzpen. Though organizationally weak, in the 1960s and 1970s it mounted the most important ideological challenge to Zionism ever to come out of Israel, much more robust and principled than anything "post-Zionism" ever ar-

*She was the founder in 1973 of the Citizens' Rights Movement, which merged with Mapam and Shinui to form Meretz in the early 1990s.

ticulated in the 1990s. Matzpen not only launched the “Israel as colonial-settler state” paradigm in Israeli society but argued that Zionism was a specific form of settler colonialism in which Palestinian natives were to be totally replaced by Jewish settlers, not incorporated or exploited by them.¹¹ Clearly anti-imperialist, Matzpen was also consistently critical of Israel’s role as watchdog of U.S. interests in the region, crushing Arab radicalism and curbing Arab national rights in return for military and economic subsidy. What Matzpen clearly understood, then, was that the Palestine question wasn’t only a Palestinian-Israeli issue but an Arab problem as well. This had important political repercussions, and Matzpen looked towards the Arab world, not only towards Palestinians, for an answer to Zionism. An Arab socialist revolution would thus redeem both Israel-Palestine from Zionism and the Arab East from Western imperialism, as it safeguards the rights of national minorities like Israeli-Jews and Kurds in the region as a whole. No other Israeli group came close to Matzpen’s theoretical innovations, or its internationalist commitments and openness to surrounding Arab societies. Its members were subjected to severe Israeli state repression.

In the 1980s, other, different groups emerged. Dai Lakibush (Stop the Occupation) played an important radicalizing role, but then lost steam. Women in Black organized vigils against the occupation all over the country, as well as abroad, but it too was weakened by the aggressions and false peace carnivals of the New World Order.

Other groups emerged after Oslo (some have reemerged, like the refusniks who reject military service in the Occupied Territories). Today Tayyush, Gush Shalom, and Anarchists Against the Wall are very active against the occupation. Their most important success on the ground has been a long popular resistance campaign against certain sections of the Wall in the West Bank. Bil’in has become their symbol, rep-

resenting cross border and global peace activism conjoined with Palestinian-led nonviolent struggle.¹² Such combinations have managed to force a modification in the route of the Wall, saving half of the lands of Bil’in even as Israel’s Supreme Court decision legitimized the expropriation of the other half.¹³ It was a small and ambiguous victory, but an important one nonetheless, if only as a reminder that Palestinians and Israelis can still jointly resist the occupation and can still manage to form new cross national relations of trust and solidarity.

So what has always been missing in Israel is an organized anti-occupation, pro-justice mass movement that is powerful enough to rattle and undermine Israel’s colonialism. Israel still lacks a genuine peace movement, certainly one that is principled enough to build on the fact that at least 40 percent of Israelis are ready to end the occupation now and withdraw to the 1967 border in accordance with the international consensus in place since 1976. Can this change? Sure. If a significant mobilized Israeli majority comes to see Israel in the way most people around the world see it — that is, as a violent usurper of the rights of others and as a danger to world peace — then: most probably. Since 1967, the United States has shielded Israelis from seeing their state as a pariah state and shielded Israel from paying the costs of the longest military occupation in recent history. This situation can’t last forever, especially if a re-emergent peace movement in the United States puts Palestinian rights at the heart of its struggle for peace in the Middle East. Israelis need to feel the pressure of organized public opinion (including boycott and state sanctions) if they are to mobilize against their elite’s colonial desires. No place matters more for the Israeli elite than the United States, so anti-occupation struggle here is particularly relevant and can be especially decisive. Only then will Israelis themselves come to organize en masse against Israel’s subjugation and negation of a whole nation.

NP: There is a debate on the left as to whether we should be urging a “two-state” or a “one-state” solution for Israel-Palestine. What is your view of these alternatives?

BAM: I think it’s strange to present these solutions as two equally available options. Even

The one-state solution is an excellent idea, but it’s utopian and is not attainable in practice now.

those advocating a revolutionary option recognize that, whatever else needs to happen, the occupation has to end first. This is what most Palestinians want, as well as a significant portion of Israelis, if not a majority. So a Palestinian strategy needs to be formulated around this demand as a national priority. Palestinian suffering under occupation has to be addressed as a national emergency. The question we need to ask is not whether to decolonize the West Bank and Gaza, but how: who will lead the struggle; what are its informing values; how to solicit Arab and other support; how to remobilize collective self-organization; how to help people become agents of their own liberation; how to mobilize refugees and the occupied in a new grassroots, democratic organization; and how to activate existing UN resolutions and international legal opinions against the illegal Wall, settlements, roads, etc.

The one-state solution is an excellent idea, but it’s utopian and is not attainable in practice now. There is no constituency for a one-state solution, nor is there capacity or leverage enough at the moment to achieve it. Political realism requires you to begin where you have the potential to be most successful and most effective. De-Zionizing Israel won’t, I think, come from the West, as some one-staters believe. I still think that the question of Palestine is an Arab question: Zionism and Western imperialism

continue to oppress Arabs and, importantly, continue to be seen by them as doing so. It is in the interests of Arabs to reverse Zionist expansionism, end Zionist exclusivism in Palestine, decolonize it, and implement the right of return. One can hardly say that about a capitalist West, not even its masses now. One-staters tend to think that if they shout hard and long enough people in the West will come round to supporting a one-state solution. But most people in the West don’t support ending Zionism in Palestine, as most Arabs do, yet do support ending the occupation. So the strategy of some Palestine advocates becomes making it harder for people in the West to support them? That’s not politics. It smacks of discursive strategies not real ones. The ideological struggle against Zionism in the West is important, and needs to be continued, but one can hardly expect it to yield the necessary pressure to overturn Zionism in Palestine. For that, we need to look East — towards the Arab world — or towards a revitalized progressive workers’ movement in the West with sufficient capacity to affect state policy. But I never hear one-staters of today say that the answer to Zionism in Palestine lies with the progressive organized working-class movements in the West. If workers’ unions are engaged at all by Palestine advocates today, it is to boycott Israel for its illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, not to end Zionism. Solidarity for that in the West can only come from a radical, anti-imperialist mass resurgence. There are unfortunately no signs of that. Should the Palestinians then wait for what Fanon called “sleeping beauty” to awake? Or do they in the meantime utilize the support and solidarity that they can get and begin bettering their lives now? It’s only reasonable to opt for the second route.

NP: In thinking about solutions, you urge political realism. How does the issue of the right of return fit into this? That is, is there a way to address the needs and rights of the Palestinian refugees that is at the same time politically realistic? Will Israelis support the “return” of seven million Palestinians?

BAM: NO THEY WON'T. And this is a serious problem. Most Israelis are becoming more racist. Their support for "transfer" of Palestinian citizens is increasing, and has reached very worrying levels. The Israeli political and military elite sees Palestinians as a subhuman group that it can bully, crush, humiliate, kill, and starve. The Israeli "left" is mostly Zionist, and advocates separation and partition, not equality. The Jewish groups that support the right of return are on the margins of Israeli society, and are mainly preoccupied with ending the occupation. So I can't see Israelis at the moment supporting the right of return. They still want to live in a state that is theirs and want that state to be a Jewish democracy (not a liberal one). But that doesn't mean that they can't come to realize that historic reconciliation (ratified by a Palestinian majority) is necessary and that they are responsible for rectifying the wrongs of the present and the past. That's more likely to happen than straight out acceptance of the right of return.

So what does one advocate for Palestinian refugees today? That's a very hard question to answer. The right of return is an inalienable Palestinian right, recognized by international laws and resolutions. It's a right that a majority of Palestinians today support. Yet every time it is invoked Palestinians are accused of wanting to destroy the state of Israel, as if their expulsion and refugeeedom are their own fault, and as if Israeli colonial racism is a Palestinian creation. It's an absurd situation when victims of a historical crime are put on the defensive by their own persecutors for the very same act that made them victims in the first place. No nation has a right to be racist or to oppress or deny the universal rights of another, certainly not one that is solely responsible for completely dispossessing the other.

What of Palestinian suffering and wretchedness in the present? If refugees can't return at this juncture, what should advocates of the Palestinian cause be doing now? Well, everything in their power to better Palestinian lives every-

where, and to help Palestinians realize those of their national rights that can be fulfilled at present. Most occupied Palestinians are refugees, and what they want is clear: a free and sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This won't only immeasurably improve their lives but would also allow those refugees from outside of Palestine who do agree to come back to do so and live normal lives in a democratic state of their own. Is that better than the vagaries and insecurities of exile? I would think so, but that is something for Palestinians to vote on and decide in a popular referendum. It should only happen if a majority of them agree to it. A "return" it is not: refugees are not returning to their homes and lands in Lydda, Sajara, or Jerusalem. What they are doing is overcoming statelessness and a life without rights. It's not a change one should denigrate or ignore, and I do think it is still possible even in today's bleak conditions.

In addition, if a grassroots Palestinian anti-occupation struggle is to succeed, it would have to cause a huge rupture within Israeli society, activating and detonating its internal contradictions. This could be powerful enough to nudge Israel out of its denial and rejectionism, pushing it towards historic reconciliation and coexistence. So Palestinians may not only get an end to military occupation but also a people willing to live with them in peace and harmony. This would slowly create the necessary conditions for sharing and solidarity, leaving racialized demography and colonial privileges far behind. The 1948 generation won't see this, but their great-grandchildren may well do. This won't redeem the suffering of 1948, but it would allow a new generation of Palestinians and Israelis to build a new society where dispossession, expulsion, and domination are things of the past. Today's utopian impulses would then be realized.

NP: Do you think it's possible that Washington, in its determination to discredit Hamas and therefore

legitimize Abbas, might actually — despite its inclinations — provide some momentum toward a settlement?

BAM: No. Since Hamas' blunder in Gaza,¹⁴ Abbas' endless courting of the Israelis, and his shunning of dialogue and conciliation with Hamas, Israel gave the Palestinians virtually zero. It did release some money and 250 Fatah prisoners, but this is peanuts when one considers that it holds more than 11,000 Palestinian prisoners and continues to arrest dozens of Palestinians a week. There has been no substantive change in the policy of checkpoints,¹⁵ nor one acre of occupied territory saved, nor one Palestinian life spared, as Washington cheerleads, endorses, and protects Israel from international law.

And yet the United States hopes to sell the world a so-called international peace conference? Is this the same administration that starved and sanctioned Palestinians for the last year and a half and fortified Israel's colonial siege? What peace can Washington talk about when Palestinians don't have access to 60 percent of the West Bank because of the Israeli occupation? What peace can the United States desire in the Middle East when it increased military aid to Israel by 25 percent in one go, reaching 30 billion dollars for the next ten years?

Washington sees no peace in the Arab East: only blood and oil.

NOTES

1. For the most recent account of the PA, see Nigel Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to al-Aqsa* (London: Routledge, 2005).
2. See the Association of Forty website, www.assoc40.org/index_main.html.
3. Sever Plocker, "Arabs are poorer," September 5, 2007, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3446076,00.html.
4. *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York:

Vintage, 2000), p. 345.

5. For an account of how half-heartedly the Arab states supported the Palestinians in 1948, see *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

6. For a summary of Munif's views, see Iskandar Habbash, "Unpublished Munif Interview: Crisis in the Arab World — Oil, Political Islam, and Dictatorship," 2003, <http://leb.net/~aljadid/interviews/Abdal-RahmanMunifUnpublishedInterview.html>.

7. Hany al-Hassan, "Fatah Between Theory and Practice," *Shuun Falastiniya* [or, Palestinian Affairs], 7 (March 1972) (in Arabic), p. 20.

8. "The Current State of the Palestinian Resistance," *Shuun Falastiniya*, 2 (May 1971), pp. 57-74, 62.

9. For a fuller discussion of this document see my "Occupied Palestine: Prisoners, Colonial Elites, and Fundamentalists," ZNet, June 11, 2006, www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=10411.

10. Interview with Tom Segev in *Haaretz*, August 24, 1990, quoted in Reuven Kaminer, *The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinian Intifada* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996). Kaminer's is the best book on the Israeli protest movement.

11. For a representative sample, see www.matzpen.org/index.asp?u=other&p=chap1-01. For a more recent analysis, see Moshe Machover's important lecture, "Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution" (November 30, 2006), www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/articles/moshe%20machover%20%202006lecture_b.pdf.

12. See www.bilin-village.org/.

13. See Amira Hass, "Disrupting the Separation Policy," *Haaretz*, September 25, 2007.

14. For my analysis of the Hamas seizure of power in Gaza, see "Symptoms of Decay in Occupied Palestine," ZNet, July 16, 2007, www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13308.

15. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has said he would remove 24 unmanned barriers on the West Bank (though Israel's military and intelligence agency are opposed), but, as the UN noted, in the most recent month alone 40 new checkpoints were established. UN, Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Report No. 47, Implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access*, (22 August – 4 September 2007), [www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRW-DocUnidFilename/LSGZ-779JAL-Full_Report.pdf/\\$File/Full_Report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRW-DocUnidFilename/LSGZ-779JAL-Full_Report.pdf/$File/Full_Report.pdf).

Hammerin' on Heaven's Door

Habitat for Humanity and the Rebuilding of New Orleans

FRAN SHOR

"It's no exaggeration to say that, without New Orleans, the United States would be lost."

DAN BAUM, "New Orleans Journal," *The New Yorker*, June 1, 2007¹

IN THE TRAILER FOR AN IMAGINARY YouTube video diary of my first workday as a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity at Musician's Village in the Upper Ninth Ward of New Orleans, here are the fleeting images that would stand out: waiting on the street behind a trash truck in my cousin's car while a neighborhood African-American woman passes out bottles of water to the black man and woman collecting the rubbish; being inundated by white Baptist church volunteers at the worksite, including a young woman named Buffy from Mississippi who, to my untrained Yankee ears, sounded like a brassier version of Sissy Spacek's Loretta Lynn; standing on a ladder in the blazing sun and withering humidity with buckets of my sweat mixed with the paint I was applying to the siding of the shot-gun style house that our Habitat work crew was completing; sharing lunch with a group of teachers from a Minneapolis suburb while a contingent of Baptists were conducting a Bible reading session; walking back to my cousin's house after a shortened work day in mid-afternoon and witnessing two burly black cops rousting three teenage African-

Americans who were just twenty yards in front of me.

So, there you have it: kindness; duty; charity; piety; and police harassment; mixing the sacred and profane, the ordinary and extraordinary, in the liminal space of one mile and limited time of one six hour slice of June 11, 2007, my first day as a Habitat volunteer in New Orleans. What is also evident from my experiences that day and the nature of the Habitat rebuilding effort is the role of race, class, gender, and religion. The inescapable reality of my whiteness in a majority black neighborhood, my middle class status in a low-income area, indeed my foreign presence, was a reminder that I was, as most of the other Habitat volunteers, little more than a philanthropic visitor. Whatever the good intentions, there were social, political, and economic problems that I could hardly address in a fundamental way. To some extent, then, the Habitat experience could be seen as a template for both the possibilities and the impediments not only for rebuilding New Orleans but also for harnessing the imagination and will to build another world.

In both the rebuilding New Orleans and building another world there is a fundamental spiritual component. However, the degree to which that spirituality is nurtured or constrained by religious dogma is important to discern. Habitat, in particular, is rooted in a specific Christian religiosity. For example, there is an intimate connection between Habitat's mission to supply affordable housing to low-income people while offering service opportunities for

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its volunteers, reflected in what is called the “theology of the hammer.” For the founder of Habitat, Millard Fuller, the hammer is viewed “as an instrument to manifest God’s love.”² This faith-based orientation has managed to attract

Habitat’s selection process for families to qualify for a twenty-year no interest \$75,000 mortgage is very rigorous, eliminating almost 9 out of 10 applicants who fail to demonstrate credit worthiness.

a wide variety of religious, corporate, and individual support. Founded by Fuller in 1976 in Americus, Georgia, Habitat for Humanity has grown to a billion dollar operation, constructing over 200,000 houses in ten countries. Certainly, Habitat’s high profile as a volunteer organization has been aided by the involvement of former President Jimmy Carter. Also, the catastrophes of Hurricane Katrina and Asian tsunamis have raised public awareness about the pressing need for housing.

In New Orleans, church affiliation with Habitat recently reached a high water mark, so to speak, with the announcement in 2007 of a five year initiative called the “Baptist Crossroads Project.” Mobilizing both human and financial resources, Baptist churches in New Orleans and around the South, already evident during my time at Musician’s Village, have pledged to build 60 houses over the next five years. The pastor of the First Baptist Church in New Orleans who initiated the “Crossroads Project,” called it “a response to the challenge of Jesus Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves.” Beyond the religious commitment, he added that the Crossroads Project will “address substandard hous-

ing and poverty in our community by helping hard-working people move from renting into home ownership.”³

While both Habitat and the Crossroads Project manifest certain qualities of a social gospel, there are also evident elements of “middle class paternalism” and individualistic spirituality that, from the perspective of sociologist Ananta Kumar Giri, emphasize “individual salvation and self-realization rather than integral transformation of self and society.”⁴ On the other hand, another study of Habitat asserts that it “is unreasonable to expect Habitat to become the kind of neighborhood-based housing development entity promoted by housing advocates for the poor.”⁵ Nevertheless, Giri contends that in Habitat “the discourse of conscience is articulated more clearly than the discourse of rights.”⁶ While Habitat “has tapped a vein of compassion that is not often visible in a society that glorifies self-interest and materialism,” it “does little to empower low income communities to deal collectively with their housing problems.”⁷ Furthermore, “the house that Habitat erects is not only an altar of God’s love but also a panopticon of middle class values and control.”⁸

Habitat’s selection process for families to qualify for a twenty-year no interest \$75,000 mortgage is very rigorous, eliminating almost 9 out of 10 applicants who fail to demonstrate credit worthiness. Of course, for many low-income families and people of color the economic system has built-in mechanisms that discriminate against any asset accumulation, let alone financial solvency.⁹ Musicians, in particular, have encountered difficulties in sustaining or even generating fiscal responsibility. It is not surprising, therefore, that the applications of some New Orleans musicians for Habitat housing in Musician’s Village have been denied. Trying to counter the criticisms, Habitat has undertaken a program to help musicians deal with the credit ratings and creditors.¹⁰

The inspiration for Musician’s Village came

from New Orleans musicians, Harry Connick, Jr. and Branford Marsalis. Shortly after their December, 2005 announcement of the project, Habitat acquired 8 acres of land in the Upper Ninth. Additional purchase of land was added to the core area. During my June sojourn as a Habitat volunteer in Musician's Village there were nearly 40 houses completed with a projection of a total of 73 single-family homes, 5 elder-friendly duplexes, a toddler-friendly park and the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music. About three-fourths of the single houses either completed or in process have been assigned to musicians. Money for Musician's Village has come from concerts by such groups as the Dave Mathews Band and Little Feat. Corporate sponsors have also donated, including the oil companies BP America and Shell.

Corporate donations, in particular, raise some concerns about Habitat's rather indiscriminate acceptance of such corporate giving, especially in light of the tight regulations over the selection process for applicants for Habitat housing. Something seems a little amiss when Habitat NOLA blithely accepts money from oil companies who have been responsible for such environmental devastation in the New Orleans region. The destruction of wetlands south of New Orleans and the continuing pollution from Baton Rouge to New Orleans in the region known as "Cancer Alley" should have made Habitat, perhaps, a tad more rigorous and environmentally conscious in taking corporate money.

On another level, Habitat's construction operation seems to overlook the contradictions that may accompany the origin of materials used in building Habitat houses or the kind of labor that Habitat employs beyond its volunteers. For example, one day during my volunteer time at Musician's Village our crew unloaded sheetrock for one of the houses that was nearing completion. The Habitat driver who had transported the sheetrock from the warehouse indicated that all the sheetrock was from China. When I in-

quired about why Habitat would purchase sheetrock from China when there were numerous sheetrock producers in the U.S. employing union labor, I was told that the sheetrock was purchased from a vendor that Habitat regularly utilized. As far as the installation of sheetrock in Habitat homes, this was a matter of subcontracting. According to our Habitat work coordinator on site, the subcontractor was Mexican-American, not at all surprising given the large number of Mexican Americans who do drywall. However, it was unclear whether this guy's crew was composed of primarily documented or undocumented workers. Given a 2006 joint study by Boalt Hall and Tulane University about "Labor and Human Rights in New Orleans" which found that twice the numbers of undocumented workers were installing drywall in post-Katrina New Orleans, it was likely that undocumented workers were indirectly employed by Habitat.¹¹ My primary focus is not whether using immigrant labor, documented or undocumented, is wrong. My concern is that an organization such as Habitat, which ostensibly is committed to social justice, should not be facilitating any exploitation of immigrant labor.

Subcontracting other jobs for Habitat houses, such as excavation and laying of the foundation, also opened up the possibility of unfair labor practices. Contractors in the New Orleans region could easily take advantage of the lack of state minimum wage laws and the Bush Administration's rescinding of federal wage standards to hire undocumented workers and pay them one-third to one-half what the going rate might be, along with denying them any health care or other benefits. While I was assured by Aleis Tusa, the Habitat communications director, that Habitat meets regularly with its qualified subcontractors, the overwhelming number of Latino personnel at Musician's Village helping with excavation and laying of the concrete foundations could easily have contained undocumented workers. For an

ostensible social justice organization, such as Habitat, to not pay special attention to the treatment and status of its hired help was, to my mind, a grave matter.

Of course, Habitat also relies on its volunteers, both short-term and long-term, to build its houses. As a consequence of the devastation of Katrina and the neglect and incompetence of the federal government in particular, Habitat has grown enormously in the New Orleans area. From a pre-Katrina full-time staff of 2 to a present 50 with 25 AmeriCorps

kids, Habitat is a massive operation attracting both church groups and students in large numbers. Especially over the spring break, students in the thousands flocked to New Orleans Habitat. Such interest in service certainly owes something to Habitat's reputation and the continuing tragedy facing New Orleans and the Gulf Region. On the other hand, as noted by Craig Rimmerman, "service activity is devoid of politics and therefore is a relatively empty way of tackling complex structural issues that arise out of the conditions that prompt service activity in the first place."¹² While it may be true that Habitat and many of its volunteers are aware of these complex structural issues on a local, national, and, indeed, global level, the apolitical orientation seems to guarantee that the service rendered is contained within an eleemosynary enclave. In other words, because of its lack of advocacy, Habitat's civic engagement is politically circumscribed.

On the other hand, when corporate CEO's and even President Bush can parachute into the Habitat sites in New Orleans, questions arise about Habitat's ultimate political and practical efficacy.¹³ The constant turnover of volunteers and the participation of unskilled volunteers,

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unskilled volunteers, like me,
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houses.

like me, create problems for quick and efficient construction of new houses. There were numerous occasions when many of us working on pounding in joist flooring had to re-do the boards because of inexact measurements and certain levels of ineptitude. Beyond the varying

levels of skills, the diverse political orientations and sense of mission did not translate into a larger commitment for federal low-income housing programs. In fact, I had a memorable luncheon debate with a conservative financial planner from Tulsa who believed that the private

sector was more efficacious when it came to delivering services, something I challenged with a reference to federal programs such as Social Security and private sector companies such as Enron. In any case, irrespective of varying political opinions, people did gravitate to Habitat out of a fundamental concern to help others in need.

Among those drawn to New Orleans Habitat were some who had family connections to the city and others who had either some or no knowledge of New Orleans. I worked with two volunteers, one a medical student at LSU whose family lived in New Orleans and just managed to weather Katrina, and the other a woman with Honduran background who worked in Philadelphia as a physical therapist and whose family lived outside of New Orleans. Both were committed to the idea of rebuilding New Orleans. Those of us who only knew New Orleans previously as tourists came to Habitat because of a commitment to overcoming the lack of low-income housing and to doing something to salvage the city. A group of eight staff members from Berklee School of Music in Boston and ten school employees from outside Minneapo-

lis all seemed dedicated to, in the words of Giri, “come to terms with their identity as citizens and human beings in a society where structural changes in economy and polity in the last two decades have widened the gulf between the two — poverty and plenty — considerably.”¹⁴

Those last two decades for New Orleans have seen increasing poverty and its attendant problems, especially among African-Americans. The 2004 U.S. Census listed the poverty rate in New Orleans at 35 percent, among the highest in the US, with 80 percent of those being black. While New Orleans and Louisiana state legislators looked to casinos for quick fixes (and under-the-table bribes) for new revenue sources, public services and schools were allowed to deteriorate. As a consequence of continued economic hardship and lack of opportunities, crime and the murder rate soared in New Orleans. The poet and New Orleans resident Andrei Codrescu cites the following remarks of one victim of a carjacking who lost her child in the incident: “New Orleans is the most beautiful city in America, the most historic city, and the city with the most potential. But it is a city with a sickness.”¹⁵ Even with only half of its pre-Katrina population, homicides continue to plague the city. While I was staying with my cousin in the Bywater area of town, there were two close by murders, one in the middle of the day not far from where I walked back from Musician’s Village to my cousin’s house.

Walking through the Upper Ninth as I did every day, I saw abandoned houses and numerous FEMA trailers which still had inhabitants almost two years after Katrina. Katrina had managed to damage areas in New Orleans where over two-thirds of New Orleanians lived. The vast majority of those areas, such as the Lower Ninth, were exclusively inhabited by African-Americans who still remain displaced. There are an estimated 200,000 New Orleanians scattered around the country in cities such as Houston and Atlanta. Many of them previously rented their residences in New Or-

leans and are still unable to receive any financial help for returning to the city. The lack of affordable housing and the abandonment of public housing altogether only add to the question that I found nagging my pitiful efforts as a Habitat volunteer: “If we build it, for whom and what are we building?”

If the built environment and commitment to racial and economic justice are lacking, the precarious ecology of New Orleans certainly raises other concerns about the long-term viability of the city and the region. While there have been improvements in the levee system and strengthening of floodwalls and pumps, many of the same neighborhoods remain in danger of hurricane storms and surges. Without a serious environmental protection plan, similar to what the Dutch have accomplished with their low-lying landscape, New Orleans faces a bleak future. While New Orleanians, as Dan Baum suggests, “are excellent at the lost art of living in the moment,” some future planning must be undertaken by those committed to rebuilding the city not as a playground for the rich or tourists who only care about Bourbon Street, getting drunk, and/or getting laid. A critique of New Orleans as a rebuilt playground can be found in the dystopic vision of Tulane University professor Lawrence Powell: “Will this quirky and endlessly fascinating place become an X-rated theme park, a Disneyland for adults? Is it fated to be the place where Orlando embraces Las Vegas? That’s the American Pompeii I apprehend rising from the toxic sludge deposited by Lake Pontchartrain: an ersatz city, a veritable schlock and awe.”¹⁶ Obviously, rebuilding New Orleans as a sustainable and just city will require the kind of imagination and political will that, unfortunately, do not appear to exist, at least, among the governing class.

At the grassroots level there are definitely efforts to rebuild a more just and inclusive New Orleans. During the second day of my volunteer time, one of the musicians in Musician’s Village gave a lunch break concert from the

porch of his brightly colored pastel shotgun style house. Although originally Brazilian, he was a New Orleans resident and local musician for the last eight years. As he played to the Habitat volunteers, I was struck by his back-to-back renditions of “Stairway to Heaven” and “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door.” The latter Dylan lyric, while sung in Portuguese, just seemed to resonate with me at the time and does so even now. Knowing that he, like other Habitat house owners, had put in hundreds of hours of “sweat equity” and feeling the sweat run down my brow during that day and throughout the week, I realized that, even with all the contradictions plaguing Habitat and New Orleans, there were many good folks prepared to hammer on heaven’s door in order to bring a little piece of heaven, however battered and compromised, down to that tenuous spot of earth known as New Orleans.

NOTES

1. www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/neworleansjournal
2. Millard Fuller, *No More Shacks: The Daring Vision of Habitat for Humanity* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1986), 127.
3. *The Times-Picayune*, June 12, 2007, B1-2.
4. Ananta Kumar Giri, *Building in the Margins of Shacks: The Vision and Projects of Habitat for Humanity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), 254.
5. R. Allen Hays, “Habitat for Humanity: Building Social Capital Through Faith-Based Service,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 24:3 (2002): 266.
6. Giri, 94.
7. Hays, 267.
8. Giri, 123.
9. See, for example, Meizhu Lui, et. al., *The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the US Racial Wealth Divide* (New York: New Press, 2006)
10. *The Times-Picayune*, January 2, 2007, www.nola.com/printer/printer.ssf?/base/news-7/1167720179104140.xml
11. For further analysis of the impact of immigrant labor, both documented and undocumented in post-Katrina New Orleans, see Katharine M. Donato, et. al., “Reconstructing New Orleans after Katrina: The Emergence of An Immigrant Labor Market,” in *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, eds. David L. Brunsma, et. al. (Lanham: MD: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming); and Elizabeth Fussell, “Latino Immigrants in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” paper presented to the Regional Seminar on Labor Rights, New Orleans, October 19–22, 2006. (Copies in author’s possession. Thanks to Nicole Trujillo-Pagan for the former and Elizabeth Fussell for the latter.)
12. Craig A. Rimmerman, *The New Citizenship: Unconventional Politics, Activism, and Service* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 105.
13. When Bush appeared at a house dedication in Musician’s Village on August 29, 2006, he visited with the owner of the new house, Honduran native and New Orleans musician, Fredy Omar. Trying to act congenial, Bush asked Omar whether there was anything he could do to help. When Fredy told Bush he could move a piece of furniture from one end of the room to the other, Bush willingly obliged. This may have been the most constructive act Bush has done is his two-term Presidency. (Thanks to my cousin, Eric Shuman, the sax player in Fredy’s salsa band, for this story. The final editorial opinion is mine.)
14. Giri, 246.
15. Andrei Codrescu, *New Orleans, Mon Amour* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2006), 165–6.
16. Quoted in *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2006: Thanks to my colleague, Julie Klein, for bringing this to my attention.

“We Are Two Nations”

On the 80th Anniversary of the Execution of Sacco and Vanzetti

MARTIN OPPENHEIMER

WHAT IS IT THAT RADICALIZES PEOPLE? For Bartolomeo Vanzetti it's fair to say that it was life and literature. Born in Italy in 1888, Vanzetti went to work at age thirteen, came to the U.S. in 1908, moved from job to job, and in Plymouth, Massachusetts, got involved in a strike at the Plymouth Cordage Company. He led the life of an itinerant laborer. He was often unemployed. As one journalist described his situation, “He learned to line his clothes with newspaper when he slept outdoors in cold weather. He saw men . . . fumble in garbage cans for cabbage-leaves and half-rotten apples . . .”¹ In 1917 he moved to Mexico to avoid the draft. He considered World War I an imperialist conflict. Later, in one of his many published letters, he would say,

We believe more now than ever that the war was wrong . . . all that they say to you, all that they have promised you — it was a lie . . . an illusion . . . a cheat . . . a fraud . . . a crime. They promised you liberty. Where is liberty? They promised you prosperity. Where is prosperity?²

After the war he returned to Plymouth, working as a fish-peddler. He read a lot — Kropotkin, Tolstoi, Zola, Hugo, Gorki, Marx, Darwin, Spencer, Proudhon, Emerson, Sinclair Lewis, and Ernest Renan, whose *Life of Jesus* had been vehemently attacked by the Catholic Church.

In the winter of 1919-20 a wave of anti left-wing panic swept the country in the aftermath of the Soviet Revolution. Anarchists and other foreigners of radical bent (even some who were

citizens) were deported to various European countries, including the Soviet Union, in large numbers during the so-called Palmer Raids (named after A. Mitchell Palmer, Woodrow Wilson's Attorney General). Vanzetti and his close friend Nicola Sacco were active in protesting these events.

On May 5, 1920, Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested and charged with an attempted holdup in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, the previous December. Sacco had an air-tight alibi and was released, but Vanzetti was quickly convicted and sentenced to 15 years. But just prior to the arrest, on April 15, a paymaster and his guard had been robbed and shot to death in Braintree, Massachusetts. Sacco and Vanzetti were indicted for that crime as well. The trial began May 21, 1921. The prejudicial statements, both in court and out, of both judge and D.A. have been amply documented, and the evidence in the case has been scrutinized repeatedly over the years, not without controversy.³ Suffice it to say that there was vastly more than a reasonable doubt of their guilt, and literally dozens of people who have examined the evidence believe them to have been innocent (plus perhaps a few dozen who think, as in the Rosenberg case, that at least one of them was guilty). Nevertheless they were found guilty and, later, sentenced to death.

They were undoubtedly guilty of being foreigners and activist radicals during a terrible moment in U.S. history. It was New England “society” that engineered the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti and, despite years of appeals and world-wide pressure by liberal, labor, and left groups, and literally dozens of famous and reputable people not of the left — even including the not-so-reputable Henry Ford — sent them

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to the electric chair on August 23, 1927.

I FIRST BECAME AWARE of the Sacco-Vanzetti case as a teenager, when I chanced on a book in my parents' library, *Days of Our Years*, by a Dutch journalist, Pierre van Paassen.⁴ The bulk of his book describes his journeys in Europe, Africa, and Palestine (the British Mandate) between the World Wars. In 1927 he is in Paris. He involves himself in last-minute appeals on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti, and seeks a statement from Alfred Dreyfus. Dreyfus refuses. Van Paassen continues:

On the day set for the execution, Paris offered the strangest spectacle I have ever witnessed: the boulevards were deserted . . . not a wheel turned in the factories. The silence was so intense it was frightening . . . The Parisian worker remained home that day, spontaneously and naturally, as if a great national emergency had suddenly arisen . . . In its bewilderment the government rushed the army in, and the troops took up their positions in the deserted squares . . . stacking their rifles and uncovering their machine guns, ready for action . . . In the crowded working-class districts, people closed their shutters in a gesture of colossal contempt for the martial display . . . Nothing like it had happened since the year 1871, when the German army staged its insolent march of triumph down the deserted Champs-Élysées and, in consternation over the menacing silence and the barred windows, turned back before it had advanced a dozen blocks.

Vanzetti had become, in the course of his seven years' imprisonment, a remarkable literary figure. He had joined evening classes and taken a correspondence course. Even after his final sentencing on April 9, 1927, he continued to follow a careful routine of reading, writing and studying. He averaged four letters to the outside per week over seven years and three months, plus articles and essays on social conditions.⁵

Meanwhile virtually the entire literary and cultural world had aligned itself with the campaign to free Sacco and Vanzetti, or at mini-

mum obtain a new trial. The case would continue to evoke cultural expressions for years after the execution. A few examples from a very

Virtually the entire literary and cultural world had aligned itself with the campaign to free Sacco and Vanzetti.

large body of post-1927 work: Ben Shahn's series of paintings, *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, (1932) is among the best-known of these expressions. There is Maxwell Anderson's verse play *Winterset* (1935); Upton Sinclair's *Boston* (1928), which makes crystal clear the class-struggle implications of the case; there are ballads by Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Joan Baez, among others, and there are several films including one in Italian released around 1970, and a new documentary just released.⁶ In one of John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* "Camera Eye" sections in "The Big Money" volume he writes:

They have clubbed us off the streets they are stronger they are rich they hire and fire the politicians the newspapereditors the old judges the small men with reputations the college presidents the wardheelers . . . all right you have won you will kill the brave men our friends tonight . . . America our nation has been beaten by strangers who have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul their hired men sit on the judge's bench they sit back with their feet on the tables under the dome of the State House they are ignorant of our beliefs they have the dollars the guns the armed forces the powerplants they have built the electricchair and hired the executioner to throw the switch all right we are two nations . . .

For many Americans living in the 1920s, the Sacco-Vanzetti case marked a watershed

that converted them to radicalism, in much the same way that the Spanish Civil War did in the 1930s, or the Rosenberg execution or the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedy in the 1950s and 1960s. There is little doubt that the case did far more to stimulate radicalism than it did to suppress it. Sacco and Vanzetti will be remembered, as Vanzetti said on their conviction, “when your [the judge and D.A.] name, his name, your laws, institutions, and your false gods are but a dim memory of a cursed past in which man was wolf to man . . .”

NOTES

1. John Nicholas Beffel, “Odyssey of a Wop,” *American Mercury* April, 1932.
2. *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, ed. Marian Denham Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson, 1928.
3. For a fairly recent discussion, see Dorothy Gallagher, *All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca*, 1988.
4. The Dial Press, 1940.
5. There is a selection of Vanzetti’s letters in John Davis (ed.), *Sacco and Vanzetti*, in the Rebel Lives series published by Ocean Press, 2004.
6. Willow Pond Films, directed by Peter Miller.



Jim West

AGAINST THE CURRENT

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Smuggling for the ANC

A Politically Incorrect Account

CAREY HARRISON

I WAS RECRUITED to the African National Congress by a nice Jewish girl who had attended Cambridge University at the same time as myself, graduating in 1965. Let's call her Sandra Levi. For all I know her parents are still alive and her mother wouldn't want to discover some of the shenanigans Sandra got up to during her youth. If my Jewish mother were alive, she mightn't want to discover what I'd been up to, either.

Sandra was little more than an acquaintance at Cambridge. She was known as "Couldn't do one thing well." The nickname had arisen because she and her boyfriend, Tom, who subsequently became a successful actor, were late for the rehearsal of an undergraduate play. According to Tom, they were late because he and Sandra had been, as he tersely put it, "screwing." When the play's director complained about Sandra's lackluster rehearsal, she remarked that she couldn't be expected to do two things well in one afternoon. Tom, the boyfriend, was then heard to murmur the words by which Sandra became known.

After she graduated, Sandra seems to have set about redressing the wrong her nickname had done her. She signed up for Voluntary Service Overseas, the British equivalent of the Peace Corps, and in Dar es Salaam she "fell in," as a

mutual friend described it, "with some heavy black dudes." It was the early 1970s, Nelson Mandela was still in jail, and the heavy black dudes belonged to the ANC. When her year in Dar was up they sent her home to recruit some nice white boys who could help further the anti-apartheid cause.

I was at the time a member of a sad but touching organization known as the British Communist Party. May I confess this now without jeopardizing my freedom? If I may not, dear editor, please replace the three offending words with asterisks or with the name of, say, the British Goat Society, another sad but touching organization of which I was also a member. Indeed I was for many years a goat-breeder and Editor of the British Goat Society Year Book; during the same years I was co-chairman of "Stage Left," the British Communist Party's drama arm. At the time these two groups seemed to me to be oddly contrasting bedfellows, and it's only now, more than 30 years later, that I'm struck by their similarities — during the period of my membership both of them somehow managed to *lose* money on a fundraising yard sale — and, despite their ill-assorted character, the absence in both cases of any driving ideological purpose.

History will have more than this to say about the British Communist Party, but I fear that few today mourn its demise. The record will describe its glory days under Harry Pollitt; its brief tenure of a Docklands seat in the Houses of Parliament; the evaporation of its membership after the quashing of the Hungarian uprising, and its steady dwindling during the '60s, '70s and '80s, among a pack of rivals, breakaways, and "far left" groups with more appeal to protest-hungry, youthful radicals. At

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the fall of Soviet Communism the CP subsided like a sheeted ghost, with barely a moan. I had joined the party out of conservatism — it was the mother party, after all, and I found schisms discouraging in the very ways that they excited others — and also because I had been partly raised in Italy, where our town mayor, Prospero Velo, was the kind of Euro-communist (he cooked wonderful pasta *con funghi*) I would like to have become. I never had the slightest regret about belonging to the CP, as *passé* as it already was when I joined; its leaders lacked ferocity, but they had a kindliness missing from the character of other, more cutting-edge factions. It was a little like mixing with Anglican churchmen.

SO SANDRA COULDN'T-DO-ONE-THING- Well came directly to me, as a person known in our circle to be a fully paid-up lefty, recruited me, and passed me over to my ANC minder, or mentor, under whose aegis I became a loyal ANC freedom fighter until the day when I was asked if I would agree to perform an assassination. This is true, and it is no laughing matter, and yet the reader will soon understand why the story cannot be told with an entirely straight face.

My mentor — we shall call him Herbie, not to spare his aged mother but because he has been for many years and still is a leading ANC insider and member of the South African government — proved to be a nice fellow, a little nervous and with a tendency to look over his shoulder, but with a good sense of humor. He had been imprisoned in South Africa for conspiring against the apartheid state, which explained his nervousness, and gave him stature in my eyes; he often assured me that if I was captured in South Africa in the line of ANC duty I could expect to spend my jailbird future

I was asked if I would agree to perform an assassination.

in the company of “some very fine chaps.” Herbie may also have mentioned that in exchange for my sacrifice I would have a modest street named after me, come the revolution. Or I may have dreamt this up on my own.

An expedition to South Africa was mooted. My wife, who was also a CP member, was a party to our schemes. One weekend we invited Herbie and his wife to dinner, and when I raised ANC business I was startled to feel a sharp kick in the shin, beneath the dinner table. From Herbie's glowing eyes I realized he was the one who'd kicked me. I was used to being kicked under the table, as it happened, because I shared with my mother a tendency to indiscretion, and she, ignoring or perhaps incited by the fact that I had inherited this from her, was forever kicking me to silence me, even before the indiscretion had reached my lips. So instead of yelping, “Ow, that's me,” I endured the familiar shin-ache and held my tongue; later, during a cigarette break in the back garden, Herbie explained that his wife knew nothing about his illegal activities. Revolution, my mentor's expression told me, was about discipline, and discipline began in the home.

In my liberal soul (side by side with my conservative bent, my socialist principles and my anarchist temperament) I found this a little overdone, but no more so than our meetings in London parks, as Herbie led the way to a spot on the greensward where, presumably, no eavesdropping microphones could tape our talk. In my experience such perfectly reasonable precautions tend to increase one's paranoia, and even now I can hardly glimpse a couple harmlessly conversing in a park without wondering what they're cooking up. Our secretive planning sessions climaxed in the Golders Green Zoo rendezvous, of cherished memory.

Golders Green is a traditionally Jewish en-

clave, in North London, and it hosts a little zoo, one so modest that we were more or less assured of privacy. Here Herbie unveiled the twenty or so packing cases that my wife and I were to smuggle into South Africa, by sea. Our tickets were paid for, as was our entire trip, by the World Council of Churches, behind whose jolly and harmless-sounding name lay a fearless promoter of revolution, it seemed. My wife and I were to pretend to be emigrating to South Africa in search of a better, richer, whiter life, as quite a few British professionals (many of them dentists) did then; we were bringing our possessions with us, hence the packing cases. Inside the packing cases, as Herbie showed us by opening one, were purple plastic colanders. Heaven only knows where he had obtained a hundred or so of these. Underneath the colanders lay a great many manuals of instruction in revolutionary activities varying from organizing strikes to making Molotov cocktails, plus a great many copies of the history of the South African Communist Party (*Founder, Mohandas K. Gandhi*, as the cover explained). Any packing case entirely filled with this literature would have been suspiciously heavy; hence the plastic colanders to fill up half the space. Between the colanders and the books sat a plywood membrane, hiding the manuals of revolution that occupied in the bottom half of the packing case. So far so good. This was, Herbie assured us, a tried and tested operation. A Cape Town printing press, used until recently by the ANC, had been traced by the police and put out of action; we would be sending out our books and pamphlets to infuriate and baffle those who thought they had stifled homegrown propaganda.

To this end, we were taking with us a roll of stick-on addresses featuring the many hundreds of sympathizers to whom we were to send the books. It always alarms me in retrospect to think of the quantity of harm that would have ensued if that little roll of addresses, such a small item compared to the twenty hefty packing cases, had fallen into official hands. Couldn't a

sympathisant in South Africa have given us the names and addresses once we arrived, so that we didn't have to smuggle in the potentially fatal details? It was true that a vital part of the mission was its isolation — the only name we could betray, if caught, was that of our distant London mentor, so perhaps it was better that we met no freedom fighters while we were in South Africa. Yet if our lengthy roll of names were captured, how would the people on it convincingly protest their innocence? And would the South African secret service have cared about their protests? Many of the addresses were in the townships, where the guilt by association with the names on the roll would surely seal a great many fates.

THIS WAS NERVE-WRACKING. But there was a more immediate source of anxiety: the packing cases themselves. All four sides of each case were decorated, about halfway up each side, by a horizontal row of large, shiny nail-heads so close together that a child, much less a customs official, would have been obliged to conclude that they either penetrated or, more likely, supported something inside the crate. If, on the outside of the packing case, someone had stenciled *False Bottom Here*, its presence could hardly have been more obvious.

I felt a panicky flutter of certainty that we should halt our flirtation with freedom fighting right now, at Golders Green Zoo, apologize, shake Herbie firmly by the hand, and run for the underground station. Instead I faltered, and asked about the telltale nails. No problem, Herbie assured us. The words *tried and tested operation* recurred. We wouldn't be attempting to go through customs with these packing cases, which indeed would give the game away on sight. No, the way it worked was that we would disembark at Cape Town along with other passengers, while the cargo and luggage in the hold would sail on around the Cape to Durban and Port Elizabeth. In due course, cargo and luggage intended for Cape Town would be un-

loaded on the ship's return, some days later, before setting out again for the UK. Our luggage would be placed in a warehouse on the dock, and we would find it in the keeping of a boy with a clipboard, according to Herbie, ready to be delivered into our hands.

It amazes me to think that we ever took this rigmarole seriously. It's even more alarming to recall that we entrusted to it our freedom and that of the unsuspecting people whose names and addresses we were carrying. Why on earth would the ship proceed to Durban and Port Elizabeth, presumably to unload cargo there as well as passengers, and only unload the Cape Town cargo on the return trip? There might have been some logic to this, unknown to us; but there was certainly none to the idea that a "boy with a clipboard" would be the only person in charge of a great quantity of packing cases newly arrived from abroad, which had not cleared customs. I can only think that Herbie's bona fides as a 'tried and tested' freedom fighter overcame whatever common sense we had between us, my wife and me, even the voice of common sense you might think would speak up in someone risking a good many years in jail, and whatever brutalities might precede it. Not to speak of the lives of those our precious roll would betray.

We were, of course, consumed with the rightness of our cause — which indeed neither time nor foolishness can dim — and too delighted with our own heroism to pull back at the last minute. I would imagine that at all times there are people risking discovery, on every continent, living beneath an implausible cover and carrying out plans as daft as ours were. How can you measure the risk, we tell ourselves, when the cause is so good? But there's a little more than this to the psychology of risk-taking. Once we enter the theatre of espionage, some part of us willingly embraces unsafeness. Perhaps that same part of us also wants to be caught, although one might not know it from the literature devoted to undercover work. Regardless of the

nobility of the cause, flouting the law makes a child of us again, mingling the pleasures of transgression with the yearning to be forgiven. This I soon discovered, on the dockside in Cape Town.

The voyage was marked only by the struggle to maintain a straight face while agreeing with the emigrating British dentists about our Mother Country's sad decline into multi-cultural squalor. Perhaps they too were staging a show, a bravado performance to mask whatever shame they felt about running off to a racist paradise. It was hard to relax; pretense was everywhere. At last we docked at Cape Town, early one rainy morning. I stood at the rail, gazing at Table Mountain wreathed in wet mist. My wife was still in bed. When I looked over the side of the ship, down at the dock, I saw our packing cases being unloaded. I knew them, even at a distance, by the idiotic false-bottom-supporting line of nails that would soon be greeting the eyes of wary South African customs officers.

There was no time to wonder what had happened to Herbie's tried and tested routine. We were about to go through customs with our comical stage props, the packing cases that looked like the work of a child attempting a conjuring trick. We had perhaps half an hour of freedom left, and then, once the South African police were done with us, we would be spending what remained of our youth behind bars, in the company of those "very fine chaps" Herbie had promised us.

AND THEN A MIRACLE APPEARED to happen, with a lack of logic that perfectly mirrored Herbie's implausible smuggling strategy. When all the dentists and their gear had passed through the customs shed, our twenty packing cases were left. It was clear enough to us that the customs officers had left them till last, and with good reason. They were a joke, and had probably been exposed as such long before we reached the customs building. All it had taken

was for one of the packing cases to be opened, and for the inspecting officer to wonder why such a heavy case appeared to be crammed with purple plastic colanders.

A whole row of customs officials awaited

No, of course I won't agree to kill
someone without further inquiry.

us. In front of them stood their chief, a small, merry man with one eye. They stood in silence, studying us. Had the silence lasted an instant longer, I would have stepped forward, as I longed to do, and confessed. It had been a moment of folly, I was ready to say in a tearful tone; we had fallen in with the wrong crowd, and had promised to do something foolish and shameful. Please, take pity on such innocents as we.

Instead, the one-eyed chief spoke first. "Any machine-guns?" he asked, surveying our pitiful packing cases. How we chuckled, along with the other customs men! And out of the shed they marched, their morning's tedious duty done, leaving us to find a van for rent, to cart off our possessions.

We were not fooled, we told ourselves. They had obviously looked into one of the cases, and would now be tailing us in the hope that we would lead them to bigger fish.

Herbie had told us to take our time, rent an apartment, unpack the books, buy envelopes, and gradually dispatch them — gradually, because for some reason still unclear to me the security forces were said by Herbie to be on the lookout for large-scale postings of subversive material. It was imperative that we send no more than a dozen books from any one mailbox. Having given up applying common sense to larger issues, we had no reason to ask ourselves how this would fool government vigilance, let alone how the police would know that our en-

velopes contained subversive matter, regardless of whether we sent few at a time or many. We followed instructions. And since we were convinced that the police might spring an ambush at any moment, we worked at a feverish pace.

The apartment we found belonged to an elderly couple who had gone on holiday. It was full of dark imported furniture lovingly polished by their owners, most likely fastidious German Jews who were now destined to return from their holiday to find bizarre debris littering their home: packing cases and a perfectly enormous number of purple plastic colanders. There would also be stamps, spare envelopes, and several pairs of thin white cotton gloves, soiled at the fingertips. Herbie had enclosed these in the packing cases, saying we were to use them when filling the envelopes. Their purpose was to save our fingers, he told us, rather than to avoid fingerprints. While my white-gloved wife took on the burden of filling envelopes, I set out in our rented van to make a map of the mailboxes of Cape Province, so that we could send out the small batches of envelopes as swiftly as possible, and be gone. We had cash with which to book a return flight to Britain, presumably posing, if asked, as returning holidaymakers rather than immigrants who'd instantly changed their minds. The operation was supposed to take a week or two. Frantic and expecting arrest at any moment, we completed it within 48 hours, going without sleep and without food other than the avocados available everywhere at the roadside. As we boarded the aircraft home, still shivering with alarm as well as the frightful effect on our system of a diet of avocado, it seemed as if the last laugh would be on us. A police car sped onto the airfield with its siren blaring, and pulled to a halt beside our aircraft. We stood waiting on the tarmac, ready for the handcuffs. Two burly policemen elbowed us out of the way and ran up the steps — precisely as if in the movie of our mission — to disappear into the plane. After an interminable wait, a man emerged, under escort. We watched him being

taken towards the police car. Then we scrambled aboard.

AS A FIRST TASTE OF UNDERCOVER derring-do, what my wife and I later referred to as Mission Avocado was a perfect introduction, full of blunders and coincidences and farcical errors on both sides, part of a struggle as wreathed in fog as Table Mountain on the day of our arrival in Cape Town. The world of conspiracy is one of unending confusion and mismanagement — like life, only more so. My last taste was just as confusing. I met Herbie in the Tottenham Court Road, to concoct our next scheme, or so I imagined. Instead, as we strolled, he asked me if I would be prepared to assassinate someone, for the cause. I didn't for one moment think he meant this as anything but idle speculation. When he made it clear that he was in deadly earnest, I had to keep a smile off my face. After all, I was walking up the Tottenham Court Road in the sunshine with someone who by now I regarded as a pal. Why was he adopting an official tone I had never heard him use before? Was this a test, I asked? Herbie shook his head. I stared at him, as we walked.

Was he seriously asking if I would I kill someone? Whom? He couldn't tell me that, Herbie replied. Then it's a real mission? I asked. He couldn't tell me, Herbie repeated. First I had to say yes or no. I protested that this was absurd. We walked slowly on, in dogged silence. No doubt I could simply have said no, at once, but Herbie's tone alerted me to the finality of this. If I said no, it struck me, I would never hear from him again — he hadn't said so, and there seemed no earthly logic to it, but I sensed it in his manner. I was hurt and baffled, and didn't want to find myself discarded in such a strange fashion. Surely, I pleaded, this was a test rather than a real enquiry. The required answer was *no*, because this would show that I was a

thinking revolutionary and not a mindless fanatic. Was I right? I asked. Give us a hint, I said, appealing to Herbie's sense of humor, to our friendship, to everything that made it idiotic to be having this conversation in this particular way, in the sunlit Tottenham Court Road. Herbie gave no sign. I kept on trying to loosen him up, but in vain. He seemed to have turned into a character from a Sartre novel, from Orwell, perhaps, or Koestler. His stony face belonged to one of the impassive, barely human apparatchiks that haunt the dreams of those who have been duped by socialism. Was this grand inquisitor my playful Herbie? Was it a joke?

It was no joke. I'm wagering, I said, that it's a test and I'm supposed to say, no: no, of course I won't agree to kill someone without further inquiry.

Could I imagine agreeing to kill someone, I wondered later, under any circumstances? Some part of my spirit had responded to the idea of murderous revenge, and had already prompted me, there on the sidewalk, to wonder whether if I — or rather an unmarried, unattached version of myself — were persuaded that I alone could stop the worst of men, a torturer perhaps, or a Hitler, from continuing along his cruel path... how easily could I say no? But this was hardly the case here, when what seemed to be demanded of me was a formal pledge, not an act of courage but a surrender of my will.

So I said no, and never heard from Herbie again.

With this my hope of a footnote in history disappeared. If Herbie ever actually said that one day, when my revolutionary career was over and the revolution itself was achieved, a small laneway, an alley perhaps, in Johannesburg would be named after me, as it would after all the heroes of the movement, I blew my chance; if you come across a Harrison Street in Jo'burg, you may be sure it commemorates someone else.

Confronting Horror

Writing About Torture

KRISTIAN WILLIAMS

I DID NOT DREAM OF BEING TORTURED.

But I did dream of being caged, of being bound and blindfolded, of being kept cold and naked in a small steel box. I dreamed of terrible footsteps, always approaching, and the chilling sound of metal clanging against metal. I dreamed of endless screams, and of shadows that stretched toward me, and of hands holding instruments that I could never quite see.

The dreams ended, always, before the pain could become real. But that is a small matter. The fear was real enough.

I SPENT A LITTLE LESS THAN A YEAR researching and writing my book *American Methods* — or, a little more than a year if you count the time spent on revisions. The book examines the U.S. government's use of torture — in war, in prison, and by proxy. My research led me to read scores of human rights reports, hundreds of pages of government documents, countless newspaper articles, and numerous books on the history and practice of torture, international law, global politics, and rape. I learned a whole new vocabulary — “hooding,” “monsterring,” “stress positions,” “falaka,” “strip cells,” “rendition,” “waterboarding,” “the Palestinian hanging.” And I became acquainted with all variety of imaginative new uses for radiators, pliers, sandbags, broom handles, wire brushes, and typewriter covers. It was not easy work.

At the beginning, my attitude was impossibly naive. Not that I believed our government's official line, that torture is rarely practiced and

never condoned — but I thought I could immerse myself in the subject for months and not suffer because of it.

I should have known better. I had already written one book about state violence, and I clearly remembered weeping at my keyboard, searching for words with which to describe the deep and abiding hate that could produce the murders of the civil rights workers Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, and James Chaney. I remembered the chill I felt typing out “death squad” as I wrote about the assassination of Fred Hampton. And still — I thought I could confront our practices of torture without also sharing in the spiritual wreckage that those practices have wrought. I assumed that my anger would protect me from the worst facts that I could be made to face. I was wrong, in part because anger cannot — and should not — diminish sorrow, or shame, or impotent loathing. But I expected, somehow, to stare into the abyss without the abyss also staring into me.

PAIN NEVER FEATURED DIRECTLY IN MY dreams. I did not see the torturers themselves, or their instruments. It was the fear — the terror — that forced me awake, gasping and sweat-soaked, in the middle of the night. And when I woke the fear stayed with me. The world felt uncomfortably small. The very idea of safety seemed brittle and thin; order was an obscene joke.

I gradually learned how to keep the nightmares at bay. They came in a cycle, and I labored to recognize it. So when I noticed that I was having trouble sleeping, before the dreams became too intense, I would shift my focus from research to writing. I would put away, for a time, whatever I was reading and try instead to get

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my thoughts in order, to translate my dread into written language. I built a wall with words, to keep out the fear. And as long as I kept writing, my anxiety would fade, my nightmares would cease. If writing could not restore the feeling of safety, it could at least shore up my confidence in my own quiet sanity.

Such, I suspect, is a major reason why I write — to confront, understand, articulate, and in a very limited way, to control that which I fear.

But the horror remains. And through my writing, I do my part to spread it. I focus it in the text. I funnel it to the reader. I distribute it, measure upon measure, chapter after chapter. And in the process, I am changed.

WRITING ABOUT TORTURE CHANGED ME, and not always for the better. I am, I realize, less tough than I once thought — but this is no loss. And I am more wary of violence, and those who advocate or excuse it. This, too, is likely for the best. But I have also lost something, which could not rightly be called inno-

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closer to faith.

cence and may be rather closer to faith. For I have come to see that the human spirit is not indomitable. It can be so thoroughly crushed that freedom and dignity disappear. They can be blotted out, surviving not even as ideals or aspirations. In one way, I have been faced with the fact of

human mortality — not only in the physical or even spiritual sense — but in a moral sense as well. It is possible, through the medium of pain, not only to wipe out a person's existence, but also to erase her sense of self, to finally break her grasp on reality — to nullify and negate all values and all meaning. This knowledge, I see now, has its price.

And yet we must remember this: I am only *thinking* about torture, while elsewhere there are actual human beings held in lightless cells, starving and frozen, undergoing electroshock, being beaten, being raped. Their suffering is not in the least abstract. Their confrontation with horror is not in any sense voluntary. Their nightmares, I would wager, are not so easily allayed.

Borrowed Light

Here in the Twentieth Century

SHEILA BLACK

WHERE SHALL WE NOT FIND IT? In Sidi's narrow restaurant
where the dark-faced men stand before the
steam of the cooking pots, picturing almond trees in
warm wind or in the torn-off arms of the boy in your
unit whom they called because of his old man face,
Grandfather, though he was at time of death
eight years old. Your stories. My stories. Today on
television, a parade of soldiers through New York.
A crowd applauding, a knot of people booing, the
soldiers swinging their rifles through the air
like clean-limbed girls. You said, *In our religion*
we believe in all the prophets, in Jesus even
with his glass of blood, his bread of flesh.
Who could not long for such a thing, you said,
to take in another like a sweet fruit? You lay with
your arm curved around me, but your face severe
as something carved, as if now when I picture you,
the future was already unreeling before us.

SHEILA BLACK is the author of a full-length poetry collection, *House of Bone*, (CustomWords Press) and a chapbook *How to be a Maquiladora* (Main Street Rag Publishing). In 2000 she was the U.S. co-winner of the Frost-Pellicer Frontera Prize, given to one U.S. and one Mexican poet living along the U.S.-Mexico Border. The poem "Borrowed Light" is part of a forthcoming collection entitled *Love/Iraq*. She lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The War on France

Sarkozy, Le Pen and the Great Escape

ALEXANDER ZEVIN

THE U.S. PRESS SHOWED AN ALMOST unnerving level of interest in this year's French presidential election. The coverage, while generous, also tended to be narrow, silly and even willfully blind to the complex issues that saw 84 percent of France's registered voters cast ballots on May 5th. The venerable news organizations delivered little more than gossip — gossip dressed up demurely as political analysis. For months the *N.Y. Times* told us what the socialist party candidate, Ségolène Royal, was wearing, commented in depth on her skirts, her hair, her radiant smile and her marriage. In an April 23rd article for the *New Yorker* entitled "The War for France," Jane Kramer began by recounting a botched attempt to order a ham and cheese sandwich from a Paris hotel. This episode revealed all sorts of things about the French — a rigid Cartesian mindset, an ossified state bureaucracy, a sluggish economy. One gets the impression that reporters in France have been locked up, forced to share a cell with every common cliché. It cannot be easy attempting to deal with a citizenry so dyspeptic they seriously spread their vote among some 12 first-round contenders — from the perennial Trotskyist Arlette Laguiller to the right-wing aristocrat Philippe de Villiers. For an American this orgy of voting is a kind of moral and civic scandal.

But for all of its concerted flippancy, the coverage, this light touch, is not at all innocent. The caricatures themselves — the French as lazy or backwards or spleenful — are only alibis and extremely harmless. They are made to serve, as it were, in a larger ideological game, a sweeping

dismissal, not of the French per se but of the entire process, this incredible conceit — as if globalization were something we might confer, debate and then vote on. Globalization, however, as we no longer even need reminding, is not a man-made force, it is a force of nature. Choosing to accept it is like choosing to take your next breath.

Nevertheless, the election is treated as a choice, a great clash, and this treatment, in a testament to the success of the concept of globalization itself, is the same in England, the United States, France and almost everywhere else: Nicholas Sarkozy plans to change France — to introduce market reforms, to reduce the protections French workers enjoy, to scale back the sprawling welfare state — in order to jumpstart the economy, create jobs and restore French competitiveness. A dark cloud hovers over his candidacy — something about removing scum from the suburbs with a *kärcher** — but this is of a piece with his appeal: tough-minded, honest, determined to break with the status quo. Ségolène Royal represents, if only by default, the bad old ways: she wants to retain the 35-hour work week, increase the minimum wage, increase state pensions, institute job training programs for recent graduates. She is portrayed, in contrast to Sarkozy, as positively airy, about to blow away — she implores voters, especially women, to move towards the light, she compares herself (ridiculously!) to Joan of Arc.

The question as it is posed by such reporting is clear, and its content is fundamentally economic. Will France, at long last, choose to enter the global marketplace by electing Nicholas Sarkozy? Or will it continue along the path of

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*cleansing hose with high pressure water

negligible economic growth, high unemployment, a kind of state sponsored slide? The fact that Nicholas Sarkozy won handily, with 53 percent of the vote, suggests the French made a difficult but courageous decision on May 5th.

But in order for this to be the case, one needs to accept the initial argument that France

France has one of the lowest poverty rates in the world. Growth, while modest, has been shared more equitably among the entire population than in the United States and UK

is in economic decline, and that this decline is the principal reason the French sent Nicholas Sarkozy to the Elysée Palace. According to a 2006 poll by CEVIPOF (Center for the Study of French Political Life) 76 percent of the French think the next generation will have less chance of success than their own. The sentiments expressed in such surveys are indeed ominous. But the causal link between the relatively high unemployment rate (9 percent or so) and a feeling of social crisis is simply assumed, never demonstrated. What's wrong with France? It's the economy, stupid. The answer is redundant. What's wrong is always only an expression of basic economic forces. History swings viciously back on its hinges: the most vulgar Marxism is here reborn as a basic neo-liberal truth. The fact that it is used, like a night-stick, to bash what remains of the left in France is more than a cruel irony. It begins to show us the quicksand upon which the whole argument that pits globalization against the continuation and expansion of the welfare state in France, and Europe, is based.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO REFUTE the notion that France has refused to join in a globalizing world market. The intensity of the press coverage itself suggests that France is a brand name with global recognition. It is not that it has failed to take part. It has played the game only too well, for like any truly good player it knows when to break the rules. French companies snap up their foreign counterparts. Between 2005 and 2006, acquisitions by French companies increased by over 150 percent. The center-right government has, at the same time, repeatedly blocked major French companies (e.g., Danone, Suez, etc.) from being acquired by foreigners. And as Finance Minister, it was Sarkozy who bailed out the French train-maker Alstom in 2004. France participates in globalization, and, to some extent, on its own terms.

In the domestic sphere the statistics, which are always presented in the most blasé manner, obscure as much as they illuminate about the economic situation in France. In an April 2007 cover story *The Economist* endorsed Nicholas Sarkozy. It noted that for the past five years GDP growth in France has been below the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) average (just 2 percent in 2006 which, however, does bring it in line with the other large European economies) and that for the last 25 years unemployment has not dipped below 8 percent. They could have added that in the banlieues, where the November 2005 riots began, that figure can rise even higher.

At the same time, France has one of the lowest poverty rates in the world. Growth, while modest, has been shared more equitably among the entire population than in the United States and the UK, where the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. French workers are more productive per hour than their U.S. or UK counterparts — at least in part because of measures such as the 35-hour work week, minimum vacation periods, and maternity and paternity leave. The top companies on the Paris Bourse continued to post record profits in 2007. And

France, which, despite all of these social protections, including universal healthcare and education, is still the sixth richest country in the world.

The numbers go on forever and cut in both directions. One risks getting permanently lost, having learnt nothing. I cite the so-called positive numbers in part to suggest the absolutely equivocal nature of this kind of game — this appeal to the alpha and omega of the economic stratum, of raw data. How can the economic be determinate (here, in the first instance) when, far from representing some neutral ground, it is a source of consternation, of endless speculation? These statistics are like dreams: their relationship to our waking life is a matter for interpretation. In this discourse on the decline of France, the economy too, it turns out, is just another sign lost in an economy of signs. To appeal to the economic data as a way of proving, definitively, that France is (or is not) in crisis is a futile one.

To say, however, as Kramer does in her New Yorker article, that France is “disastrously out of touch with the global reality” is dishonest. Such dismissals are entirely too shrill to be believed. The fact that they are uttered with near unanimity suggests the rather urgent need to cover over alternative explanations. On one level, the alternative is obvious: if the welfare model in France is threatened by globalization (by, for example, cheap foreign labor), so too is the rationale for globalization inevitable. Like any great threat, this one comes from within the established order; from within the very heart of the new “global reality.” Such is the great weakness of this *de facto* argument, which, one way or another, must constantly appeal to the figure of reality. Kramer elsewhere calls the relationship between the French government and its citizens — one based on a strong, protectionist state — a “historic compromise with reality.” This captures something of the basic conceit in the literature on these elections in which the whole nation of France is portrayed as catastrophically deluded. Taking this “diagnosis” se-

riously begs the question: can a people make a pact with the imaginary? And, if they can, would it remain an illusion? Wouldn't the notion of popular sovereignty have the imprimatur to alter the very nature of reality — to send it along a different track?

An oft-cited poll shows that only 36 percent of the French think the “free market” is the best economic system, in contrast to 71 percent of Americans and 66 percent of the British. The prevalence of this view suggests that a very different reality already exists in France. In some ongoing, imperfect, and imperiled way, the French have already made certain choices about the costs of globalization they are willing to accept. The real is at its most mystical when it is invoked in the name of globalization. Reality: not critique but circularity and injunction — its very vacuousness a sign that it has taken leave of the rational. It is worth noting, also, that reality, economy — these dog-eared categories — are what a globalizing world (of crumbling national borders, freely flowing capital, and so on) should most profoundly call into question. Somehow these terms remain foundational. There are no others. Instead it is the welfare state that is called into question; the welfare state, which, by comparison to the “reality” of unregulated capitalism, is a positively modern historical phenomenon. The recent social struggles that produced a version of social citizenship in France are willfully forgotten.¹ The welfare state becomes, by a maddening reversal, the sign of anachronism itself.

IN SO FAR AS IT IS EVER JUST AN EXPLANATION, the economic one sheds very little light on the sense of foreboding felt by the French electorate. Nor can it readily explain Nicholas Sarkozy's victory. For behind the flood of data lurks a still more inexplicable character whose appeal is very rarely understood: the eternal right-wing candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. Mr. Le Pen is dismissed in the same smug manner as the French welfare state. At 78 he is nearly

as old. His racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia are notorious. He is the Ubu-Roi of French politics — rotund, mirthful, infuriating and seemingly indestructible. He has stood in five presidential elections. Even after his relatively poor first round showing in 2007, he continues to harangue and provoke. He recently criticized one of Sarkozy's new cabinet ministers, Rachida Dati, for maintaining her French-Moroccan dual citizenship. Dati had no comment. It is hardly necessary to respond. In the current system, which is not proportional, the National Front (FN), fails to get any seats in parliament. But both this posture of non-engagement and the attempts to destroy him outright — he has been tried on more than one occasion for Holocaust denial — leave him strangely unscathed.

After his defeat in the first round, Le Pen has once again been exiled from respectable discourse, this time with a sigh of relief. A strange sentiment, considering the entire 2007 election was played out in the shadow of 2002 when Le Pen beat then Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin. In the first round of that election Le Pen won about 17 percent of the vote, slightly more than Jospin and slightly less than Jacques Chirac. Jane Kramer called this event, simply, a disaster. The national membership of the Socialist Party chose the charismatic Royal, in part, to avoid a repeat of 2002 at all costs. A disaster, a catastrophe, and so much more.

It becomes, at some point, useless to brush Le Pen off as an extreme right wing candidate (a disaster visited on an upright nation) when more than 5 million French people feel comfortable voting for him. Le Pen is represented alternately as a clown and a storm trooper. He is, perhaps, a bit of both. He is Ubu in this sense too — for if his views are loathsome to many, he gains his strength from those ugly grudges

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that still course through modern France. His life, which traces the decline of France in the twentieth-century, is an expression of this discontent. Orphaned during World War II, Le Pen fought as a paratrooper in Indochina and served as an intelligence officer in Algeria. When he speaks

of a “zero immigration” policy he is always alluding, in some way, to Algeria, and the massive immigration that followed France's withdrawal in 1962. When he speaks of “law and order” he is also speaking about Algeria — this time in reference to the children and grandchildren of those immigrants, many of whom still live in the same crime-ridden housing projects in the suburbs.

Polls never get his level of support quite right. His voters: an army of shadows. They too come from Algeria as pieds-noirs, Algerian residents of French decent, more than a million of whom flooded the metropole after the colony's independence. Algeria is the *mise-en-scene* of Le Pen's political fortune: both the putative target of his ire — the largely Muslim descendants of immigrants from North Africa — as well as his base of support in the former colonial elites. Le Pen, in his very person, summons and speaks to the latter — to their sense of betrayal and loss at the sudden withdrawal of French forces by De Gaulle after a decade of brutal fighting. For them — and their children and many others — Algeria remains a ghost limb.

Le Pen's relatively weak showing in this election (about 10 percent in the first round) is a testament to his indelible impact on the political scene. The main presidential candidates took up his central themes of immigration, employment, and crime with a vigor that belies all the hand wringing about his unconscionable positions. Le Pen was the first to notice such official hypocrisy. “Politicians now copy entire

sections of our discourse, which they still ranted against a few months ago,” he said as far back as January 2006. Sarkozy is extremely nimble at this game. He openly borrowed from Le Pen during the campaign, urging strict law enforcement in the same breath as he called young troublemakers from the suburbs “thugs” and “scum.” He has followed through on his campaign promise to create a cryptically titled Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, which aims to deport some 25,000 immigrants this year alone. At the new ministry Le Pen’s “France aux Français” (France for the French) rhetoric is dressed up in all the majesty of state. For her part, Ségolène Royal frequently urged her supporters to reclaim patriotic symbols like the flag and the national anthem. And François Bayrou, the self-appointed representative of the middle way in the first round, effectively shunned divisive ideologies, aping Le Pen’s pragmatic dictum: “Ni Droite, Ni Gauche, Français” (Neither Left, nor Right, but French).

One of the points of attempting to understand Le Pen, and his appeal, is to show that it is not Le Pen (or it is no longer Le Pen) who fills the symbolic role of evil in French political and cultural life. It is Sarkozy, uniquely, who now possesses the power to terrify; who, like a particularly apt pupil, surpasses and outstrips the old master. The evidence for such a transition was provided by Le Pen himself in one of the election’s great pieces of political stagecraft. Le Pen made an unexpected visit to the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil where Sarkozy, then interior minister, called young delinquents, mainly of North African descent, “scum” in 2005. Le Pen was quoted in the *Times* telling Arab and African passersby, “If some want to Kärcherize you, we want to help you get out of these ghettos.” Sarkozy’s language is so violent — he infamously promised to flush out the troubled suburb of La Courneuve with a hose — that it allows Le Pen to pose as a conciliatory figure among the very minority groups he has done so much to antagonize. But, most sig-

nificantly, and as Le Pen did not fail to point out, he was able to campaign and speak freely in a neighborhood where Nicholas Sarkozy never showed his face during the election. A place where the President-elect of France dare not go and is not welcome. This says everything about the fear, distrust and anger felt for Nicolas Sarkozy by many citizens.

THE STANDARD WISDOM is that anyone who wishes to be president of France must seduce the public. Sarkozy shows that domination and threats also exercise a powerful allure. His campaign, extraordinarily, was based on an open hostility to the “French model” — the need, among other things, to work harder, longer, and with greater independence from the state. During the campaign he spoke of a “strategy of rupture” and in his victory speech he affirmed his desire for a “rupture” with the past. Sarkozy arrives not to save France but to vanquish the very notion of retrieval. He does not seek vengeance for historical grievances (as does Le Pen) but escape, a clean slate. Like Le Pen his campaign was based on fear. But instead of relying solely on a fear of the other — of immigrants and criminals — to win votes, Sarkozy cultivates fear of himself. He cloaks himself in this fear like a talisman. In calling for a ministry with the suggestive name of immigration and national identity Sarkozy did not make a blunder. The name conjures up the Vichy government with its Commissariat of Jewish Affairs, and it is meant to. His apparent preference for Louis-Ferdinand Céline, one of the few authors he has acknowledged reading, also suggests the mystique of wartime collaboration and *Bagatelles pour un massacre*. The fact that his mother was a Jewish immigrant (a tidbit that Craig Smith, writing for the *N.Y. Times* and the *Herald Tribune*, never tires of sweetly repeating about the man) only adds to the general ambience of danger. A haphazard and contradictory mash of symbols, the whiff of scandal, the thrill of self-repudiation. Le style c’est final.²

Le Pen aims to release historical forces in a kind of bacchanal, a free-for-all, a set of anarchic conditions which, he thinks, will favor his reactionary proposals.

Sarkozy, on the contrary, has no desire to unleash the hidden forces (of resentment, betrayal, loss and racial fear) inspired by, among other things, Algeria, but to control these symbols for his own

ends. To use them and then outrun them. This is “Speedy Sarkozy’s” fatal innovation. He outflanks Le Pen, who is, for all his vitriol, still a part of the painful history of Vichy, Nazi apologias, and colonial misadventures. Sarkozy promises to give France a new identity without looking for it anywhere. By leaving all stones unturned. But how to perform such a trick? How to make something appear from nothing? The same way nothing always attains its value: through repetition, through circulation, through the economy.

THE IMPERATIVE TO GLOBALIZE and to grow economically, at all costs, is a way to short-circuit these troubling and persistent questions of history and national identity. The “rupture” is the linchpin of this strategy: to boom, to forget, to discover national purpose in the midst of a breathtaking surplus. To vote for Sarkozy is to finally be done with Le Pen. Done with him precisely because — having been fully assimilated into the political agenda of the “center-right” — he will cease needing to exist outside of it. Sarkozy is, in this sense, the mauvais génie of the elections — an “evil genius of modernity, which pushes innovation to the point of extravagance” in order to discover a kind of fantastical liberty³. It is no accident that the so-called necessity to globalize is presented as a liberation from social problems. The enlightened and moderate position — that jobs and

economic growth are the best weapons against Le Pen and his pandering — is worse than a hoax. In the name of economic exigency, it

wants nothing more than to be rid of both Le Pen and the immigrants his FN party stigmatizes. It is not even a question of surpassing divisions within France through prosperity. The economic messianism of journal-

ists, politicians, and others is absolutely opposed to dealing with these problems in the first place. It is intolerance itself. It proposes to skip them.

The people who voted for Sarkozy have, in fact, made a pact with the imaginary — in which, they hope, the past no longer has to be a noose around their neck. It is the equivalent of a jailbreak, organized en masse. Sarkozy’s UMP robs the FN of its rhetorical power even as its intentions remain highly ambiguous. Does the ruling party also intend to make France an immigrant free zone, or to give ‘native’ French preferential treatment in hiring and social services? The politicians are playing with fire and risk infuriating everyone. The French do not want Nicholas Sarkozy to destroy the welfare state but rather to cleanse them of a certain contamination that inheres in the very process of defining it.

It is no coincidence that, at the end of the campaign, Sarkozy turns his gaze on Europe. In his victory speech he renewed France’s commitment to the European Union and promised to revive its constitution. Or at least to implement key parts of it — this time without the consent of the electorate who, in the wake of their 2005 rejection of that document, can no longer be counted on. The engine of economic integration and liberalization on the continent, the EU seems to be the panacea for unemployment Sarkozy has promised. But the forces of globalization are not to be relied upon. The

Instead of relying solely on a fear of the other — of immigrants and criminals — to win votes, Sarkozy cultivates fear of himself.

outsourcing of jobs, especially industrial ones, often takes place within the EU itself where developing markets in the east have less stringent labor regulations. Nor is it entirely clear how the right's proposals to relax France's own labor laws by making jobs harder to hold (i.e. more 'flexible') increases the quantity, or quality, of available occupations. Taken on its own terms, the promised economic miracle appears precarious. But even if Sarkozy's victory represents the dawn of a startling economic triumph, the anxieties about the constitution have not gone away; the more than five million immigrants, and their citizen children and grandchildren, have not gone away; and the cultural resentments bred by a century of geopolitical de-

cline have certainly not gone away. In the end, the escape — not from reality or the present but from the irreducible truth of history — can only be temporary. The past: it is a permanent malady, and also a spark of hope.

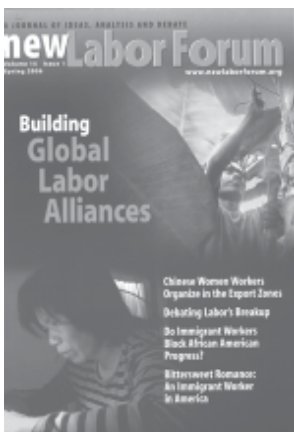
NOTES

1. For a more thorough discussion of the historical evolution of social citizenship in France and an original analysis of economic and employment data, see: Cohen, Mitchell. "French Crisis, Left Crisis: Report by a Compromised Social Democrat." *Dissent*, summer, 2006
2. "Style is final" — a quotation from Louis Ferdinand Céline that, according to a February 9, 2006, article in *Le Monde* by Philippe Ridet, is a favorite expression of Sarkozy's.
3. Jean Baudrillard. *America* (London: Verso, 1998) p. 96.

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Does Immigration Hurt U.S.-Born Workers?

MARTIN OPPENHEIMER

IMMIGRATION HAS BECOME THE MOST divisive issue in domestic American politics since civil rights. Not for the first time in American history, immigrants have become scapegoats for many of the real problems of America's middle and working classes. Unemployment, high taxes, crime rates, the economic plight of African-American teenagers, the decline of traditional American values, even the cost of auto insurance, you name it, somebody has tagged "aliens." Once again immigrants like African-Americans yesterday and still today are being used to divert and divide the working class. In this divisive political climate there should be no question of where the left must stand: the human rights of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, must be defended against the resurgence of xenophobia regardless of its source. We need to develop a strategy that defends the immigrant worker and petty bourgeois in the face of the anti-immigrant sentiments of many white and African-American workers and many U.S.-born small-scale employers.

The defense of immigrants must be coupled to an educational mobilization that has as its goal the reversal of the diversion of workers from an understanding of the roots of our problems, and, equally, the exposure and overcoming of every attempt to foment divisions within the working class. In order to do this we must be as clear as possible about the material roots of the hostility of many U.S.-born (including African-American, and even second and third-generation immigrant) workers towards recent immigrants. This hostility is not only fomented by

reactionary political elements, but is also undergirded by what appears to be respectable scholarship emanating from some academic circles and think tanks.

Immigration is a far more complex issue than civil rights in the 1950s-1970s. In those days the issue was (for most people at least outside the South) relatively simple: you were for equal rights, or not. You were for including African-Americans in the "American dream" or you were for continuing to exclude them. Most important in understanding the difference between then and now is that resistance to integration was rooted in social and political fears: old-fashioned racism in all of its historical complexity plus fear of Black political power. White workers were little concerned with African-Americans taking their jobs or undercutting their wages since for the most part the latter were either located in non-competing sectors of the labor market, or were in unionized sectors getting similar wages. It was a time of relatively full employment: the great sucking sound of American jobs going offshore had not yet begun. This time around, economic fear forms much of the basis for anti-immigrant hostility by both white and African-American workers, although the fear of immigrant political power is a factor especially in the Southwest. It has also been mentioned in connection with the potential loss of political power by African-Americans, whose clout might be diluted by large-scale legal immigrant participation in the electoral process, especially at the local level.

The immigration issue (which, insofar as it is considered a "problem," is mainly about Latinos) is therefore more complicated. Elements of the power structure appear to be pro-immigrant for their own purposes (access to

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low-wage workers), while other fractions, especially small business enterprises now forced to compete with low-wage immigrant small businesses, are hostile to immigration (always, of course, “only illegal immigration”). Many union and non-union but well-paid workers, particularly in contracting, believe (and cite anecdotal evidence) that their wages and sometimes their jobs are melting away as lower-paid non-union immigrant work crews move in.

Do immigrants have a deleterious effect on U.S.-born, especially African-American workers, as has been charged by any number of writers, from Christopher Jencks to the Center for Immigration Studies’ George Borjas to Stephen Steinberg (writing in this journal, summer 2005 and winter 2006)? Does immigration add to their costs especially in unemployment, underemployment, and wages? Do immigrants survive, never mind rise, on the backs of the native-born proletariat, especially African-American workers? Whatever else immigrants are charged with, it is these questions, and their answers, that are crucial to understanding and overcoming divisions within the U.S. working class (the primary one being white versus all workers of all other colors, the second the division between Latinos and Blacks.) What strategy to develop to overcome these divisions is crucial to the future of progressive politics in this country.

MASSIVE MIGRATION FROM ALL PARTS OF the globe began after the immigration reforms of 1965. The result was that immigrants were “thrust into competition with blacks for job opportunities,” according to Steinberg, author of the highly regarded *The Ethnic Myth*. He asks, are African-American workers becoming superfluous because immigrants (including the undocumented) have arrived in such large numbers so as to undercut Black progress? He assumes that the jobs are there: “Although it is often argued that blacks arrived [in urban job markets: M.O.] at a time when the industries

that had provided opportunities to earlier immigrants were in decline, the fact is that millions of new immigrants were rapidly absorbed into both the residual blue-collar sector and the expanding service industries.” He states that if immigration had remained at the low level of 1965, then “tight labor markets would have provided incentives for employers to lower their racist barriers, to hire and train black workers, and if necessary, to improve wages and conditions to make even these marginal jobs attractive to native workers.”

What has happened, Steinberg says, is that the presence of immigrant labor has kept wages down, sidelined African-American labor (via discrimination), and in some cases has even led to the exodus of African-Americans from some communities. Although Steinberg comes at the issue from what he sees as a left perspective, the gist of his argument is little different from that of Jencks, Borjas, or any of the writers who want to stop, or at least slow-down, immigration. He dismisses studies concluding that immigration has only small negative effects on the economic situation of African-Americans. This, he says, defies common sense given the horrendous unemployment statistics for Black men in so many urban areas.

In the follow-up issue of *New Politics*, Michael Hirsch, a sociologist and labor journalist, concentrates on the structural factors that historically pushed and pulled Black workers into Northern and Western cities, resulting in significant economic advances (the push factor of collapsing agricultural prices and continuing racism in the South, and the pull factor of wartime jobs in both World Wars). Deindustrialization is the major factor that has destroyed these advances and has pauperized large sectors of the industrial heartland and cities dependent on manufacturing generally. This is where the African-American population came to be concentrated after World War II. “The tragedy of deindustrialization,” he says, “is that the closing of the mills liquidated this genera-

tion of well-paid black breadwinners and the shop-floor leadership that was emerging.” Immigration was not a factor in that, nor, for instance, in the containerization process in the shipping industry, or in the computerization of auto plants, among other examples. Hirsch

Understanding (the reasons for dysfunctionality toward job seeking) doesn’t change employers’ discrimination.

summarizes: If the U.S. had limited immigration instead of liberalizing it post-1965, then “outsourcing of U.S. products and services would have happened that much sooner.” This point is made by a number of researchers. For example, Nelson Lim, a researcher at RAND, writing in Roger Waldinger’s edited *Strangers At the Gates*, puts it succinctly: “In the era of (NAFTA), any decline in the supply of low-skilled immigrants will simply push employers to move their businesses abroad.” The point is not so much that if labor costs become too high labor will be exported. “Too high” is after all simply a cost factor determined by competition and profit rates. It is that if labor costs are lower elsewhere, work will be moved there so long as it can be.

And if it cannot be moved? In the absence of immigrants, would African-American (and white) workers be mowing lawns, cleaning hotel rooms, and nailing up sheetrock (jobs that are not exportable) at union-level wages? Following Steinberg’s argument, would white employers hire African-American workers in a more or less nondiscriminatory way because they were needed, as they once were in heavy industry, if immigrants were not available?

To get at some answers to this and the broader question of whether or not immigrants are undermining U.S.-born labor, it is useful to

break the issue down into three discrete parts: (1) are immigrants hired in preference to U.S.-born, especially African-American workers? (2) do immigrants displace U.S.-born, especially African-American workers? (3) does immigrant competition lower the wages of U.S.-born workers? The short answer to each of these questions is: Yes and No, Sometimes, and Maybe. Whatever else, the answer is not an unequivocal Yes, despite what anti-immigrationists from the Minutemen and Lou Dobbs on the “populist” right to some unions, and even some respected researchers, say. This brief essay can do no more than summarize. But first it should be made clear that any social science research that relates to policy is political: there is no “objective” or “neutral” methodology. Immigration research is no exception.

(1) Are immigrants hired in preference to U.S.-born, especially African-American workers?

There is a consensus about one aspect of this allegation at least: employers, especially of younger, lower skilled, less educated workers, often hire immigrants (generally Latinos) over African-Americans. As Steven Camarota, Director of Research at the Center for Immigration Studies told the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary on Oct, 30, 2003, “There is certainly a lot of anecdotal evidence and some systematic evidence that immigrants are seen as better workers by some employers, especially in comparison to native-born African Americans.” Roger Waldinger and Michael I. Lichter, in their 2003 book *How the Other Half Works*, devote an entire chapter to addressing “Whom Employers Want,” and conclude that employers have a “hierarchy of ethnic preferences” in which African-Americans are at the bottom. As Andrew Sum, also associated with the C.I.S., told an American Youth Policy Forum in March 2005, there is “a perceived reputation of many immigrants as hard-working and loyal,” with the implication that African-American youth are not, that they have “atti-

tudes” that make them less reliable, more troublesome, employees.

As for the realities underlying these preferences, any number of observers, including scholars, have pointed to the employment consequences of “ghetto-related behavior,” as African-American sociologist William Julius Wilson, a former President of the American Sociological Association put it, which is by no means limited to African-American youth. There are a lot of reasons for dysfunctional (to job-seeking) behavior among some lower stratum working class youth, but understanding them doesn’t change employers’ discrimination. We don’t actually know the extent of these behaviors, but we do know that many employers buy into these stereotypes. In support of the discrimination thesis Andrew Sum cites data showing that among low-income male high school students 23 percent of whites, 12 percent of Hispanics, but only 7 percent of African-Americans are employed.

Steven Steinberg, in his *New Politics* essays, challenges the accuracy of employer claims, and says that even if this stereotype has a basis in fact, employers are obligated to hire on the basis of individual merit and not on the reputation of the group. For him it’s plain old-fashioned prejudiced, racist-based discrimination. More to the point, he says employers use “network hiring” of immigrants to keep African-Americans out. Network hiring, all experts agree, is crucial in creating employment niches for many (not only immigrant) ethnic/racial groups. Once an employer hires a worker who proves reliable, the employer will ask that worker to recruit another, who will likely be of the same ethnicity. In that it excludes other ethnicities, network hiring constitutes a form of institutional racism, true enough, but hiring that relies on referrals from present employees is universal. Why is this “naked bigotry” (Steinberg’s expression) when African-Americans are excluded (consciously or not), but not when they do the “excluding” as they develop niches, as in

several of the Los Angeles industries described by Waldinger and Lichter?

Employment niches, sociologist Frank Wilson noted several years ago, involve a “substantial share of the workforce of urban minority workers”: 37 percent of African-Americans, 36 percent of Hispanics, and 27 percent of Asians. Of course the reasons for the development of these niches vary. Frequently they are the result of exclusion from other occupations. And minorities create businesses that cater to specialized minority markets. Regardless of the reason an ethnic quasi-monopoly or niche develops in an occupation, or in a business, other groups tend to stay away. Short of legally mandating hiring halls for all employment, a political impossibility, network or nepotistic hiring will continue in the private sector, and will, naturally, cause resentment among those excluded.

Aside from discrimination, some econometricians argue that the sheer number of immigrants entering particular occupations will create a competitive structure leading to more unemployment and lower wages for African-Americans. Using a worst-case scenario, George Borjas estimates that the 1980-2000 influx of immigrants might in theory have reduced the employment rate of African-American men by 5 percent at the national level, and in addition increased the incarceration rate of black high school dropouts by 1.7 percent (the incarceration rate, he says, is correlated to unemployment). But as Borjas admits, “much of the decline in employment and increase in incarceration . . . would have taken place even if the immigrant influx had been far smaller.” Presumably this would have been due to deindustrialization rather than to immigration. In any case, immigrants are increasingly dispersed away from urban areas in recent years, so they are not competing as much with African-Americans for jobs in large urban centers, formerly the gateways for all immigration.

As for immigrant enterprises taking busi-

ness away from native-owned, particularly Black-owned companies, while there are a lot of stories, there is little hard evidence. A 1997 study by Robert Fairlie and Bruce Myer of U.C. Santa Cruz and Northwestern University found that immigration had no effect on Black self-employment. Steve Camarota, in a 2000 C.I.S. report arguing that the positive effects of immigrant entrepreneurship have been overrated, indirectly confirms this. There appears to be no decline in native, including African-American entrepreneurship in major immigrant-receiving areas.

(2) Do immigrants displace U.S.-born workers?

The answer is mired in methodological controversies, pitting one set of researchers, those generally associated with the Center for Immigration Studies who, with only a few qualifications, say “Yes” against a range of others whose conclusions are more mixed, more nuanced.

There is some agreement on the dynamic underlying the increasing employment of immigrants at the lower end of the economy. Immanuel Ness, writing in the left *Dollars and Sense* (Sept.-Oct. 2006) tells us that “industrial restructuring and capital mobility have eroded traditional industries . . . in ways that have led many companies to create millions of low-wage jobs and to seek vulnerable workers to fill them.” Employers try to maximize profit by making labor cheaper. They increasingly do this through outsourcing or subcontracting, hiring part-timers, and in some industries paying workers under the table. The influx of immigrants provides many of those workers since U.S.-born workers without a high school degree, who are the most vulnerable in our labor force, are now just 12 percent of all U.S.-born workers. So as businesses restructure, if insufficient numbers of U.S.-born workers are available (or those who are available are deemed undesirable) immigrants are hired. Some of them are no doubt among the estimated 6.3 million “illegal” workers in the U.S. economy (4.3 percent of the ci-

vilian labor force).

Andrew Sum and colleagues at the C.I.S. pretty much agree: “(S)ome employers have begun to reorganize work in ways that systematically exclude certain native-born workers, especially those under 35, from employment and that create work that does not meet the basic labor standards that have been developed over the years.” But their conclusion is not, as you would expect, to advocate enforcement of labor standards. Rather, they assert that “If the jobs held by new immigrant males aged 16 to 34 were made available to jobless native-born males, then the job deficit among the native born [allegedly 1.7 million in 2005-M.O.] would be completely eliminated.” (The number of new immigrant males in that age group is estimated at 1.85 million.) The assumption of the C.I.S. econometricians apparently is that you simply plug 1.7 million non-immigrants into those 1.7 million jobs, just like that. Wouldn’t it be nice if the labor market operated that efficiently. In real life workers do not have perfect information about where jobs are, and even if they did many would not, and often could not (due to age) move, willy-nilly, away from family, friends, churches, neighborhoods, to chase jobs in faraway places unless they were indeed desperate, as desperate, say, as many . . . immigrants.

So one question is: does the U.S. economy need immigrant workers because there aren’t enough U.S.-born workers available? Anti-immigrationists say no, there are enough available, and if there were no immigrants the U.S.-born (including African-American) unemployed would be hired, and discrimination against African-Americans would have to decline. Some pro-immigrationists argue that immigrants are needed because there are jobs “Americans won’t do,” to which the anti-immigrationists reply, “there are no jobs Americans won’t do, you just have to provide decent wages and working conditions.”

Are there jobs at the less-skilled end of the

occupational spectrum that “Americans won’t do,” that is, for which they are not available? Maybe there are. The term “available” can mean many things. Many African-American youth are not “available” for field agricultural work because the pay is too low (the average wage of a field agricultural worker is \$9.50 an hour), it might require a move to another state, and perhaps there is an onus on doing work associated with slavery. And surely there are other jobs where the pay and working conditions are below what a U.S.-born worker would consider even minimally survivable. It would be nice if living wages were available throughout the economy, but in highly competitive, non-unionized, labor-intensive small business sectors wages are low, and will remain as low as the law allows (or lower, off the books) and desperate immigrants are often willing to take them.

Rob Paral, at the Immigration Policy Center, a branch of the pro-immigrant American Immigration Law Foundation, argues that immigrants are hired to supplement, rather than displace, the U.S.-born, at least in some job categories. “Thirteen occupational categories collectively would have been short more than 500,000 workers during the 1990s without recently arrived immigrant employees, *even if all unemployed natives with recent experience in those categories had been re-employed.*” [my emph.: M.O.] These jobs include everything from farm workers to cooks, painters, janitors, maids, and construction workers. Moreover, Paral demonstrates that not all immigrants get wages significantly below those of similarly educated and skilled U.S.-born workers, although many do. The unionized workers at Swift Co. in Greeley Colorado, who were raided by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in December, 2006, were earning \$12.75 an hour, not a magnificent wage but more than twice the Federal minimum wage. As immigrants become naturalized and get older, their wages approach or exceed U.S.-born workers’ wages. This trend will likely continue as more immigrants join unions.

One set of researchers looks at specific geographical areas (usually states), or at specific industries. For example, the Pew Hispanic Center, in an August, 2006 report by Rakesh Kochbar, tells us that there are wide variations in the relationship between the growth of immigrant population and the employment outcomes of U.S.-born workers. About 25 percent of them live in states where growth of immigration is correlated to favorable outcomes for native workers. About 15 percent live in states where the outcome is negative. The rest live in states where immigrant growth was below average, but employment for the U.S.-born wasn’t good either. “The size of the foreign-born workforce is also unrelated to the employment prospects for native workers.” Even more interesting, the Pew report says, “the relative youth and low levels of education among foreign workers appear to have no bearing on the employment outcomes of native workers of similar schooling and age.” Still, it is clear that a much lower percentage of young African-Americans are employed than other groups. That doesn’t prove that Hispanics are displacing African-Americans, but questions remain.

Another approach, associated with the work of Roger Waldinger and Michael Lichter, focuses on specific industries, in this case in Los Angeles. They examine six low-wage industries and find that the concentration of Latino immigrants and African-Americans differs. Each industry contains disproportionately large components of one or the other. They argue that overall even when immigrants create a “niche” in, say, the apparel industry, and over time displace some U.S.-born workers, the industry’s strength in turn creates more jobs for the U.S.-born, at higher wages. “A city experiencing an influx of immigrants may well find itself with more buying power,” thus benefiting the job situation for natives. So maybe native workers in positive growth areas would not have been better off without immigration.

What accounts for the skewed distribution

of workers of color in Los Angeles (or any) industries? How do ethnic niches develop? In summary, Waldinger and Lichter tell us, "Immigration is a network-driven process, and the prominent role played by ethnic networks in the labor market makes for ethnic separation." Different industries rely more on network recruitment than others. African-Americans are disadvantaged in this process in L.A. at least because of their smaller numbers relative to Latinos, and because of discrimination. In a period of twenty years (1970-1990), "African-American concentrations in those industries in which immigrants were already overrepresented in 1970 simply disappeared." On the other hand, African-American concentration increased where immigrants were underrepresented in 1970. Meanwhile, African-American educational levels had increased. Thus African-Americans, according to Waldinger and Lichter, were "pulled" rather than "pushed" out of their employment concentrations, moving more into higher-skill sectors where bureaucratic rather than network hiring is the pattern, mainly, that is, in the public sector.

Nevertheless, in this changing environment "the less-skilled members of the [African-American] group who cannot pass the employers' tests may be left out in the cold," especially since they must look for work where immigrants have come, over the years, to predominate. Even when overall employment for African-American workers is stable, "immigration may harm the most vulnerable African-Americans and yet yield no net negative effects on Los Angeles African-Americans as a whole."

Borjas and others associated with the C.I.S. dispute this approach. As Jencks puts it, "we have to treat the United States as one big labor market, figure out how immigrants change the national distribution of skills, and estimate the effect of these changes on different groups' earnings." Also, they argue, if some U.S.-born workers facing immigrant competition decide to move out, those remaining will correspondingly

face a tighter labor market and will not be displaced, creating an artificial impression that things aren't so bad in a particular locality. And, since many immigrants' jobs are in sectors created by immigration itself—the many niche businesses that cater to immigrants — this might well create some kind of multiplier effect, generating more jobs also for the U.S.-born.

In general, apart from the C.I.S. group, researchers going back to the mid-1980's have given us mixed messages. They have told us either that the foreign-born share of the population has no significant effect on U.S.-born employment, or if it does, it is very slight, or that the impact on jobs differs from place to place and industry to industry. We cannot dismiss the idea that a large influx or "labor supply shock" as Borjas & Co. call it, of immigrants, especially at the low-skill end, might have a negative effect on some U.S.-born workers' employment rates, and in some cities and industries, especially among African-Americans. But we also should not accept the unqualified generalization that "immigrants take American workers' jobs away" because this is not only misleading, but politically dangerous.

(3) Does immigrant competition lower the wages of Black and other U.S.-born workers?

A number of observers say it does little if any damage to wages. Waldinger and Lichter, summarizing a lot of studies, claim that "Immigration seemed to have no effect on the wages or employment of white natives . . . and very slight, if any, negative effects (on) native blacks." A 1997 National Research Council report concluded immigration had small negative effects on wages, including for African-Americans. David Card, of U.C. Berkeley, found that since 1980 the wages of U.S.-born dropouts relative to high school graduates has remained constant despite immigrant influxes. A February, 2007 study by Giovanni Peri, for the Public Policy Institute of California says that in California immigration has had a positive effect on U.S.-

born workers. According to his calculations, “immigration induced a 4 percent real wage increase for the average native worker.” Even high school dropouts saw a slight improvement. This effect, Peri theorized in an earlier study, is due to the fact that “the foreign-born tend to be employed in different occupations than U.S. natives.” However, earlier immigrants do suffer significant losses of income when an influx of new immigrants takes place.

Wage gaps between immigrants and the U.S.-born, as well as wage levels for each group in cities with large numbers of immigrants, it turns out, varies significantly from city to city, as Mark Ellis, an immigration demographer, discovered. The gap is due to the labor market that channels each group into a different segment of the local economy, one paying somewhat better. In some cities, despite immigrant influxes, wages for the U.S.-born, including African Americans, increased due to a shift to higher-paying services, even as wages for Latinos remained low (hence a growing gap between them and the U.S.-born).

The most often cited studies that contest the more benign view are by George Borjas and his colleagues at C.I.S.. His conclusion in a May 2004 report: “Weekly wages grew fastest for workers in those skill groups that were least affected by immigration . . . the immigrant influx of the 1980s and 1990s lowered the wages of most native workers, particularly of those workers at the bottom and top of the education distribution.” In criticizing President Bush’s immigration reform program, which would have paved the way to legalizing many illegal immigrants and opening the door to many new immigrants, he states further: “It is clear that Mexican immigration, which is predominantly low-

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“problem.”

skill, accounts for virtually the *entire* [emph. in orig.] adverse impact of immigration on low-skill native workers.” Theoretically any large-scale increase in the labor force, or in a particular skill group, will tend to lower wages, especially in the absence of strong unions. But at the local level there can be positive wage gains despite immigration, Borjas admits. “If immigrants . . . cluster in cities with thriving

economies, there would be a built-in spurious positive correlation between immigration and wages . . . [However] The flow of jobs and workers tends to equalize economic conditions across cities.” Therefore if we measure the labor market impact of immigration at the national level, the positive picture in some localities is wiped out. Borjas argues that we need to analyze information on millions of workers over many years, using many variables such as experience, age, education, etc. and see what happens as immigration increases the number of workers in any given group. The bottom line, according to Borjas, is that “immigration does adversely impact the wages of natives in competition with immigrants.” That impact is largest for African-Americans. In short, while native workers’ wages may not be negatively affected by immigration in many areas, overall, when we average it out and look at many discrete labor variables, Borjas seems to say, we can create a model that tells us how much an increase in a skill group’s size will affect annual earnings. This amount can be sizable: “In 2000, for example, the typical native man without a high school diploma earned \$25,000 annually. This implies that immigration reduced this worker’s earnings by \$1,800.” No wonder he/she is upset! These and similar figures are consistently quoted by anti-immigration advocates.

Borjas' theoretical assumption from the beginning is an old economics truism: that if the supply of labor (boosted by immigration) exceeds the demand in any given occupation, wages will decline, all other things being equal. But this truism often fails because all other things are rarely equal. Employer resistance, including the threat to close plants, out-and-out union busting tactics, or industry restructuring by deskilling work (and firing better-paid workers), can push wages down even when there is little surplus labor. On the other hand, an upgrading of skills due to technological change can push wages up. Also, unionization can improve the wages of all workers, both immigrant and U.S.-born. Just as the generalization about immigrants taking "American" jobs away has to be qualified, so the generalization that immigration adversely affects the wages of U.S.-born workers has to be qualified as well. Again, not to do so is not only inaccurate, but politically dangerous. The rhetoric of "immigrants getting ahead on the backs of African-Americans" is therefore neither accurate nor useful. It is not accurate because the immigrant group that most clearly impacts African-Americans is at the bottom of the pole; it isn't getting ahead, period. If African-Americans aren't getting ahead it is much more likely due to the changing structure of the economy in urban areas, plus the erosion of the buying power of the minimum wage. And the rhetoric isn't useful because it is divisive.

AS FOR SOLUTIONS, no matter what immigration policy is proposed, its logic leads to its negation. One policy often espoused by those wishing to reduce immigration for whatever reason, from "saving American culture" to saving American wages to slowing population growth, is "to help create more jobs in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean," as Christopher Jencks said in a 2001 *New York Review* piece said. Here is *Business Week* (April 24, 2006): "Labor-exporting nations must do more

to provide employment opportunities and access to social mobility for citizens at home." (By "liberalizing" their economies, and eliminating governmental interference, as far as BW is concerned.) In fact, as Julie Hollar reminds us in the September/October issue of the media muckraking *Extra*, this was the rationale used in promoting NAFTA back in Bill Clinton's day. Clinton's Attorney-General Janet Reno wrote, in 1993, that "We will not stop the flow of immigration until these immigrants find decent jobs, at decent wages, in Mexico." However, NAFTA's free trade policies had the opposite effect, destroying agricultural jobs, promoting low-wage assembly (maquiladora) jobs, and leading to a decline in average household income, thus promoting emigration further.

The logic of world capital drives it always to export labor costs to cheaper areas, or, alternatively, to import cheaper (immigrant) labor as local labor costs rise (or as labor shortages develop) — or indeed both. Hence improving Mexican standards of living, desirable as that might be, means raising wages, which will lead to a flight of capital from Mexico to even lower-wage areas. Once that occurs (and it began in 2001 as Mexican manufacturing started to move to China), the cycle begins again and immigrants resume their flow into the U.S. to find work.

Most immigration reformers focus on bettering the condition of immigrants so as to level the playing field with U.S.-born workers, that is, so that the U.S.-born won't be undercut. Raising the minimum wage, creating hiring halls and requiring employers to use them and pay living wages, providing access to drivers' licenses, etc. are examples. Jencks and many others advocate increasing the number of unskilled immigrants given legal status, while also cracking down on employers who hire the undocumented.

However, tough enforcement will at most slow illegal immigration as long as conditions below the Rio are dismal, no matter how many

walls are built to stop them, no matter how many National Guard are sent (assuming they could be spared!), and no matter how many employers are fined. Furthermore, improving conditions for legal immigrants would result in more employers joining those who have already taken their businesses offshore. This in turn might lead to an improvement of conditions in the sending countries on the very questionable assumption that foreign investment leads to higher incomes, or at least more jobs, but would it create enough? So far there is little evidence of that. There would also be fewer jobs for the U.S.-born victims of outsourcing.

The point is simply this: neither an improvement of conditions in sending countries, nor an improvement for immigrants in the receiving country can solve the immigration “problem.” The first will lead to outsourcing to even lower-wage areas from the sending country and the second will also lead to outsourcing if not to the original sending country, then to another where wages are even lower. The consequence of this “race to the bottom” is that poverty-stricken people throughout the world will continue with their desperate and dangerous border crossings to find work under whatever conditions.

LARGE SEGMENTS OF THE PUBLIC have come to define immigration as a “problem” because it is seen as undermining American culture, increasing crime, raising our taxes, and taking jobs away. The simple reason this problem exists, in the popular mind, is that “there are too many of them.” The politics of immigration today therefore hinges on slowing or reversing the flow of immigrants, especially Mexicans and Central Americans. But no program, no body of legislation, here or in any country,

can stop the flow of economic emigration because it cannot be done country by country, or even if two countries devise a common program. It can only be resolved on a global basis, when and if all boats rise. This cannot happen in the context of present-day global capitalism.

Meanwhile, demystifying the economic dimension (jobs, wages, discrimination) as well as exposing other myths about immigrants may help in slowing down reactionary political and economic elements presently exploiting the immigration issue for whatever reason (not the least of which is electioneering.) This is not, however, a solution.

But there is a larger solution, at least potentially, on the horizon. Global capitalism has sown the seeds of this solution as its depredations have slowly generated opposition. The headlines mostly feature the increasing skepticism, if not total opposition, to U.S.-sponsored international monetary policies on the part of several Latin American governments. They have come to power promising to liberate their countries from the disastrous economic programs that go by the spurious name “free trade,” which generate poverty and emigration. More important, however, is the dissent to these programs “in the streets,” in the form of what is called the global justice movement, with its now famous Forums. Finally, there is the beginning of cross-border labor organizing. The globalization of capital that Marx and Engels predicted long ago is also slowly but inexorably leading to a globalization of working class solidarity. Only when popular movements (and the governments they elect) put an end to the exploitative rule of capital will the immigration “problem” be solved.

Editor's Note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, www.newpol.org.

America's Soft Power Dysfunctions

When Arab Problems Are Allowed To Wash Upon American Shores

EMAD EL-DIN AYSHA

Our political organization is thoroughly rotten, almost non-existent. It is Carthagian . . . Never was there such an absurd waste of power, such ridiculous inconsequence of policy — not for want of men but for want of any effective central authority or dominant idea to make them work together.

—ANDRÉ SIEGFRIED, *ENGLAND'S CRISIS*, 1931

IN MARCH 2006 I watched a rather striking televised debate between Muwafaq Harb, the (then) unpopular director of Al-Hurra and Radio Sawa, and Democracy Now's Amy Goodman. I found out in 2007 that Harb had been fired. His replacement, CNN's Larry Register, was hired specifically to reverse Harb's course.

Hence, this article, which is about America's fast depleting soft power reserves — its ideological-cultural appeal, its image abroad — and how Bush administration policy is speeding up this process of erosion, the hiring of Harb as a case in point. Soft power refers to a country's "ability to get desired outcomes through attraction instead of force." By force we mean hard power (military and economic coercion). In policy parlance it refers to public diplomacy — "short-term public relations: explaining current U.S. policy, circulating speeches" — and cultural diplomacy, involving longer-term initiatives: "academic exchanges . . . U.S. libraries and American-studies programs, cultivating relationships with writers and editors receptive to America and its values."

The Role Reversals of War Fatigue

BRINGING HARB IN and setting up Radio Sawa

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and Al-Hurra TV was such a soft power policy of the longer-term kind, a cultural diplomacy move meant to do even more than just improve the impression Arabs have of the U.S. They were meant to reform the Arab psyche in general, away from extremism, fundamentalism and anti-Americanism towards democratization and Westernization. (Not to mention peace with Israel). The argument could always be made, of course, that globalization by itself would do the job for the U.S. of pacifying and modernizing the recalcitrant Arabs. That was the operative assumption in the good old 1990s, an article of faith that took a nasty shock with the fall of the Twin Towers, leading to a major overhaul of older approaches to managing America's image abroad.

And so that Al-Jazeera broadcast with Harb put the lie to this whole grand project because it was the American guest who was criticizing the behavior of the U.S. media and its slavish devotion to post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy. The Arab, by contrast, was the one "defending" U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. media, with all the quite explicit anti-libertarian implications involved in such a stance.

I suspect this compare-and-contrast was intentional on the part of the ever-shrewd Al-Jazeera producers, showing that even Americans are unhappy about U.S. media coverage of Mideast conflicts, politics and culture. This means, by extension, that this Arab, as an Arab

doing America's bidding for it, "must" be untrustworthy at best or downright treacherous at worst. In fact, on the launching of Al-Hurra, the response of Al-Jazeera officials was specifically that "Arab viewers would see the network for what it was, a tool of the American government." Moreover, this handicap was voiced early on in the U.S. itself, with Edward Djerejian, director of the James A. Baker Public Policy Institute of Rice University, arguing that "We're skeptical that it will be able to jump over this barrier, this obstacle of credibility, in terms of being a state-run media outlet." It is also interesting that this Middle East expert was actually appointed by then Secretary of State Colin Powell to review U.S. "public relations" efforts in the Arab world, a point I will return to below.

Something else that struck me, even more so, about the Harb discussion was the peculiar way he went about defending the American media against the charge, posed by Goodman and practically everybody, that it is not representative. ("Harb" means "war" in Arabic). She used the run up to the Iraq War as a case study and how opposing opinions were completely sidelined by the networks and mainstream press. The moderator, Faisal Al-Qasim, posed his own question in this regard, saying that the American media is not the media of the people, representing the people and public opinion. In his response Muwafaq Harb began by saying this was all exaggerated and that the case of the Iraq War was unrepresentative, then took the opposite route in mid-stride by using an example that he saw as more representative.

That is, the media coverage of the dispute over the planned takeover of American port facilities by an Arab country and Congress' move to annul this. Harb said that while public opinion polls showed a clear majority against Dubai Ports World taking over ports in six American cities, most American journalists — he cited Thomas Friedman, of all people — were in favor of this move. He then explained that

there is a lesson here, that it is not the job of the press just to "beat the drums" — an Arabic expression for congratulating and flattering in a sycophantic way — for the public or the gov-

What we are seeing here is a further transference of the dysfunctions of the still de-colonizing Third World to the American power structure.

ernment. He added that there is a "leadership role for the makers of public opinion, a leadership role to make people aware and I think this is the thing that our friend Amy has forgotten." I was positively flabbergasted! This is Arab propaganda mediaspeak, talking of making people "aware" of what actually is good for them whether they like it or not.

Fortunately I am not alone in the assessment, as other Arab critics have also noted how the "last thing we expected was for Washington to actually sell us back our poor Arab-made merchandise through Alhurra." Moreover, a great many of Al-Hurra's key employees had actually cut their teeth "under Safwat el-Sherif in Egypt's state-controlled television . . . an uninspired media that took its every cue from the government and the security services"!

The Categories of Cultural Malaise

IN AN ANTHROPOLOGY LECTURE some time ago contrasting the development policies in India and Egypt, the speaker noted that in India the emphasis, following Gandhi, is always on promoting "consciousness" whereas in Egypt it is on promoting "awareness." Promoting awareness means I'm going to make you aware of what is good for you, you ignorant person who is single-handedly responsible for everything that's wrong with our beloved country. And

Harb used the exact same Arabic word.

It's a very elitist way of talking and thinking and is meant, very explicitly, to prevent social conflict and maintain a harmonious national unity. Indian developmental rhetoric is meant to get the peasant to become politically literate and decide for himself what is good for him and his people, with an explicit understanding that progress necessitates social conflict of some kind. The way Harb is talking also has a distinctly Stalinist feel to it, the idea of the revolutionary intellectual who is the "educator" of the people, the ignorant masses whom he talks down to from up and above. Such intellectuals see themselves as guiding the people like lambs — or cows or camels, depending on your cultural frame — to greener pastures. More usually they direct them to the slaughter.

The composition of Al-Hurra's staff, alluded to above, would explain this Stalinist twang as most are Lebanese and cut their professional teeth during the Lebanese "civil war, with attitudes and ideologies typical of that era." (The rest are Iraqis.)

Apart from the tremendous damage this will do to America's increasingly depleted soft power resources — making the United States look hypocritical over freedom of expression and employing cultural snobs that look down on their roots — there are other worries as well. What we are seeing here is a further transference of the dysfunctions of the still de-colonizing Third World to the American power structure. We've seen other examples of this with U.S. delegations heading to the Arab world to study, in detail, the modalities of military tribunals, even using Arab interrogators and prisons to "debrief" terror suspects. But now the sordid Arab condition is infecting the media too, America's last line of defense in its public diplomacy war with its enemies, rivals and friends in the Arab and Muslim world.

From my own experiences of such "opposition" intellectuals I can add that they are petty dictators in their own field; they cannot handle

disagreement and condemn the Arab intelligentsia in the same terms they deride — "traitors," "conspirators," and "backwardists."

In point of fact, one of the frequent criticisms leveled at Al-Hurra, and Harb, was that it "looks like the Middle Eastern states we want to change: It's run by a small dictator who is totally corrupt." Harb, while the "news director," determined everything from recruitment to salaries to the priority and content of programs and the choice of guests to subcontracting, all by himself on his personal whims.

As a result the staff hired was way below par compared to the Arab competition, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia, with unofficial blacklists barring certain guests and implicit understandings with certain Arab regimes, with a misappropriation running into the millions of dollars. And so Harb was removed and replaced with an American. Nonetheless, it is prudent to point out that Harb made all these grievous moral and professional errors because he was "allowed" to by the very people who hired him. As one (Arab) critic put it: "There is no oversight . . . This guy [Harb] hires and fires and sets salaries on his own, and he'll continue to do it as long as he feels protected by Norman Pattiz and Kenneth Tomlinson." (Tomlinson is the chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the panel created by Congress to oversee Al-Hurra, while Pattiz heads the Middle East committee of the board.)

Apart from such congressional backing, Republican and Democrat, Harb got the job thanks to support from the White House Office of Global Communications. We'll have to wait and see if Larry Register's American media ethos can counteract these remaining "American" causes for the channel's downfall.

The Global Dismemberment of American Soft Power

CONTRARY TO COMMON BELIEF, the trials and tribulations of the Bush administration's involvement with the instrumentalities of soft

power — the usage of ideas, information and images to promote interests — does not begin with the fiasco over the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI). The exposé, as probably intended, was met with outrage from the media amid concerns over freedom of the press, given that these false stories could easily make their way back into the domestic media thanks to the global information village.

The story really begins with one of the few people to emerge from the OSI controversy unscathed, namely, John Walter Rendon Jr., head of The Rendon Group (TRG), a Washington-based public relations and international consulting firm. Rendon had originally been brought in to provide advice on how best to run the OSI, though he denies this. With its premature death he was given the task of finding substitutes, establishing the Coalition Information Center (CIC) in October 2001 to monitor Muslim opinion, replying to terrorist accusations and convincing Muslims that the war on terrorism isn't a war against Islam. Even the successor organizations to the OSI, the White House's Office of Global Communications and the Pentagon's secretive Information Operations Task Force, employ his services. Rendon does not deny working with the IOTF, and reports to the J-3 (head of operations at the Joint Chiefs of Staff) through the IOTF.

The Rendon Group, moreover, is authorized to "research and analyze information classified up to Top Secret/SCI/SI/TK/G/HCS," which covers everything from communications intercepts, to reconnaissance aircraft and spy satellite imagery, to human intelligence. Its specific task following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan was to spread the administration's message on the Iraq War, something that included getting hold of Iraqi defectors for the CIA and publicizing their revelations. This may sound amazing, a private contractor being hired to debrief spies and handle intelligence analysis — and Rendon charges the CIA and the Pentagon \$311.26 an hour for this. But Rendon

is at the proverbial tip of the iceberg of Washington private contractors who have been actively gobbling up the jobs originally designated for the CIA. That is, everyone from clandestine operations regional desk officers, crisis center watch officers, analysts and counterintelligence officers.

About half of the CIA's work is now carried out by such "spies-for-hire," with Congress being none the wiser. Rendon, then, represents the contemporary trend in post-9/11 America's management of its soft power agenda; a trend that has its roots in the decade that preceded the current presidency.* Instead of (re-)building the infrastructure of public diplomacy in-house within the federal bureaucracy following the Cold Warless world of the 1990s, the government has continued to go out-house and subcontract its efforts to leading lights in the private sector. If anything, it was Rendon who helped start this trend to begin with, as he was brought into the mechanics of the implementation of U.S. foreign policy by the CIA itself under Bush Sr. in 1989. They hired him to get rid of Manuel Noriega's stranglehold on Panama, apparently because they had been given the job by the White House but didn't want to risk any of their own people.

As Rendon himself brags, since then his company has "worked in ninety-one countries . . . involved in every war, with the exception of Somalia." Iraq, moreover, for a long time has been Rendon's exclusive preserve, a test case of just how ineffective his organization, the people his organization employs, and the people who employ him all are. According to Thomas Twetten, the CIA's former deputy of operations, the Iraqi National Congress (INC) was for all intents and purposes Rendon's creation. He even

*Even when it comes to old-fashioned coercive hard power, companies from Blackwater to Halliburton are increasingly taking over the army's job; whether building bases or using phosphorous weapons. And now Halliburton doesn't even pay taxes to the U.S. government, shifting to Dubai of all places!

gave the organization its title. "The INC was clueless," says Twetten. "They needed a lot of help and didn't know where to start. That is why Rendon was brought in." Of course, we all know how reliable the "intelligence" the INC provided was; suffice it to say that the CIA pulled the plug in 1996. It had to turn to the Pentagon to stay financially afloat and the INC's track record has not improved much since, ranging from the information they provided on Saddam's supposedly still operational WMD program or his even more supposed connection to 9/11. But on a more strictly soft power understanding, Rendon's work on behalf of liberating Iraq through information was a disaster.

Apart from setting up the INC he also established the opposition Iraqi Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and Radio Hurriah (Freedom) with the CIA. According to a CIA source the broadcasts "sucked. The Iraqis never listened to it. It was like broadcasting Rush Limbaugh into Iraq, in English. Nobody knew what the fuck it was. The only people that we found out listened to it were the Israelis." What Rendon did was hire "this Potemkin village to write scripts for the radio, in Kuwait . . . [managed] by these kids, that had all been in Latin America" who knew little or nothing about Iraq. One ex-CIA official described the whole operation as a "\$150 million rip-off," and one the CIA was actively involved in. The long record of government-Rendon cooperation, then, has been abysmal, and yet it persists.

Much the same holds for Al-Hurra, with broadcasters from Beirut and Dubai getting paid substantial sums of money despite the fact that they hardly ever showed up for work while someone else was reportedly paid \$80,000 a year for a weekly ten minute talk. From a theoretical perspective what this all means is that, paradoxically, in the age of globalization (the hollowing out of the state) the proactive role of the state in managing global information flows has been reaffirmed. The "state-centrism" of realism, in other words, has been reaffirmed. At

least in principle. Leaving it to the private sector simply won't do. They are too steeped in the every-man-for-himself market culture of Adam Smith. Examples of this abound, from CNN's function as Saddam's mouthpiece during the first Gulf War to the role that American networks played in confounding the U.S. presence in Somalia (under Clinton).

Moreover, the classic case of this in American media history is the fact that if it were not for the Federal Communication Commission's "stipulations about 'social responsibility' and the necessity for a minimum level" of international new coverage "it is possible that for financial reasons" such coverage "would disappear from general broadcasting and become the province of specialized news channels such as CNN on cable television." Media corporations, like all businesses, are primarily interested in the profitability — and not the cultural-ideological content — of what they broadcast. As a consequence, the economic phenomenon of "market failure" takes on political significance, creating problems for the very spread of capitalism and the liberal model of democracy it is supposed to promote. According to Claude Moisy, former chairman and general manager of Agence France-Presse, throughout the 1990s — following the first Gulf War — CNN itself was "struggling to make live global coverage its trademark." How can the U.S. provide world news, with a distinctly pro-American slant, to the world if it cannot even (afford to) provide it to its own domestic audience?

As Marxists and Keynesians have long observed, capitalism needs to be protected from itself. Al-Hurra was supposed to remedy this market failure by creating an American media outlet both focused on a foreign audience — Arabs and Muslims — and subsidized by the American taxpayer (\$200 million so far with another \$80 million for the next fiscal year). It was supposed to but instead fell into the same political economic trap, and hasn't been able to get itself out of this fix even now that Muwafaq

Harb is gone. While Harb was in charge quiet a lot of deference was paid to Arab sensibilities, popular and official, when it came to matters ranging from describing Hamas and Hezbollah as “terrorist” organizations to Saddam’s execution and coverage of the Egyptian presidential elections. Even under Larry Register complaints have already abounded in the United States over Al-Hurra’s growing pro-Arabic, pro-Islamic tilt.

Where Not To Go from Here?

NOT THAT THE PUBLIC SECTOR is all it’s cracked up to be in the U.S., to be honest, even in the heyday of the Cold War. Institutions in the United States, public and private, have a penchant for over-scientizing matters of politics, making up for cultural ignorance of various world hotspots through a fetish for abstract models: Bob McNamara’s excessive usage of flowchart diagrams during the Vietnam War and the RAND Corporation’s usage of oligopolistic models (game theory) to plot Soviet responses. The neo-conservatives are an extension of this tradition in the contemporary context, given that Paul Wolfowitz was originally slotted to become a chemist before falling in love with political science, to the dismay of his father — a distinguished maths professor at Cornell — who considered political science tantamount to “astrology”!

That would explain their “rational” expectation that the Iraqis would greet the invading armies with flowers and open arms. Cherry-picking educational curricula and religious scripture for “immoderate” injunctions will only

make matters worse — yet more foreign intervention into our very holiest of holies, scripture and the teaching of scripture. And “enlightened” teaching of scripture will automatically be tainted in the minds of the hyperactive Muslim youth by the source of funding and instructions for such teaching.

Not to forget the top-down, elitist form of education this will entail. (Such an attitude pervades the rabid condemnations of extremism on Saudi TV during the Friday prayer sermon, furnishing us with a religious example of what Muwafaq Harb has been getting up to). The best way the Americans can help Arabs get out of this fix is to put their own house in order and, in the process, kill off the sources for cash and political support for Arab collaborators, and the cultural elitism this perpetuates. This will have a rebounding effect by isolating key decision-centers in the United States from the cultural diseases the Arabs suffer from.

In the long run the American nation-state has to reassert itself, whether in the form of reversing the tide of globalization or reemploying more classical realists and area studies specialists. John Rendon and Paul Wolfowitz — private sector, public sector — are two sides of the same post-9/11 U.S. coin that is costing both the American dismembered nation-state and the Arab/Muslim world far too dearly.

Special thanks to Nancy Snow, Helen Rizzo and Nicholas Hopkins.

A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, www.newpol.org.

After Twelve Years

Where Is That Labor-Intellectual Alliance?

HERMAN BENSON

CHEERLEADING IS NOT ENOUGH. It's time for those scholars, artists, and writers to take another look at what's happening in our labor movement.

When John Sweeney defeated Lane Kirkland and Tom Donahue to take over as president of the AFL-CIO in 1995, he proposed to lead the federation out of its doldrums. What resounded with promise was his call for "a reborn movement of American workers, ready to fight for social and economic justice . . . a new progressive voice in American life . . . changing the direction of American politics . . . a vibrant social movement, a democratic movement that speaks for all American workers."

Sweeney's program inspired an unusual outpouring of sympathy for the labor movement. Forty-three liberal and radical professionals, mostly from the universities, joined in a public manifesto proclaiming support for the new labor movement. "As intellectuals, educators, and professionals," they wrote, "we want to play our part in helping realize [Sweeney's] promise." The 43 were followed by hundreds of others who led pro-union "teach-ins" in universities around the country attended by thousands who came to signify a newly found allegiance to organized labor: students, scholars, historians, civil libertarians, writers, free lance intellectuals, civil rights leaders, along with union staff professionals, labor leaders, and a multitude of reporters. Representatives of most worthy social causes were there. (Only grassroots union dues-payers seemed missing.)

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In the spirit of the times, new labor-oriented magazines proliferated in the universities.

Those who organized the rallies united to create a new organization to cement their unity with organized labor: Scholars, Artists, and Writers for Social Justice (SAWSJ, affectionately, Sausage). It was a moment of great expectations.

Three years later, in "Falling in Love Again? Intellectuals and the Labor Movement in Post-war America," Nelson Lichtenstein, history professor at the University of Virginia, an author of the 1995 Declaration of 43, and a founder of SAWSJ, wrote of "this alliance between a leftward tilting labor movement and a social democratic intelligentsia," an alliance that was being consummated after decades of estrangement. He recognized that differences were inevitable. "A certain distance will . . . always exist between America's critical intellectuals and the trade union movement." Nevertheless, he reflected, it was a "healthy tension from which we can . . . 'bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old. . . .'"

After a few years, the euphoria dulled somewhat; and then along came Andy Stern around 2004.

Stern, who had replaced Sweeney as president of the big Service Employees International Union, set out to do unto Sweeney what Sweeney had done unto Kirkland and Donahue. Under Sweeney's stewardship, Stern declared, the AFL-CIO had failed to fulfill its promises; labor continued to decline in numbers and political power. He and his SEIU would lead the way where Sweeney stumbled. When Stern failed to convince a majority of top union leaders that he had an effective plan to rebuild and reorient the labor movement, he led a formi-

dable group of unions out of the AFL-CIO, and along with the Carpenters which had left earlier, he founded a rival federation, the Change to Win Coalition.

But this time, unlike 1995, there was no resounding echo from intellectuals to the renewed call for another crusade. What happened to SAWSJ? It seems to have vanished as quickly as it had appeared, but without fanfare. Apparently, life had become too complicated for mere enthusiasm.

For a group that staked a claim to leadership in reinventing labor and restoring America, Change to Win was an odd multi-coupling. Earlier, three of its major affiliates had been on the Department of Justice's list of unions most heavily infiltrated by organized crime: the Teamsters, Laborers, and Hotel workers. The Teamsters union is still under active federal monitorship. The former suspect presidents of both the Laborers and Hotel workers, under pressure of law enforcement authorities, had been forced out and replaced by leaders with a reputation for integrity; but neither union experienced any internal reform upsurge. UNITE, another C to W affiliate, defunct as a clothing union, took refuge in a merger with the Hotel Employees. The Carpenters Union, even before linking up with Stern, had already reinvented itself as a model of bureaucratic super-centralization.

While Sweeney's insurgent rise in the AFL-CIO was greeted with unalloyed enthusiasm by intellectuals who welcomed the opportunity to serve a reinvigorated labor movement, Stern's emergence as a new kind of leader met with a muted reception because his promise for Big Change carries a mixed message: On the one hand, his drive to organize immigrants and minorities, the super-exploited of America,

inspires a sympathetic response from social-justice liberal and radical intellectuals. On the other hand, his vision of the future labor movement (if you can properly characterize his erratic oscillations as "vision") evokes puzzlement. It projects a highly bureaucratized top-down labor movement in which

the influence of the rank and file is limited. Insulated from democratic control, its leadership is free to move unpredictably. While Stern's Change to Win delegation in China stands together with the

dictatorial government's sponsored labor organization in a slap at Wal-Mart, Stern stands together with Wal-Mart in the United States, in a joint declaration for a never defined government-sponsored universal health care system.

For unions in the Change to Win coalition, a concentration on organizing low-paid service workers comes naturally. The big industrial and manufacturing unions, which remain in the AFL-CIO, face a crisis of survival. They represent a layer of the working class that had once been reasonably well-paid and secure but now faces cutbacks in wages and jobs, global pressure from low-paid labor, plant closures, and a sharp drop in union membership. But the C to W unions are concentrated in the expanding service sectors free from foreign competition. The Laborers — a C to W affiliate — organizes the unskilled section of the construction industry where minorities and immigrants, legal and illegal, can find work. The Carpenters Union is reaching out to organize immigrants, documented and undocumented. (See *Wall Street Journal* 12/15/05)

THE CALL TO ORGANIZE THE UNORGANIZED has always been a motherhood affirmation, often proclaimed, seldom achieved. Back in

But it turned out that there are more things in the Stern-SEIU philosophy than enrolling the oppressed.

1961, in “The Decline of the Labor Movement, and What Can Be Done About It,” Solomon Barkin, issuing an early warning signal, wrote of the need for a “transformation . . . as radical as that of the Thirties, when the dominance of the old crafts, with their ‘aristocrats of labor’ viewpoint, was swept away in a flood of industrial unionism. . . . Ethnic, color, and religious discrimination within unions must yield before the insistence on equal opportunity for all. Unions must intensify their pressure for economic, social, and political uplift for minorities, with special vigor for our current largest minority, the Negroes.”

“There is no area,” he concluded, “where the shift in power and initiative is more urgent than in the field of organization Vested rights of national unions must not be allowed to stand in the way of the transcendent interests of the movement as a whole.” Barkin was the prototype intellectual, serving as research director of the Textile Workers Union. His 75-page work was published by the Fund for the Republic’s Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. No one seemed to pay attention. For forty years, the downward drift continued.

But now? At last there was a difference. Stern’s SEIU and others in the new coalition actually set out to put words into action. They insisted that the labor movement had to address the needs of those sections of the workforce neglected and most exploited: racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, healthcare workers.

In its concentration upon the most neglected sectors of the working class, in words and deeds, Stern’s appeal resonated among intellectuals, especially those who had criticized the labor movement precisely because they felt it had neglected the most oppressed. Many of those who had come out of the radical student movement of the sixties or were inspired by its tradition, had once looked down with disdain upon the organized working class as a privileged minority whose comfortable status de-

pended upon sharing in the exploitation of the oppressed masses. And now, a labor movement under Stern’s guidance was directing itself precisely toward those oppressed! It was only natural that Stern would begin with the moral support of intellectuals who had responded to the early appeal from Sweeney. He could enroll in his campaign civil rights campaigners and students who had been active in a roster of worthy social causes.

But it turned out that there are more things in the Stern-SEIU philosophy than enrolling the oppressed.

Stern emphasizes that the labor movement must increase its numbers massively if it is to be taken seriously as a political force. He is determined to get those numbers willy-nilly, not bound by any rigid preconceived rules on how that mass is to be recruited, retained, and deployed. It seems like a variant of an old watchword: peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must; almost anything goes.

If employers resist, Stern’s SEIU will mobilize mass demonstrations, call strikes, and rally support from the community groups like ACORN to pressure them to accept unionization. In the course of those battles, the union usually does more than improve its enrollment statistics; it raises the wages of those immigrants, women, and minorities who serve as underpaid janitors, sweepers, cleaners, and semi-skilled maintenance workers. It is this aspect of life in the SEIU-inspired Change to Win assemblage that has impressed older radicals and has provided young idealists with the opportunity to do something socially useful. But nothing is perfect — there is the other side.

For employers who are willing to cooperate, Stern displays a soft side. If they accept unionization peaceably, he will hold out the hand of cooperation and provide a pliable brand of unionism. As he told reporter Kris Maher of the *Wall Street Journal*, “We want to find a 21st century new model that is less focused on individual grievances, more focused on industry

needs.” That spirit of making unionism acceptable to employers was incorporated into agreements he signed with a West Coast nursing home employers association which agreed to accept the unionization of 42 of its affiliates if the SEIU agreed to stay away from 185 of its nonunion affiliates.

Stern looks to work with amenable employers to restore union power. On a broader arena, he hopes to join with big business somehow to restore America’s economic position in the world. And not with your ordinary CEO. “Mr. Stern told me,” writes Alan Murray in the *Wall Street Journal* (5/30/07), “that he much prefers working with the buyout kings than with their public company counterparts. ‘I’ve been incredibly impressed,’ he said, ‘Compared with most of my meetings with company CEOs these men . . . have much more understanding of what we are trying to accomplish.’ ” It makes sense. Free-wheeling managers of masses of workers and free-wheeling managers of masses of capital can understand one another.

This is a man hard to pin down. He is, by turns, militant and acquiescent. He is for “social change” but in close cooperation with buyout capitalists. He renounces labor’s dependence upon Democrats — which warms the blood of many progressives — but he projects not a rebellious surge toward independence but a willingness to work with Republicans. The element of ideological consistency that holds these contradictory ideas together is some notion of restoring labor’s power, but in concert with cooperating employers. The cement that solidifies his base and enables him to fly off in all directions is good old-fashioned centralized bureaucracy. .

Consider Stern’s dismissal of the importance of “individual grievances.” In a reasonably democratic union, dues paying union members will naturally demand proper attention to their grievances, a concern which may not seem vital to impatient leaders who, remote from the job site, are preoccupied with what they are con-

vinced are bigger things. If job stewards are elected by the rank and file (in an honest count), if local officers are truly dependent on the members because they face the real possibility of organized opposition, they will be sensitive to membership demands and less likely to jump to attention at orders from above. That helps explain why the Stern forces disparage the advocacy of union democracy and rely heavily on appointing officers of huge new locals.

Stern wrote, “Workers want . . . strength and a voice, not some purist, intellectual, historical, mythical, democracy.” As Steve Lerner, a Stern braintruster, put it, “Considering union democracy as only a question of how a union is governed is too narrow . . . If only 10 percent of workers in an industry are unionized, it is impossible to have real union democracy because 90 percent are excluded.” If members must wait for democracy in their unions until democracy permeates industry, they may have to wait forever.

To pursue a flexible maneuverist course, to be free to jump from here to there, Stern would create or recreate the labor movement in the kind of bureaucratic mold that allows the leaders on top to free themselves from interference by the rank and file below and deploy the new union power as they see fit, presumably in the best interests of those oppressed and voiceless masses below awaiting liberation into the future industrial democracy. In that view, industrial democracy appears not as an achievement of democratic unionism but as a far off pie-in-the-sky substitute for it.

To achieve great goals, Stern seems convinced, unions must be bureaucratized. Locals are merged into new huge sprawling units with geographically extensive jurisdiction; and, as permitted by federal law, the officers of these new locals are appointed, not elected. The structure becomes so broad and so complicated that it is difficult for any local-wide caucus, independent of the officialdom, to take shape. The room for rising outside of the power structure

is narrowed. It becomes increasingly difficult to achieve any paid position without approval of the top officialdom.

But what cannot be shrugged off is an insistent dissent from within the SEIU itself, from the United Healthcare Workers-West, a 140,000-member local in California.

Monopoly control over all paid staff is carried to ultimate perfection in the Carpenters Union, an affiliate of Change to Win. In that union, no one, appointed or elected, can hold any paid position in the locals or councils without the endorsement of the top Executive Secretary Treasurer of the council. Locals are not permitted to pay their own elected officers. The SEIU has not reached that peak of organizational perfection, but it moves inexorably in that direction.

In June 2006, the SEIU announced that its International Executive Board had decided to merge all 600,000 members in California into a few new mega locals. The decision was to be submitted to a statewide membership referendum. We have heard of show-trials. This was a projected show-referendum. Anyone in a position of authority was required to support the IEB decision; none of them could oppose it. As the directive put it:

“ALL LOCAL UNIONS, union officers, and assigned staff must fully cooperate in the implementation and transition process to assure that this decision is carried out in an orderly fashion No union funds, resources or staff may be used to oppose, interfere or undermine in any way the IEB determination in this

matter.” We assume that any rank and filers, without office, could use their limited individual resources to campaign against the plan on their free time and try to reach those 600,000 scattered over the whole state.

Local 521, with over 45,000 members is one of those new locals with an appointed, not elected, leadership. (Five two one = five locals into one.) Applicants for appointment to the new executive board must signify their acceptance to an eight-point “Code of Conduct” which in addition to various harmless declarations includes the following:

2. I will not . . . engage in personal attacks on other members, staff, or leaders at union meetings, in the press, or other literature or venues. I will be mindful that emails could become public, and will not disparage other leaders, staff, or members in any such way that could become public either intentionally or not . . .

3. [O]nce a decision has been made, I will support that decision to members and others. I am not giving up my right to speak and make my position clear, but as a member of the board or committee, I will support the decision once it has been made. 4. I will not . . . take . . . legal action against the union or its leaders and other committee members for actions they take in their legal role as leaders, as long as I remain a member of this appointed board or committee.

WHERE CRITICS ARE EFFECTIVE in making their case, unload the opponents. In Massachusetts, where the SEIU completed its familiar surgical process of carving up and rejoining the parts of nine locals into one new 13,000-member Local 888, complete with an appointed officialdom, University of Massachusetts employees organized a caucus to campaign for the kind of democratic setup they had enjoyed in their old locals. After a thousand members petitioned the international for the right to elect officers and stewards, the SEIU solved its problem by getting rid of 2,300 of those university employees. They were subtly encouraged to leave the SEIU and join the Massachusetts Teachers Association.

As small locals were merged into large locals and large locals into jumbos, complaints mounted from rank and file activists and local officers of a “top down” management style by condescending leaders, often appointed from above. But these objections could be discounted as gripes from the usual suspects: from inveterate malcontents or from old-fashioned dreamers who are comfortable only in intimate units and who feel out of place in the newly centralized power machines.

But others began to ask questions. Under the auspices of the Committees of Correspondence a group of two dozen labor activists, a few in the upper ranks of their union hierarchies, met in New York in February 2007 for a full-day discussion on how labor could advance an effective program on health care, immigrants’ rights, and the war in Iraq. This is a group that enthusiastically shares Stern’s emphasis on the need to organize minorities, women and immigrants. Nevertheless, even though the subject was not on the agenda, some participants, according to an official report on proceedings, expressed misgivings over “some leaders” embracing “partnerships with employers—possibly another term for class collaboration.” One union official feared that “some unions which have a militant history are losing their democratic and militant character.” Another “addressed ‘commandism’ on the left and within labor.”

Jerry Brown was president of the SEIU’s big New England Health Care Local 1199 and prominent in progressive causes. He is not keen about opening disputes in the labor movement to public scrutiny. In a review of a book by Andy Stern, Brown writes, “My only caveat about leaving the AFL-CIO was that the dispute was carried out in the pages of the *N.Y. Times*, on *60 Minutes*, etc.” Now retired however, he seems somewhat free, if reluctantly, to mention some of what’s been bothering him. After paying due respect to author Stern, his talents, and his contributions to the movement, Brown speaks his own mind on the key issues where he thinks

Stern “goes off track.”

[PARTNERSHIP WITH EMPLOYERS]

“What is not explained is that the most successful efforts are the payoffs for years of struggle, strikes, and other conflicts with employers, conflicts that engaged many members and built strong membership organizations. In contrast, the SEIU recently has entered into ‘cooperative relationships’ that deny ‘employees’ many of the basic workplace protections and rights that most traditional union contracts provide.

“Unfortunately, some of these ‘alliances’ are highlighted by Andy as examples of a new way of thinking about our role and mission.”

[DEMOCRACY AND THE RANK AND FILE]

“After paying tribute to Stern for leading ‘rallies, sit downs, marches, and even strikes . . .’” Brown continues, “Unfortunately, our approaches in other industries does not involve the members at all until . . . we deliver the employer some benefit . . . We have to ask ourselves if these methods can produce a real democratic workers’ organization or if it is more likely that they will produce a ‘membership’ that is as alienated from the union leadership as it is from the employers . . . the very antithesis of true rank and file unionism.”

[CONSOLIDATION OF UNIONS]

“Larger is often better. . . . But how do we do this and still have workers make the crucial decisions in their own workplaces. . . . How do we make sure there is real democracy in choosing and electing union officials? Andy continues to stress the importance of consolidation. . . . He does not address the necessity of preserving effective democratic processes. . . .”

[SUMMARIZING THE ISSUES]

“Without a question . . . discussion and debate should take place at every level of SEIU.” [Extrapolating the advice for the intellectuals, discussion should flow at every level in and around the labor movement.]

BUT HOW MANY TROOPS do these critics have? So far, all these complaints might be ignored by Stern or others impressed by raw power. Rank and filers speak with a small voice; radicals are reduced to strong opinions; Brown has moral force but no continuing clout. But what cannot be shrugged off is an insistent dis-

sent from within the SEIU itself, from the United Healthcare Workers-West, a 140,000-member local in California.

According to the UHW-W, the SEIU agreement with an association of 284 nursing homes in California was not simply unacceptable; it amounted to “company unionism.” By implication, the criticism transcended the immediate issues of the California agreement; and the charge came not from perennial malcontents but from the responsible leaders of a major SEIU affiliate.

In a detailed analysis of the agreement, UHW charged that negotiations had “evolved into a substitute staff-driven process” and “a fundamental lack of membership involvement, running contrary to our constitution and bylaws as well as our standard practice.” According to UHW the agreements banned the right to strike and provided only limited provisions for arbitrating disputes; employers retained the unilateral right to change the economic terms of the agreement; no provisions for paid vacations, holiday, or sick leave; no seniority; strict limits on the number of stewards, undermining “work site member empowerment and activism in the union.” In summary, according to the UHW, the units created under the agreements “may come close to becoming . . . company unions.”

Twenty thousand members signed petitions backing the UHW. The protests were so overwhelming that the SEIU was impelled to back-track and reject renewal of the agreement. When so many unionists, directly affected, repudiate a key element in Stern’s way, can our labor intellectuals fail to notice?

Back in 1995, when that gathering of radical and liberal academics and their thousands of sympathizers rallied for labor “teach-ins” around the country, life seemed simple. No need for intellectuals to over-intellectualize. They responded to Sweeney’s call for change; they offered moral support to the new labor movement; they volunteered services; they helped restore labor’s image as a force for social justice.

But now there are more things than were dreamed of in 1995. Now come Andy Stern, the Teamsters, and Change to Win. They may succeed in building a stronger labor movement. Maybe. That is for the uncertain future. What is certain for the present is that they are already constructing the model of a new labor movement: more bureaucratic, more highly centralized, and more remote from the grassroots than ever before.

At other times, such a trend might have provoked concern from freedom-loving, social justice intellectuals. So far, no. If the future of the SEIU and of our labor movement merits “discussion at every level” so does the future of the intellectual-labor alliance.

A special dilemma confronts those who were drawn to Stern and the C to W by their experiences in the New Left or out of its tradition. They sought social change through participatory democracy. They turn now to the labor movement, especially to Stern and the SEIU, to find a powerful force for social change. But where, they might ask, is the participatory democracy?

WHERE DO INTELLECTUALS FIT IN? In 1999, with the help of SAWSJ and its affiliated professors, the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute published “Faculty @ Work,” a 74-page letter-size, how-to manual for professionals in the universities who want to help restore workers’ rights to organize. The guide offered a wide-ranging program of activism: classroom inspiration for students, opportunities for internships and jobs in unions, unionization of faculty, blue and white collar staff, and adjunct teachers in universities. Above all, educators could use their prestige to rally community support for union organizing campaigns, and put pressure on anti-union employers.

Linda Chavez Thompson, AFL-CIO executive vice president, called upon “faculty and staff” to join “in making the world a little more humane, fair, tolerant, and equitable.” Sweeney

wrote that “SAWSJ, students, and faculty are pumping new life into our movement.”

In the euphoria of those days, little debate was in order; everything would surely work out; labor was newly on the march; it was enough to rally support. But that was ten years ago. Since then, with a split in the labor movement, what was once posed so simply has become complex. Are those SAWSJ enthusiasts to be public relations cheerleaders? Are they to offer their talents as professional technicians? What is their role as independent-minded, critical thinkers?

DISCUSSION ON THE FIT between labor and intellectuals has persisted ever since there has been a labor movement.

Back in 1923, along with pamphlets by Scott Nearing, Stuart Chase, Norman Thomas, and Harry Laidler — intellectuals all — the League for Industrial Democracy published a 33-page work by George Soule entitled “The Intellectual and the Labor Movement.” As a guide to how intellectuals might serve unions, it is remarkably similar in spirit to the AFL-CIO Manual 76 later. In his brief introduction, Laidler reminded readers that “many years ago . . . Peter Kropotkin wrote his famous appeal to young ‘intellectuals’ to cast in their lot with the labor movement.” I remember Kropotkin’s “Appeal to the Young,” because, at 16, I found it so inspiring. “The never-ceasing struggle for truth, justice, and equality,” wrote Kropotkin, “will give you powers you never dreamt lay dormant in yourselves.”

But author Soule was not to be diverted into any extended discourse on misty ideals. He was preoccupied with how intellectuals might find practical entry into the labor movement and how they would handle themselves once there. He cautioned, “. . . The intellectual who has a romantic picture of the labor movement should remember that the rank and file of those who compose it approach it from a different ground and with a somewhat different purpose.” Once the intellectual sheds his illusions, “In the

fields of trained technical assistance labor ought to expect much of the intellectual.... the intellectual can better aid the union by doing his own job well for the union than by trying to do the union’s job for it.”

Soule goes on to tell intellectuals, much like the AFL-CIO 76 years later, where they can find opportunities for professional service to unions: teach classes, provide legal, editorial, and accountancy expertise, publicity. Thirteen pages from commentators offer addresses for job opportunities and where to turn if intellectuals want to form their own unions. But in this preoccupation with technical and professional services, something was missing.

LABOR NEEDS INTELLECTUALS; intellectuals need labor. That their interdependence is once again accepted as established truth is one lasting benefit of Sweeney’s rise in 1995. But no need for a union job mart for intellectuals. In the search for a practical niche for intellectuals in and around unions, the danger is that both sides will lose sight of the basic force that binds them together.

Gus Tyler is an intellectual who was embedded in the labor movement as assistant president to David Dubinsky in the ILGWU. Back in 1973 in the *American Federationist* he wrote (even while cautioning against exaggerating the power of intellectuals) “. . . the anti-establishment intellectuals who can be found on the campus, or in the media, or in social work . . . are educated, fairly affluent, articulate, and genuinely influential, they are a meaningful force in shaping public opinion in this country . . .” It is that ability to help shape public opinion that makes intellectuals so valuable an ally; they provide a public stamp of moral approval for unionism and thereby reinforce its political and social power in the nation.

Liberal and anti-establishment intellectuals share with labor the goal of social change; they want a more just, more democratic, more equalitarian society. The labor movement of-

fers the social power that can transform ideals from dreams into reality. That combination, the power of unions and the aspirations of intellectuals, is the basis of their alliance.

In January 1997, the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations invited academics who were in New Orleans for the annual conference of the Industrial Relations Research Association to a discussion on how to participate in “restoring and renewing historic ties between the labor and academic worlds.” In issuing the invitation, Sumner Rosen wrote of “the hunger among students and teachers for a force on the side of economic and social justice with which they could connect.”

THE INTELLECTUALS’ CHIEF VALUE to the labor movement derives not from their talents as professional technicians or skilled PR writers — unions have been hiring all that kind of help they need — but from their reputation for sharing people’s concerns, for impartiality, for independent-mindedness, wearing no one’s collar. (By jealously defending their “tenure” rights, academics preserve that reputation.) With their endorsement, the labor movement frees itself from the image of a narrow self-interest group and comes forward as a broad people’s movement. That contribution is the intellectuals’ key service to the labor movement; no other group can provide it as effectively.

Unions cannot buy that kind of service because once bought, it depreciates. People who suspect the motives of a hired mouthpiece can respect an independent voice. Intellectuals remain a valuable ally only by remaining independent and critical. Once they become kneejerk apologists, their value deteriorates. A successful alliance requires mutual respect: allies working in unison, but freely and independently.

There’s the rub. Can union leaders, always super sensitive to anything that might challenge their authority, even remotely, tolerate intellectuals who feel free to speak their mind? On the other side, will intellectuals, (aware of that de-

pressing quality of labor leadership) refrain from speaking out frankly for fear of losing access to established union power? These questions are posed now precisely because this is a time of rapid change in the labor movement when discussion should be free and frank. There is the opportunity: expansion of union economic and political power. There is the danger: intensified bureaucracy and the suppression of union democracy. These are serious questions.

Intellectuals spring to the defense of one of their own against attack from employers. Kate Bronfenbrenner, an academic at Cornell, is one of the most prolific and insightful commentators on our emerging labor movement. Around 1998, she testified at public hearings on a bitter strike at Beverly Enterprises and sharply criticized the nursing home company. Outraged by what it charged was irresponsible meddling by an academic, the company delivered a stinging protest and filed suit against her. Because she was not a tenure-track faculty member at Cornell she was vulnerable; the fear was that the university might buckle under company pressure and invent a pretext to drop her from the rolls. Hundreds of professors, around the country, signed petitions on her behalf. Cornell got the message: it ended by coming to her defense; her job was saved.

But how different the course of events when the need was for protest against pressure from influential labor leaders.

In 1988, after another series of building trades scandals, the Cornell ILR Press published the interim report of the governor’s Organized Crime Task Force on corruption and racketeering in the New York City construction industry. It was a remarkable product. It placed the blame for corruption impartially on crooked employers and union officials; if anything, more on employers: “Corrupt contractors are equally, if not more culpable than corrupt union officials.” It noted that union members themselves were victimized and recorded the efforts of reform leaders to oust racketeers. It pointed to

union democracy as an antidote to corruption: "One possible strategy involves fostering union democracy by assuring workers control over their unions and assisting them in imposing accountability on their union officers. Democratic structures and procedures . . . can make more likely the election of officials who work on behalf of their members rather than their own self interest."

Two years later, the task force's final report was ready, but this time Cornell refused to publish it. High officials of the New York State Federation of Labor had denounced the publication of the earlier interim report. Cornell yielded to the pressure. No outcry of protest from academics, not even a public whisper. The final report had to be published by the NYU Press. (Its author, James Jacobs, is an NYU law professor.)

(In some respects, the final report was more remarkable than the first. It concludes with a tribute to union reformers: " 'dissident' workers in many construction unions are willing to raise their voices against incumbent racketeers We conclude by dedicating our Final Report to these courageous men and women whose faith in American values, institutions, and laws has been an inspiration to us during our labors on this project." P. S. *Governor Cuomo postponed publication of the report for many months until an election was over. Then it was released without fanfare, filed, and forgotten.*)

No academic protest against Cornell's caveat? But, one might demur, that was five years before those 43 intellectuals cemented their alliance with labor. Consider then the case of Robert Zieger, who, in 2001 submitted a paper to *Labor Heritage*, entitled "'Black and White, Unite and Fight'? Race and Labor in American History."

Labor Heritage is a glossy official AFL-CIO magazine that exudes a scholarly aura and makes space available to academics, especially to those who recount great labor struggles of the past canonized by time. Robert Zieger, a labor history professor at the University of

Florida, is the author of "The CIO: 1935-1955" (a 500-page major work acclaimed as a "classic" by David Brody) and of "American Workers, American Unions, 1920-1985." His credentials as acceptable writer for Labor Heritage received an inadvertent boost from Dan LaBotz who, reviewing Zieger's CIO book in the Marxist *Against the Current* (9-10/95), criticized him as a labor establishment spokesman. "This . . . history is fundamentally an apology for the labor bureaucracy," wrote LaBotz.

He had presented his piece, Zieger explains, "to promote dialogue between academics such as myself and men and women active in the labor movement." It was accepted by *Labor Heritage*—at first. But to his surprise, some months later, Michael Merrill, director of the George Meany Center, informed him that, in an editorial change of heart, it was rejected. What bothered Merrill was not some individual inadequacy of Zieger's work but a heretical deviation from what was acceptable to the AFL-CIO. Merrill conceded that it "does clearly and concisely present the currently prevailing conventional wisdom within the academic community about the labor movement's record on race." But he noted that the paper "does not fit with the new editorial direction" and that it "does not . . . give sufficient credit to the diversity of [the labor movement's] record, especially in the AFL era." It was a blunt warning to "the academic community" to toe a politically correct line if they want access. The implication is depressing: if labor's keepers of the seal cannot permit criticism of its past record, how much more intolerable will they find any frank criticism of its current practice.

Zieger suggested that fellow academics "take my sobering experience into account." They didn't. There was no petition outcry against this union-imposed censorship.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS in the new alliance? As hired hands or volunteer professional technicians, their value

is minimal. In all their books and articles that abound from university presses, we don't read much about their practical work out in the field. They don't go out to organize. They don't spend time in the union office. They don't handle grievances. They don't canvass for votes. Some of their students, while still young and vigorous, may volunteer for the grueling work; but those professors, those academics, are celebrated for their writings and lectures on labor history, on the significance of new trends, estimates of progress, on the broad future of the labor movement as a force for social justice. They can best fulfill a role as labor's advocate when they also serve as labor's conscience.

Both sides of this alliance have a problem. Labor leaders want to bask in the glow of support by eminent intellectuals. But, jealous of their power in their unions, they are sensitive to anything that might question it. They set limits; they want unalloyed endorsement, not frank criticism.

Those professionals and academics who have answered the union call — in the hundreds or thousands — are convinced that the labor movement, at last, is going their way. They are eager for access to that power. Unions pay tuition fees for union members to attend their classes. They direct their students to unions as paid interns. Unions back their publications. Eminent labor leaders endorse their conferences. Unions finance research projects. To safeguard those connections, which seem so vital to the cause of social justice, they need only to submit to a measure of censorship, preferably self-censorship, which is something that Robert Zieger discovered to his dismay.

But there are flaws in the adjustments so essential to this happy coexistence. If labor leaders insist that intellectuals toe the official line, they risk destroying their credibility as impartial advocates in the public arena. If intellectuals submit to those limitations, they risk losing their soul.

All these overhanging questions arise be-

cause Andy Stern, a would-be savior of the working class, is constructing a new labor movement based on ambiguous and contradictory principles: organize the oppressed but insulate union power from the influence of the rank and file.

The rising sector of the labor movement can be aggressive and then compliant; it focuses attention on neglected minorities and then treats them with contempt; it declares independence of the Democrats and seeks arrangements with the Republicans; it hails democracy in industry but derogates democracy in unions.

Objections can be anticipated: "We must be realists, not dreamers. There can be no perfect democracy. Unions must be centralized for battle against a powerfully organized foe. If workers can sometimes be manipulated into unions from above, why not? Sometimes it is necessary to maneuver or compromise or cooperate with employers. If in this dog-eat-dog world all this is necessary to build a stronger labor movement, so be it. Etc., etc."

It is not merely a question of scrutinizing the validity of the details of Stern's program or practice. Obviously I have my opinion; others will have theirs. Each move taken by itself may be the cleverest scheme in the world. There have always been persuasive arguments for freewheeling realism, compromise, and opportunism. However, after all is said, intellectuals must ask, "Is this what we had in mind? Is this what those Scholars, Artists, and Writers expected when they responded to Sweeney's call for "a reborn movement of American workers, ready to fight for social and economic justice . . . a new progressive voice in American life . . . changing the direction of American politics . . . a vibrant social movement . . . a democratic movement that speaks for all American workers?" In short, what kind of labor movement are we building?

Intellectuals are ready to serve the labor movement. But can the labor movement adjust to an alliance with outspoken, independent-minded critics? SAWSJ, where are you when we need you?

Babble On

Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht on the Radio as Medium, Method, Message, and Metaphor

EVERETT C. FROST

[With the invention of radio] one suddenly had the possibility to tell everyone everything; but one had, when one thought about it, nothing to say. . . . One looked around to see if anywhere anything was being said to anybody, and then tried to compete and butt in so as to say something to someone. That was radio in its first phase as a substitute — a substitute for the theatre, the opera, the concert, the lecture, the coffee-hour music, the local newspaper and so on. From the beginning radio imitated almost any existing institution which had to do with the broadcast of speech or music. In this Tower of Babel cacophony and dissonance came forth that could not be ignored.

BERTOLT BRECHT, "RADIO AS AN COMMUNICATIONS APPARATUS"

What a huge technological triumph! — To be able, at last, to send a Viennese waltz and a cooking recipe out to the whole planet. What a sensation! What for?!

BERTOLT BRECHT, "RADIO — EINE VORSINTFLUTLICHE ERFINDUNG"

1. The Attraction of Radio

AMID THE OMNIPRESENT BABEL of cell phones, pagers, blackberries, walkmans, cable, AM, FM, short wave, portable radios, MP3, Napsters and iPods, it is perhaps impossible to imagine, now, how the fragile ventriloquism of the radio once seemed such an awesome, magical, means of communication — one that would provide heretofore unimagined opportunities for writers and composers, revolutionize human civilization, and transform the nature of human consciousness itself (as per-

haps it shall, as perhaps it has). The egregiously utopian claims made on its behalf in this regard bear an amusing similarity to claims now made for digitalization and its resultant, "dot-com revolution," internet, and the "information superhighway" of the world wide web, and Brecht's worries (above) seem very contemporary as one surfs the blogs and digital webcasts.

Berlin got its first "wireless" broadcast in October 1923, with the rest of Germany following in the months thereafter. Broadcasting had been interdicted by all of the European combatant governments throughout the First World War, and so got off to a start a decade later than it did in the United States. That delay may have proved its salvation, because the lucrative but disastrous model of commercial broadcasting in America had progressed far enough that the designers of European broad-

EVERETT C. FROST *directed the American national broadcast premiere of The Oceanflight for the Sound Play 1991-92 radio drama series. An earlier version of this essay was given as an address to the media session of (biannual) meeting of IFTR (International Federation of Theatre Research), Washington, D.C., July 2005 whose theme was "Citizen/Artist."*

cast simply balked at its crassness. “I can remember,” recalled Brecht, “how I heard about the radio for the first time. There were ironic newspaper accounts about a virtual radio hurricane that was in the process of devastating America. Nonetheless one had the impression that it was not just a craze but something truly modern.”¹

In Europe, the “something truly modern” provided avant garde artists with audiences on a scale hitherto unimaginable, and, not incidentally, with a new avenue for employment — sometimes rather lucrative employment — and Brecht and Benjamin, like many other Weimar artists and intellectuals, were interested in the new medium as a source of income.

Radio also seduced with its “truly modern” reinvention of very ancient oral traditions, the mesmerizing aura of something oracular, the archetype of the ineffable divinity of whom no visual form could be known, no graven image made, served by all those ancient, Biblical prophets, like Ezekiel or John, waiting patiently for the Word to enter through the ear. It is a performative archetype of radio that has, from time to time, been exploited to catastrophic effect by maniacs like Hitler, and is an analogy parodied by Bertolt Brecht and Elizabeth Hauptmann in their melodrama, *Happy End*:

[LILLIAN] Lots of people today think it’s fashionable to laugh when God is mentioned, and say, “Yes, but have you ever seen Him? You can’t believe in something you can’t see.” There’s even a famous French astronomer who said, in print, “I searched with my telescope from one end of the universe to the other, and I couldn’t find God.”

[MARY] (rehearsing) “I searched with my telescope . . .”

[LILLIAN] Well, of course he couldn’t find God. He was using the wrong instrument. You don’t see God with a telescope. And here I thought we’d bring in the miracle of radio.

[MARY] The radio? What does the radio have to do with it?

[JANE] Did he turn the radio on?

[LILLIAN] (very fast) It’s like this: One day suddenly, you’re told that there are waves in the air that carry sound. And you can’t see them. And you don’t believe they exist. Then one day you set up a crystal set, and put on the ear-phones — and all at once you hear music! And then you believe!

[MARY] (utterly confused) The radio? Well, I suppose.

...

[LILLIAN] God is always broadcasting. His music is always on the air. It’s just a question of using the right tool, the right part of you, to hear Him with. We can all see God in our hearts, and hear His music in our souls: It’s just a matter of tuning in on His wavelength. — Now, you think you can follow that?

It is a performative archetype of radio that in some measure may help explain Benjamin’s interest in it — his origins deriving as much from the Jewish mysticism of his friend and mentor, Gershom Scholem, as from the Marxism of his friend and colleague, Bertolt Brecht. Hannah Arendt has remarked that, “As one may read in the Preface to the *Origin of German Tragedy*, Benjamin regarded truth as an exclusively acoustical phenomenon: It was ‘not Plato but Adam’ who gave things their names — was the ‘father of philosophy.’”²

2. The Motive for Radio

THE SCIENTIFIC (TECHNOLOGICAL) ADVANCES in communication represented by radio and film, paralleled — as it seemed to Brecht, Benjamin, and many of their contemporaries — the advance being made in Russia in implementing what seemed to them a scientific (Marxist) understanding of history. The connections between these two contemporaneous historic phenomena might well, at a political or cultural level, provide a desperately sought way out of bourgeois capitalism that had become not only decadent and exploitive but, in the First World War, disastrously and pointlessly murderous on a mechanized scale unknown in human history.

To Benjamin, as to many others, the conjunction of these historic events inscribed profound implications for the performing arts requiring a new theoretical matrix or aesthetic. Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" was written as an attempt to disrupt the ideologies that had led at once to impasse and catastrophe, and to replace them with a view of history, at once apocalyptic and revolutionary, and articulated in avant garde art. Social revolutions follow technical ones. The technical advance in communications brought about by radio, film, and photography, like other cultural innovations such as the invention of drama in ancient Greece or the *Meistersingers* in Renaissance Germany, required a new theoretical matrix or aesthetic in order to generate, identify, and employ new forms of expertise and expression that could lead the way out of the murderous impasse imposed by capitalism and bourgeois culture.³ Benjamin said that he began the task of creating a new aesthetic, "with the insight that absolutely all aesthetic categories (standards) have lost their validity," and cannot be revitalized from old aesthetic theories. "Rather," he says, "a detour via materialistic criticism is necessary, one that places the books (i.e., works of literature) in a temporal context. Such criticism will then lead to a new dialectical aesthetics."⁴

In, what is perhaps his best known essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin writes, "During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well."⁵

Thus the creation of a new aesthetic and of new performance practices would have to take into account innovations in communications technology because, as Benjamin — drawing on his friend and mentor, Theodor Adorno — argued, these fundamentally re-oriented the

relationship(s) of perception to consciousness itself. Media is not a neutral medium transmitting content through it unaltered (the way, for

For Benjamin, as for Brecht, the thing of crucial importance was that the listener also be heard.

example, plumbing relocates water). It not only transmits culture, it alters it as well, just as an irrigation system reconstitutes everything it touches: in altering perception media alters consciousness, and in altering consciousness, it alters social, political, cultural and economic relations. Informed by avant garde artists like Brecht and progressive intellectuals like Benjamin, media could be a source of social and political empowerment on a scale hitherto unimagined. In the hands of demented madmen like Joseph Goebbels it could be used to arouse jingoistic narcissism, xenophobia, and paranoia.

As Karlheinz Barck has shown, Benjamin anticipates Marshall McLuhan's media studies a half-century later. McLuhan, famously made electricity not only an analogy of our central nervous system, but an extension of it as well. Both Benjamin and McLuhan (in Barck's words) "insist on tactility as the attitude that continues to connect the human senses in spite of the increased specialization and isolation of perception induced by technical evolution."⁶

As the admonition "look but don't touch" implies, touch is the most intimate of the senses. The sense closest to touch is sound. At the fundamental frequencies, down there in the lower depths of the audible range, it is touch: the vibrating rhythms at the bottom end of an electric guitar, of a base drum or organ note more felt with the fanny than heard with the ear. This accounts for the primal — even primeval —

emotional power of, in McLuhan's phrase, "the tribal drum" (radio) and phonography (literally, "sound writing"). These intimate sensate connections on a broad scale provided the new medium with (for better or worse) the power to mutate perception, individual and social; and its oracular (auracular) qualities provided an hitherto impossible opportunity to sharpen (rather than mesmerize) the critical faculties of the listeners, and imposed the "task of engendering in listeners a critical response to radio." It was incumbent on the critic, making an intellectual contribution to this process "to show the social transformations expressed by these changes of perception."⁷ Benjamin was prescient in seeing that the power of radio existed, whether or not anyone attended to it or theorized about it, and that, therefore, it had a tremendous potential for education, which could counter the potential for propaganda, messmerization, manipulation for which the Nazis appropriated it. The stakes in this dialectic, hindsight needs no longer to argue, were not — and are not — inconsequential.

But engendering in listeners a critical response would require undoing the prevailing commodification of the radio and its audience. In this sense radio theory addresses centrally one of the primary issues of modernism — the sense of an audience that is absent or lost or latent or dormant and has, like a truant schoolchild, to be made present, or, like Little Bo-Peep, to be found, or, like a film, developed — or mobilized — or épatered. In the early days of radio, what the department stores were interested in was selling you the box on which things could be heard, and they left it to the artists and wannabees to provide the tunes, the vaudeville routines, and the records for the Saturday night prom. It took David Sarnoff to convince what became NBC that the real commodity was not the box, you could sell that only once, but the ears of the listeners which could be sold over and over to sponsors — and vaudeville became "soap opera" — named after the prod-

uct most often promoted to housewives on daytime serials. It was this commodification that Benjamin sought to overcome.

In his insistence on an active listener rather than a passive, commodified audience, we can detect the considerable influence of Brecht. In an essay on "Radio as an Instrument of Communication," Brecht remarks:

In regard to the reason for the existence of radio, it cannot in my opinion consist only of the beautification of public life. . . . Nor is radio, in my view, an adequate means of bringing comfort back into life at home and making family living tolerable. . . . Currently radio is one-sided, when it should be two-sided. It is only a distribution mechanism, it only informs.

Now to make a positive suggestion for the transformation of the function of radio: It should be changed from being a distribution instrument to being an instrument of communication. It could conceivably be the greatest instrument of communication if it not only broadcast but also received; if it allowed the listener to speak as well as to hear and did not isolate him but brought him into a relationship.

IT WAS IMPORTANT to both Brecht and Benjamin that their new aesthetic theorizing implemented a conception of art that resulted in and from praxis — a combination of theory and practice such that theorizing had direct consequences for doing, and actual practice informed theorizing. At the most basic level theory would simply explain and justify what they were in fact doing, while what they were doing "made sense" in a theoretical context.

In the period before audiotape, radio was more heavily dependent than it is now on the talk, the newscaster with a script, the lecture, the reading of literary works, the first person narrative, and the live-in-studio performance of music and drama. These forms derive from a top-down one-to-many model (of presenter to audience) based on assumptions that Brecht and Benjamin wanted to invert.

Start then, Brecht argues, from another per-

spective than the top-down, one-to-many model. One way to do so was to adapt his theories of epic theatre to radio in a form appropriate to the new medium. As Benjamin described it:

He (Brecht) wishes to show a series of situations in our social existence in which the individual is still able to achieve something by the use of his skills: at the same time he wishes to “provoke” the strata in question into making opposing statements of their own, so that people from the mass audience who would never have done so of their own accord will step up to the microphone.⁸

For Benjamin, as for Brecht, the thing of crucial importance was that the listener also be heard, and is not to be isolated but to be placed in some kind of interactive, participatory, relation to others because, politically speaking, if an audience were empowered in this way, it might break the mystifying stranglehold of consumption, which at this level seems to function as a false substitute for genuine community. “The basic error of radio administrators is to perpetuate in its work the fundamental split between performers and audience, which is belied by its technical foundation. Any child can see,” wrote Benjamin in his “Reflections on Radio,” “that it is in the spirit of radio to put as many people as possible in front of a microphone on every possible occasion,” suggesting an (inter) actively involved live studio audience, for example. Where it was not possible to come in front of the microphone, listeners could still participate from their homes.

Instead of training in cultural artifacts, which rendered the listener a passive recipient, audience members could participate in them, which made them an active part of the process, encouraged to seek each other out and form affinity groups based on a similarity of interests or backgrounds or political persuasions. For example, Hörmodelle — model plays for role playing — (including ones written by Benjamin himself) could be constructed and followed by

discussions which took up “the problems of everyday life — school and education, the techniques of success, marriage difficulties — could be debated in the form of example and counter-example.”

A play might, for example, portray a conflict about family finances or adolescent rebellion with alternate endings discussed by a studio audience (whether they were expected actually to perform in them as well I have not been able to determine), and audience members at home encouraged to write and discuss versions of their own. With music published in the radio program guide and the newspapers, there were programs in which a musical composition was performed on the radio leaving out an instrument, with that part — trumpet, piano, violin, accordion — supplied by a performer at home. For Brecht the role of the radio artist, like that of the theatre artist, was to shape the material to engender this educative function, not to amuse or entertain:

Radio should educate mutually, not just report. It is a formal task of the radio to give this teaching function an interesting character, to make things interesting. Some parts, especially those for young people, could even be artistically shaped. This effort of radio to shape educational material artistically would be met by the ambitions of modern art which wishes to give art an educational character.

As an example of such possible practices, which use the radio as a communication instrument I have already talked about in regard to my *Oceanflight* at the Baden-Baden music festival in 1929. This is a model for new uses of your instruments.

3. The Implementation of Radio: The Oceanflight

THE PLAY, AND ITS VARIOUS TITLES, has a complicated history which may be briefly summarized:

As a Music Editor of Radio Berlin [the pre-Nazi predecessor to the present Sender Freies Berlin (SFB)], Kurt Weill was able to create

opportunities on the air for many artists and critics, Brecht among them — the two avant garde entrepreneurs having become celebrities as a result their collaboration on the *Three Penny Opera*. In 1929 Brecht and Weill collaborated on a broadcast of the *Berliner Requiem* and that

History, in other words, was not to be seen as in the days of “culinary” opera as made (or unmade) by Heroes such as Parcival or Siegfried or Faust but by the collective will of the workers.

summer, German radio decided to broadcast the arts festival that had been taking place annually in the resort town of Baden-Baden. Radio technology was massively more cumbersome and less portable than it is now, and making the broadcast was a rather formidable labor for radio at that time. In response, participants in the festival agreed to create works specifically designed for radio; and Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill invited Paul Hindemith (the Baden-Baden festival Director) to collaborate on their already begun work-in-progress for the air waves about Charles Lindbergh’s historic triumph over the sea waves two years before. For the same festival, Brecht wrote, and Hindemith scored, the “Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis” (Baden-Baden —Didactic or Teaching) Cantata of Acquiescence — hereafter “Badener Lehrstück”) in which Brecht extended the political implications of “The Oceanflight” in the light of his increasing absorption into communist ideology. Both were subtitled “Lehrstücke” — didactic or educational plays more intended to prompt an audience to confront rather than escape from their economic circumstances, and intended as a ful-

fillment of Brecht’s theoretical thinking that radio should be used for educational purposes.

The subsequent history of the work and even of the name of the play is complicated. The collaboration, which premiered at Baden-Baden under the title, *Lindbergh, A Play for the Baden-Baden Music Festival*, satisfied none of the participants — Hindemith withdrew his music and Weill re-scored Brecht’s text. Meanwhile, Brecht was altering his view of the text in the light of his evolving politics as expressed in the sequel — the *Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence*. At the premiere performance the part of Lindbergh was sung by a tenor pointedly identified by a sign not as Lindbergh or the flier but as “The Listener”:

On the left side of the platform was the radio orchestra with its apparatus and singers; on the right side with the score in front of him was the listener, who performed Lindbergh’s role, i.e. the pedagogical part. He sang his part to the instrumental accompaniment supplied by the radio. He read the speaking sections without identifying his own feeling with that contained in the text, pausing at the end of each line of verse; in other words, in the spirit of an exercise. On the back wall of the platform was (a banner proclaiming) the theory being demonstrated in this way.⁹

Two radio stations printed the script of Brecht’s Lindberghflight in their program guide so that the listeners could perform it as was Brecht’s intention: “*The Oceanflight* is worthless unless it teaches. It is not an artwork which deserves a performance which doesn’t promote its teaching function.”

After three broadcasts of the Lindberghflight he remarked:

This practice produces discipline which is the basis of freedom. The individual will naturally reach for something entertaining, but will not reach for teaching material which does not promise him either money or social advantages. Such practicing only benefits the individual insofar as they benefit the state, and they only benefit a state which wants to be of equal ben-

efit to everyone. The Oceanflight therefore has neither an esthetic nor a revolutionary value independent of its use, which can only be organized by the state. Its proper use however makes it “revolutionary” in as much as that the contemporary state has no interest in organizing such practice.

By 1930, Brecht wanted to insert into the Lindbergh play the long poem, “Ideology” from the sequel (the *Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquisition*), and insisted that it was more politically correct to understand the trans-Atlantic triumph as not the solo flight of the hero, Lindbergh, but as the *Der Flug der Lindberghs* [*Flight of the Lindberghs*] (plural emphasized)], because Brecht wanted to stress that Lindbergh was not alone when he flew. Invisibly with him there flew the workers from the Ryan airplane factory in San Diego who had put together his plane, “The Spirit of St. Louis,” and Brecht wanted Lindbergh to say, “I am not alone; there are eight of us flying.” History, in other words, was not to be seen as in the days of “culinary” opera as made (or unmade) by Heroes such as Parcival or Siegfried or Faust but by the collective will of the workers; though he seems to have been less forthright in applying the implications of this political ideology to his sometimes reliance on Elisabeth Hauptmann as his co-author during this period. Be that as it may, however, to further emphasize the point, he now wanted the part of Lindbergh to be sung not by a tenor soloist but by a chorus; preferably of amateurs being instructed, not in music but in ideology, or of schoolchildren (and somewhere along the way the work picked up the subtitle of “Ein Lehrstück für Knaben und Mädchen” — a didactic play for little boys and girls).

As Brecht would later write,

In a concert performance (which is absolutely wrong-headed), at least the part of the aviator must be sung by a chorus so that the spirit of the work will not be completely destroyed. Only through group singing of the “I” role — “I am so-and-so”; “I am setting out”; “I am

not tired”; etc. — can a little of its didactic effect be salvaged.

Kurt Weill was predictably, and not unreasonably, adverse to Brecht’s retroactively imposed conditions when these made hash of the much labored for and rather remarkable musical integrity of the piece. How progressive composers maintained musical standards while incorporating the kinds of popular music not confined to the approval of an educated elite was a matter richly debated in both Europe and America at the time. Weill’s use of jazz, blues, the “boogie woogie” idiom that was a craze of the time, in a cantata setting was, itself, a gesture in the educational direction Brecht was pointing, and both courageous and innovative. The fault lines that would divide the two men are already in evidence here.

But history would wrench this magnificent work yet further. Both Brecht and Weill were marked for elimination by the Nazis and had to flee Germany for their lives. Their *Three-Penny Opera* was held up for ridicule in an exhibition of “degenerate art” (and when it had exactly the opposite effect on the public, the Nazis withdrew it from the show!).

During their exile, Charles Lindbergh became a spokesman for “America Firsters”: Americans who believed that the Nazis were, if not right about everything, certainly not on the whole such a bad thing as degenerate socialists and communists made them out to be and, anyway, an(other) European problem which Americans ought to stay out of. In 1938 he accepted the German Cross from Herman Goering; and, in September 1941 made a speech in Des Moines, Iowa to the effect that the Americans could not win against German air power and that the Western world was infected by people of “inferior blood” from Asia and Africa — a danger to the entire Caucasian race.

Consequently, in 1950, when Sud-Deutscher Rundfunk (SDR) sought to broadcast a revival of the Lindberghflight as part of

historical survey of the pre-Nazi origins of German radio, Brecht wrote them that:

If you wish to insert the Lindbergh flight into a historical survey, I must ask you to append a Prologue to the piece and to undertake a few small changes in the Text. It is now known that Lindbergh maintained close ties to the Nazis. In those days his enthusiastic report about the invincible Nazi air force had an enervating effect on several countries. Lindbergh also played a sinister role as a fascist in the USA. In my radio play therefore the title has to be changed to *The Oceanflight* and one is required to insert this prologue and Lindbergh's name must be eliminated.

Prologue to the broadcast of the *Oceanflight*:

You will hear
a report about the first oceanflight
in May 1927.
A young man achieved it.
He triumphed over storm, ice and greedy waters.
Nevertheless may his name be expunged,
because though he found his way
over uncharted waters
he lost himself in the swamps of our cities.
Storm and ice did not overcome him,
but his fellow man overcame him.
One decade later misguided by fame and fortune
He showed Hitler's slaughterers how to fly
with deadly bombs.
Therefore may his name be expunged.
Take warning:
neither courage nor knowledge
of motors and navigational charts
will earn for the antisocial
a hero's song.

4. Postmodern Implications of Brecht and Benjamin's Radio Theory

WHATEVER ITS MERITS, and aside from the problem of whether or not it actually achieves what Brecht and Benjamin said it would, such a use of radio seems considerably less radical or innovative now, in a hyper-interactive era of talk shows, email, bulletin boards, blogs, text messages, and the interactive chat-rooms attached

to the websites maintained by most radio stations. The opportunities for "feedback" are much greater than Brecht or Benjamin could have imagined. But the effect is contrary to the one envisioned by Brecht and Benjamin. Such feedback is used to surveil or amuse an audience rather than to educate or enfranchise it. Rather than empowering listeners, the very reverse has happened: instead of listeners controlling the ways in which they perform the radio, digitalized technology has increasingly invaded and surveilled the way media performs them. (Note: "them" = "us").

Whatever else this surveillance may be, it is a grim confirmation Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication" — the "incursion of imagery and communication into areas hitherto considered private."

"For," writes Frederic Jameson in the *Ideology of Theory*

Brecht and Benjamin had not yet begun to feel the full force and constriction of that stark alternative between a mass audience or media culture, and a minority "elite" modernism, in which our thinking about aesthetics today is inevitably locked. Rather, they foresaw a revolutionary utilization of communications technology such that the most striking advances in artistic technique — effects such as those of "montage," for instance, which today we tend to associate almost exclusively with modernism as such — could at once be harnessed in politicizing and didactic purposes.

As Jameson goes on to point out, Brecht's theory is inadequate to account for the present circumstances precisely because it assumes (or at least requires) that the media and the most advanced technologies be placed at the disposal of the artist. Benjamin's theory that a revolutionary art derives from the artist's use of them now seems naive. Instead, in the culture of commodification, these resources are placed at the disposal of corporate sponsors (in commercial radio) and corporate underwriters (in "noncommercial" radio) for the development (delivery)

of a complicated taxonomy of niche audiences (targeting most likely buyers) and large mass audiences (scatter effect). Contemporary radio, like other forms of media, has appropriated an anti-realist distancing effect that bears intertextual resonances with Brecht's alienation (*Verfremdung*) theory that he could not possibly have foreseen. Contrary to his intent on stage or radio, the result is mesmerizing rather than empowering. The real political effect is not in the content, though that too is often pernicious, but in the perverse celebration and reification of personalism and narcissism that is in direct opposition to the impersonal, social, and analytical sought by Brecht or Benjamin. Empowerment is illusory since wholly self-absorbed and incapable of carrying an agenda.

As capitalism develops from classical (i.e. Marxist or Frankfurt School) models to contemporary ones encompassing multinational corporations and vertically integrated media conglomerates, it increasingly loses sight of — is unable to take responsibility for — social or cultural questions, developing instead elaborate rationalizations — sustained by mediated campaigns (including political elections) for spinning human misery into greater and greater wealth for fewer and fewer people. It is a process for which global broadcasting, including public service broadcasting, serves as “cultural capital” in Badiou's sense and evinces, in Jameson's words, “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.” “Postmodernity [i.e., the condition of living in the post modern period, not the theoretical matrix that has come to be thus defined] demands that one live schizophrenically, trying on the one hand to live the inherited meanings and, on the other hand, recognizing that such meanings cannot enable one to respond to one's affective situation”:¹⁰

“Do not remember things longer than they last,” advises Galy Gay in Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*.

The postmodern condition does not enable one to “cope.” It includes an exaggerated reliance on the present and, with temporality diminished, an emphasis on spatiality in which radio (which exists only in time, having no spatial dimension) merges into the background as the sonic wallpaper or wraparound that insulates from the surrounding noise pollution, but is expected to have no content. Thus, if as Elin Diamond has noted, the challenge of feminist performance is to transform performance (back into?) temporarily fostering “a receptivity both to the contingency of the present and to mimetic figurations . . . of historical experience,”¹¹ radio, like the body, reclaimed from commodification, is a partner in that enterprise. If we could but once again listen to the radio, we might create the conditions in which to reclaim our history.

Consider the problem of the Soundscape: The sudden leap from the aural (radio) and bonding through top 40 radio, dedications, the album and 45 rpm spin-offs interconnected by telephone, followed by the isolation of being immersed in the personalized acoustic aquarium of the walkman, in less than a generation — this is supplanted by the visual reliance on the email and computer games, which in turn are quickly replaced by the highly mobile and very aural and omnipresent cell phone, only to find it literally metamorphose in your hand into a visual means for making and transmitting sometimes very invasive visual images, and for a return to a more primitive, more universal, and more immediate form of email known as text-messaging. The ear now again being relieved, it can now again be immersed in the personalized ipod, the self-programmed digital update of the walkman — an iconic commodity so desirable that the newspapers warn New York schoolkids not to flaunt them on the subways — they had become a major target of roving gangs, who board subways with the specific purpose of stealing them.

All this goes on simultaneously now, per-

mitting the disposition of multiple identities adopted and adapted ad hoc to contexts — a process perfected perhaps a half-generation ago by the multiple identities of email persona adopted by youth culture — radically non-local and non-geographic.

The argument that needs to be joined is no longer that tired one about popular culture vs. (debasing) “high” art, but is about reclaiming an authentic experience from a commodified one, and participating in it as an audience, not surveilled by it as a consumer. The two “sides” — if that is what they are — to the ‘argument’ — if that is what it is — over popular culture vs. “high” art seems to be mistaken, for these two forms are not mutually exclusive alternatives but partners. Beckett may be unimaginable without Joyce or Proust, but he is equally inconceivable without Chaplin and Keaton (Buster, not Diane). It takes only a little more imagination to notice that the semiotics of Chaplin and Keaton (Buster and Diane) are modified in the presence of Beckett and Proust. The real enemy of each is not the other, but the common enemy of both, the synthetic experience that substitutes for and persuades you you’ve had a real one.

As I noticed when I began, lurking behind my remarks is Brecht’s evocation of an image of the tower of Babel, and I invoke it here as the archetype of what radio has in our time

largely become. It remains to be seen whether the citizen artists among us who take an interest in it can turn it back into the sounded language of all humanity at work in building a future that is both utopian and scientific, or whether it all collapses in a sonorous blast of mutually unintelligible tongues.

NOTES

1. “Radio: An Antedeluvian Invention?” in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, Marc Silberman, ed. (London: Methuen, 2000) 36.
2. “Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940” (Editor’s Introduction to) *Walter Benjamin: Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt, ed. (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1969) 49.
3. “Theatre and Radio,” in *Selected Writings 2 (1927-1934)* (Boston: Harvard U. Press, 1999) 584-5.
4. Cited in Karlheinz Barck, “Connecting Benjamin” in *Mapping Benjamin: the Work of Art in the Digital Age*, Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich and Marrinan, Michael, eds. (Stanford, CA: Stanford U. Press, 2003) 38.
5. *Illuminations*, 222.
6. *Ibid.*, 42.
7. “Reflections on the Radio,” in *Selected Writings 2*, 544 and *Illuminations*, 222.
8. Quoted in Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin: A Biography* (London: Verso, 1996) 193.
9. Brecht’s remarks on this radio play are in *Brecht on Film and Radio*.
10. Lawrence Grossberg, *Dancing in Spite of Myself* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 1997) 223.
11. *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and the Theatre*, Elin Diamond, ed. (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 1997) 142.



Torturers in Pinstripe Suits

KURT JACOBSEN

SNATCHING IS WHAT SLIME BALL STREET thieves do, isn't it? States do it too, if they are authoritarian states or authoritarian wannabes. When a malicious state snatches its prey, it steals their wretched body, their human rights and a chunk

of everyone else's humanity too as torturers with grey pinstripe souls drag their victims into sadistic chambers where no wimp will stop them from doing their remorseless duty. The message that this nasty fate could befall anyone is never classified, even if the repugnant details are. The Nazis in pre-holocaust days were quite happy for word to circulate about grisly dark deeds in Dachau and the other "bone-breaker" camps. Rumors kept slackers in line. All governments thrive on secrecy, which does to some giddy leaders what smoking crack does to sad lumpen souls: it pumps them up to feel smarter and wiser and grander than they really are. Our political elites, despite perfunctory protests to the contrary, too often yearn to feel the full 100 proof intoxication of inflicting awesome institutional power against any insolent enemy or, what the hell, any old friend too who suddenly

becomes inconvenient, like Saddam Hussein or Manuel Noriega.

Rendition

DIRECTED BY GAVIN HOOD

New Lines Film, 2007

What good is power if you can't abuse it, hmm? It stands to reason that it's the only sure way to prove you possess it. What was the whole darned point of

owning that expensive shiny military machine, Madeleine Albright moaned a decade ago to an appalled Colin Powell, if sprightly political mandarins can't deploy it as they see fit? (Dick Cheney seems to have been thinking along the same lines.) What use are the cumulative powers of the U.S. state apparatus if a frankly *fuhrerprinzip* Republican Party leadership cannot unleash them arbitrarily to swat down pestilential critics, despite outcries by overly fussy constitutionalists and other milquetoast misfits. If indeed a rare government employee should feel kind of queasy about the utter unconstitutionality of an executive branch whim, the next presidential signing statement will fix it in a jiffy. Scan Jack Goldsmith's *The Terror Presidency* if you want a harrowing glimpse into how ambitious professionals learn to explain away their patent betrayal of the Constitution and of their fellow, but less well heeled, Americans.

Al-Qaeda on 9/11 handily gave Dubya permission to impose blanket bureaucratic oppression at home, ranging from total surveillance to the stripping of rights from anyone brandish-

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ing the wrong affiliations, origins, and opinions. The United States commenced morphing into the brittle land of the penthouse bully. Orwellian is in. Anything goes. Ship dicey terrorist suspects to Guantanamo or else waft them off into the deliberate calculated nothingness of extraordinary rendition, which, as Hood's film acknowledges, began under Clinton in 1995 and was expanded and accelerated under Dubya. Doughty defenders of extraordinary rendition point out that Adolf Eichmann might not have wound up in his iconic glass booth if Israelis hadn't kidnapped him. Snatching Eichmann was deemed okay because he was, well, who he was; unfortunately, anyone can be fingered today as a figure of Eichmann-like proportions by the slick amoral neocon yahoos who misrule America. Eichmann, in his SS heyday, would have grasped their logic instantly. Hannah Arendt may well have been right to argue that banal people are often perfectly tuned vehicles for immense evil. Primo Levi too rued the world's most dangerous human type — the conformist — for “without the Hosses, the Eichmanns, the Kesselrings, without thousands of other faithful and blind executors of orders, the great savage beasts Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels would have been impotent and disarmed.” Primo Levi, *The Mirror Maker* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1989), p. 86.

Secrecy gets invoked recklessly so that authorities pretend to enjoy a monopoly of magical knowledge when they actually are criminally clueless. Some graybeards among us recall all too well Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon babbling the fob-them-off refrain that if only we benighted citizens knew what they knew we would celebrate their ineffably wise decisions, such as punishing dissent at home and waging a hideous Southeast Asian war based on de-

grades of casually crafted mendacities, as the Pentagon Papers confirmed. A landfill the size of Yosemite Park is needed to handle all the pulped official lies responsible for the agonies of Vietnam. Dubya's administration soon may require all of Wyoming to bury its toxic outpour of disinformation. Up until now, the legislative and judicial branches and media exposes occasionally forced the megalomaniacs back a bit. But it sometimes feels as if 1950s B movie extraterrestrials had descended and seized the U.S. government. (Indeed, some years ago a brilliant little British Film Society played with that simple compelling premise, that the rich are different from you and me — “pace Hemingway” — because they literally are hostile space aliens who ravenously feast on nutritious humanity.)

DIRECTOR GAVIN HOOD is a talented, driven and gutsy forty-something South African who numbers within his small but impressive oeuvre a pair of estimable independent films, *A Reasonable Man* (1999) and *Tsotsi* (2005), which took an Oscar for best foreign films a few years ago. Here he strides into more delicate territory both in terms of the volatile theme — “sympathy for the renditioned” — and for accommodating all the inherent limits that attend a high budget studio production, which demands that he and the screenwriter spare no cliché and no tear-jerking moment as they rummage through every imaginable Hollywood trope to lure the audience onto their side. It's hard to blame him for that, but it does weigh down the pace and potential impact of the film.

In the opening scene beneath gorgeous landmark Table Mountain in Cape Town, a dapper Egyptian-born chemical engineer

The plot lumbers along to a tidy set of bloody bow ribbons in perfect karmic crowd-pleasing harmony.

Anwar El-Ilbrahimi, who pulls in 200 grand a year, is leaving a professional conference for a flight home to Chicago. There, in a neo-Norman Rockwell setting, his pregnant wife Isabella (Reese Witherspoon) literally is playing Soccer Mom with her young son in the front yard of a nice old fixer-upper house on a leafy city street. Isabella also jabbars cheerily on a cell phone with Anwar. Soon her handsome husband is boarding the plane after his cell phone mistakenly registers a missed message from a North African terrorist. Cut to a car stalled in traffic in dusty yellow-grey Egyptian (really, Moroccan) city square where gawky CIA agent Douglas Freeman (Jake Gyllenhaal) a self-described pen pusher, analyst (like Robert Redford in *Three Days of The Condor*), chats diffidently about tracing terrorist suspects with his macho local CIA boss, who is in the dirtier end of the spook business. Ultimately, if the American public knew all that was being done in their name and under cover they might well want to erase Washington, D.C., and start over.

A gunshot strikes an innocent bystander. A moment later a suicide bomb erupts and rips the square and everyone in it to pieces. The CIA boss is struck by shards and bleeds to death on Freeman's lap. The bomb, we learn, was intended to assassinate the glowering Telly Savalas lookalike local police chief Abasi Fawal, who goes untouched. Freeman takes over as the neighborhood CIA chief and soon is squirming as he witnesses Abasi torturing bomb suspects, including Anwar. Hood doggedly intercuts Anwar's interrogation and Freeman's growing doubts about Anwar's guilt with the tragic playing out of a love affair between the Egyptian security chief's fawn-like daughter and a sensitive but vengeful young man whose brother, we later learn, was tortured to death by her father. I'm not giving much away if I say that the plot lumbers along to a tidy set of bloody bow ribbons in perfect karmic crowd-pleasing harmony, such as never remotely happens in real life.

Anwar is swiftly seized in Chicago — out of sight of his waiting family. He is hooded, shackled, and with the blessing of icy CIA director Corine Whitman (Meryl Streep), who is portrayed as vengeful over the loss of a CIA agent, is soon cast into the hell of enhanced interrogation, abroad. Hood takes a piquant moment to have Abasi, the police chief, be the one to mouth the fact that of 19 dead and 75 injured in the blast it is only the single American casualty who registers with the Yanks. Anwar's clothes are almost ritually sheared off and he becomes a naked shivering battered body chained to a chair. The interrogation depends on purely circumstantial evidence. Anwar even worked on a study of bomb technology for the ATF, which cuts no ice with the rigid humorless Abasi. Hood provides a sober visual dose of the suffocating waterboard technique, that many Americans seem to think is a Walt Disney playground attraction. Cross the supreme rulers of the new American super-state, they'll try to drown you on a dry slab or else zap endless volleys of agonizing voltage throughout your shuddering body.

Our annoyingly callow CIA man Freeman is quick enough on the uptake to see that Abasi is not remotely interested whether Anwar is truly guilty but only cares as to when he can induce Anwar to confess to every suitable thing from suicide bombs to lacing Barry Bonds' granola with steroids. Freeman seems to be one of the few intelligence agents who reject the popular new theory that just because you have no evidence this does not mean your culprit is not guilty as hell. In one striking moment, though, Freeman himself grabs Anwar roughly by the throat, thereby dispelling any lurking audience suspicions he is a wuss. Anwar bumbles out a confession. Hood makes sure you realize that you would too. The implacable torturer Abasi is divinely certain of his own moral ground, and such people always are.

Cut to Isabella, winsomeness incarnate, doggedly searching for her missing husband.

She contacts old boyfriend Alan (Peter Sarsgaard) a shrewd Senatorial aide, who manages to slip past the sleek government denials. (A duty free receipt proved her husband actually was on the plane the government states he never boarded.) She needs this sharp insider's help badly. Alan briefly consults his salty Senator (Alan Arkin) who soon backs as far away from the tainted missing husband case as the news polls tell him to, and he advises his overwrought aide to do the same. The Sarsgaard character, so far as I could read him, was precisely the sort of sly fellow who does retreat. Yet the aide plunges stubbornly ahead anyway largely because the script simply needs him to do so. One other niggling trouble with the script is that the rendition program comes off as if it were the result of a snit by the CIA director, rather than a key piece in the dismantling of legal restraint on American authorities, which runs, of course, to the top. Where, as Bush remarked so ingratiatingly, things would be a whole lot easier if he were a dictator. Heh, heh. The envy that Washington movers and shakers like the Whitman character feel for third world despotism is palpable. At last, the irritating constitutional shackles are off the elites and the real metallic ones are on everyone else.

A memorable scene that is almost worth the price of admission is the tart exchange at a Washington social event in which the crusading aide bests Corine Whitman as she spews the terrorist invocations which authorities like to spray around themselves like bug repellent. But Streep holds all the cards and nothing can penetrate the seamless stonewalling — unless of course some inexplicably sensitive insider like Doug Freeman lets his Jiminy Cricket conscience get the better of him. Doug also enjoys

a brief gratuitous screen dalliance with a stunning sultry co-worker who later helps him out as getaway driver. At least they'll enjoy unemployment together. Meanwhile Abasi's gentle daughter is distraught to find out that her moody boy friend is plotting to kill her father and she scampers out to save them both from each other. But wouldn't it occur to her that getting near her dad is the real reason he dallied with her? Oh well. Freeman abruptly decides about brutal torture sessions that enough is enough because, you know, that's the kind of guy he is. The saintly aide is the sterling kind of guy he is too. I call these rather thin reeds to rest the fate of the American Republic upon.

The parallel story lines converge as Hood obligatorily picks up the slow loping filmic pace over the last few minutes. While there is little one can swallow in the strained portraits of the key Western characters, Hood does a fine job of cluing the audience into the fact that Egyptian players are multi-dimensional human beings. Is the young Egyptian suitor of Abasi's daughter a typical suicide bomber? Not according to most reports. Is Anwar a typical suspect who has been renditioned? Not likely. Is Streep a typical CIA Chief personality? Probably, yes. The true underlying message overcomes just barely the dramatic infelicities of the mass marketed story. There is also flashback to the opening bomb sequence which is almost gratuitously confusing, though some honcho inside the studio thinks he was clarifying things. What is persistently clear is that in this case, as in other dangerously authoritarian eras, the lesson is those who are sworn to uphold the law are more of a threat to society than those who break it.

Social Capital

The Science of Obfuscation

STEPHEN STEINBERG

VILLA VICTORIA — a great title. As with other legendary ethnographies — *Street Corner Society*, *Urban Villagers*, *Tally's Corner*, *All Our Kin*, and *Sidewalk*, *Villa Victoria* projects images of Gemeinschaft, of that quintessential social bond that survives even in the city that notoriously eviscerates the social bond. Although the contents of these books often contradict expectations, the romantic impulse excited by the titles is not so easily rebuffed by cold facts. Readers eagerly ply these books in search of validation that the social bond survives all the antithetical forces aligned against it — the soullessness of modernity, the atomization of mass society, the greed and decadence of capitalism, the terror of bowling alone. We look to these books for a distinctively sociological rendition of the classic morality tale where the human spirit triumphs over the forces aligned against it.

Small is up front in cautioning the reader that *Villa Victoria* is *not* a traditional community study. His study is better defined by its subtitle: "The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio." Ah, "social capital" — one of the trilogy of neologisms, along with "human capital" and "cultural capital" — that has recently entered sociology's lexicon of obfuscation. Their rhetorical function is to set the stage

Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio

MARIO LUIS SMALL

University of Chicago Press, 2004.
226 pp. \$20

for another morality tale — the one where even the disfranchised and downtrodden of Marxist imagination can escape their plight, if only they have the necessary quotient of human/cultural/social capital. Small's rendition has a new twist: in the case of *Villa Victoria*, we are introduced to a community that was built on the power of social capital, only to see it wane over time. It is a declensionist narrative of the rise and decline of social capital.

Let me make my point about the ideology that inheres within the social capital construct with an anecdote. In 1977 I was doing field research in Nicodemus, Kansas, which was the last surviving colony from the exoduster movement of the 1870s. The "exodusters" were blacks fleeing oppression in the South who found refuge in Kansas, which had been passed over on the westward march because of its lack of trees and water. After living in dugouts and surviving perilous winters, the exodusters succeeded in building a thriving rural community that flourished until it was decimated by the dustbowl and the Depression. Today it continues mostly as a retirement community. I interviewed Mrs. Hattie Burney, a school teacher, who taught generations of Nicodemus's children. She told me that the banker in neighboring Hays was planning an exhibit commemorating the anniversary of his bank, and wanted to include photographs of all of the octogenarians in the area. Mrs. Burney demurred, and as she told the story, she threw back her shoulders and said with a defiant laugh: "I told him, 'Your bank and my life is quite another thing.'"

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Mrs. Burney knew intuitively that there was something wrong with pairing *his bank* and *her life*. I have the same problem. For Marx “capital” entailed a vast system of domination and exploitation that engendered deep and enduring divisions in class, status, and power. Marx certainly allowed for the fact that capitalism permeates all spheres of life — including the human, the cultural, and the social — but he never lost sight of the underlying and abiding link between capitalist structures and these ancillary behaviors.

In the hands of the exponents of human/cultural/social capital, however, these constructs are fatally reductionist — reduced to an attribute of discrete individuals, despite ecological and social correlates. I know their disclaimers: that they are probing the *interstices* between structure and agency. That they wish to account for the *process* by which poverty is reproduced from one generation to the next. That structural theories are overdetermined, and that they wish to probe the “complexity” and “variability” of how the poor cope with poverty. That they are restoring “culture” and “agency” to the sociological equation. The problem is that, contrary to Marx, they remove these factors from the larger structural and institutional matrix in which they are embedded, and treat them as independent factors and determinants in their own right. Thus, Small writes in his preface: “This book is focused exclusively on the relationship between concentrated poverty and social capital.” Think about it: concentrated poverty is taken as a given. Its backward linkages to political economy are acknowledged in principle, but the entire thrust of Small’s study and the methods deployed, pertain to the frivolous question of

According to Small, even the rats
and mice observe the class
boundary and avoid the parks that
the gentrifiers cultivate, leaving
them to more upscale fauna —
birds and squirrels.

who among the poor has social capital and who doesn’t. Nor does Small attempt to determine whether having social capital has the positive consequences that are assumed. Rather, social capital is treated as the sociological equivalent of Viagra, spiraling people up the ladder of success. Conversely, *not* having social capital is seen as personal and collective deficit. Thus, the focus of analysis, and implicitly the onus of blame, is placed on the poor themselves.

SMALL ANTICIPATES THIS CRITICISM and tries to head it off. Not very convincingly, I fear. He is so riveted on the narrow question of exploring differences among his subjects in social capital that one learns almost nothing about the powerful social forces that relegate them to desperate lives on the economic margins in the first place. Except for a three-page section on political economy, little is said about the transformations within Boston’s postindustrial economy that have widened the income gap between the haves and the have-nots and vastly increased the cost of housing, at the same time that a relentless neoliberal agenda has dismantled programs for the poor. Notwithstanding caveats to the contrary, Villa Victoria is treated in a virtual vacuum, and all the explanatory focus is on determining the prevalence and trend of social capital.

Small may counter that his is not a study of poverty or the plight of the working class in Boston’s postindustrial economy, but a far more limited study of social capital. Fair enough: let us take Small’s study on its own terms. At the outset of his book, Small notes that many studies have confirmed William Julius Wilson’s contention that concentrated poverty is a detriment,

and that poor people who have moved to middle-class neighborhoods, have done better as a result. Actually, the evidence supporting this theory is mixed at best, as Edward Goetz shows in *Clearing the Way: Deconcentrating the Poor in Urban America*. Thus, Small's study may be predicated on a false premise, in that he seeks to explain how and why concentrated poverty has negative outcomes that are themselves in doubt. According to Small, this is the "black box of neighborhood effects," and his whole purpose is "to rely on Villa Victoria to open the black box." So, let's see what lies within his black box.

Villa Victoria had a glorious genesis. Boston's South End was regarded as a hopeless slum at a time when the prevailing principle in planning held that the best way to clean up the slum is to tear it down. When Herbert Gans studied the West End in the 1950s, there was barely any community resistance to the imperial policies of the Boston Redevelopment Agency. But Villa Victoria's genesis was in the late 1960s, and Puerto Ricans living in the area mounted a grassroots campaign, spearheaded by the Emergency Tenants' Council, whose motto was: "No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19!" ("We shall not be moved from Parcel 19!") Dozens of community groups and ad hoc committees sprung up in opposition to the BRA, and in the end they extracted a concession for the construction of affordable housing for displaced residents, later bestowed with the name Villa Victoria (Victory City) by the residents. To my mind, this form of political mobilization, built as it was on the intersecting solidarities of ethnicity and class, is the ultimate form of "social capital." If Small agrees, there is no sign of it. Rather he treats the events leading up to the development of Villa Victoria merely as historical background for his chapter on "The Rise and Fall of Local Participation."

Small characterizes the first years after the completion of Villa Victoria in 1971 as "the golden years" when participation in voluntary

groups flourished. This included grassroots activism, like Puerto Rican Tenants in Action, a TV station and several newsletters, ESL courses, math and literacy workshops, a solar greenhouse, cultural groups' activities around music, dance, and mural painting, as well as cooking and gardening. However, by the time that Small began fieldwork in the late 1990s, "most of the associations and activities of the 1970s and 1980s had vanished. There were no cooking groups; no plays for the elderly; no volunteer-run English or math courses; no print making; no newsletters." The TV station had ceased operation, and there was little appetite for community participation. "How did it come to this?" is the burning question.

What did Small turn up to explain the loss of social capital from the golden years when local groups flourished? I count four empirical nuggets in his black box:

1. Since its inception in 1971, Villa Victoria went from being a place of pride as "an urban oasis devoid of squalor" to "a shameful ghetto" in the perception of its residents. Partly this reflected the physical deterioration of the housing, exacerbated by shrinking budgets and neglect. But it is also a case of relative deprivation: the pioneers harbored memories of much worse poverty and privation in Puerto Rico. In contrast, the next generation compared themselves to the affluent gentrifiers in the neighborhood who had the foresight and the capital to gobble up properties at depressed prices.

2. As part of the development and ultimate gentrification of the South End, the poor and marginal residents of Villa Victoria were thrown into proximity with gentrifiers who included liberal intellectuals, artists, and professionals. But contrary to social capital theory, this was inconsequential. An invisible but impenetrable wall separated the two groups. The gentrifiers did not even deign to attend the Puerto Rican festival that attracted 15,000 revelers. Commercial establishments — stores, restaurants, hair salons, et cetera — are segmented by ethnicity and class. According to Small, even the rats and mice observe the class

boundary and avoid the parks that the gentrifiers cultivate, leaving them to more upscale fauna — birds and squirrels.

3. Villa Victoria was rich in resources and social bonding. However, Small contends that the tight ethnic enclave actually decreased “bridging” between social classes. He argues that high resource neighborhoods paradoxically increase social isolation with the world outside. It is hard to see how they would be better off without these ethnic and class solidarities, which produced Villa Victoria in the first place, but Small embraces Putnam’s position that they have the wrong kind of social capital, in that “bonds” come at the expense of “bridges.”

4. Aside from “neighborhood effects,” individuals varied in the extent of their ties across lines of ethnicity, often depending on circumstances of their workplace. Generally speaking, only those residents of Villa Victoria who worked in mainstream work settings were able to develop friendships and networks outside the ethnic community.

AS IS READILY APPARENT, there are no great surprises in Small’s black box. His overall conclusion states the obvious: “poor neighborhoods are not always isolated or uninvolved. And not all poor people in a given poor neighborhood are isolated or uninvolved.” This conclusion puts Small in polite disagreement with the exponents of concentrated poverty and social capital. Not only does he find that the poor residents of Villa Victoria have internal solidarities, but he also finds that proximity to middle-class neighbors does not plug them into networks leading to jobs and opportunity. If he followed the logic of his argument to its logical conclusion, he would have challenged William Julius Wilson and other exponents of concentrated poverty. After all, this theory has been deployed to provide justification for the forcible eviction of the poor from Cabrini Green and the Taylor Homes in Chicago, and for contending that the tsunami in New Orleans had a silver lining, in that it broke up concentrated poverty and dispersed the poor to other com-

munities where, building one doubtful premise on another, they will acquire the social capital they lacked in their former neighborhoods. Thus, we can take comfort in the fact that Small presumably would be opposed to blowing up Villa Victoria and dispersing its residents with Section 8s to other neighborhoods — all in the name of deconcentrating poverty and moving the poor to opportunity. No doubt, this is precisely what their upscale neighbors would favor, since they regard Villa Victoria as an eyesore, and the drugs and crime in neighboring O’Day Park as a menace.

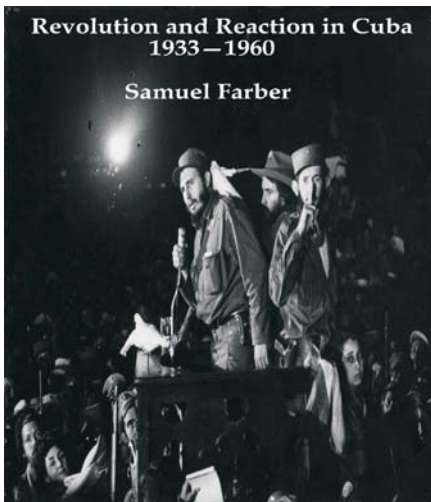
In his epilogue, Small returns to Villa Victoria six months later, and finds some salubrious changes: the daycare center had moved to a more accessible location, its former locale converted into a youth center with a large TV set, lounge chairs, and some video games. The technology center was thriving. The health care center had moved to a better location. And thanks to an outside grant, the residents of every house had been provided with a free computer and internet access, provided they took an introductory computer course at Villa Tech. On the other hand, several young men had been stabbed or shot in O’Day Park. Small shrugs this off and concludes “on a note of cautious optimism about the future of community participation and development of beneficial social ties in Villa Victoria.”

It goes without saying that garden clubs, youth centers, and ESL classes have their place, but they are at best a palliative and no substitute for jobs and opportunities. The violence that Small reports on the penultimate page of his book is perhaps only the tip of an iceberg, given that 44 percent of the Latinos in Villa Victoria were living below the poverty line in 1990.

When Jay MacLeod, author of *Ain’t No Making It*, returned to the site of his study in Cambridge after five years, he found that practically all of his youthful subjects were still floundering at or near the bottom of the ladder, and

this was as true for the Brothers (blacks) who had cultural capital as it was for the Hallway Hangers (whites) who lacked cultural capital. MacLeod put his finger on the crucial mediating factor between structure and agency that eludes Small in his single-minded search for social capital: the extreme wage polarization that relegates working-class youth to low-paying, dead-end jobs. As Barry Bluestone and Mary Huff Stevenson show in *The Boston Renaissance*, this is the dark side to Boston's booming economy. It was not for lack of social capital that Villa Victoria dissolved from hope to despair, from an oasis of hope to a shameless ghetto. What the troublesome youth who deal drugs in O'Day Park need is not a computer or a youth center equipped with video games, but jobs — jobs that pay a living wage, and that would allow them to escape poverty, support a family, and join a bowling league.

In the final analysis, Villa Victoria was perhaps a hollow victory. Although it prevented the forcible eviction of Puerto Ricans from the South End, and it provided affordable housing for these working-class families, it did nothing to address the dire needs of their children for jobs and affordable housing, leaving them trapped in this anomalous pocket of poverty in one of Boston's most expensive neighborhoods. What the struggling residents of Villa Victoria need is not an infusion of social capital, but the resurrection of a politics and a policy agenda that gave them Villa Victoria in the first place. For their part, armchair scholars can begin by relegating the twin concepts of "concentrated poverty" and "social capital" to the trash bin of obfuscating, victim-blaming terminology that serves only to shift attention away from structures of class and racial oppression.



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Unraveling the Political Einstein

JEROLD TOUGER

THE TOTAL ECLIPSE OF 1919 permitted astronomers to observe stars very close to the sun, and to detect very small shifts in their positions. The generally cautious front page of the *New York Times* proclaimed “Lights All Askew in the Heavens.” *The Times* of London called it a “Revolution in Science.” In the absence of a theory, these observations might only have interested a handful of scientists. But because Einstein’s general theory of relativity had predicted them precisely, they so captured the attention of the world press that Einstein quickly gained celebrity status.

That status has yet to subside. Over half a century after his death, books on Einstein, both popular and scholarly, continue to proliferate. Einstein biographies and memoirs on amazon.com number over two hundred. The outpouring is fueled by the writings and correspondence of Einstein himself. This is a body of material vast enough to drown the most dedicated researcher. The Einstein Papers Project, begun in 1986 under the Sponsorship of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Princeton University Press and still ongoing, has as its long term goal the publication of *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, which when finished will contain over 14,000 documents selected from

over 40,000 documents in Einstein’s personal collection and 15,000 additional documents

discovered by the Project. The massiveness of this project is reflected in the fact that some two decades after the start of the project, only ten of a projected twenty-five volumes have been published.

For readers interested in Einstein’s political

and social concerns who do not want to wait decades more for the completion of the Project or wade through its chronological organization, *Einstein on Politics* provides a valuable middle ground. The editors were both members of the Einstein Papers Project when it was located at Boston University (1986–2000); Schulmann is a former head. They present a significant selection of papers and enough thematic organization and editorial comment to provide guidance in navigating the sea of material.

The selectivity and the commentary also mean that the book comes with a point of view. The foundational substrate of that point of view, that Einstein was a principled humanist, deeply devoted to a range of causes — pacifism, disarmament, international government, civil liberties, a viable economic structure for human well-being, a Jewish homeland — seems irrefutable. But the editors also claim that Einstein was no naïve idealist. They speak of the “sophisticated . . . pragmatism . . . [that] came to shape his political views, which he constantly adapted and adjusted to changing circumstances while never abandoning principle.” The breadth of material provides substantial evidence for this claim,

Einstein on Politics: His Thoughts and Public Stands on Nationalism, Zionism, War, Peace, and the Bomb

EDITED BY DAVID E. ROWE
AND ROBERT SCHULMANN
Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 2007
523 pp., \$29.95

JEROLD TOUGER is professor of physics at Curry College and author of *Introductory Physics: Building Understanding*. For three decades he has taught an inter-area science course, developed under a National Science Foundation grant, that considers the sciences in the context of broader global issues.

but also offers significant evidence for the counterclaim. It all depends on where we blind men grasp the elephant.

There is no doubt that Einstein's views were responsive to changing circumstances. Perhaps his most famous political act is the letter sent to President Roosevelt in August, 1939, which he helped write, and which carried his signature. In it, Einstein alerted FDR that recent work by European and European émigré physicists had made it possible — and probably imminent — that a sustainable chain reaction could be achieved in a large mass of uranium, and that that made it “conceivable — though much less certain — that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed.” Further, the letter transmitted information passed on from other physicists that Germany had stopped the sale of uranium from Czechoslovakian mines. Einstein, the pacifist, as the most prominent voice of the physics community, had helped set in motion the chain of events which led to the Manhattan Project and the development of the atomic bomb.

Curiously, Einstein's numerous humanitarian acts on behalf of scientists seeking refuge from Germany and Nazi-occupied nations get no mention in this book, though these acts were certainly political as well as humanitarian. For example, the widely read *Evolution of Physics* (1938) by Einstein and Leopold Infeld was in fact authored by Infeld although Einstein reviewed the manuscript and discussed its progress with Infeld almost daily. According to Infeld's autobiography (*Quest*), Einstein agreed to lend his name as co-author because Infeld, by this time having come to Princeton with Einstein's assistance, was insecure about his refugee status, and felt he needed this boost to his professional reputation to remain at Princeton.

Einstein's scientific and moral views intersected in his arguments for academic freedom and scientific objectivity, which have particular relevance today. In 1920, the German right-wing press was already espousing the views of

physicists Ernst Gehrcke and Philipp Lenard that Einstein's relativity theory was both unsound and un-German. Einstein countered his critics at length. “Herr Gehrcke,” he asserted in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, “in part has presented

Einstein's view of what individuals wanted reflected an intellectual elitism that recurrently constrained his thinking.

direct falsehoods and in part attempted to create a false impression among uninformed laymen through biased data selection and distortion of the facts.” In private correspondence he was blunter still: “This world is a remarkable house of fools . . . Their conviction about [whether relativity is correct] is determined by the political party to which they belong.”

Though at times his views seem to be too circumscribed by the events of his own day, at other times words such as these seem to speak directly to some of today's contentious issues. One can easily imagine Einstein taking on the advocates of intelligent design and those who deny the dangers of global warming. Their positions find hospitable lodging on the website of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank founded in 1973 and self-described as a “research and educational institute . . . whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies.” The logical conflict between objectivity in research and the promotion of socio-political and religious objectives would have been far more obvious to Einstein than to the present occupant of the White House.

Einstein's commitment to internationalism was lifelong. He believed that nations, in their mutual distrust and ongoing preparation for war, were self-destructively making war an in-

evitable outcome, and that this could be avoided only by the voluntary mutual relinquishing of some sovereignty to an international controlling body that had powers of enforcement. He was to be disappointed repeatedly — by the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, by the United Nations as “important and useful” but “merely [as] a transitional system toward . . . the establishment of a supra-national authority vested with sufficient legislative and executive powers to keep the peace,” by the failure to establish enforceable controls over nuclear weapons.

EINSTEIN’S WRITINGS ALWAYS STROVE to establish a social-philosophical basis for his political views. His arguments for a supranational government strongly paralleled Hobbes’s utilitarian arguments for the government of nations, though the writings in this volume make no reference to Hobbes. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes postulated a state of nature — what humanity would be like without the rule of law — in which each individual supposes himself somehow capable of protecting himself, by himself, from others, and in consequence seeks infinite power and is in a constant state of war or preparation for war with every other individual. This is very like Einstein’s perception of relationships among nations.

Hobbes viewed the state of nature as biologically and morally intolerable, biologically because it threatens extinction (as Einstein feared the international situation would do if it persisted) and morally because it does not lead to the one good on which individuals would agree — achieving what each individual perceives as good to the greatest possible extent for the greatest number of individuals. As that agreement leads to the subordination of personal sovereignty to a government empowered to enforce the greatest good for the greatest number, so Einstein viewed it to be in the self-interest of nations to cede enforceable powers to a higher authority.

In Hobbes’s state of nature, there is no agreement about what is good or evil, right or wrong, other than achieving the greatest good — in each individual’s own terms — for the greatest number. Einstein’s view of what individuals wanted, however, was far less expansive, and reflected an intellectual elitism that recurrently constrained his thinking.

“The satisfaction of physical needs,” he wrote in 1940, “is indeed the indispensable precondition of a satisfactory existence . . . but . . . in order to be content, men must also have the possibility of developing their intellectual and artistic powers to whatever extent accords with their personal characteristics and abilities.” In *What I Believe* (1930), he had written, “What is truly valuable . . . [is] the creative and impressionable individuality, the personality — he who produces the noble and sublime while the common herd remains dull and insensible in feeling.” This puts something of a crimp in what the editors call his “fierce empathy with the underdog.” From this perspective, it seems almost inevitable that in multiple documents over many years, Einstein would repeatedly call on intellectuals who “by virtue of their intellectual accomplishments have achieved great prestige among their colleagues in the entire civilized world” to take collective public positions on major international issues, and would be repeatedly disappointed when those public pronouncements failed to have the hoped-for impact on the course of events. We now flip back to the editors’ preface: “When idealistic views remain unchecked by a realistic assessment of the everyday world, these may fairly be called naive. But this charge does not apply to Einstein.” Perhaps, after all, this is too sweeping a generalization about a complex individual who actively devoted his attention to so many crucial issues.

Einstein spoke of rooting one’s convictions in a “clear understanding of the prevailing objective conditions.” Yet there are some puzzling omissions, at least in the documents contained

in this volume, in the circumstances that he considered as bearing on particular issues. His arguments in favor of socialism in preference to laissez faire capitalism — notably his 1949 essay “Why Socialism?” in *Monthly Review* — were substantially driven by his concern that technological advances were leading to more efficient means of production requiring fewer workers. This, he reasoned, led to progressively greater concentration of wealth in the hands of the few who controlled the means of production, and a progressively larger underemployed underclass. But his criticism of unfettered capitalism in this and other documents curiously had little or nothing to say about the countervailing power of organized labor and labor legislation, both of which were in the ascendant, at least in the United States, for much of Einstein’s adult life. Oddly, this seems to make some of his criticisms seem more on target in the post-Reagan era than in his own.

His views of what he considered the Soviet Union’s “experiment” with socialism were complex. While he thought it “undeniable that a state of severe coercion exists in the political sphere,” he conjectured that some of it might have been necessary to produce rapid economic gain and industrialization, and admired the zeal with which the Soviet Union promoted the advancement of science and technology. In 1942, he wrote that Russia’s “conduct of the war has made obvious her great achievements in all industrial and technical fields.” Had he lived to see it, he would not have been surprised by Sputnik. In arguing that Russia had “labored more honestly and unequivocally to promote international security than any of the other great powers,” he suggested that Stalin’s 1939 non-aggression pact with Hitler’s Germany may have been compelled by the recognition that Germany might turn its attacks eastward, but he does not mention or indicate how this might justify Russia’s subsequent occupation of Bessarabia and Bukovina in Rumania and sections of eastern Poland, areas that were within

or exceeded Russia’s “sphere of influence” as acknowledged by the pact. And his statement that “in Russia, the equality of all national and cultural groups is not merely nominal but is actually practiced” would raise more than a few eyebrows.

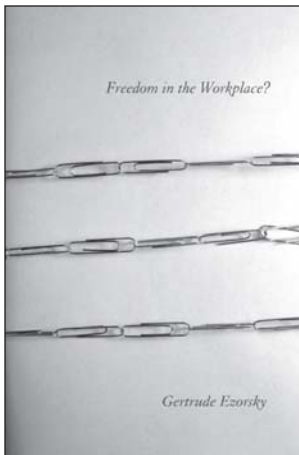
Yet he was deeply committed to American democracy, despite what he called “this shameful evil” of racial prejudice, and by the early fifties was profoundly distressed that it was being compromised by the coercion and intimidation of intellectuals in the McCarthy era. He wrote to Bertrand Russell in 1953 of the politicians who “have succeeded in convincing the masses that the Russians and the American Communists endanger the safety of the country .. [and thus] consider themselves so powerful. The cruder the tales they spread, the more assured they feel of their reelection by the misguided population.” Here also, if we substitute “those who hate freedom” for the Russians and American Communists, Einstein’s remarks seem applicable to today’s issues.

Wherever he stood on issues, Einstein’s position was always independent of the dichotomized stances those issues conventionally evoked. Supportive of what he viewed as the socialist goals of the Soviet Union, he was nevertheless contemptuous of doctrinaire Marxism. Ardent in his efforts for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, he nevertheless stressed that he “would much rather see reasonable agreement with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state.” His 1938 view that “the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders” seemed to treat the state of spirituality and separateness of Jewish life in Europe and America at that time as inherent and immutable traits of the Jewish people. But his assessment of the Arab-Jewish conflict in 1948 — “The claims of their extremists are indeed irreconcilable, but the common Jew and the common Arab are not extremists” — hopefully still has validity today.

Drawing on values central to science, Einstein frequently spoke of the need for objectivity. But the experience of any finite human lifetime molds and filters one's view of history, preventing complete objectivity with regard to the totality of the human condition. What comes across forcefully in these pages is

that Einstein, flawed and constrained by circumstances as he was, thought broadly and deeply about the dominant issues confronting his generation and was both an important barometer of and a deeply committed spokesperson for the social conscience of his time.

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When Free Labor Isn't Free

KIM MOODY

CENTRAL TO NEOLIBERAL ideology and the neo-classical economic theory that underlies it is the notion that we are all free to choose jobs or careers much as we are free to choose one toothpaste over another. There are, to be sure, some qualifications. To buy any toothpaste you need money. To get money, unless you are very lucky, you need a job. Workers, however, we are assured by one popular macroeconomics textbook, “are free to enter any line of work for which they are qualified.” Of course, being “qualified” implies a whole social history in which the worker is often not free to choose—race, gender, neighborhood, education, etc.—but which determines just what lines of work are actually available. Still, there is no cop at the entry to the great labor market and you are free to choose among some jobs. So, freedom, in this view, is the lack of coercion or physical or legal obstacles.

Gertrude Ezorsky takes on this type of argument in her book *Freedom in the Workplace?* As the question mark at the end of the title suggests, she rejects the neoliberal view of free choice. To the notion that workers “are free to accept or refuse employer offers, and as employees they are free to remain in a job or quit,” she argues that most of us are not “fortunate enough financially to exercise such freedom.” The

Freedom in the Workplace?

GERTRUDE EZORSKY

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007
91 pp., \$12.95

whistleblower is not free to speak out, the sick worker to simply stay at home, or the impoverished person to turn down a lousy job, all for the same reason. They must all work to earn a living and the truth is there are not infinite opportunities in the real capitalist labor

market. This is what Marx called the “dull compulsion of economic relations.” In reality choice is strictly limited for most of us in the free market.

Before looking more closely at Ezorsky’s arguments about freedom and unfreedom in the market or the workplace, it’s worth reminding ourselves that the “free labor market” was from the start based on compulsion of one sort or another. In England where capitalism first took shape, the basis of accumulation lay in the enclosures. This was where land, such as the commons or forest, formerly open to the peasantry became private property of the landlord, excluding the peasants. As Marx put it in *Capital* there was forced “expropriation of the agricultural producer, the peasant, from the soil,” when “great masses of men are suddenly and forcefully torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled as free and ‘unattached’ proletarians on the labor market.” This process went on for nearly four centuries, pushed by acts of Parliament. It was enforced at points by the extreme unfreedom of the master and servant laws and the workhouse. The alternatives to wage labor were removed one-by-one. Wage labor was born unfree.

In the northern states of nineteenth century America, where the master and servants laws were overturned, “free labor” took on an-

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other cast in opposition to slavery. As Eric Foner points out, free labor was not equated to wage labor, which was still regarded as demeaning and dependent. Rather “‘free labor’ meant labor with choices, with the opportunity to quit the wage-earning class.” Wage labor was not

Threats, of course, play a big part in the real labor market.

free so long as it remained wage labor. In the years following the Civil War as workers began organizing unions to deal with the rapid growth of corporate capitalism, the descent of the “independent mechanic” to that of dependent wage earner was interpreted by these workers not as free labor, but as “wage slavery.” “But what a paradox,” wrote David Montgomery, “for the ‘free-labor system’ to generate ‘wage slavery.’ It could be resolved only on the supposition that all wage earners were free to escape that status.” When the reality of industrial America finally took hold, this supposition was no longer tenable. Wage labor was here to stay. A concept like “wage slavery” would not do. It became necessary to define it as free in itself.

This was accomplished by changing the subject. Up to the late 19th century classical political economy of almost all varieties focused on the creation of wealth and held to one or another version of the labor theory of value. To get rid of this potentially embarrassing idea, the central problem of economics was shifted from the creation of wealth, where it had been at least since Adam Smith, to the distribution of scarce resources—from production to consumption. The new marginal utility theorists, however, had only half a theory of wage determination based on employer demand. Alfred Marshall introduced the concept of a supply-side in which workers make choices between work and lei-

sure, high wages and low. This kind of thinking still prevails. Take this example from a recent National Bureau of Economic Research working paper on immigration and wage determination. Three economists wrote:

A positive immigrant supply shift puts downward pressure on the wages in the market sector, causing native workers to substitute out of market work and into either crime or leisure. (Borjas, Grogger, and Hanson, NBER Working Paper 12518, September 2006)

What matters here is the ability of the “native workers” to freely “substitute out” into crime or leisure. Leisure, of course, refers to unemployment, which in the neoclassical view is always voluntary. What we have here is not science, but ideology. And, though Ezorsky addresses the philosopher counterparts to neoclassical economists, the arguments against this ideological construction of free choice are essentially the same.

FIRST EZORSKY EXPLAINS what she calls the “obstacle concept of freedom.” In this view one is free to do (or not do) something as long as there is no obstacle. She focuses on two versions of this theory, which she calls Narrow Interference and Broad Interference. Narrow Interference argues that only actual physical restraint by another person or persons is unfreedom. By this definition the wage-earner in the labor market will experience relatively great freedom. Broad Interference adds coercion, usually in the form of a threat, to the lack of freedom. What, then, of the low wage farm worker unable to support a family on that wage and who has “no chance of a better job.” There is neither restraint nor coercion. This worker could leave this job, so according to both Narrow and Broad Interference theorists she is free. Yet, she faces an obstacle to supporting her family—the low wage. Ezorsky argues she is in fact unfree. She backs this up with a philosopher’s argument. If the farm worker later got a better

job she would be free to support her family; hence she was not free in the earlier job. The obstacle of having “no chance for a better job” has been removed. Suppose it wasn’t? Would she be free? I don’t think so and neither, I suspect, would Ezorsky.

She introduces another form of the “dull compulsion of economic relations” in the concept of social forcing. This is distinct from situations in which actual restraint is involved. In these situations the person has the ability to make a choice. But is this a real choice? Here, Ezorsky provides many examples from real workplace and labor market life. Social forcing may involve alternatives, but the choice is always between lesser evils. Sometimes coercion is involved. For example, an employer tells a worker with chronic bronchitis that she must either take a serious wage cut or be moved to part-time work in which case she would lose her health care benefits. She takes the pay cut. There was a choice, but clearly not a free choice as a threat was involved. Threats, of course, play a big part in the real labor market. As Ezorsky points out, they are a big obstacle to union organizing. She quotes a Cornell study by Kate Bronfenbrenner: “More than half of all employers across a wide range of industries use these threats [of job loss and plant closing] as part of their anti-union campaign.”

But, what of a worker who is unemployed with no benefits and is offered a dangerous job? No threat is involved since he does not have to take the job and his economic situation will improve if he does. This too, Ezorsky argues, is social forcing. The worker is forced to choose the lesser evil. A distinction is then made between coercion or threat and a forcing offer in which the worker really has little choice if she is to survive economically. In this latter type of case the worker may actually improve her situation, moving from unemployment to paid work. The neoclassical economist would no doubt argue that this worker was simply acting rationally in her own self-interest; hence the choice

was free. If you think unemployment is the same as leisure, this might make sense. If, on the other hand, you are out there in the ever-worsening labor market it just might look like unfreedom. Ezorsky makes the point that we are both free and unfree in that we are not restrained from making a choice, but are in fact forced to choose the lesser evil by circumstance. To put it another way, for most people unfreedom trumps freedom.

Naturally, the neo-classical economist and allied philosophers have a counter argument. Ezorsky admits she has assumed in many of the cases she uses that no better job is available. But she cites Milton Friedman: “The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work.” Who needs a union when you can just seek shelter in the benevolence of a competing employer? Ezorsky answers this: “But I am talking about rational workers who have their wits about them. If they could get better jobs they would grab them.” But that’s not so easy. Of the 8.4 million jobs in the largest growing occupations projected for 2014 by the BLS, 70 percent are in the low or very low wage category (*Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 2007*, p. 393). The rational choices of most people are severely limited.

Another form of these limits is called systemic forcing. This takes us back to the enclosures. Although Ezorsky doesn’t use this analogy, the idea is similar. We are not only forced by bad alternatives, but by a lack of alternatives or supports that would make real choice possible. Enclose the commons or the wasteland or drain the fen and our peasant is forced to seek his livelihood elsewhere, probably in the newly developing labor market. What happens today when day care is unavailable or unaffordable for the single mother? Or when millions are denied access to health care because fewer jobs offer health insurance and/or the city’s only public hospital has closed? Or when a worker loses a job in one place and has to look else-

where only to discover that Greyhound doesn't go there any more, or that the cost of transportation is prohibitive? In these cases, too, workers are forced to accept the lesser evil because these key enabling services are not available or affordable in the U.S. No obstacle is in the way of the bad choice, so the worker is free in the eyes of the neoliberal policy makers who make sure such options are not provided. The enclosures never end.

What about all the laws that are meant to provide some rights and protection?

Freedom in the Workplace? has a very useful summary of U.S. labor law at the end. But as the book reminds us, most of the positive ones are routinely violated or have been undermined by court decisions over the years. As socialist and union activist Stan Weir used to tell us, when you enter the American workplace you leave the Bill of Rights at the door. So it is with many legal protections. If you are lucky enough to have a union where you work, there is some protection against threats if the union chooses to assert them. But these days most workers don't have a union, and, as Ezorsky points out, employers have little trouble defying the laws that are supposed to make unionization a right. Freedom in the workplace isn't something

granted, but something that has to be fought for again and again.

Freedom in the Workplace? is not a shop steward's handbook. It is a philosophical treatise engaging those philosophers who uphold neoliberal ideology by their arguments even if they don't embrace its entire logic. While it is quite accessible and avoids the convoluted language we sometimes associate with philosophy, some may wonder if this approach is for them. Nevertheless, this work puts forth the arguments we all need to know in one form or another. Capitalism brought with it many freedoms most people did not have under the old systems it replaced. But it has also brought conquest, the return of slavery, fascism, war, and unrelenting poverty on a world scale. The enclosure has gone global and countless millions are forced off the land and into wage labor. In 2005, according to the UN, 191 million people lived outside their native country hoping to avoid the lesser evil. As one writer put it, this system has brought both rich and poor alike the freedom to sleep under bridges. So has it brought us the right to choose between unemployment and bad jobs. And this it has called freedom. Ezorsky says no.

Return of the Oppressed

Neoliberal Agrarian Policies and the Revival of Rural Militancy

ASHLEY DAWSON

IN OUR AGE OF MEDIA SATURATION, the most significant historical milestones often go unrecorded, pushed out of public consciousness by celebrity gossip and the latest diet fads. One such relatively unspectacular but nonetheless momentous threshold — humanity's transition from a rural to a predominantly urban species — has, however, received significant attention lately. Marking this watershed urban shift have been studies such as Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* and Robert Neuwirth's *Shadow Cities*, as well as high profile art exhibitions at the Venice Biennale and the Tate Modern in London. In addition, the United Nations agency Habitat has issued a series of alarming reports highlighting the growing global problem of slums. Along with and linked to global warming, this worldwide wave of urbanization promises to be one of the great challenges to the sustainability of civilization in the 21st century.

Does this urbanization trend mean that the countryside is no longer relevant? There is, after all, a long tradition among progressives of writing off rural zones; witness Karl Marx's famous off-handed comment concerning "rural idiocy" and the long-standing emphasis on

working class rather than peasant revolutionary agency among orthodox Marxists. This ten-

dency to marginalize the countryside was checked to a certain extent by the rural basis of many twentieth century revolutionary nationalist movements, including, most significantly, the Chinese and the Cuban revolu-

tions. Yet the last several decades have seen a dramatic decline in attention to agrarian questions, marked most recently by a scholarly debate over the supposed disappearance of the peasantry. Yet the recent literature on urbanization ironically underlines the folly of such debates. In the foreground of recent accounts of mega-cities is the dialectical relation between urban and rural scales; indeed, the two need to be seen as part of a continuum rather than, as they have traditionally been represented, as opposing poles. Any theory of urbanization in the 21st century worth its salt must therefore examine the structural transformation of the countryside in the global South over the last few decades.

As they have in a number of other domains, from trade to the state, neo-liberal doctrines have played a primary role in reshaping agrarian policy in a range of nations around the world. Beginning in the 1970s, the halting state-led agrarian reforms that characterized postcolonial and other developing countries were replaced by agrarian policies developed under the aegis of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United States Agency for International

Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform

PETER ROSSET, RAJ PATEL, AND
MICHAEL COURVILLE, EDS.

Oakland, CA: Food First Books 2006
370 pp \$21.95

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Development. In the name of accelerated development and in tandem with the technological changes ushered in by the so-called Green Revolution, policies aimed at increasing Gross Domestic Product replaced agrarian reforms framed in terms of social justice. Neo-liberal macro-economic policies that privileged large-scale industries such as logging, tourism, and industrialized agriculture concentrated land and profits in the hands of an increasingly small proportion of the population. Peasants and indigenous peoples were forced to work within the dictates of the market, attempting to hold their ground on an uneven playing field tilted against small producers. The predictable result has been a global wave of displacement and urbanization. Lacking significant industrial transformation, most peripheral nations find themselves with massive populations of semi-proletarianized worker-peasants whose survival strategies straddle and make nonsense of the urban-rural divide.

The wretched of the earth have not meekly acquiesced to these neo-liberal policies, however. Indeed, the last two decades have witnessed growing rural militancy. After decades in which agrarian issues were virtually ignored within policy-making circles, land reform was thrust back into public view during the 1990s as a result of widespread spontaneous land invasions around the world as well as the formation of important organizations such as Mexico's Zapatistas (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional or EZLN) and Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra or MST). Although scholars such as James Petras, Sam Moyo, and Paris Yeros have begun to analyze this resurgence of rural social movements, the debates over land reform that they have helped rekindle still need significant critical attention.

The wretched of the earth have
not meekly acquiesced to neo-
liberal policies.

Food First's *Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform*, which makes a strong intervention in contemporary debates around agrarian policies, will therefore be an essential part of the activist scholar's toolkit.

The background to the book is the World Bank's recent reframing of land reform. After decades of championing mega-projects, the Bank's development economists have finally acknowledged the efficiency of the small farmer and, consequently, have admitted that worsening inequitable access to land is a major obstacle to economic development and growth. Land reform is consequently on the table again. Yet, as the essays in *Promised Land* emphasize, the Bank's recent revival of agrarian issues adopts a market-led strategy continuous with the hegemonic neo-liberal doctrines of the last quarter century. In addition to offering a devastating critique of market-based reforms, the contributors to *Promised Land* also highlight contrasting policy proposals such as the redistributive approach favored by La Via Campesina, an organization that unites landless, peasant, and indigenous groups from around the world. For La Via Campesina, land reform holds out the promise of an alternative paradigm of development based on national food sovereignty, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

PROMISED LAND IS DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS: a history of land reform during the post-1945 period, with essays covering select countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia; an overview of current debates on agrarian reform that offers a definitive assessment and debunking of the World Bank's market-led policies; and a concluding section that focuses on agrarian reform alternatives and resistance, with particular attention devoted to state-led reforms in Cuba and Venezuela and to the

nearly thirty year-long struggle of Brazil's MST. As well as addressing a variety of different regions, the collection also offers analysis of land reform policies through the lens of gender and indigenous people's rights. The result is an extremely comprehensive series of discussions by a group of scholars, the bulk of whom are not only from the global South but have themselves been involved in supporting social movements such as the MST through their work with Food First and the Land Research Action Network, an international NGO that provides critical research and analysis to support groups struggling for land as part of the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform. *Promised Land* is clearly the harvest of much work in these fields.

With their wealth of experience, the editors and authors included in the volume are certainly the best judges of what sorts of essays constitute a useful intervention into current debates around agrarian reform. From a broader standpoint, however, the volume raises but does not answer many fascinating questions concerning resistance to neo-liberal agrarian policies. Perhaps most centrally, if land invasions and other organized forms of opposition to inequalitarian policies have helped rekindle debates concerning land reform, what kinds of theories help explain peasant agency today? Given the fact

that there has been an important debate recently concerning the putative disappearance of the peasantry, how can we account for the heightened profile of groups like the Zapatistas and the MST over the last decade? What forms of ideological resistance have such groups developed to neo-liberal orthodoxy? More generally, what is the broader political-economic context within which the contemporary revival of the agrarian question needs to be framed?

These questions flow naturally from an acknowledgement that peasant and landless peoples' movements are some of the most radical responses to the hegemony of neo-liberalism over the last three decades. The key role of La Via Campesina in the World Social Forum has certainly helped underline the centrality of agrarian questions to global social justice. The organizations profiled in tantalizing but all too brief detail in *Promised Land* offer important insights into emergent alternatives to the oppressive status quo. Now that the authors who collaborated in *Promised Land* have demolished doctrines of market-led agrarian reform, one can only hope that they will turn to a more extended and detailed discussion of the alternative vision offered by the global campaign for agrarian reform.

Resurgent Labor: A Lean Analysis

MANFRED McDOWELL

NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME Kim Moody promises to cut through the “globaloney” that attributes the disorientation and decline of the labor movement in the United States to the force and logic of world-wide economic integration, and to offer an analysis that restores to unions a measure of strategic choice.

For those familiar with any of Moody’s several books on American labor, or with his editorship of *Labor Notes*, the argument of *U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition* is well rehearsed. But as before, they may find themselves asking whether the alternative he proposes for the recapture of lost economic and political power is advanced much beyond the repeated expression of an ideal.

Whether or not they can be usefully summarized under the rubric of “globalization,” Moody acknowledges broadly three trends associated with wider international developments that have contributed to the collapse of union membership and density in the United States. First is the “ferocious” deployment of technology whose chief characteristic, a renewed emphasis on management measurement and control, he explored some ten years ago in *Workers in a Lean World*. Second is the movement of jobs, not beyond the reach of union organizers (losses to “offshoring” and imports concentrate in a small number of vulnerable sectors such as textiles and clothing), but to sites in the United

States away from areas of traditional union strength. Third is the accelerated growth of services, not a harbinger of a “post-industrial society” but a “shock” nonetheless for a movement centered on its industrial unions and, for two to three generations, without experience of the large scale immigration upon which the new employment draws.

The first big drop in union membership (2.4 million in just three years), however, comes some years before these trends fully unfold. It begins in 1980–81, a recession, but years that saw two events Moody believes are indicative of the confusion to follow and of “a failure of leadership” that is chronic. The first is the final authorization of the Chrysler bailout that opens “the floodgate of concessions” not only in the auto sector but also across the economy. The second is the isolation within the labor movement, and the defeat, of PATCO—the air traffic controllers whose strike protested intensive and, they had argued, dangerous, work schedules.

In terms of labor management the shift toward “leaner” production has presented little that, in itself, is new in the experience of the unions. The little that was new, the early team-centered experiments in employee participation, rapidly gave way to more tried and trusted methods: to Total Quality Management and other refinements of Taylorist time keeping and logistics. What was disorientating for a post-World War Two generation was the sheer audacity with which management sought to increase its surveillance and control, to manipu-

U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from Above, The Promise of Revival from Below

KIM MOODY

N.Y.: Verso, 2007
289 pp. (\$29.95)

MANFRED McDOWELL is a child welfare worker and independent political researcher living in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

late work patterns and conditions, to outsource and, of course, to automate, and the scale of the ambition this suggests.

That ambition, of course, is to reduce unit labor costs, but not alone by maintaining pressure on wages and benefits. It is to reduce, and reduce radically, the extent to which productivity depends on the skills and on the disposition of the hourly work force. The issues it raises are largely “workplace issues”: job classification, work rules, workload, staffing, hours. Yet it is precisely the power to bargain on such matters that the unions have progressively abandoned. PATCO is a “milestone” in a “long process” of “surrender.”

In national negotiations employer demands for changes in the workplace regime have been met by conceding the right to resolve the issues with union locals. This opens the way to competitive plant and local bargaining on the basis of working conditions. At the same time, agreements increasingly have referred grievances on the shop floor to bureaucratic arbitration. This reduces the ability of workers to quickly settle disputes over speedup, safety and the enforcement of contract (to resort to walk outs and “work to rule”) and has weakened plant and shop floor organization accordingly.

As late as 1980-81 it may have been possible to regard management’s increasing dictation of the workplace regime as a trade-off: “flexibility” for the promise, post-recovery, of a return to relative job security and to incremental pay and benefit gains. But if a bargain had indeed been struck, it did not hold. Despite the productivity gains, “downsizing,” continued and, albeit with a slight abatement in the late 1990s, the pressure on wages and benefits has been sustained.

Where unions have succeeded in putting down a marker it has been on the rare occasions on which they have reversed the traditional order of contract negotiation. This was the case in the 1997 UPS strike where the Teamsters allowed workload and part-time working to go

forward as the lead issues and, on that basis, succeeded in building “a coordinated strike structure in every workplace they could reach.” But these have been isolated departures from

Today, for the organizers trying to pass out the union card is the suspicion not only that unions cannot be relied upon to hold the line on pay and benefits, but also that if the management messes you around you are on your own.

the general and dispiriting practice of the internationals that continue in their faltering attempts to negotiate and enforce contracts “from headquarters.”

The most corrosive legacy of these “lost years” since 1980 is the cynicism they have engendered. Today, for the organizers trying to pass out the union card, greater than any other challenge involved in an approach to workers, native born or immigrant, in a new plant in the South, a retail chain, or a health park is the suspicion not only that unions cannot be relied upon to hold the line on pay and benefits, but also that if the management messes you around you are on your own.

Moody, of course, continues in the faith that were unions to make a credible effort to reverse this perception, many of these new workplaces would be organizing themselves. The choice for labor is to rebuild its bargaining power from the bottom up. This involves more than a recovery of past militant practice. The power to confront “total” management can be mobilized only with multiplier of broader coalitions and connections. Unions must not only draw on wider community support, but themselves bring new strength to activism across a range of is-

sues that bear on their members' health, security, and dignity on the job and also reach out to "other sectors of the class": access to health care, to education and training, gender and racial equality, the environment and broader issues of social and economic justice.

"Democratic social-movement unionism": from its first deployment in *Workers in a Lean World* the concept has generated tremendous interest internationally among activists and left academics. Remarkably, however, in this his latest work Moody seems neither to have acknowledged this discussion nor to have contributed to it. At best, we have a clearer idea only as to what the new unionism is not. It is not the new beginning promised by the unions in the Change to Win Coalition, the 2005 split from the AFL-CIO that Moody now sees as having served no lasting organizational or political purpose.

AS A FORCE FOR CHANGE AND RENEWAL, the credibility of the Coalition has rested substantially on the reputation of the Service Employees International (SEIU) as a militant socially-minded union. This was established with its Justice for Janitors campaign in 1990, hailed as a breakthrough in the organization of working women, of Latinos and immigrants, and of the lowest paid and least regarded. The problem is that the Service Employees seek to combine an aggressive approach to organizing with an equally aggressive commitment to "business" principles: the continuing search for partnership with capital ("We have to work with employers to help them succeed") and, consistent with the "corporate speak" that suffuses the language of the union and of its coalition, the pursuit of ever greater operational "efficiency."

In the name of securing of greater "industrial and market focus," the Service Employees have created huge megalocals covering six or seven states. Given the near given impossibility of membership meetings, they are run by professional staffs as essentially administrative

units. The predictable result of this shift of power upward in the union's structure away from the members, locals, and workplaces are settlements in the cause the union had championed in 1990 that are "horrible"—not even making up for lost real wages.

"Social-movement unionism" is not "corporate business unionism." The choice it defines for labor is not a choice between federations.

Moody continues to find, within both the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition, "rays of hope, glimmers of successful tactics and actions," and "innovative experiments." Yet by his own estimate none of these are themselves examples of the new unionism. Whatever their source, like the UPS strike and Justice for Janitors, quite evidently they have not built wages and working conditions into a broader strategy for progressive reform. Thus the preferences they may have expressed for greater workplace organization, membership involvement, or community outreach retain the appearance of tactical, rather than strategic, choices.

But with *US Labor in Trouble* we have what, in effect, is a disclaimer. For answers as to how these fragmented experiences within the labor movement might be drawn together, Moody leaves us to await the next "period of upsurge." While this can no more be predicted than was the labor militancy of the 1960s or earlier seemingly cyclical decades of insurgency, it is to be keenly anticipated. "Hard" as it is "to imagine such an upsurge today" — and this is how Moody hastily concludes — the hope must be that "a clearer vision with a wide enough base and an experienced grassroots leadership" will "push beyond the limits of the ideology, practice, and personnel of business unionism in its old and new forms."

If this is the best that can be said it is unfortunate. What we are left to cope with is really a colossal double standard. We then have interests of capital, derived from everyday practice within a more or less known environment,

dissected with an acuity that, judging by the reviews of *Workers in a Lean World*, might even engage the pragmatic interests of the business press. On the other hand, the interests of labor are posited on the basis of circumstances and of forms and structures about which we can say little or nothing.

This is the hazard of any radical analysis, but must it be so? Is it not possible at least to identify some of the strategic questions which activists and militants of the next “wave” would have to address?

For a strategy that places pay and conditions at the center of a program for progressive reform, Moody does hazard at least one institutional imperative. The “alternative view to business unionism’s approach to politics has a name: a labor party.” Once again, however, while we have discussion of how present arrangements, the unions’ attachment to the Democratic Party, fail the interests of labor (or rather serve the interests of capital) but almost no suggestion as to how the new departure would practically redress the imbalance.

There is a rich, if yellowing, literature on why a labor party has never been established within the social and institutional framework of American politics. But leaving that aside, how would the unions reconcile the electoral dynamic of *their* party with industrial action and social movement, which, in the first instance, are never about solicitude for “majority opinion” but always about the self-identification and activism of minorities.

The party Moody proposes is not, in his terms, a socialist party. Rather it seems to be the party he regards, particularly in light of the European experience, as natural to a labor movement—a party that seeks, not to upturn, but to “shift the balance of class forces.” If so, Europe is instructive.

There is one labor conflict Moody has cited as an inspiration of which I have had some personal recollection: I have poignant memories of attending late in 1997 what must have been

one of the last meetings of WOW — Women of the Waterfront, a support group formed by the “wives, sisters, and sweethearts” of 500 Liverpool dock workers. Their men had been locked out two years before when they had balked at being placed on 24-hour seven-days-a-week call. Minds and lives had clearly changed in the course of an international solidarity campaign that, despite a stirring tale of ships “blacked” by longshoremen at wharves from Philadelphia to Yokahama, was clearly going to defeat.

Striking was the women’s deafening silence on an event that only six months before British trade unions has hailed as deliverance: the end to 18 years of Conservative Party rule and the election of a “Labor Government.” Seeing the Labor Party as their best and only hope, the British trade unions had isolated the Liverpool dockers to a degree for which no amount of international longshore solidarity could compensate.

Whether or not the Labor Party could have “afforded” an association with the locked-out men, it is hard to argue with success. Labor has gone on to win an unprecedented third term in office with a record of express intolerance for industrial militancy. It retained the Conservatives’ proscription of, among other actions that might have allowed for practical solidarity with the Liverpool dockers, sympathy strikes and secondary picketing. Some of Britain’s more activist and socially engaged unions — the Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers and the Firefighters — have taken the unprecedented step of disaffiliating from the party. Indeed, across Europe where there is a parting of ways between party and unions we can see the outlines of greater social activism emerge. In Germany, for example, where the Social Democrats are now in coalition with the center-right, hospital privatization is prompting unions to reach out to professional associations, individual patients, social clubs and other parts of “civil society.”

Perhaps Moody should be persuaded to make of what he regards as an historic failure on the part of labor in the United States a present virtue. Precisely because they limit their electoral intervention to a party that is not their own (today even Republicans fail to identify the

Democrats with "Big Labor") American unions have a freedom to agitate, to coalesce and to innovate in the search for responses to the yet unresolved challenge of progressive renewal that some European labor movements are only now beginning to rediscover.

Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory

EDITOR:

Hillel Ticktin, *University of Glasgow, UK*

Critique is an independent, refereed, scholarly journal founded in 1973. It attempts to analyse contemporary society from a critical Marxist perspective. **Critique** takes the view that Marxism has been so degraded by the Stalinist period that much of what has passed for Marxism has ranged between incoherent nonsense and empty if complex scholastic schema. Since socialism in one country is a theoretical and practical impossibility, **Critique** rejected and continues to reject analyses purporting to show this or that country is or was socialist. Furthermore, **Critique** emphatically insists on the impossibility of an undemocratic socialism.

The aim of **Critique** is to take part in the restoration of the earlier pre-eminence of Marxist thought by encouraging discussion around the political economy of contemporary capitalist and non-capitalist societies. For this purpose, it regards debate around methodology and as a consequence philosophy to be essential. Inevitably, contemporary political economy must also involve debate around the importance of historical events and so **Critique** encourages contributions of historical analysis.



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Women and American Labor

AMY LITTLEFIELD

WHEN THE REVOLUTION COMES it will be led by women in aprons, women with their rubber-gloved hands on their hips. Or so the cover of Dorothy Sue Cobble's new anthology, *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor* might suggest. The anthology includes a wide array of primarily women's voices, ranging from university professors to labor activists, all engaged in debate and discussion about the changing face of the labor movement. In her introduction, Cobble warns organized labor that it had better pay attention to the "defiant and female" worker on the cover.

The book confronts the failure of academic discourse on labor to adequately address the intersection of sex and class. Few books, Cobble commented in a phone interview,* have noted the fact that the face of labor is changing, that women are now the majority in many facets of the labor movement. Despite a revived interest in labor activism and immigrant workers' activism in particular, Cobble says, labor researchers have failed to account for the fact that gender matters. *The Sex of Class* begins to fill this gap by discussing the separate histories of the labor and women's movements, the struggles

Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor

ED. DOROTHY SUE COBBLE
Ithaca, NY: Cornell U. Press
2007, 327 pp. \$65

that working women have faced, and the ways in which different groups have come together to organize. Cobble, a professor of labor studies, history, and women's and gender studies at

Rutgers University, has published several books about labor, including the 1994 winner of the Philip Taft Book Prize for the best book in American labor history, *The Other Women's Movement: Work-*

place Justice and Social Rights in Modern America (Princeton, 2004).

The Sex of Class is both accessible and engaging, not only for those who study labor, but also for young people who have a lot of fire for social action, and just need a solid foundation upon which to dance. Cobble said it took some cajoling to convince the labor organizers in this anthology to contribute to an academic publication, something some of them were unused to. The cajoling was well worth the effort. The wide range of expertise in *The Sex of Class*, offered by seasoned activists as well as polished researchers, reveals both the complexities of the problems and the innovativeness of the solutions posed by the labor and women's movements. The anthology also offers perspectives from many different identity groups and workers' groups within the labor movement. Separate chapters address the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) movement for labor rights, the global activist efforts of informal economy workers and foreign factory workers, immigrant rights activism, and the struggles of

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*Dorothy Sue Cobble, telephone interview, October 17, 2007

welfare women, mothers, and home care providers. Cobble's introduction is an appeal to all of these groups to unite in opposition to a system that is aligned against all of them. Many of the contributors echo this call for a newer, more unified struggle.

Karen Nussbaum, a longtime labor organizer who worked for the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, writes, in her illuminating chapter on the history of working women's "insurgent consciousness," that in the 1970s one union leader told her: "You can't organize women because they think with their cunts, not their brains." (162)

The essays in this collection show us that women are not only capable of using their brains, but able to do so with strength and brilliance. The stories about women's organizing efforts are by far the most compelling part of this book. Stories about factory workers organizing global campaigns, secretarial workers singing songs of action, and activists in Montana organizing paid wages for stay-at-home mothers seem to echo with potential. These stories show that there is a women's labor movement out there, or at least that there are vibrant pockets of ingenious and determined women's labor activism. The unification of these pockets, and of the still separate struggles of labor and feminism, is the underlying goal of Cobble's anthology. It is a call to unity and a call to action.

Cobble begins the introduction to this book with a story about sexual harassment:

"A young female laundry worker is distraught," Cobble writes, "when her boss tells her that she too will have to service him sexually if she wants to keep her job. And what a job it is: paltry wages, stifling heat, the dirty laundry

relentlessly piling up around her, the huge unforgiving machines ready to scorch her hands along with the hot starched sheets."

The worker and several of her female co-workers fight back. "They might have won, too, had not some of their husbands and boyfriends interfered; the women were needed at home, the men insisted."

In this story, the worker and several of her female co-workers fight back. They contact a local workers' organization.

"They might have won, too," Cobble imagines, "had not some of their husbands and boyfriends interfered; the women were

needed at home, the men insisted; and besides, such aggressive public displays were unfeminine."

Cobble uses this example to demonstrate the multi-faceted oppression endured by working class, marginalized women. Her prototypical worker faces economic concerns, harsh working conditions, and perhaps also racial and ethnic discrimination. At home she is not acknowledged as an equal partner. At work she is not acknowledged as a worker. After this example, however, the issue of sexual harassment — and the intricately connected issues of sexual assault and domestic violence — are then abandoned for most of the book. The young female laundry worker's story is never resolved.

MANY OF THE CONTRIBUTORS to the anthology bump up against the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault in their discussion of other topics, but the issue deserves more scrutiny than it receives. Katie Quan's essay on women factory workers is one of the few that provides examples of sexual harassment. She writes about how workers in Sara Lee's maquiladoras were forced to take pregnancy tests every three months and sometimes "required to show soiled sanitary napkins to prove they were having menstrual cycles." (257) Those

who were pregnant were either fired or compelled to work just as hard as they had before. Quan writes, "It was not uncommon to see blood in the restrooms — the result of an abortion." (257) Such stories both remind us that sexual harassment and other forms of sexual abuse are a tactic of control used by employers and also illustrate the depth of the damage such tactics cause.

In her call to organized labor to put anti-sexual harassment action on their agenda, Marion Crain demonstrates that sexual harassment is a "collective harm" that hurts the men who witness it as well as the women who are often the recipients of such abuse by creating a "toxic work environment." Does the labor movement need to know that sexual harassment hurts anyone other than the victims in order to act on it? Perhaps so. Cobble believes that one of the strengths of the book is that it proves that so-called women's labor issues in fact impact everyone. This argument is echoed in Crain's article and many of the other essays in this book; male laborers need to pay attention, the book suggests, because it is in their best interest, as well as women's.

The separation of women's issues and labor issues has dictated the agenda of the labor movement for too long, and the book invites the reader to see these issues as one and the same. This is a powerful concept. It might have been even more powerful if someone had added a footnote that said, "As it turns out, this stuff is important for everyone. But even if it weren't, it would still be worth addressing."

The issue of race is peripherally mentioned in many chapters, and though the book addresses the fact that many welfare recipients and women who occupy the worst-paid positions are women of color, a chapter that offers a pre-

scription for how to address the multiple layers of oppression brought on by race and class would have greatly enriched the text. Though the early women's movement was far more receptive than the mainstream labor movement to concerns raised by other marginalized groups, like the LGBTQ community, when it comes to race the women's movement has often failed to represent all women. More attention could have been granted to the ways that women of all races, as well as all classes, have worked together, or have failed to do so.

One argument of this book is that there is a need to expand the definition of worker to include women wage workers, welfare recipients, and mothers. This definition must also expand to include workers of all races. The issue of race as well as the issue of gender cannot be seen as separate from the overall struggle for workers' rights, for the rights of all people to work in a safe environment and live in a safe home.

The Sex of Class has something for just about everyone interested in labor and feminism. For the policy-makers, it offers new strategies for public policy that will benefit women workers. For union leaders, it is an appeal to pay attention to sexual differences and to make the sex of class part of the agenda. For the working women's movement, it is both a resounding pat on the back and a call for new ideas and new alliances. And for the student beginning a study of feminism and labor activism, it blends together the two issues with elegance and clarity. It unites past with present, and then turns towards the future. Here is your legacy, it tells the young activist. Now get out there and exercise your "insurgent conscious," your heart, and your brain.

Injustice in Iran: An Appeal to the UN

AKBAR GANJI

On September 18, 2007 Akbar Ganji sent the following open letter to the UN Secretary-General. It was signed by more than 300 public intellectuals, writers, and Nobel Laureates from around the world and was released to coincide with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's arrival in NY in October 2007.



To His Excellency Ban Ki-moon,
Secretary-General of the United Nations,

THE PEOPLE OF IRAN are experiencing difficult times both internationally and domestically. Internationally, they face the threat of a military attack from the United States and the imposition of extensive sanctions by the UN Security Council. Domestically, a despotic state has — through constant and organized repression — imprisoned them in a life and death situation.

Far from helping the development of democracy, U.S. policy over the past 50 years has consistently been to the detriment of the proponents of freedom and democracy in Iran. The 1953 coup against the nationalist government

of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq and the unwavering support for the despotic regime of the Shah, who acted as America's gendarme in the Persian Gulf, are just two examples of these flawed policies. More recently the confrontation between various U.S. administrations and the Iranian state over the past three decades has made internal conditions very difficult for the proponents of freedom and human rights in Iran. Exploiting the danger posed by the United States, the Iranian regime has put military-security forces in charge of the government, shut down all independent domestic media, and is imprisoning human rights activists on the pretext that they are all agents of a foreign enemy. The Bush Administration, for its part, by approving a fund for democracy assistance in Iran, which has in fact being largely spent on official institutions and media affiliated with the U.S. government, has made it easy for the Iranian regime to describe its opponents as mercenaries of the United States and to crush them with impunity. At the same time, even speaking about "the possibility" of a military attack on Iran makes things extremely difficult for human rights and pro-democracy activists in Iran. No Iranian wants to see what happened to Iraq or Afghanistan repeated in Iran. Iranian democrats also watch with deep concern the support in some American circles for separatist movements in Iran. Preserving Iran's territorial integrity is important to all those who struggle for democracy and human rights in Iran. We want democracy for Iran and for all Iranians. We also believe that the dismemberment of Middle Eastern countries will fuel widespread and prolonged conflict in the region. In order to help the process of democratization in the Middle East, the United States

AKBAR GANJI, a writer and former Revolutionary Guard, is one of Iran's leading human rights activists. He has been imprisoned for his activities critical of the Iranian government, in particular for his articles exposing the complicity of then President Rafsanjani and other leading members of the conservative clergy in the murders of political dissidents and intellectuals in 1998. In 2005 Ganji went on hunger strike for several weeks to protest his prison conditions. He has written for democratic newspapers across Iran; most of these newspapers have since been shut down. He has also written 10 books, including the bestselling *The Dungeon of Ghosts* and *The Red Eminence* and *The Grey Eminence*.

can best help by promoting a just peace between the Palestinians and Israelis, and pave the way for the creation of a truly independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. A just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian state would inflict the heaviest blow on the forces of fundamentalism and terrorism in the Middle East.



Your Excellency,

IRAN'S DANGEROUS INTERNATIONAL SITUATION and the consequences of Iran's dispute with the West have totally deflected the world's attention and especially the attention of the United Nations from the intolerable conditions that the Iranian regime has created for the Iranian people. The dispute over the enrichment of uranium should not make the world forget that, although the 1979 revolution of Iran was a popular revolution, it did not lead to the formation of a democratic system that protects human rights. The Islamic Republic is a fundamentalist state that does not afford official recognition to the private sphere. It represses civil society and violates human rights. Thousands of political prisoners were executed during the first decade after the revolution without fair trials or due process of the law, and dozens of dissidents and activists were assassinated during the second decade. Independent newspapers are constantly being banned and journalists are sent to prison. All news websites are filtered and books are either refused publication permits or are slashed with the blade of censorship before publication. Women are totally deprived of equality with men and, when they demand equal rights, they are accused of acting against national security, subjected to various types of intimidation and have to endure various penalties, including long prison terms. In the first decade of the 21st century, stoning (the worst form of torture leading to death) is one of the sentences that Iranians face

on the basis of existing laws. A number of Iranian teachers, who took part in peaceful civil protests over their pay and conditions, have been dismissed from their jobs and some have even been sent into internal exile in far-flung regions or jailed. Iranian workers are deprived of the right to establish independent unions. Workers who ask to be allowed to form unions in order to struggle for their corporate rights are beaten and imprisoned. Iranian university students have paid the highest costs in recent years in defence of liberty, human rights and democracy. Security organizations prevent young people who are critical of the official state orthodoxy from gaining admission into university, and those who do make it through the rigorous ideological and political vetting process have no right to engage in peaceful protest against government policies.

If students' activities displease the govern-

Over the past few decades, many dissidents and activists have been killed and the killers have been acquitted in court.

ing elites, they are summarily expelled from university and in many instances jailed. The Islamic Republic has also been expelling dissident professors from universities for about a quarter of a century. In the meantime, in the Islamic Republic's prisons, opponents are forced to confess to crimes that they have not committed and to express remorse. These confessions, which have been extracted by force, are then broadcast on the state media in a manner reminiscent of Stalinist show-trials. There are no fair, competitive elections in Iran; instead, elections are stage managed and rigged. And even people who find their way into parliament and into the executive branch of government have no pow-

ers or resources to alter the status quo. All the legal and extra-legal powers are in the hands of the Iran's top leader, who rules like a despotic sultan.



Your Excellency,

ARE YOU AWARE that in Iran political dissidents, human rights activists and pro-democracy campaigners are legally deprived of “the right to life”? On the basis of Article 226 of the Islamic Penal Law and Note 2 of Paragraph E of Section B of Article 295 of the same law any person can unilaterally decide that another human being has forfeited the right to life and kill him or her in the name of performing one's religious duty to rid society of vice. Over the past few decades, many dissidents and activists have been killed on the basis of this article and the killers have been acquitted in court. In such circumstances, no dissident or activist has a right to life in Iran, because, on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence and the laws of the Islamic Republic, the definition of those who have forfeited the right to life (*mahduroldam*) is very broad.

Are you aware that, in Iran, writers are lawfully banned from writing? On the basis of Note 2 of Paragraph 8 of Article 9 of the Press Law, writers who are convicted of “propaganda against the ruling system” are deprived for life of “the right to all press activity.” In recent years, many writers and journalists have been convicted of propaganda against the ruling system. The court's verdicts make it clear that any criticism of state bodies is deemed to be propaganda against the ruling system.

Your Excellency,

THE PEOPLE OF IRAN and Iranian advocates for freedom and democracy are experiencing difficult days. They need the moral support of the proponents of freedom throughout the world and effective intervention by the United Nations. We categorically reject a military attack on Iran. At the same time, we ask you and all of the world's intellectuals and proponents of liberty and democracy to condemn the human rights violations of the Iranian state. We expect from Your Excellency, in your capacity as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to reprimand the Iranian government — in keeping with your legal duties — for its extensive violation of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights covenants and treaties.

Above all, we hope that with Your Excellency's immediate intervention, all of Iran's political prisoners, who are facing more deplorable conditions with every passing day, will soon be released. The people of Iran are asking themselves whether the UN Security Council is only decisive and effective when it comes to the suspension of the enrichment of uranium, and whether the lives of the Iranian people are unimportant as far as the Security Council is concerned. The people of Iran are entitled to freedom, democracy and human rights. We Iranians hope that the United Nations and all the forums that defend democracy and human rights will be unflinching in their support for Iran's quest for freedom and democracy.

Yours Sincerely,
Akbar Ganji

For a full list of the over 300 endorsers, go to www.nybooks.com/articles/20838

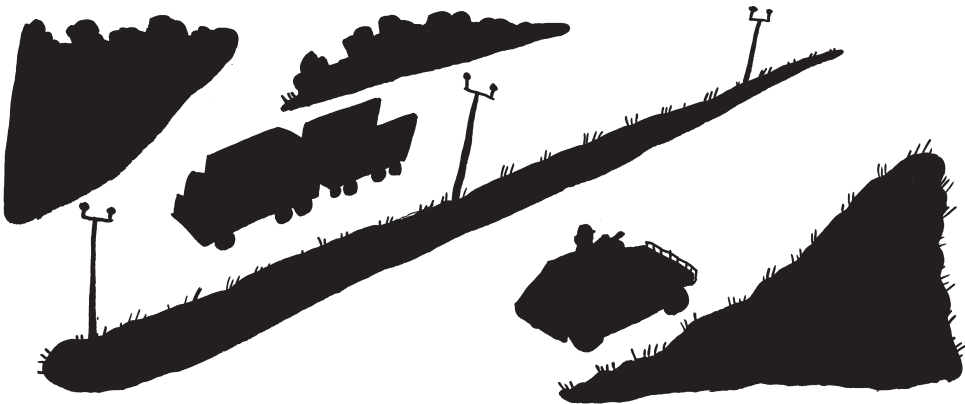
WORDS & PICTURES

MY DORCHESTER NEIGHBORS

BY GREG COOK



Army Sgt. BRIAN FOUNTAINE, 24,
hoped to become a Boston firefighter like his father and
grandfather before him. So he joined the military as his
father had done, hoping it would be his way in.



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GREG COOK is an artist, writer and garbageman who
lives in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. To see more
of his work, please visit gregcookland.com.

He returned to Iraq for his second tour in December 2005.



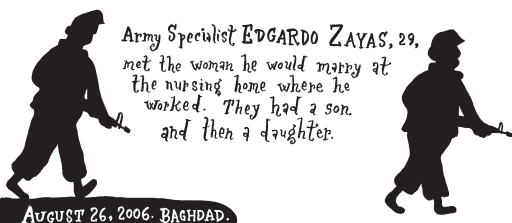
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AUGUST 26, 2006. BAGHDAD.

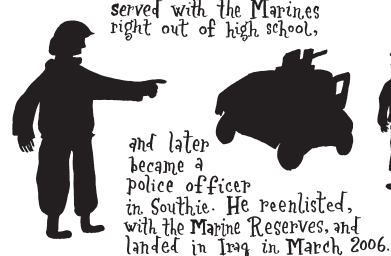
His father tried to talk him out of it, but he enlisted anyway, to support



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Sgt. TERRENCE SHANE BURKE, 28,



was supposed to ride with him on Sept. 5, 2006,

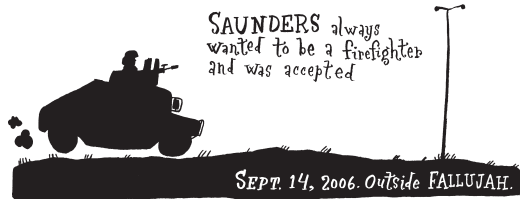
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but was
reassigned
at the last minute.

FALLUJAH.



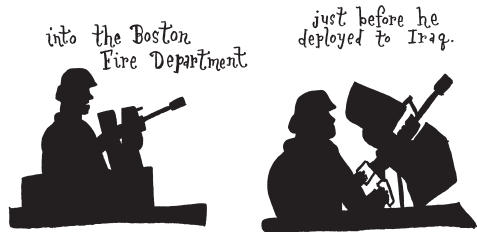
SAUNDERS always
wanted to be a firefighter
and was accepted

SEPT. 14, 2006. Outside FALLUJAH.



Instead
Saunders was
patrolling
a rooftop

and saw
the whole
thing.



into the Boston
Fire Department

just before he
deployed to Iraq.



Burke lost
his left leg
below the knee,
and suffered
second-degree
burns and multiple
fractures.



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Screams.



"I felt the pain
in my leg immediately."



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A guy had a hole in his throat.



"For a minute I
thought it was gone."



8/9

His leg was broken.



in two places. His right
eardrum was punctured.
A concussion. Third-
degree burn to his neck.



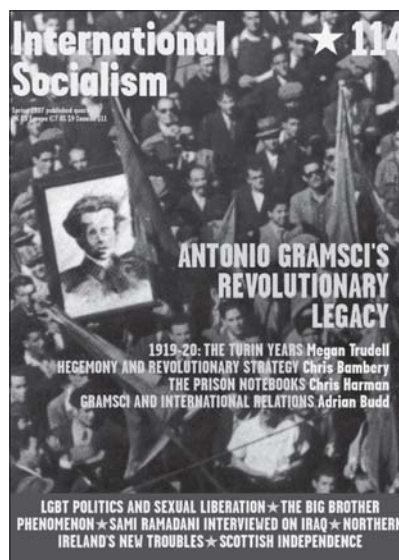
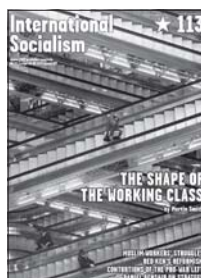
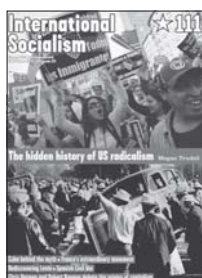
Somehow everyone in
the Humvee survived.



Based on accounts in The Dorchester Reporter, The Boston Globe, and CBS4, Boston.

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