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a journal of socialist thought

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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 or Fall 2009. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, April 1, 2009. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500

MARVIN AND BETTY

From the Editors

SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT the election, perhaps there is little to be said. Never in our lifetime did so much seem to be at stake. The McCain-Palin ticket offered a continuation of policies redistributing wealth upward, waging endless wars, and extending the grip of the Christian right theocrats. Obama's election was a historic milestone in the long, painful struggle for civil rights. Equally important, Obama has galvanized the energies of millions — especially the young — and has raised both their hopes and their expectations.

Yet some disillusionment has already set in. Is it cynical of us to point that out? We believe not. In this issue, both Joanne Landy and Jack Gerson show that Obama's promises themselves, as well as some of his choices of people for key positions in his administration — people responsible for the current economic and international debacles — are causes for concern. The hole that this country is in is a hard one to climb out of. If severe disillusionment sets in, combined with ever-deepening crises, will the pendulum shift wildly to the right? (Ominous is the fact that the sale of firearms has greatly increased since the election.) The Limbaughs and Hannitys will not hesitate to spur on their legions in any crisis. This will test our resilience. Yet we must always keep in mind that, after decades of struggle, consciousness really has been raised: a vast majority of Americans now believe in a single-payer universal health plan, in equal rights for minorities, in the protection

of women's right to choose, in jobs and a living wage for all, and in peace abroad. (Not all of this was true sixty years ago. In fact, very little of it.)

In this issue, we offer Part 2 of the Gay/Left symposium begun in #45. Each of the writers gives a hard look at the past and present relationship of gays and the left. Elsewhere ... Historian Nelson Lichtenstein carefully examines the way in which another time of ferment — the year 1968 — changed history. Robert Fitch analyzes the current economic crisis. Herman Benson considers the struggle in the powerful SEIU union. Cyril Mychalejko addresses U.S. policy in Latin America, and Robert Stout discusses the region's social movements. Jeffrey Shantz looks at a struggle — little known in this country — by indigenous women in Canada against the destructive threat to their community in British Columbia by the coming Olympic Winter Games in British Columbia. A long time worker in the horse racing business, Denise Flakes, continues the discussion — begun in #44 — of the impact of immigration on American labor.

This is a time when the enthusiasm generated by Obama's victory should offer important opportunities for progressive politics. We hope the analyses and ideas of our diverse authors will contribute to the clear thinking that the struggle for peace and justice demands.

MARVIN AND BETTY

Please ask your librarian to subscribe to *New Politics*.

Israel and the Arabs

AS A LEFT ZIONIST, I share most of Prof. Wallerstein's concerns (#45, Summer 2008). I am a longtime advocate for an end to Israeli settlements, for full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and a viable independent state for Palestinians who are not Israelis. But there were some important lacunae in his recounting of history in "The U.S. in the Middle East."

Wallerstein is correct that the course of events changed radically in 1967, but Israel did not attack Egypt merely because Nasser "seemed to be assembling Arab troops for an invasion." Nasser, in fact, laid siege to Israel. He established an alliance of Arab states — including Jordan, which then lost the West Bank because its army, newly under Egyptian command, shelled West Jerusalem and the outskirts of Tel Aviv. And Nasser assembled 100,000 troops along Israel's Sinai border, expelled the UN peacekeeping force, and announced a blockade of shipping to Israel's port of Eilat. At the same time, Nasser whipped Arab masses to a frenzy with bloodcurdling rhetoric about a final battle.

There was a small window of time, immediately after Israel's victory in 1967, when an Arab offer to negotiate a reasonable peace would have likely been received positively. This passed with the infamous resolution of the Arab League at Khartoum of the three "no's": No to recognition of Israel, no to negotiations and no to peace. What followed were the years of blindness, self-righteousness and territorial ambitions manifested under Golda Meir, and then more egregiously under a succession of Likud governments allied with the militant settler movement.

Wallerstein barely mentions the Oslo years, which might have borne fruit if not for the as-

sassination of Yitzhak Rabin in late 1995 and a wave of terrorist attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv early in '96, which all-but guaranteed Likud's return to power. The professor is correct that negotiations might still have succeeded at Taba in January 2001, but the eruption of the second Intifada had already insured Sharon's election. We need not discuss the complications of Sharon's efforts at withdrawing from parts of the occupied territories unilaterally, without negotiations, which have been met by the ascendancy of Hamas and ongoing attacks on Israel in the face of its withdrawal (attacks which Israel has responded to in a lop-sided way).

Olmert and Livni's efforts at diplomacy have been more energetic than Sharon's, but they are being undermined by settlements' expansion and violent Palestinian disunity. As for the role of the U.S., it is certainly possible that Israel will be in crisis as a result of a distancing in this "special relationship." It is also possible that an Obama administration will pursue diplomacy skillfully from day one, as Obama himself proclaims.

Or it may develop that Israel will pull a rabbit out of its own hat, as it did when it won independence without material U.S. support, when it secretly launched Oslo in 1992, and as it has recently done in reaching out to Syria via Turkey, and even to Hamas and Hezbollah for limited agreements. Israel's ongoing success as an economic and military power, even as it remains a very small and vulnerable country, continually defies expectations and confounds predictions.

RALPH SELIGER

Editor, Israel Horizons [www.meretzusa.org/
sections/publications/israel-horizons-magazine/
current-issue](http://www.meretzusa.org/sections/publications/israel-horizons-magazine/current-issue)

Symposium on Gays and the Left (Part II)

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF *NEW POLITICS*, we published Part I of a symposium on gays and the left, with contributions by Bettina Aptheker, John D’Emilio, Martin Duberman, Jeffrey Escoffier, and David McReynolds, and a piece by Christopher Phelps on a 1952 document of the Socialist Party youth that urged the SP to support the decriminalization of same-sex activity. Below is Part II of the symposium, with articles by Peter Drucker, Marcia Gallo, Thomas Harrison, Doug Ireland, and Sherry Wolf. We invite responses from our readers.

—JOANNE LANDY and THOMAS HARRISON

Reinventing a Queer Left

PETER DRUCKER

AS SEVERAL OF THE PARTICIPANTS in Part I of this symposium noted, the association between lesbians, gays, and the left was a constant through much of the 20th century. It is an open question whether that connection will amount to much in the 21st century. As in many countries, there is a push in the United States today to incorporate lesbians and gays into the prevailing sexual and familial order. Given how that order is structured under capitalism, probably the best it can offer us is second-class citizenship. But the radical left, in its current weakened and marginalized state, is not doing much to expose the lousy deal that queers are being offered or to build an alliance with radical queers who reject it. Unless the left does better in meeting this challenge, a rightward realignment of the lesbian/gay movement could succeed in co-

opting the great majority of LGBT people into mainstream Democratic and even Republican politics.

The left-wing sympathies of many lesbians and gays over the past hundred years were not due mainly to what the left was offering them. Several of the contributors to Part I rightly criticized the narrow economic focus and sexual conservatism that characterizes much of the U.S. left even today. For much of the 20th century, most of the U.S. left was at best tolerant or indifferent to lesbians and gays. At its worst — particularly at the high point of Stalinism and other forms of “socialism from above” from the 1930s to the 1950s — much of the left followed the lead of the Soviet Union in associating homosexuality with bourgeois decadence or even fascism. Bettina Aptheker’s account of her experience of CP homophobia was all too typical. Even later and further to the left, many Maoists and some admirers of the early Cuban revolution were just as bad.

Despite their bruising experiences with the left, many lesbians and gays persisted in orienting toward it, because they felt they had no

PETER DRUCKER is a longtime socialist and gay activist, an advisory editor of *Against the Current*, and editor of the anthology *Different Rainbows on same-sex sexualities and politics in the dependent world*. He lives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Many thanks to Alan Sears and Christopher Beck for comments on an earlier version of this piece.

choice. They knew that there was no hope at all of tolerance from the Christian-oriented right. A commitment to secular enlightenment played a large part in drawing gay radicals like Oscar Wilde, Edward Carpenter, and Magnus Hirschfeld toward socialism, as Jeff Escoffier mentions in his article.

Their hopes were briefly buoyed by the early experience of the Russian revolution and its decriminalization of homosexuality. Sex radicals like Alexandra Kollontai helped make the early Soviet Union a supporter of the World League for Sex Reform in the 1920s.

This tradition was revived in the 1970s when, as John D’Emilio and Escoffier point out, leftists played a prominent role in the lesbian/gay movement through publications like *Gay Left*, *Gay Community News*, and *Body Politic*. The first three U.S. national marches for lesbian/gay rights, in 1979, 1987, and 1993, were led by the left, with exemplary democratic decision-making processes and a wide range of progressive demands. While not necessarily representative of the mass of apolitical lesbians, gays, and bisexuals, these platforms did speak for thousands of activists. Urvashi Vaid’s tenure as director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force was the apogee of progressive LGBT leadership — which shipwrecked on Clinton’s betrayal in his first months in office on the issue of gays in the military.

Rightward

DESPITE VICTORIES FOR LESBIAN/GAY RIGHTS that bucked the general rightward tide, the lesbian/gay left of the 1970s and 80s grew weaker as the left in general went into retreat. Equally important, though barely perceptible at first, were the openings to the right that have gradu-

ally become available to mainstream lesbian/gay leaders. The new opportunities for gay moderates and conservatives were manifest in a sea change that took place in national lesbian/gay politics late in the 1990s. The fourth national march in 2000 marked a drastic change in lead-

ership, style, and program. The right-leaning Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF) and the Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches seized the initiative with a mobilization around the theme “faith and family” that brought hundreds of thousands of lesbians and gays to

Washington DC. The LGBTQ left has yet to succeed in winning the initiative back.

D’Emilio has a point when he writes that many lesbians and gays today see the left as inconsequential. The centrality of same-sex marriage as a demand is both a reflection and a cause of this shift. As D’Emilio says, the “single-issue marriage-equality platform” risks becoming “a mobilizing tool for the right.” “The right” in this context does not necessarily mean the Republican Party. People for whom defending same-sex marriage is a priority were not likely to vote Republican in 2008, since Obama’s position on the issue was a bit better than McCain’s: he supported same-sex civil unions, though like McCain he has voiced opposition to same-sex marriage (and like McCain wanted to leave the issue to the states). But support for Obama as a lesser evil on lesbian/gay rights was one aspect of a long retreat from the progressive LGBT activist agenda of the 1970s, 80s and early ‘90s. And it reflected the absence of an adequate queer agenda in the broader political arena.

The shift to the right in the U.S. lesbian/

In countries like the Netherlands and Denmark, right-wing forces have shown since 2001 how Islamophobia can be used to win right-wing hegemony in mainstream lesbian/gay organizations.

gay movement reflects something deeper than the accidents of party politics. As someone who has been living in the Netherlands for the last 15 years, I may have an easier time detecting some of the changes underway than people back home. 9/11 gave the right in Europe and North America a chance to redefine itself in relation to women and gays. After acting as a not very effective brake on feminist and sexual change for half a century, many rightists suddenly declared themselves defenders of Western enlightenment, women, and even gays against “Islamic fascism.” In countries like the Netherlands and Denmark, right-wing forces have shown since 2001 how Islamophobia can be used to win right-wing hegemony in mainstream lesbian/gay organizations. Even in the United States, neocons — the Republican faction least ideologically committed to Christian fundamentalism — have been repackaging themselves as virtual feminists. Now, with the right shaken and divided by the Iraq quagmire, more space is opening up for gay voices in the center and center-right of U.S. politics.¹

More fundamentally, the rightward shift reflects the impact of a much more unequal society on LGBT communities. The post-Stonewall gay liberation movement of the 1970s emerged in a capitalist class society, of course, but that society was relatively the most egalitarian the United States has seen in the course of the past century. Gay historians have charted the role of mass military service in World War II and mass access to university education in creating a social base for lesbian/gay communities. But by the 1980s, Reaganism, and neoliberal globalization more generally, polarized and divided LGBTQ communities as they polarized and divided the United States as a whole. Mike Davis described 20 years ago in *Prisoners of the American Dream* the rise of a substantial upper-middle-class layer, whose real incomes rose as most working people’s real wages declined. Most working people who vote for Republicans or right-wing Democrats may

be deluded by Christian evangelism, nationalism, or similar ideological smokescreens; but many upper-middle-class people have an objective stake in the economic agenda of neoliberalism. Some of them make up the base of lesbian/gay organizations like the HRCF.²

Some of these people are lost to the left. It is no accident that some of the most influential lesbian/gay organizations in the United States today are indifferent to racism and class exploitation, as Martin Duberman points out. For a significant minority of lesbians and above all gay men, the passage of anti-discrimination and same-sex marriage laws really are the culmination of their steady progress toward a relatively comfortable niche in an unjust system.

Transforming the Family

WHATEVER THE REASONS, the fact is that LGBTQ people are no longer a constituency that the left can take for granted. The right is a more serious contender for their loyalty than it used to be. With the number of open LGBTQs in the United States now far exceeding the number of socialists or other radical leftists, this should matter to radicals. A well thought out, appealing program on sexual politics is not a luxury for the left today, but a necessity.

Fortunately for the left, there are still many queers that the right is not about to integrate, people the radical left should be able to reach. Race and class are obviously crucial factors that divide most LGBT people from HRCF leaders and their ilk. But they are far from the only factors. Not only can the left reach many queers with basic class and antiracist politics; it should also be able to reach out to them specifically with radical, feminist positions on the family and sexuality. Going beyond narrow support for lesbian/gay rights, the left should integrate support for LGBTQ liberation into a comprehensive program for reproductive freedom and socialization of childcare and domestic labor.

Living in the Netherlands, where same-sex marriage has now been legal for almost a de-

cade, makes it easier for me to see that it is *not* the capstone of lesbian/gay equality. In practical terms, rebaptizing legal same-sex partnerships “marriage” got Dutch same-sex couples virtually nothing — just as the legal right to marry in California gave same-sex couples virtually no practical benefits beyond the civil unions previously available to them under California state law. And it has left some forms of discrimination intact.

Consider the situation of lesbian parents. Under Dutch law, if a man and woman are legally married, when the woman gives birth her husband is automatically the child’s legal parent. Not so if two women are legally married. The child’s non-birth-mother can become a legal parent only by waiting a legally prescribed period of time, hiring a lawyer and applying to a court for adoption. The child’s biological father must appear in court if he can be identified — anonymous sperm donorship was banned in the Netherlands about the time same-sex marriage was legalized — and can make the adoption more difficult unless he testifies that the child “has nothing to expect from him as a father.”

Admittedly, this may just be a legal wrinkle that will be ironed out in a few years’ time. The neoliberal state may be increasingly tolerant of alternative family forms as long as they, like heterosexual nuclear families, shoulder the economic cost of caring for their members’ needs. But I suspect that the fundamental interest of the state in a capitalist society — especially the neoliberal lean state — in ensuring the privatized reproduction of the labor force is likely to perpetuate the second-class status of same-sex and single parents. By far the most effective way of ensuring that parents will do the hard, unpaid work of raising children is to rely on the deep-rooted ideological sense of the natural — meaning biological — bond between parent and child. Even as more room opens up for lesbian and gay parenting and other alternative family forms, there are strong pressures to continue to

define alternatives as exceptional and conditional.

Understanding this gives the left an angle to tackle the issue of same-sex marriage differently from the right. We should not turn our backs on all the same-sex couples who yearn for marriage equality; as long as there are practical or symbolic benefits to be gained by marrying, same-sex couples should have an equal right to them. But the left can take a transitional approach to the issue, supporting the demand for equality in a way that undermines marriage as an institution. This can be the starting point for the comprehensive “family agenda” that D’Emilio advocates in his contribution. The left can, for example, demand that children be supported by the community as a whole (even Hilary Clinton once said that “it takes a village to raise a child”!); millions of stressed parents should welcome this. We should demand that the rights and responsibilities of social parenthood be uncoupled from the often questionable fact of biological fatherhood. This would make the left a natural voice not only for all the lesbian mothers who are today denied equal parenting rights, but also for millions of queers who remember how alienating it was to grow up in families structurally defined as straight. The left should also insist that essential social rights like health care and legal residency should not be dependent on marital status, thus making itself the champion of millions of people who are single by circumstance or choice.³

A New Queer Left

THE LEFT COULD ALSO WIN A NEW QUEER base by rediscovering radical demands around sexuality. The differentiation within LGBT communities in recent decades has taken place not only along class and political lines, but also along lines of sexuality. While some lesbians and gays have been mastering the arts of dressing — and acting — for success, various sexual minorities who don’t identify with the new lesbian/gay re-

spectability have been defining and organizing themselves. Transgenders are a notable example. More generally, sexual diversity is a defining feature of communities that tend to identify today as “queer” rather than “gay.”

Transgender inclusion has become an unavoidable issue for any effort to combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Every lobbying group trying to push a civil rights bill through Congress or a state legislature has to decide whether to add “gender identity” after “sexual orientation.” The left should be clear that sacrificing transgender people to political expediency is unacceptable. Transgender has in fact assumed the mantle of gender nonconformity that the lesbian/gay mainstream shucked off in the course of the past 30 years. It is also highlighting basic feminist issues about the role of gender in structuring the labor market.

Queer politics in the broadest sense is (re)raising fundamental issues not only around gender roles, but also about power relations in sexuality. Once upon a time the lesbian/gay movement understood that issues like sadomasochism and intergenerational relationships were defining issues for sexual politics. Past debates — as in 1979, when socialist groups with opposite positions on age-of-consent laws almost derailed planning for the national march, and 1982, when “pro-sex” and “anti-porn” feminists clashed over SM — may not always have been constructive; but they dealt with the unavoidable question of how sexual relations can be free and equal in a society where power differentials are ubiquitous.

Today, judging by the contributions to Part I of this symposium, these issues have slipped beyond the pale of discussion on the left. Dave McReynolds at least alludes to them in a couple of sentences. None of the other contributors touches on them at all. I believe that sexual

rebels who have been effectively read out of mainstream lesbian/gay politics should at least be able to get a hearing on the radical left.

All this puts in question the idea that there can ever again be “a” gay movement, a sort of “big tent” including the whole LGBTQ spectrum from left to right. When all sexual dissidents were outlaws, we all had a certain common interest in battering at the walls of prejudice. Today some gays seem to be scaling the walls if not safely inside them, and feel that disreputable allies can only hold them back. Shifting alliances of different currents and of people with varying sexual identities, issue by issue, may make more sense as an image of the LGBTQ future. Within this landscape, the broad radical left should become a reliable ally for a new queer left as it challenges the newly respectable lesbian/gay right.

This means that the left itself needs to be transformed. It needs to reclaim the almost forgotten liberatory impulses of the 1960s and 70s, when radical politics embraced the whole of human experience, including its most intimate aspects, and the most despised of society’s outcasts. And the left needs to purge its own culture of heteronormative attitudes and habits so that queers, for the first time, will feel equally and fully at home in its ranks.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of LGBT politics in relation to the Arab world, see my review of Joseph Massad’s *Desiring Arabs* in *Against the Current* 137 (Nov.-Dec. 2008).
2. I explore these socioeconomic and sexual changes in greater depth in an article for a planned special issue on sexuality for the journal *Historical Materialism* (London).
3. This approach to the issue of same-sex marriage is outlined in point 17 of the Fourth International’s resolution “On Lesbian/Gay Liberation” (2003), available at www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article177.

Eight Kinds of Strength

A Tribute to Valerie Taylor, Lesbian Writer and Revolutionary

MARCIA GALLO

The Sweet Little Old Gray-Haired Lady in Sneakers¹

I am a woman,
a lesbian,
a poet,
poor,
handicapped,
radical,
Indian,
over seventy —
an eight-time loser.

How shall I not be
a revolutionary?

How shall I not see
my sister in every woman,
my brother in any man,
my child to cherish in every child?

When they dragged Jane Kennedy into solitary
that was my arm the cops were twisting.

When they dropped napalm on the rice paddies
that was my skin on fire,
that was my blood running out hot and sticky.

Goddess,
give me eight kinds of strength to fight back.

I FIRST READ THIS 1979 POEM by Valerie Taylor at the Gerber/Hart Library in Chicago in the winter of 2003. I was visiting from New York to gather information on the Daughters

of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian rights organization in the United States. Started in San Francisco in 1955 by four lesbian couples including Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, the DOB had organized chapters in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago by 1961, and I was at Gerber/Hart to see what I could learn about local members. Karen Sendziak, the tireless and extremely knowledgeable archivist at Gerber/Hart, had pointed me toward Valerie Taylor's papers.

Seated at a small desk in the library's main room that cold Saturday afternoon, with women and men streaming in and out to borrow books, drop off donations, check out a photography exhibit, or meet friends, I delighted both in the feeling of being in the midst of a vibrant gay community and in my discovery of the extent of Taylor's life and work — as a Daughter and beyond. I had already known that, as "Velma Tate," she had joined DOB in Chicago in 1962 and contributed articles to the group's national magazine *The Ladder*. What I learned while at Gerber/Hart was that she served as secretary to the local board of DOB in 1962-63 and appeared on Chicago radio shows with other Daughters. She also helped start one of the most significant gay groups of the 1960s, Mattachine Midwest, with the love of her life, Pearl Hart. Hart (1890-1975) was an outstanding civil rights lawyer and advocate for activists of all sorts in Chicago, a founder of the National Lawyers Guild. They met when Taylor was 50 and Hart was 73.

"In the summer of 1965 two events in Chicago heralded the end of the McCarthy era," Taylor wrote in "Notes from a Lesbian Grandmother," her weekly column in Mattachine Midwest's newsletter. "The last HUAC hearings in the United States were held here, with

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Pearl Hart representing two of the defendants; this was the famous hearing at which Dr. Jeremiah Stamler and Yolanda Hall were exonerated.” The second event she noted was the formation of Mattachine Midwest, which celebrated its 15th anniversary in 1980. It lasted until 1986.²

But chronicling Taylor’s involvement with the gay rights movement was one thing; finding “The Sweet Little Old Gray-Haired Lady in Sneakers” was another. It was a sight for my sore eyes after hours of deciphering fading meeting minutes and blurry mimeographed newsletters. I loved the title of the poem, a sarcastic commentary on the refusal by 1970s periodical *Mother Earth* to run gay or lesbian announcements because the editors did not want to alienate the “sweet little old gray-haired ladies in sneakers” who read their magazine, assuming them to be heterosexual.³ And I especially appreciated Taylor’s poetic ability to “perform intersectionality” at a time when it was just called “being a radical feminist.”

Her references to “napalm” and “rice paddies” were immediately recognizable, but I will admit now that I had to look up “Jane Kennedy” — the name rang a bell deep in the recesses of the activist side of my brain, but I couldn’t remember exactly which act had caused her imprisonment. Through the Internet, I found a moving testimony written in 1975 by the legendary Dorothy Day and published in *The Catholic Worker*. Day visited Kennedy — as well as Puerto Rican Nationalist leader Lolita Lebrun — at Alderson Federal Prison in West Virginia that year. She reported, “The political prisoners, Jane Kennedy and Lolita Le Brun (sic), were there. Jane, for fouling up a computer (I don’t know how to explain it) and also for destroying draft files in Indianapolis, was sentenced to three years on each count, the sentences to be served concurrently . . . I had not met Jane before, and was much impressed by her. A loving, sensitive person, she has suffered much.” The experience led Day to recall, “I have

seen the inside of many prisons, the first time in Washington during the suffrage demonstrations, where I saw my cell mate, one of the leaders, strung up to the bars of the cell door, chained

Taylor was a counterpoint to the stereotypical lesbian activist of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the leaders of DOB, as well as lesbians active in allied organizations at that time, described themselves as conventional except for their sexual nonconformity.

there by her wrists for three hours. Our sleepless night on a single cot with no blanket in that Occaquan punishment cell was lightened by a long conversation with Lucy Burns, a school teacher in Brooklyn. We talked not about suffrage or prisons, but about the novels of Joseph Conrad.”⁴

That sent me off on a tangent to learn more about Dorothy Day’s prison experiences as well as Jane Kennedy’s, and to understand how Lolita Lebrun also ended up at Alderson Federal Prison. This sort of “off site” exploration happened repeatedly when researching Valerie Taylor, as a reference of hers would motivate me to dig deeper into the complexities of her life and the lives of her close friends and collaborators.

Taylor was born Velma Nacella Young on September 7, 1913 in Aurora, Illinois to a family of “independent Midwestern farmers” and feminists. As she told Tee Corinne and Caroline Overman in 1988, “I had a great-grandmother who marched in the first suffrage parade in Elgin, Illinois with my father, who was then a baby, strapped to her back.”⁵ An undiagnosed case of polio left her with pronounced curva-

ture of the spine, an obvious “widow’s hump” which contributed to her sense of herself as unattractive but did not interfere with her success as a student. Extremely poor eyesight almost did, until it was discovered and she was given eyeglasses in high school. She graduated in 1930 and then, “after five Depression years on the farm with no hope of further education,”⁶ received a one-year scholarship to Blackburn College in Carlinville, Illinois. Taylor’s time at Blackburn — from which she graduated in 1937 after many interruptions to earn money to continue her studies — shaped her politically:

Perhaps the outstanding faculty member was the Reverend Richard Rasmussen . . . he preached (and lived) what was then known as the Social Gospel. It was the era of A.J. Muste, Willard Uphaus, John Haynes Holmes, and Kagawa. Christianity for them, and for many of us, involved an end to war, poverty, and racism.⁷

She not only attended classes but went to Socialist meetings and farm sales, and joined local picket lines. As she explained it later, “From there into feminism, the civil rights movement, and the struggle for international peace was a logical step.”⁸

Hers was a political sensibility I resonated with. I, too, had come from a working-class background that included Midwestern roots; struggled to earn a college degree and worked continuously through undergraduate and graduate school; saw myself as a socialist feminist and was shaped by the civil rights struggle well before “becoming” a lesbian. Taylor also was a counterpoint to the stereotypical lesbian activist of the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the leaders of DOB, as well as lesbians active in allied organizations at that time, described themselves as conventional except for their sexual nonconformity and were seen as politically liberal at best. Taylor, however, was an out and proud radical whose lesbianism was incorporated into her passion for social justice, just as the poverty and physical disabilities of her youth

shaped her worldview as an adult. Her radicalism also provided a delicious complement to her success as one of the first, and best, of the era’s lesbian pulp fiction writers.

Taylor’s talent for creating believable characters, her sly sense of humor, and (not for nothing) her descriptive scenes of lesbian sex and romance insured a steady readership of both women and men. She was one of the handful of female published paperback writers and one of the very few who were openly lesbian.

SHE BEGAN PUBLISHING POETRY in 1946 using variations of her birth name while being trapped in a bad marriage to William “Jerry” Tate and raising three young sons. She placed over 200 poems in periodicals ranging from *Baptist Leader* to the *Ladies Home Journal* and the *New York Herald Tribune* from then until her death in 1997. She sold “true confession” stories for \$100 each in 1950 and her first novel — *Hired Girl* — in 1952; she used the proceeds to find a new home for herself and her sons and to begin divorce proceedings against Tate, whom she had married in 1939. But it was the newly-lucrative paperback originals market that gave her career as a writer a boost.

From 1957 to 1964, as Valerie Taylor, she published seven lesbian-themed novels with increasingly bold titles: *Whisper Their Love* (1957), *The Girls in 3-B* (1959), *Stranger on Lesbos* (1960), *Return to Lesbos* (1963), *Unlike Others* (1963), *A World Without Men* (1963), and *Journey to Fulfillment* (1964). Two of them — *Whisper Their Love* and *Stranger on Lesbos* — were published as hardback editions in London. As Katherine V. Forrest, herself a revered lesbian novelist who was first published in the 1980s, wrote recently, Taylor “was perhaps the first of our pulp writers to be relatively open and visible, leaving her marriage and conventional life to live in the gay area of Chicago.”⁹ Taylor joined the tiny ranks of openly lesbian and gay novelists and nonfiction writers whose works could be found in leftist and avant-garde bookstores

as well as on the paperback racks of drugstores and bus stations.

Excerpt from Taylor's *Return to Lesbos*:

Here were the Ann Bannon books side-by-side with Jeannette Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature*; *North Beach Girl* and *Take Me Home* next to the Covici-Friede edition of *The Well of Loneliness*, dated 1928. Here, huddled together as though for warmth in an unfriendly world, were Gore Vidal and a tall thin volume of Baudelaire, translated by someone she had never heard of. Here were books in the field, for people with a special interest, a special orientation.¹⁰

As Francine Davenport, Taylor also published a heterosexual novel, *the Secret of the Bayou*, in 1967, which was translated into French and Dutch. "I had been in the hospital and needed to make some money in a hurry," she recalled, "so I wrote a Gothic."¹¹ She also had learned after her divorce that "one doesn't have to be good-looking or young, or even unhandicapped, to be sexually attractive" and her poems as well as novels reflect male and female lovers during her life. She admitted to one interviewer that she "always had a weakness for weak men and strong women."¹² Her passionate 11-year relationship with Pearl Hart certainly proved the latter.

Taylor began collaborating with Chicago writer and publisher Marie Kuda in 1968 and the two women founded, with three others, the Lesbian Writers' Conference in Chicago in 1974. Throughout the first half of the 1970s, Taylor wrote for local alternative newspapers on a variety of subjects; after Hart's death in 1975, she moved to Margaretville, New York to live with old friends from Blackburn. She continued participating in annual Lesbian Writers' Conference gatherings back in Chicago and kept writing: she had two new novels published by feminist pioneer publisher Naiad Press under the direction of her longtime associate from DOB and *The Ladder*, Barbara Grier. Naiad also republished three of her earlier lesbian pulp fic-

tion works, now classics.

In 1979, Taylor moved to Tucson, Arizona in search of warmer weather and continued to write for local publications. She also continued to be politically active. Taylor wrote that the gay community center, Casa Nuestra, as well as the local Quaker meeting she joined, "made Tucson more than welcome to me." She found a new lover, never publicly named, in 1982, when she was nearly 70 years old.

Interviewed by Studs Terkel in 1995, two years before she died, for his book *Coming of Age*, Taylor described a life full of passion, politics, good food and friendships, and good work. As an artist as well as a lifelong activist for peace and justice, a gay Gray Panther, she ultimately embodied the "sweet little old gray-haired lady in sneakers" who never stopped believing in the transformative power of love and revolution.

NOTES

1. Poem by Valerie Taylor, in Jeannette Foster and Valerie Taylor, *Two Women: The Poetry of Jeannette Foster and Valerie Taylor* (Chicago: Womanpress, 1976).
2. Valerie Taylor, "The Early Years of Mattachine Midwest," reprinted from the *Mattachine Midwest Newsletter* April/May, 1980 in Tee A. Corinne, *Valerie Taylor: A Resource Book*, 1999; published by the Estate of Valerie Taylor.
3. Tee Corinne, "A Valerie Taylor Resource Book," 6.
4. Dorothy Day, *The Catholic Worker*, 1975. See also Clare Hanrahan, *Jailed for Justice: A Woman's Guide to Federal Prison Camp*. Celtic Wordcraft, 2007.
5. Tee Corinne and Caroline Overman, "Valerie Taylor Interview," *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, #25: Winter 1988, 64.
6. Valerie Taylor, "Autobiography," 1991; 4-5. Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago, IL.
7. *Ibid.*, 14.
8. *Ibid.*, 11.
9. Katherine V. Forrest, *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian Paperback Novels 1950-1965*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2005, xi.
10. Excerpt from Valerie Taylor's *Return to Lesbos* reprinted in Forrest, *Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, 156.
11. Tee Corinne, "A Valerie Taylor Resource Book," 5.
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Socialism and Homosexuality

THOMAS HARRISON

SAME-SEX DESIRE has always been a part of human life. There is much evidence, though not yet conclusive, that a predominant sexual attraction to members of one's own sex is innate. But innate or not, we know that it is definitely formed early in life, certainly before the age of ten.

The absurdity of the claim that homosexuality is contrary to "human nature" can easily be demonstrated by pointing to the wide variety of attitudes toward same-sex desire to be found in human societies throughout history. At the opposite extreme from modern post-Christian homophobia are the attitudes and practices of ancient Greece, especially Athens. There, sexual relations between men were not only accepted but praised. As in all cultures, however, strict rules governed sexual conduct, and Greek homoeroticism was accompanied by a strong tradition of misogyny.

Michel Foucault was one of the first to show that the Greeks did not treat sexual desire as a problem, as Christianity has always done.¹ He argued that sex for the ancient Greeks was analogous to eating and drinking — one appetite among others, to be indulged in moderation. Since Foucault, other historians have reconstructed the elaborate ethical discourse with which the Greeks surrounded homoerotic desire.

Adult Greek males were conventionally attracted sexually to handsome adolescent boys and courted them assiduously. Boys, on the other hand, were expected to gratify their adult lovers only from motives of respect, admiration and non-physical love (unless they were prosti-

tutes). In relations between men, as in relations between men and women, one partner was supposed to play the "active" role and the other the "passive"; this meant that one was the penetrator and the other the penetrated. If a boy felt sexual desire for an adult man, this could only represent a desire to be penetrated, to have a penis inserted into his anus or mouth — to be, in other words, like a woman, who took pleasure in sexual subordination. He might properly, however, allow his lover to thrust his penis between the boy's thighs. Women were thought capable of reciprocating their male lovers' sexual passion, but, again, since this required being penetrated through one orifice or another, it was considered a mark of their inferior nature. (Only a very small amount of evidence exists for lesbianism in Greek antiquity. The poetry of Sappho, a woman from the island of Lesbos — whence the nineteenth century euphemism for female homosexuality — expresses erotic attraction to women, but there is not much else.)

While imaginary women played a prominent role in Greek mythology, literature and visual arts, living women were ranked with children and adolescents. The male ideal was for women to be secluded, to remain indoors. A woman's chief function was defined as marriage at puberty and the production of legitimate children; beyond that, men had little use for them as companions or conversationalists. Even the women of Sparta, who engaged in wrestling, footraces and other forms of public physical exercise, much to the disgust of most Athenians, did so in order to strengthen their bodies for the rigors of childbirth.

Despite Christianity's pronounced erotophobia, same-sex relations appear to have been widely tolerated in Christian Europe until the late twelfth century, even among the priesthood,

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where heterosexual marriage was also common. Once the Church moved to stamp out priestly marriage and enforce chastity, it could not afford to allow homosexuality to go unsanctioned. So in 1179, the Third Lateran Council condemned sex between men. Within the next century, secular law followed suit, making "sodomy" punishable by death throughout feudal Europe.

But from the fourteenth until the nineteenth centuries, the penalty for sodomy seems to have been applied only episodically, even while it remained a capital crime. In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers called for state non-interference in private life, and it was in that spirit that in 1791, early in the French Revolution, France's Assembly decriminalized sodomy. This was confirmed by the Napoleonic Code and exported to some other parts of Europe, such as the Netherlands and the South German states, by Napoleon's conquests. The liberal principle justifying decriminalization was later formulated by John Stuart Mill: an activity that does no harm to non-consenting others should not be regulated by law.

At the same time, however, the Industrial Revolution extended the bourgeois family model, developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and based on marriage between men and women, with strictly-defined gender-roles and clear patriarchal supremacy, to the population as a whole. Because this structure entailed the unpaid labor of women, including their exclusive responsibility for the care of children, it was the least expensive means of reproducing the labor force. Its rigidly hierarchical structure fostered the relations of domination and subordination necessary for the reproduction of class society as a whole. And the foun-

dation of these relations was heterosexual love.

It therefore became necessary to stigmatize and, if possible, suppress alternative living arrangements. All the more so, because capitalism, along with the secularization of life and the opportunities to elude community surveillance in the cities, made it possible for a growing minority to live outside the nuclear family, earning independent incomes, as "homosexuals" — a

term coined in the 1860s to designate a new social identity.

The new morality of compulsory heterosexuality was buttressed by legal sanctions. In Britain, the old law that made "buggery" punishable by death was repealed in 1861. The new law banning "gross indecency" between males reduced the maximum penalty to life imprisonment, but it was designed to increase prosecutions, which it did. Upon the unification of Germany in 1871, Prussian law was enshrined in Paragraph 175 of the new penal code: "Unnatural coupling undertaken between persons of the male sex and between people and animals is punishable by imprisonment" of up to five years.

But the beginning of the nineteenth century also saw the appearance of anti-capitalist thinkers who criticized the nuclear family and proposed a reorganized society in which people's sexual potential would be unleashed. Charles Fourier devised schemes for non-monogamous "phalansteries" that would encourage all kinds of sex, including what he called "sapphic" and "pederastic" — the latter referring, on the Greek model, to relations between mature men and boys in their late adolescence, not children. The trouble with these early socialists was that they were uninterested in, even hostile to, democratic

Once the Church moved to stamp out priestly marriage and enforce chastity, it could not afford to allow homosexuality to go unsanctioned. So in 1179, the Third Lateran Council condemned sex between men.

mass movements and had no strategy for abolishing capitalism other than appealing for the support of wealthy philanthropists and spreading their utopian communities.

Marxism: The Flawed Legacy

MARX AND ENGELS NEVER SUBJECTED homophobia to the sort of historical materialist criticism that they, especially Engels, applied to the family and the oppression of women. Indeed, Engels in particular evinced all the prejudices of high Victorianism when it came to homosexuality. In an 1869 letter to Marx about Jean Baptiste von Schweitzer, the gay leader of the rival Lassallean socialists, he joked coarsely about the allegedly spreading influence of homosexuals within the workers' movement: "It is a bit of luck that we, personally, are too old to have to fear that, when this party wins, we shall have to pay physical tribute to the victors. . . . If Schweitzer could be made useful for anything, it would be to wheedle out of this peculiar honorable gentleman the particulars of the pederasts in high and top places, which would certainly not be difficult for him as a brother in spirit." (This last dig referred to the fact that Schweitzer, following his mentor Ferdinand Lassalle, was a supporter of Bismarck and the Prussian state.)

Engels' pioneering analysis, published in 1884 as *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, tried to show that the family and the oppression of women were not embedded in "human nature," but arose historically in conjunction with the emergence of class societies²; the abolition of class society, therefore, could be expected to free women and abolish the family, at least as a site of gender inequality. At the same time, Engels presents heterosexuality as unproblematically "natural." Homosexuality is briefly mentioned, disparagingly, in connection with ancient Greece as nothing but a product of misogyny.

Without excusing Engels' ugly homophobia, and that of Marx, it seems short sighted to simply equate them with the standard-issue big-

ots of their time. Marxism, as a method of historical analysis and a theory of democratic revolution from below, created the tools for understanding the relation of gay oppression to misogyny and compulsory heterosexuality, and for pointing the way toward liberation. As a body of theory, it has proved capable of cumulative development and of incorporating, eventually, all aspects of human emancipation. Its utopian — and later anarchist — rivals did not, despite their often more enlightened attitudes toward homosexuality, and sex in general. Even in their own era, the prejudice of Marx and Engels, unlike the homophobia of those who defended the status quo, was a failure to live up to their ideals of universal freedom from oppression and exploitation. And in fact, after them, socialists' consciousness of gay oppression and their willingness to fight it did grow — until the colossal setbacks of the 1930s, from which Marxism has still not fully recovered.

In Britain in the 1880s and 1890s the more democratic and libertarian socialist tendencies, especially those associated with William Morris, attracted prominent homosexuals such as Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter.³

But it was in Germany, where the first significant organized gay rights movement arose, that links were forged between the socialist movement and the fight for gay rights.

In the late 1890s, a number of leading German Social Democrats were won over to the theory, advanced by Magnus Hirschfeld, that homosexuals constituted a third, "intermediate sex," between men and women, and that same-sex attraction was as natural and ethical as heterosexuality. Hirschfeld, a doctor, sex researcher, homosexual, and SPD member, was the founder of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. In 1897 he launched a campaign to repeal Paragraph 175. August Bebel, the chairman of the SPD, was one of the first to sign Hirschfeld's petition, and in 1898 he spoke in favor of it in the Reichstag. A large number of prominent figures in the SPD (but not, apparently, any of

the party's leading left-wingers) put their names on the petition, although the party never officially endorsed it. Already in 1895 Eduard Bernstein had written a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* condemning the trial of Oscar Wilde.

These advances should not be idealized. The SPD was officially noncommittal on Paragraph 175, and even most Social Democrats who took a stand never went beyond the position of decriminalization as a civil rights issue. Socialists in Germany and elsewhere tended to take, publicly, an ascetic attitude toward sexual matters, to emphasize continence and personal responsibility rather than sexual liberation. Added to this was a persistent leitmotif in socialist discourse associating homosexuality with the degeneracy and immorality of the upper classes, and a conviction that real workers — routinely idealized as brawny heterosexuals — just “didn’t do those things.” Bernstein, for example, despite his support for decriminalization, thought that homosexuality might be a form of “dissolute licentiousness” most common in the upper echelons of society; either that, or some sort of illness.

Bernstein did no more than reflect prevailing scientific opinion. Unlike Hirschfeld and his followers, the great majority of medical and legal experts defined homosexuality as a mental illness or some other kind of pathology, rather than a natural variation. As such, they insisted, it would respond to treatment, not punishment; this more sophisticated form of prejudice was common among liberal, secular-minded people, as well as, probably, most socialists.

On the whole, however, the socialist press avoided the whole subject of homosexuality, whether from prejudice or puritanical squeamishness. At the same time, popular homophobia was eagerly exploited whenever it was politically opportune, as when prominent gay members of the elite became embroiled in sex scandals.⁴ It should be stressed, however, that the SPD was far more advanced on gay rights

than any other European socialist party — mainly because of pressure from Germany’s politically active, high-profile gay rights movement, which was virtually unique at the time.

The Early Soviet Period

IT WAS AS A RESULT OF THE BOLSHEVIK Revolution that socialism came closest to embracing sexual liberation, including gay liberation, if only temporarily. Almost immediately after the Revolution, voluntary homosexual relations for persons 14 and older were legalized. In 1922 the new Soviet criminal code removed all legal restrictions on sexual activity as such. Sex crimes were defined as the violation of an individual’s “life, health, freedom, and dignity,” not as specific sexual acts.

The authoritative text on these matters is Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent*. In a work of painstaking research, Healey argues that Bolsheviks were divided between “libertarians” and “rationalizers.” Rationalizers, he claims, were suspicious of pleasure and interested in regulating sexual expression and promoting reproductive capacity — hence they tended to “pathologize” homosexuality. For Healey, Alexandra Kollontai was the outstanding champion of sexual libertarianism, while he places Lenin squarely in the camp of the rationalizers.

Kollontai is not recorded as having said or written anything about homosexuals; her major concern was promoting sexual autonomy for women in their relations with men. The evidence for Lenin’s view comes essentially from only two sources: his correspondence with Inessa Armand, a Bolshevik of French origin (with whom Lenin is rumored to have had an affair), and conversations with the German Communist Clara Zetkin. The latter was published for the first time only in 1925, after Lenin’s death, as *Reminiscences of Lenin*, and widely circulated thereafter because it suited the needs of the emerging Stalinist policies on sex

and the family; the letters to Armand were not published until 1939 and were clearly used to justify the extremely conservative family law instituted in the years immediately preceding. Both sources should therefore be taken with a grain of salt. In neither does Lenin refer at all to homosexuality. He expresses impatience with talk of “free love,” and warns that it should not mean “freedom from the serious” in love — for example, taking responsibility for children and honoring commitments to one’s spouse or partner. He declares that “skirt-chasing” is incompatible with revolutionary activity. Lenin can be reproached for his obvious prudishness — to Zetkin, he expresses distaste for “poking about in sexual matters” — but not for the sort of proto-Stalinist social engineering to which Healey seeks to link him. And whatever the differences between “libertarians” and “rationalizers,” until 1934 Soviet law made no attempt to control sex for social goals or to stigmatize homosexuals.

As far as homosexuality is concerned, Bolshevik policy went beyond mere legalization — though this alone was a major accomplishment at a time when the maximum sentence for sodomy ranged from five years in Germany to life imprisonment in England. Throughout the 1920s, Soviet representatives maintained relations with Hirschfeld, who in 1919, in the more liberal climate of Weimar, had established the Institute for Sexual Science. The Institute was a center for research, sex education, and legal aid to victims of Paragraph 175, and it campaigned not just for repeal of the sodomy statute but against homophobia in the broadest sense; Hirschfeld often noted that prejudice against homosexuals was just as strong in countries like France and the Netherlands, where they were not criminalized, as it was in Germany. In 1923, the Commissar of Health, N.A. Semashko, on a visit to Hirschfeld’s Institute, assured the Germans that Soviet legalization was “a deliberately emancipatory measure, part of the sexual revolution.” Two years later, the

Director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene Grigorii Batkis, in a pamphlet, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*, described Soviet policy as “the absolute non-interference of the state and society in sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured and no one’s interests are encroached upon. Concerning homosexuality, sodomy and various forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against morality — Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called ‘natural’ intercourse.”

But, as Healey points out, throughout the 1920s there were also prominent Soviet medical experts who insisted on defining homosexuality as pathology, a social “problem,” and even a source of criminal behavior. Healey also maintains that official policy was inconsistent, although the examples he cites are highly ambiguous. One was the frequent use of pedophilia allegations in the prosecutions of Orthodox clerics; it may well be, however, that these were cases of actual child abuse — as in the recent Catholic Church scandals — rather than gay-baiting political enemies. Likewise, the attempt to stamp out the tradition of employing *bachi* — boy prostitutes who danced and dressed in female clothing — in Central Asia and Azerbaijan seems less likely to have been an expression of homophobia and Great Russian chauvinism directed at “backward” cultures within the Soviet Union, as Healey insists, than a legitimate policy of suppressing the exploitation of children.

Whatever the case, homophobia — like anti-Semitism, national chauvinism, sexism, and patriarchy — could not be eliminated in a few years in a predominantly peasant country beset by the crushing poverty and devastation brought by the World War and Civil War. The problem of emancipating women is illustrative. Major steps were indeed taken to achieve equality for women. As commissar of public welfare, Alexandra Kollontai argued that a workers’ state must liberate women from enslavement to con-

tinuous childbearing and to the drudgery of endless cooking, cleaning and childcare. She predicted that freeing women from these burdens would give rise to a “new woman” — tough, independent, as free as a man to lead an active life outside the home, to experience love outside of marriage, and to pursue her talents through work. At Kollontai’s urging, communal restaurants and laundries were set up and childcare facilities created for working women. In addition, laws against abortion were repealed, and contraception was made available to all. Women could divorce their husbands by simply notifying the authorities, and men could do the same. Women who did the same jobs as men had to be paid the same wages.

But the government’s efforts to liberate women were limited by a desperate lack of resources. So, for example, some of the childcare centers sought by Kollontai were set up, but they were bleak institutions full of malnourished children cared for by half-starved attendants. Communal restaurants serving watery cabbage soup were not appealing alternatives to a working woman’s kitchen, where she might at least be able, occasionally, to cook an egg or a piece of bacon obtained on the black market. One consequence of poverty that was especially degrading to women was prostitution. Women who worked in factories, for example, earned so little that they frequently took money for sex. Widespread prostitution, moreover, led to an epidemic of venereal disease. The only solution was to raise women’s standard of living, but under the circumstances this was impossible.

Stalin and Hitler: The Night Descends

LIBERTARIAN, DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS OF all kinds withered in this atmosphere, while the conservative, authoritarian prejudices surviving from the old regime flourished and blended in seamlessly with the consolidating culture of Stalinism. Already in 1926 Hirschfeld, returning from a visit to the USSR, expressed disappointment at the prudery he found prevalent

there, including the stigmatizing of homosexuality as “unproletarian.”

In 1934, with the Stalinist bureaucracy in complete control, homosexuality was re-criminalized. A new law imposed three to five years of hard labor for any man convicted of performing sexual intercourse with another man. In the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia of 1936*, homosexuality was defined as “a sexual perversion” considered “shameful and criminal.”

The persecution of gays under Stalin was no mere recrudescence of traditional bigotry, however. Homosexuals were regarded as “asocial” outsiders, and therefore potential subversives, potential threats to the new system, which aimed at total control. They were also a threat to the super-productivism mandated by the drive for rapid industrialization. Soviet industry demanded ever more workers, while the maximum diversion of resources toward armaments and capital goods meant that the traditional heterosexual family had to assume the bulk of the cost and burden of maintaining the labor supply.

Thus, women too became victims of the Stalinist counterrevolution. Because so many more workers were needed in the industrialization drive, masses of women were encouraged to take jobs that had always been reserved for men — operating heavy machinery, stoking blast furnaces, construction and the like. But the idea of equal pay for equal work was abandoned. Women were paid far less than men and generally kept in the lowest positions. In 1935 abortion was outlawed. Now women were offered financial bonuses and awards for having more babies. Divorce was discouraged. To “strengthen the family,” divorcees had to pay stiff taxes, which increased with every subsequent divorce.

Almost at the same time that Stalinism extinguished the promise of gay liberation in Russia, the Nazis brutally cut short the progress that the gay rights movement had been making in Weimar Germany. After the stabilization of the Republic in 1924, Germany saw the flowering

of a remarkable new, innovative cultural life, especially in Berlin and other big cities. The American journalist, William L. Shirer, wrote: “A wonderful ferment was working in Germany. Life seemed more free, more modern, more exciting than any place I had ever seen.” Just as

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gay and women’s liberation movements paralleled each other in the 1970s, both movements were active in Weimar Germany. The Sex Reform movement campaigned to free women from the burden of constant childbearing through the legalization of contraception and abortion. Although it did not succeed in getting the law changed, abortion was actually quite commonplace in Weimar Germany. Sex Reform also campaigned openly in favor of women’s right to sexual pleasure (according to the nineteenth century ideal of “femininity,” women were not supposed to enjoy, or even be interested in, sex). Bars and clubs for lesbians and gay men proliferated, especially in Berlin. The first films on gay subjects were made by German studios — *Different From the Others* and *Girls in Uniform* (about lesbianism in a girls’ school). In 1929, with the support of the SPD and the German Communist Party (KPD), the Reichstag came very close to repealing Paragraph 175. In fact, during most of the Weimar years, the KPD was the most consistent and outspoken defender of gay rights. In the Reichstag, Communist deputies called not only for decriminalization, but also for equal treatment of gays and straights across the board.

As previously noted, however, the SPD’s commitment to gay liberation was thin and did

not go beyond legalization, and by the late 1920s the KPD was becoming Stalinized. With the onset of the Depression and the explosive growth of Nazism, both parties began to change course. The Nazis were militantly homophobic; they often declared that Magnus Hirschfeld (a triple threat — gay, Socialist and Jewish) would be their very first victim when they came to power. At the same time, it was widely known that a handful of Nazi leaders were homosexuals, most notably Ernst Röhm, the head of the Nazi storm troopers — the SA — and one of Hitler’s closest associates, and the two parties of the left frequently gay-baited the Nazi movement as a hotbed of sexual “perversion.” In 1931, an SPD newspaper in Munich obtained private correspondence from Röhm to a friend in which he discussed his sexual adventures. The SPD attacked Röhm’s “immorality,” but not the Nazis’ hypocrisy. When it was discovered that the Reichstag fire was set by a young Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, a drifter who may have been mentally disturbed, the KPD claimed that the whole thing was a conspiracy of homosexual Nazis using van der Lubbe, a “pederast,” as their pawn.⁵

Articles condemning homosexuality as “unproletarian” had been appearing in the KPD press beginning in the late 20s, and in 1934 it was more or less officially labeled a “fascistic perversion.” From then on, the linkage of homosexuality and fascism became the stock in trade of Stalinist propaganda worldwide. Wilhelm Reich, though not a Stalinist (he had been expelled from the KPD in 1933), attributed the Nazis’ appeal to the suppression of healthy heterosexuality by German bourgeois prudishness, and associated homosexuality with fascist sadism, masochism and misogyny. The Frankfurt School’s Erich Fromm also claimed to find a relationship between homosexuality and sadomasochistic character disorders typical of fascists. In the Soviet Union, the writer Maxim Gorky proclaimed: “Exterminate all homosexuals and fascism will vanish.” Gorky

even alleged, obscenely: “In the fascist countries homosexuality, which ruins the youth, flourishes without punishment.”

Meanwhile, the Nazis were showing just how much “flourishing” homosexuals were to enjoy in Germany. As soon as Hitler came to power, the SA went around raiding gay bars and packing off the men they arrested there to concentration camps.⁶ The first great public book burning — the one most often seen today in documentaries — took place when Nazi students attacked Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science (Hirschfeld was, luckily, in Paris at the time; he did not return to Germany). After the purge of the SA in 1934,⁷ the Nazis launched a massive attack on gay men. Paragraph 175 had prohibited sexual acts between men; in any case, it had rarely been enforced under Weimar. The Nazis now passed a new law making “simple contemplation of the desired object” a felony. In other words, a man could be convicted merely for flirting with another man. Thousands were sent to prisons and concentration camps; the total is unknown, but it was at least 10,000 and more likely several times that number. In the camps, gay men had to wear yellow armbands with the letter A (for *Arschficker* — “ass-fucker”) on them. Later, gay prisoners were identified by a pink triangle sewn on their shirts. Homosexuals were subject to especially cruel treatment by the guards and even, tragically, by their fellow prisoners, so the death rate among them was unusually high. Lesbians were largely ignored, partly because lesbianism was less visible and partly because heterosexual men found it hard to believe that women could have a settled preference for sex with other women (“all they need is a good . . .”).

The Closeted Postwar Years

THE PERIOD FROM THE 1930S UNTIL THE LATE 1960s was one of profound retrogression for the cause of gay liberation. The virulent homophobia of Stalinist Russia was reproduced in Com-

munist parties throughout the world and, after World War II, in the bureaucratic collectivist regimes of Eastern Europe, East Asia and Cuba. In West Germany, the Nazis’ 1935 sodomy law was upheld by the high court as late as 1957 and not repealed until 1969 (the GDR decriminalized homosexuality in 1968, to my knowledge the only Communist country to do so until Cuba in 1992). Gay survivors of the Nazi concentration camps were denied compensation, and some actually remained in prison until the 1960s. The 1950s witch-hunts in the U.S. and Britain that victimized thousands of gay men are well known. Homosexuality remained classified as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973.

On the left, the whole pre-1930s tradition was simply forgotten. Even though most non-Stalinist socialist groups did not prohibit homosexuals from joining or expel those who were discovered (the U.S. Trotskyist group, the Socialist Workers Party, was one notable exception, retaining a Stalinist exclusionary policy until 1970), gay men and lesbians were often closeted within these organizations. Nor did democratic socialists even take up the essentially liberal cause of decriminalization, which is what makes the Socialist Party internal document uncovered by Christopher Phelps and discussed in his article in the previous issue of *New Politics*, so significant as an early portent of change.

The change, initiated in the United States by the Stonewall Riots and the Gay Liberation Front, and reinforced by the women’s movement and the “sexual revolution,” when it came brought a sharp awakening among socialists (as opposed to the deluded admirers of Brezhnev, Mao or Enver Hoxha). Groups such as the International Socialists — of which I was a member at the time — suddenly had gay caucuses and moved to adopt resolutions in favor of gay liberation. The GLF, in its turn, framed the struggle for sexual freedom as part and parcel of the broader struggle for radical social change.

The Contemporary Scene: Progress and Danger

BUT WITHIN A FEW YEARS, the New Left perched out, and the revolutionaries of the GLF were eclipsed by the assimilationist spokespersons of an emerging “gay community” — self-appointed leaders who had a stake in the political and social status quo. Well-heeled gay organizations now cater to almost any politician, no matter how conservative, as long as she/he is “good on gay issues.”

Today, anti-sodomy laws are a thing of the past, and progress is evident on many fronts. On the other hand, the scandalous bipartisan resistance to equalizing marriage rights persists (recall the near-unanimous vote in Congress in favor of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act); in the 2008 elections many of those who went to the polls for the first time to cast their votes for Barack Obama also voted to amend their state constitutions to prevent the legalization of gay marriage. Indeed, even among progressives, it is commonly felt (though not necessarily admitted) that the demand for marriage rights, while just in principle, is politically inexpedient because it makes it harder to elect Democrats — increasingly the be-all and end-all of progressive politics. But when Democrats, such as our new President, offer civil unions rather than marriage, even with all the legal benefits of marriage, they thereby continue to treat gay men and lesbians as second class citizens, which in turn makes it easier for the right to stigmatize us. From most Americans, we can now expect tolerance, but not full respect for our human dignity.

Meanwhile, the threat of violence and humiliation remains part of our everyday lives. A significant number of us have been verbally or physically assaulted; some, of course, have been murdered. It still takes courage to be physically affectionate, even to hold hands, in public. For gay youth, schools can be a living hell, and suicide is much more likely than among other young people.

The Roots of Homophobia

TO COMBAT HOMOPHOBIA, its sources must be understood. At first glance, the main culprit would seem to be religion. In the West, theologically conservative Jews and Christians regard homosexuality not only as an “abomination in the sight of God,” but as a major threat to the sanctity of the family. But the extraordinary virulence of homophobia in the Judeo-Christian tradition is a bit mysterious if considered solely on the basis of scriptural sanctions. In all of the Bible, only one sentence, in Leviticus, explicitly condemns sex between men. Yet, as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, hundreds of sentences in both testaments condemn greed, and no one calls for denying equal rights to the greedy. And there is no logical reason why, today, gay marriage should threaten heterosexual marriage. But logic has little to do with the way in which gays have been made by religious conservatives into scapegoats for the profound crisis of heterosexual marriage — along with feminists, abortion rights advocates, and “secular humanists.”

Homophobia would appear, then, to have much deeper cultural roots. Nussbaum argues persuasively in *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* that homophobia is rooted in sexual shame, a profound unease with our own bodies that engenders disgust with our messy, sticky, odorous and vulnerable animality. This disgust is taught — it’s not present in infancy — and people also learn, in order to protect themselves from self-loathing, to project it on to certain groups: women, racial minorities, Jews, the poor, in India the Untouchables, etc., as well as homosexuals, who are viewed as debased, contaminated.

Throughout history, and in a great many cultures, women have been degraded as receivers of semen, and they have been the object of elaborate taboos associated with things involving bodily secretions — sex, birth, menstruation. Historians have even shown how the voluminous skirts that Western women wore un-

til the 1920s were considered necessary to hide their unseemly contents. Men's disgust with women's bodies has evidently played a central role in women's subordination.

In our own society, gay men (much more than lesbians) are not only seen by a great many people as deeply disgusting — the idea of anal penetration in particular inspires terror and loathing among straight men. So unclean is the homosexual that he is feared for his potential to contaminate others. His very gaze is polluting and has often been used in court as a mitigating or even exculpating circumstance in gay-bashing cases. It would seem to be this powerful disgust, and the fear it inspires, reinforced by religious sanctions and anxiety for the future of the heterosexual family, that explains the ongoing panic in this country. Gay men are viewed as extremely dangerous, forever preying on children, seeking to advance their "gay agenda," and to legitimize their "lifestyle."

Clearly, what Nussbaum calls the "decontamination of the body" in our culture will not be easy; in fact it will not be possible to any great extent without revolutionary cultural change. The struggle against homophobia and for full sexual equality must continue and intensify in the here-and-now, of course, but if we appreciate its deep-rootedness, we must also see that only in a transformed world will irrational fear of contamination and fantasies of steely invulnerability and omnipotence lose their salience and fade away.

Prospects

SOCIALISTS, IT SEEMS TO ME, can play a crucial role in pointing the way, and actually moving us toward, such a future, in the first place by advocating a non-sectarian politics aimed at detaching the oppressed from their ties to the status quo through the creation of a new political party. The distressingly large vote against gay marriage by Blacks and Latinos in 2008 points up the urgent need for a progressive coalition politics among oppressed groups based

on common struggle and mutual respect. The Obama campaign was neither a coalition nor even a movement, and it did not make an issue of homophobia. Nor did it offer anything concrete in the way of "real change" that might have trumped homophobia.

The potential constituency for a populist, anti-capitalist mass movement and a new political party of the left is vast. But it can be built only by eschewing both the narrow economic strategy typified by Ralph Nader, with his almost exclusive focus on corporate malfeasance and his open contempt for what he called "gonadal politics," and the phony "big tent" coalitionism advocated by Todd Gitlin and many other liberal pundits (and once championed by that undeservedly idealized gay icon, Bayard Rustin), in which "identity politics" must not be allowed to interfere with the absurd fantasy of turning the Democratic Party into a progressive anti-corporate force.

By its very nature, a truly independent left would go a long way toward breaking down hierarchies and cultivating compassion. Certainly, it should *campaign* for gay rights — that is, not just advocate them but also educate people to understand why they are just and necessary. Within such a left, should it emerge, socialists will be an educational current and aspiring leadership; as such, they will have to think about, and help others to imagine, a great deal more than legal equality for gays. There hasn't been much discussion in recent years of the abolition of the nuclear family (except insofar as capitalism is already doing so, in part). Still, it's hard to imagine how freedom and equality for gay men — as well as for women — can be achieved without the socialization of family functions, of housework and childcare, which in turn implies a transition away from capitalism. Not that the nuclear family will be replaced easily, or even that most people in a socialist society will choose to abandon it. With all its problems, it is still the only thing that is at least capable of mediating the pain of development,

especially for infants, with deep emotional understanding. But at the very least, a society committed to nurturing — unlike the societies we have known — should be able to provide much more support for the essential work being carried on by families. And as the problem of scarcity is solved, cohabitation will no longer be based on economic considerations, but purely on mutual affection — thus the family will cease to be a compulsory system. Surely this will undermine the basis for homophobia.

We can only dimly imagine how gender and sexual orientation might change in a world without discrimination, hierarchy and domination, in which the erotic is not repressed or sublimated by economic necessity. But it is probable that a socialist world will be one in which people no longer feel disgust and shame, except towards those things that are actually harmful. It seems reasonable to suppose that, freed of the compulsion to correspond to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and to seek “normality,” people will be able to express themselves sexually with more individuality and variety than we ever dreamed possible.

NOTES

1. Augustine, for example, believed that original sin entered the souls of unborn children literally through their fathers' semen. Paul reluctantly recommended marriage only for those incapable of chastity. Even Clement of Alexandria, one of the most positive advocates of marriage among the early Churchmen, said: “Our ideal is not to experience desire at all. . . . A man who marries for the sake of begetting children must practice continence so that it is not desire he feels for his wife.” See Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*.

2. Actually, on this point Engels may have been wrong: possibly, sexual inequality predates class antagonisms. Its great antiquity does not prove that it is hard-wired into the human species, but does suggest that the subordination of women may prove harder to eradicate than class exploitation itself.

3. The Cambridge-educated Carpenter, a poet, writer and political activist (he was one of the founders of the Independent Labour Party), lived openly with a working-class man, George Merrill. Their partnership was the inspiration for Maurice and Alec, the gamekeeper, in E.M. Forster's novel, *Maurice*. Less flatteringly, George Orwell apparently had Carpenter, and others like him, in mind when he denounced, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the “fruit-juice drinkers, nudists, sandal-wearers and sex maniacs” that were attracted to socialism.

Wilde, a great admirer of Morris, wrote “The Soul of Man Under Socialism,” worth reading for its trenchant analysis of the ways in which economic necessity stifles the cultivation of personal excellence. The heroine of Wilde's first play, *Vera*, was modeled on Vera Zasulich, whose attempt to assassinate a brutal Tsarist official launched a series of assaults by Russian socialists that culminated in the killing of Tsar Alexander II. Zasulich escaped to Switzerland, where she was one of the three founders in exile of the first Russian Marxist group.

4. The SPD press had a field day with the Eulenburg Affair in 1907-09, in which several members of the Kaiser's cabinet and personal entourage were accused of violating Paragraph 175.

5. It is still widely believed that the Reichstag Fire was a Nazi plot, but most historians agree that van der Lubbe acted alone.

6. That a gay man, Röhm, could order raids on gay bars is no more inexplicable than the relentless persecution of gays carried out by the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover, a closeted, cross-dressing homosexual. This may also be the place to mention the persistent myth that Hitler himself was gay, for which there is as much evidence as there is for the even more widely held belief that he had Jewish ancestry — zero.

7. This purge — the “Night of the Long Knives” — actually had little to do with Röhm's sexual orientation, although that had always been a scandal to most Nazis — especially Göring and Himmler — and to their “respectable” supporters. Röhm was leading the cry for a “second revolution” against big business, the *Junkers* and the rest of the old elites. He also wanted to get rid of the Army officer corps and replace them with SA men. The *Reichswehr* was alarmed, and the generals promised Hitler that if he would eliminate the radicals they would give him their full support on the death of President Hindenburg, who was gravely ill.

Socialism and Gay Liberation

Back to the Future

DOUG IRELAND

IN 1865, WHILE MARX, IN HOLLAND, was playing the Victorian parlor game “Confessions” with his daughter Jenny, when asked for his favorite maxim he replied, “*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*” or “nothing human is alien to me,” a dictum he had lifted from the second century B.C. Carthaginian slave-turned-playwright Terentius (Terence.)

Unfortunately, this admirable and inspiring attitude was never extended by either Marx or Engels to same-sexers. Well before the invention of the word “homosexual” by Karoly Maria Kertbeny in 1869, the correspondence of Marx and Engels is riddled with what we would now characterize as unmistakable homophobia of a vicious character. When the pioneering German homosexual liberationist Karl Ulrichs sent Marx one of his books on the subject, which Marx forwarded to his collaborator, Engels described Ulrichs’ platform of homosexual emancipation from criminal laws as “turning smut into history.” Marx, in commenting on Karl Boruttau’s *Gedanken über Gewissens Freiheit* (*Thoughts on Freedom of Conscience*), disparaged the author as “this faggoty prick” (*Schwanzschwulen*). The homophobia of Marx and Engels has been meticulously documented by Hubert Kennedy of San Francisco State University, Ulrichs’ U.S. biographer, in his essay “Johann Baptist von Schweitzer: The Queer Marx Loved to Hate,” which is included in the anthology *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, edited by Gert Hekma, Harry

Oosterhuis, and James Steakley (Haworth Press) and is also available online.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate lapse into prejudice by socialism’s two most famous names, virtually all of the early important figures who worked for homosexual liberation were socialists. John Addington Symonds, the most daring innovator in the history of nineteenth-century British homosexual writing and consciousness, was a radical socialist; he helped found several “Walt Whitman Societies” in the north of England—the first recorded English groups of gay men founded explicitly to discuss same-sex love—wrote the pro-homosexual *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, published in 1883, and circulated privately printed essays in defense of homosexuality that were very influential. Edward Carpenter, the libertarian socialist poet and essayist who played a significant role in making possible the birth of the Fabian Society and the Labour Party, took up Symonds’ homosexual liberationist mantle on the latter’s death in 1893, and his 1908 book on the subject, *The Intermediate Sex*, would become a foundational text of the gay liberation movements of the 20th century. Oscar Wilde, who wrote *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* and joined the agitation in favor of clemency for the Haymarket Martyrs, was profoundly influenced by the writings of Ulrichs and adopted his “Uranian” terminology. Wilde and his friends referred in their letters to the campaign for legalization of homosexuality as “the Cause,” joining a secret Uranian organization, the Order of Chaeronea, to fight for it (Wilde’s position as an important precursor of gay liberation was solidly documented by Neil McKenna’s groundbreaking 2003 revisionist biography, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*.) The Order of

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Chaeronea's founder, George Ives, also thought of himself as a socialist.

In Germany, the pioneer sexologist Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a member of the Social Democratic Party, founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1897 to fight for repeal of the statute criminalizing homosexuality, and he was able to secure public support for repeal from socialist leaders like Karl Kautsky, Edouard Bernstein, and the SDP's parliamentary leader August Bebel (who introduced the repeal bill into the Reichstag). The man who became Hirschfeld's deputy and eventually his successor as head of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1929, Kurt Hiller, was a well-known radical socialist essayist who coined the slogan, "The liberation of the homosexuals is the task of the homosexuals themselves." When the pacifist novelist Henri Barbusse became the editor of the French Communist Party's newspaper, *l'Humanité*, in 1926, and — well before Stalin's recriminalization of homosexuality in 1933 — began polemicizing against homosexuality as the product of decadence in the bourgeois sector of society and a perversion favored by fascism in articles widely reprinted in the world Communist press, it was Hiller who provided the most stinging rebuttal to Barbusse in a famous gay liberationist speech, the "Appeal on Behalf of an Oppressed Human Variety," written for the Second International Congress for Sexual Reform held in Copenhagen in 1928. Thanks to the work of Hirschfeld, Hiller, and their colleagues in the early German homosexual rights movement, the German Communist Party was the only one in the Western Hemisphere to reject Barbusse's bigotry.

ESCOFFIER: [The liberation movement] celebrated the otherness, the differentness, and the marginality of the homosexual; whereas the gay politics of citizenship acknowledges the satisfaction of conforming, passing, belonging, and being accepted.

In the United States, however, both Socialists and Communists bought into the "homosexuality-is-capitalist-decadence" argument and used homosexual stereotypes to attack their enemies. It was thanks to American anarchist writers and propagandists that the defense of homosexuality developed in Europe by the likes of Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, Carpenter, and Symonds crossed the Atlantic to these shores — at a time

when no other political movement or notable public figure in the United States dealt with the issue of same-sex eroticism and love, as Terence Kissack has detailed in his important 2008 book, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895–1917*.

"THE ANARCHIST SEX RADICALS," Kissack writes discerningly, "were interested in the ethical, social, and cultural place of homosexuality within society, because that question lies at the nexus of individual freedom and state power." Thus the American anarchists were virtually alone here in the States in defending and iconizing Wilde (who had said he was "something of an anarchist") after his trial and imprisonment, at a time when his plays were banned and his books removed from library shelves. The towering figure of American anarchism, Emma Goldman, an extremely charismatic public speaker, spoke repeatedly to large audiences all over the United States about homosexuality in the first two decades of the last century, devoting whole lectures to the subject. And Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, a best-seller published by Goldman's Mother Earth publishing house in 1912 (with an introduction Goldman had solicited from

Carpenter and a frontispiece excerpt from Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol"), was one of the most important political texts dealing with homosexuality to have been written by an American before the 1950s.

When Harry Hay, who'd been influenced by Carpenter's writing, led a group of queer Communists and fellow travelers in founding the "Bachelors for Henry Wallace" during the 1948 Progressive Party presidential campaign, that pioneering (if closeted) effort at starting a gay organization became the nucleus for the creation of the Mattachine Society in 1950 as the earliest lasting homophile organization. But if Mattachine's roots in the radical left have long been well-documented, Christopher Phelps, in his essay which appeared in the last issue of *New Politics*, has performed a singular service of historical excavation in demonstrating that there were similar homosexual liberationist stirrings in a parallel time frame in Norman Thomas' Socialist Party. (Phelps gets extra points for understanding the importance of his discovery because he is not homosexual himself.)

When Sylvia Rivera and other transgendered and gender rebels launched the fight-back against a brutal police raid at New York's Stonewall Inn 38 years ago, that sparked the birth of a radical gay liberationist rebellion — against the State, which made us criminals; against the medical and psychiatric professions, which declared us sick; and against the culture of heterotyranny which made us the targets of disdain, ridicule, opprobrium, hate, and violence. Born in the wake of the Stonewall rebellion, the gay liberation movement insisted — to borrow from the title of an early film by the gay German *cinéaste* Rosa von Praunheim — that "it is not the homosexual who is perverse, but the society in which he lives."

Drawing from feminist critiques of the tyrannies of patriarchy and the family, gay liberation rejected the white, middle-class culture's patriarchal rigidities, hierarchies, and rituals; homophobia and misogyny were seen as two

sides of the same coin. Gay liberation insisted on the right to plural desires and opposed "any prescription for how consenting adults may or must make love," as the historian and gay activist Martin Duberman then put it. Gay liberation was, he wrote, "a rite of passage — not into manhood or womanhood as those states have been traditionally defined; not sanctioned by supernatural doctrine; not blueprinted by centuries of ritualized behavior; not greeted by kinship rejoicing and social acceptance; not marked by the extension of fellowship into the established adult community," but rather placing "ourselves in the forefront of the newest and most far-reaching revolution: the re-characterization of sexuality."

In the early seventies, when I came out, gay liberation saw itself as "a paradigm of resistance" to the stultifying political culture of the Nixon years, and was infused with a sense of commitment to unleashing the collective energies of a hitherto invisible people as part of the much larger effort to maximize social justice and human liberation for all. The early cadres of gay activists were almost always graduates of the sixties struggles on the left — for civil rights, against the Vietnam war and the "corporate liberalism" that dominated the large multiversities. Since official liberalism of that day rejected gay liberation as a "pathetic" celebration of "perversion," we felt it was doubly subversive, and were proud of that.

The accomplishments of the post-Stonewall gay liberation movement were many. It shattered forever the silence that had imprisoned same-sexers in untenable solitude and alienation; its raucous, media-savvy confrontations changed the nature of public discourse on homosexuality — symbolized by the insistence on the word "gay," a code word for same-sex love for more than a century, instead of the clinical, one-dimensional "homosexual." The most significant victory was the successful fight to have the American Psychiatric Association drop same-sex attraction from its catalog of "disor-

ders” in 1973. And, of course, gay liberation made coming out — the most radical act in a

Ultimately one cannot change
minds and hearts simply by
legislation alone.

homophobic society — not only the basis of mental and emotional health for gay people, but the imperative for creating the political movement that could carry through the fight for civil rights.

AS MORE AND MORE PEOPLE BEGAN TO come out, thanks to the liberationists’ clamorous visibility, the out gay community increasingly began to reflect the demographic, political, and cultural makeup of the society as a whole. And thus the gay liberation movement was replaced by what Jeffrey Escoffier, in his seminal 1998 book *American Homo: Community and Perversity*, called “the gay citizenship movement.”

Gay liberation considered innate homosexuality as much a challenge to a suffocating and unjust social order as the political radicalism that many of its proponents, including myself, embraced. But it was transformed in a relatively short time into a more limited quest for gay citizenship.

Or, as Escoffier wrote, the liberation movement “celebrated the otherness, the differentness, and the marginality of the homosexual; whereas the gay politics of citizenship acknowledges the satisfaction of conforming, passing, belonging, and being accepted.”

The de-radicalization of the gay movement was accelerated by a number of factors. For one thing, gay liberation was largely the work of people who had been participants in or influenced by the sixties movements for black civil

rights and against the war in Vietnam, or by labor or radical campus struggles. As the first generation of activists began to burn out, the movement was populated with younger people with little or no previous history of political protest. Simultaneously, the fulgurant rise of the commercial gay ghetto and the emergence of the gay market contributed to the rapid growth of an out gay middle class, which saw itself as having more of a stake in the dominant culture than did the young marginals and intellectuals who made up the movement’s first wave.

Finally, the backlash against visible homosexuality and against the demand for full gay citizenship drove the movement to seek political advances through a more traditional form of interest-group politics. The need to appeal to the non-gay electorate helped water down and eventually extinguish the radical liberationist discourse; in this, the gay movement did not escape the similar fate of other initially radical social protest movements.

AND THEN CAME AIDS.

From 1981, when it was first identified as a “gay cancer,” until well into the ’90s, AIDS was used to stigmatize homosexuals, especially gay males, by the political homophobes of the right. And whatever shards of liberationist thinking and attitudes that remained in the gay community were effectively snuffed out.

First, the epidemic and the social opprobrium it brought with it forced the gay community to turn back in upon itself in a struggle to survive. Government was entirely absent from the fight against AIDS in the Reagan years, so the burden of prevention, education, and even care for the sick fell upon gay people themselves. AIDS consumed an enormous amount of the gay community’s money and energies, as we took day-to-day responsibility for our afflicted “extended families” of friends and lovers.

Worst of all, this grimmest of reapers also took away forever thousands of gay liberation’s most original and tireless activists, a hemorrhage

unparalleled in the history of any other U.S. social movement. I always think of my late, dear friend Vito Russo, the epitome of radical gay and AIDS activism and the author of *The Celluloid Closet* (a history of gays in film) as symbolizing the enormity of this lethal hemorrhage of irreplaceable talent.

Finally, any radicalism that still existed in the gay community was increasingly channeled into the fight against AIDS with the founding of ACT UP. The struggle for simple survival took primacy over the larger issues of social and sexual transformation.

By the end of the nineties, the institutionalization of the gay movement was complete. The Human Rights Campaign, the wealthiest national gay organization with the largest staff, some 114 people now — to which today's corporate media invariably turn for the "gay view" on issues — adopted a top-down, corporate structure that demands little more of its members than writing a check or attending a black-tie dinner, or occasionally writing a letter (or more likely sending an e-mail) to a public official. In their endless search for corporate sponsorships for gay events and activities, in their insistence on presenting a homogenized and false image of gay people, the gay institutions like HRC and their access-obsessed gaycrats are committing serious strategic and tactical errors — like acquiescing in a truncated version of the still-to-be-passed federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act for gays and lesbians that excludes the transgendered — which play into the hands of our heavily funded and organizationally sophisticated enemies on the right. The lack of attention paid to queers in the Black and Latino communities by the institutional gay movement, and their invisibility in the image of homosexuality portrayed by HRC and much of the gay media, also works to our detriment. (Witness the fact that in all the November, 2008 state referendums to ban gay marriage, those

communities of color voted overwhelmingly against marriage equality for same-sex couples.)

Yes, the political center of gravity in this country has moved significantly to the right in the decades since Stonewall — and with it the political center of gravity of the out gay community. But now that three and a half decades of struggle have created an ever-enlarging cultural and political space for LGBT people, I'm sensing a hunger for a return to some of the earlier principles of sexual liberation for all with which our movement began, not just here at home but abroad — and that includes a growing demand for our gay institutions to abandon their navel-gazing isolationism and embrace international LGBT solidarity.

In the long term, developing new strategies of resistance and liberation will require the gay movement, which has become so *embourgeoisé*, to begin a serious and radical rethinking of homosexualities and gender identities so as to understand at a deeper level why the fear and loathing of same-sex love and gender variants are so deeply engrained in society and culture not only here in the United States, but around the world. This also means breaking the forms of social control implicit in the gay market ideology. And re-connecting to other movements for social justice who should be our natural allies — all the while remembering the dictum of a great black civil rights organizer who also was gay, Bayard Rustin, who taught us that "all successful coalitions are based on mutual self-interest," which means embracing the struggles of others as we ask them to embrace ours.

But, as important as the demands of the gay citizenship movement are, ultimately one cannot change minds and hearts simply by legislation alone. Only a fundamental redefinition of human freedom that includes a re-characterization of human sexuality in all its glorious varieties — the original project of gay liberation — can do that.

LGBT Political Cul-de-sac: Make a U-Turn

SHERRY WOLF

Electoral Cul-de-sac

ON THE EVE OF 2009, it is impossible to speak of a national gay liberation movement, as that would entail active groups of people mobilizing at the grassroots to achieve common aims. There has not been a national march on Washington to demand civil rights, to say nothing of liberation, since 1993.¹ The vibrant twenty-fifth anniversary march commemorating the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York City the following year drew an estimated one million people, but these actions were not used by mainstream gay organizations with money and powerful connections to build grassroots movements as a means of winning concrete gains.

The largest and most visible LGBT group is the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which from its inception has been a lobbying group that touts corporate sponsors such as American Airlines, Citibank, and IBM. There are, of course, small but important local initiatives to stop reactionary legislation or fight incidents of violence against LGBT people. But these are usually defensive battles, disconnected, and short-lived — regardless of the intentions of many committed activists.

With the virtual collapse of an organized left over the last thirty years, the quest for LGBT liberation has been abandoned as impractical, undesirable, or just plain Utopian. Under attack by a confident right, most existing LGBT groups struggle to challenge big-

otry and reactionary legislation, or provide social services to gay teens under siege or people with HIV/AIDS in a climate of slashed social services. Discussions about the origins of gay oppression inside the nuclear family, class society's construction of strict gender roles, and the material and ideological connection between LGBT and women's oppression exist today almost exclusively on the margins of the left and in the classrooms of a few radical professors. These ideological and organizational weaknesses feed off each other and amount to a lowering of expectations and demands.

This political retreat has been decades in the making. The combative gay liberation movement that flourished in the years following the Stonewall Rebellion was effectively absorbed into the Democratic Party by the mid-1970s. The fact that the last march on Washington was scheduled *after* the 1992 presidential election, rather than as a show of force beforehand to pressure the candidate Bill Clinton, was itself a concession to the notion that LGBT activists ought not expose the Democrats to gay scrutiny lest their broader appeal be tarnished. What was tragedy under Clinton became almost farcical with Barack Obama's rise. No prominent LGBT organization demanded that the candidate even defend same-sex marriage. And Obama offered nothing but verbal palliatives on LGBT issues alongside explicit opposition to same-sex marriage. Lack of independence from the Democrats has left LGBT activists in a self-defeating cul-de-sac, giving politicians an official pass to maintain homophobic and oppressive policies.

Socialists and LGBT Liberation

IN THIS CONTEXT, there is an urgent need to

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rebuild a national movement for LGBT liberation—one based on struggle, not collaboration with the Democrats. It is high time to revive and further develop the Marxist tradition as the theoretical basis for such a movement. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels lived in the Victorian era, many decades before the notion of gay liberation took form. They did, however, provide the theoretical tools to wage a successful battle against all forms of oppression.

Quite simply, Marxism is about all the oppressed and exploited taking control of society and running it in their own interests. Socialists view oppression as the result of the division of society into classes. Because the ruling class under capitalism is inevitably a small minority of the population, it must use the institutional and ideological tools at its disposal to divide the mass of the population against itself in order to prevent the majority of exploited peoples of the world from uniting and rising in unison to take back what is rightfully theirs. Homophobic, sexist, racist, nationalist, and other divisions in modern society reflect the needs of the class that owns and controls capital. The Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass put it aptly when he said of the slaveholders' strategy against slaves and poor whites, "They divided both to conquer each."²

Much work remains to be done to develop an explicitly socialist approach to LGBT oppression, but Marx's method provides the basis for doing so. As historical materialists who believe that people's behavior and attitudes are shaped by their material surroundings, it follows that socialists are constructionists when it comes to the question of sexuality. In other

The absence of freedoms for LGBT people in the former USSR after the rise of Stalinism — alongside other self-proclaimed Communist societies in Cuba and China — are not examples of socialism's blind spot to the oppression of gays, but Stalinism's betrayal of all workers, and by extension, socialism itself.

words, sexuality is a fluid and not fixed behavior. The historical fact of the creation of homosexual and heterosexual identities in the latter half of the nineteenth century (and the emergence of trans-sexuality in the twentieth) attests to this outlook. If we lived in a truly free society, in which people were neither oppressed by their sexual identity, nor were they even defined by it, we could begin to see how a liberated human sexuality would evolve and express itself.

Contrary to the dominant myth of socialism prevalent in the academy, Marxists do not "privilege" class over race, gender, or sexual oppression. In fact, socialism cannot achieve the liberation of the exploited without the liberation of the oppressed. As any cursory look at the modern workforce will show, class unity is inconceivable so long as these divisions are allowed to fester among working-class people who are themselves Black, transgender, immigrant, and members of every other oppressed group.

LGBT people — like women and Blacks — experience a special oppression in that they can be denied jobs and housing (often legally) and are subject to verbal and physical harassment, as well as being treated as second-class citizens when it comes to marriage, health care, and even experiencing daily humiliations like being accosted in public toilets for appearing to be the "wrong" gender.

But unlike Blacks and women, who perform certain social and economic functions for capitalism, LGBT people do not perform a specific productive or reproductive role. Racism against African Americans, deliberately stoked

from above, is the historic ideological division inside the U.S. working class, key to the maintenance of corporate rule. It is therefore inconceivable that a revolutionary socialist movement could effectively challenge the exploitation of workers without taking on oppressions, including sexual and gender, that are essential means of workers' exploitation.

Because socialists oppose oppression of every sort, no matter what class of people is affected, they have been found in the forefront of struggles for sexual liberation from the nineteenth century to the present day. Christopher Phelps and Jeffrey Escoffier discussed some examples of historical links between socialists and the gay movement in the Summer 2008 edition of *New Politics*. There are many more instances, of which I'll touch on just a few.

The first politician anywhere in the world to speak for the rights of gays on the floor of a national legislature was August Bebel, leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who addressed the German Reichstag on January 13, 1898.³ Not only did leading SPD members such as Karl Kautsky and Finance Minister Rudolph Hilferding sign a petition demanding the repeal of the German anti-sodomy law, Paragraph 175, but they also helped circulate the petition and encouraged thousands to add their names.

The SPD's newspaper, *Vorwärts*, popularized gay issues in its pages. In preparation for a parliamentary debate on the issue in 1905, SPD member August Thiele did research using works from the first openly gay movement, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. Included in his thirty-four pages of speeches in the Reichstag is this insightful comment, which many members of today's U.S. Congress would never admit: Anti-gay legislation is the legacy of "priestly cruelty and intolerance" that "reminds one of the period of the Middle Ages, of that time when witches were burned, heretics were tortured, and proceedings against the dissenters were conducted with the wheel and gallows."⁴

There are some who try to denigrate the enormity of advances for LGBT people in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution.⁵ But facts are stubborn things. In 1917, all laws against homosexuality were struck down by the new revolutionary government along with the rest of the tsarist criminal code; consensual sex was deemed a private matter and not only were gays free to live as they chose without state intervention, but the Soviet courts approved of marriage between homosexuals and, extraordinarily, there are even recorded instances of sex change operations in the 1920s. In other words, the revolution accomplished this grandiose social-sexual leap nearly ninety years before the Supreme Court of the United States finally struck down all sodomy laws.⁶

The Russian workers' government achieved reforms that most modern LGBT people still fight for around the world. This is all the more remarkable considering that the revolution of 1917 represented the victory of mass struggle led by workers — but in a largely peasant society ideologically shaped by religious superstition and semi-feudal relations. Nevertheless, in the few short years of its existence, the Russian Revolution upended all previous structures of society, including the most intimate relations between people.

Given the depth of historical distortion, it is worth quoting from the 1923 pamphlet, "The Sexual Revolution in Russia," written by Dr. Grigorii Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene: "Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality—Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters."⁷

The Myth of Anti-gay Socialism

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION REPRESENTED a rather extraordinary statement of principles for any society, no less one that in the midst of the

First World War undertook a working-class revolution — and afterward endured three years of civil war during which millions died, starvation was rampant, and industrialization was catapulted back to the level of the eighteenth century. When the Russian Revolution was finally overturned in the late-1920s and replaced with the totalitarian rule of Joseph Stalin, its gains were jettisoned as well.

Despite the revolution's enormous strides toward achieving gay liberation, Stalin's counter-revolutionary legacy has been accepted by most academics as "socialist practice." But the absence of freedoms for LGBT people in the former USSR after the rise of Stalinism — alongside other self-proclaimed Communist societies in Cuba and China—are not examples of socialism's blind spot to the oppression of gays, but Stalinism's betrayal of all workers, and by extension, socialism itself.

Cuba's sexual policies, more than that of any of the other so-called socialist states, have had an enormous impact on the American left, including left-wing LGBT people. The American Empire's five-decade embargo and attempts to overthrow and discredit the Castro regime for its temerity in nationalizing former U.S. properties in Cuba, while thumbing its nose at U.S. imperial arrogance, has rightly fueled sympathies from the left. However, it is one thing to oppose imperialist aggression toward Cuba—as any leftist must—and quite another to paint its economic and social policies as socialist.

While Cubaphiles of the American left argue that all progress achieved there is the fruit of revolutionary developments, this explanation is incompatible with the facts. Nearly fifty years have passed since the revolution initiated the open repression of LGBT people. Homosexuality in Cuba was not illegal prior to the revolution, but afterward LGBT people were openly repressed and even sent to concentration camps from 1965–68 or forced into exile with other "criminals" and "scum" in the Mariel boat exodus of 125,000 Cubans in 1980. It is estimated

that up to 60,000 LGBT people, mostly gay men, were sent to the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPs) where they were forced to cut sugarcane or marble surrounded by barbed wire under a tropical sun for twelve to sixteen hours a day in order to meet unrealistic production levels.⁸ Decades later, the worst aspects of Cuba's anti-gay policies have finally been mitigated, but the refusal of the democratic right to organize any independent movement for sexual liberation persists. As socialist Paul D'Amato argues: "Oppression is not the product of an unfinished revolution; oppression continues to exist in Cuba because exploitation continues.... A society that has not liberated the working class is incapable of achieving the full liberation of the oppressed either. The condition of one is the condition of the other."⁹

The absence of much scholarship linking modern gay struggles with the far left is an expression of both the withered state of the left and the political biases of many LGBT activists and academics, who largely turned toward a politics of identity under the influence of postmodernism during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This theoretical shift represented a rejection of the working class as the agent of change, translating into a pessimistic strategy for change coming through the actions of autonomous identity groups across class lines. Queer theory that has developed within the academy in recent years shares a common postmodern perspective with identity politics, and nothing has yet risen to replace the identity politics perspective on a broad scale — despite abundant criticism from queer theorists. It will probably take the reemergence of class struggle to retire some of the hostility to working-class politics and the belief that mass struggle and organization are obsolete — ideas that dominate some sections of the LGBT left.

Also troublesome are the pseudo-radical notions regarding assimilation. There is an unwritten assumption behind some of the anti-assimilationist chatter about gay marriage that

conceives of culturally eclectic and sexually adventurous LGBT folks being sucked into the Norman Rockwellian lives of vanilla sex and

Fifty-eight percent of Americans oppose a ban on gay marriage, 75 percent believe gays should be allowed to serve openly in the military, and a May 2007 Gallup poll shows 89 percent of the population opposes discrimination against gays in the workplace.

picket fences, which all straight couples supposedly lead. In this snooty chimera of reality, sexual minorities are put forward as more evolved members of the species from heterosexual fossils, who, poor souls, pair off and lead lives of quiet desperation. Aside from this moralistic caricature of heterosexuals as wholesale defenders of bourgeois norms, this conception of LGBT folks smacks of Hollywood fantasy upper-class gays and lesbians, not the real lives of the working-class majority. Any truly oppositional politics must stand unapologetically in defense of the right to same-sex marriage — as leftists did sixty years ago with mixed-race marriage — despite critiques of the state, religion, and monogamy.

Where Do We Go from Here?

DESPITE THE SORRY STATE OF THE FAR LEFT and the low level of LGBT fightback and organization, there are reasons to be hopeful about the prospects for rebuilding a left and advancing struggles for sexual liberation. The global economic meltdown has created a massive ideological opening for the left to insert itself into the debate about why the free-market system is in free fall and how this is connected not sim-

ply to bad neoliberal policies, but the inability of capitalism to satisfy the needs of the very workers who produce profit. Naturally, American workers have mixed consciousness—but alongside backward ideas there is a rising disgust with the nasty culture wars of the recent past.

At this writing, one week before the 2008 election, it appears likely that a Black man will be elected president in a country built on slavery. Despite Obama's conservatism and adherence to capitalist priorities, his election will indicate a shift to the left in popular consciousness. There are positive indicators regarding LGBT politics too. Fifty-eight percent of Americans oppose a ban on gay marriage, 75 percent believe gays should be allowed to serve openly in the military, and a May 2007 Gallup poll shows 89 percent of the population opposes discrimination against gays in the workplace. These are startlingly good numbers given the equivocation (at best) from the Democrats and near-absence of any activist movement. Imagine the impact on consciousness if workers' opinions were not just shifting on the basis of lived experience alongside the rising ranks of out co-workers and family members, but inside of organizations and struggles where sexual stereotypes were confidently contested.

Two generations of Americans have grown up now without having direct experience of mass struggle, which feeds cynicism. As a lesbian Marxist who came of age in the neo-Cold War, AIDS-ravaged 1980s, I too am a member of the post-Stonewall generation who encounters suspicion that struggle and organization are anachronisms. But reality is forcing those alternatives. I would caution leftists against narrowing our sights, presuming that LGBT battles will or should necessarily rise independently of wider outrage against expanding wars and a collapsing economy. Sexual minorities, after all, are directly affected by these unfolding catastrophes and our demands can and must be brought into broader battles that will eventu-

ally erupt and can be shaped by leftists.

The absence over the last decades of a collaborative, organized, and vocal left that mobilizes independently of the Democratic Party has played a role in leading LGBT people into the current political cul-de-sac. As with real world dead-ends, the only way out is a U-turn. The rebuilding of an independent left is now possible, with sexual liberation as an explicit component of its class struggle agenda.

NOTES

1. A controversial and non-political HRC-sponsored Millennium March on Washington for Equality took place on April 30, 2000. This music concert and marketing fair was boycotted by Pride at Work, NGLTF, National Association of Black and White Men Together, as well as virtually every other progressive and left-wing gay organization and publication for being a "a profit-making business enterprise masquerading as a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender civil rights rally." HRC executive director Elizabeth Birch said of the "march": "For a lot of people who dreamed of a different kind of world, the very notion that the Human Rights Campaign was involved in calling for this march was an anathema." Quoted in Joshua Gamson, "Whose Millennium March?", *Nation*, March 30, 2000.
2. Quoted in W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 299.
3. John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1935)* (Ojai, California: Times Change Press, 1995), 11.
4. *Ibid.*, 68.
5. See Igor S. Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia* (New York: Free Press, 1995) and Gregory Carleton, *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia* (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) for examples of a few of the more trenchant attacks on these gains. See Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) for excellent, never-before-published material on the revolution and homosexuality.
6. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down all sodomy laws in a 6–3 vote in *Lawrence et al v. Texas* on June 26, 2003.
7. Lauritsen and Thorstad, 71–73.
8. Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), Chapter 3.
9. D'Amato, "Race and Sex in Cuba," *International Socialist Review* Issue 51, January–February 2007, 57.

Where Will Obama Go?

JACK GERSON

ON NOVEMBER 5, THE DAY AFTER election day, students at my school skipped down the hall singing and shouting “Obama, Obama, Obama” at the top of their lungs. All day. And all day the next day too. I teach at Castlemont High School, which serves East Oakland, one of the poorest, most violent and most drug-ridden parts of the San Francisco Bay Area. For most students, hope means getting out of East Oakland. But on the day after election day, hope was spelled O-B-A-M-A.

My students’ reactions mirrored those around the country: raucous election night celebrations into the wee hours in urban centers across the United States — downtown Oakland, Brooklyn, Chicago. . . . Indeed, friends say that the euphoria extended across the Atlantic. Thus, for example, strangers in several parts of London reportedly greeted each other with smiles and sighs of relief. Newspapers published numerous cartoons of Lincoln or Martin Luther King shaking Obama’s hand. It was unmistakable: Obama’s election was viewed as laying the basis for completing the unfinished business of the Civil War and the New Deal — equity and equality for black people, redistributing wealth and providing vast social programs. It’s no exaggeration to say that Barack Obama has inspired greater hope from more people than any other president in our lifetimes — greater even than John Kennedy at the height of

Camelot.

Tens of millions have invested their hopes, identified their aspirations, and hitched their futures to Barack Obama. Millions of young people — including people of color, like my students — have been energized and potentially drawn into extended political activism. Will the hopes be realized? Will a movement for real change emerge — a movement Obama not only professes to want but also says is essential?

Or will we see mass disillusionment?

Because along with such hopes come great expectations. Beyond Obama the symbol, there is Obama the political figure. This Obama is clearly a brilliant campaigner, one intelligent enough to know that his best electoral strategy was to steer clear of concrete programs in favor of vague pledges of change through unity. But the brilliant campaigner has thus far given every indication that on major policy questions — and particularly on the two most pressing areas, the economy and foreign policy — he will adopt the most conventional of approaches: recycle policies and personnel from the Clinton Administration (and even — in the case of Paul Volcker — from the Carter Administration).

So let’s look at the key challenges, tentatively discuss what could be done, and look at what Obama seems poised to do.

Finance and the Economy

OBAMA INHERITS THE GRAVEST SET of economic problems and what will likely become the deepest economic downturn of the postwar era. The financial system came close to total meltdown in late September, and while massive state interventions appear to have staved off total collapse, the world economy is in recession and no one can say with certainty

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whether the contraction will be “merely” a deep recession or will devolve into a full-out depression. In any event, the approach thus far has been to try to right the ship by throwing money at failing giant corporations: banks, investment firms, insurance companies — and now the auto companies are demanding their payout. This approach is not likely to regenerate a boom economy: somehow the mountain of debt amassed during the bubble needs to be liquidated; the spiral of housing foreclosures and defaults needs to be put to rest; banks need to unfreeze medium and long term credit lines; the world currency exchange rates need to be stabilized and need to reflect the actual relative underlying economic strengths of nations. It is not clear how this will come about. Trillions of dollars of debt in the form of credit-default swaps (insurance on mortgage “vehicles”) remain outstanding (estimates range up to \$50 trillion — several times U.S. gross domestic product). Next up (or down) will be consumer credit card debt. The consumer-paced economic boom-turned-housing-bubble is unraveling and running in reverse and bringing contraction of production and massive job loss along.

Clearly, the neoliberal economic policies that have dominated the past three decades have reached their limits. These policies were put in place to break out of the stagflation of the late seventies and restore conditions of capital accumulation by putting the state fully at the service of private capital — abrogating the social contract of the postwar period — weakening labor, cutting or privatizing public services; deregulating finance, telecommunications, airlines and generally weakening or removing health, safety, environmental, inspection and a raft of other protective state regulations; and using the Federal Reserve Bank and the International Monetary Fund to impose harsh austerity programs aimed at workers and the poor at home and — especially — in developing countries. Aside from, perhaps, David Cameron in Britain and John McCain in the U.S., it’s

pretty well understood that austerity, wage cutting, and cuts in public programs would only deepen the economic contraction. And even most of Wall Street is trying to appear as advocates of greater regulation.

The inchoate grassroots supporters will be promoting wealth redistribution, alternative energy programs, and withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as Iraq, a just resolution for Palestinians.

So, Obama’s opening economic moves should be obvious: shift priorities from profits to people. Do everything possible to minimize the plight of those most in need. Provide for infants, schoolchildren, the elderly, and the jobless.

- Start by proposing and implementing a massive public works program that concentrates on vital public programs — schools, housing, hospitals, sanitation, and public health, and on rebuilding the country’s infrastructure;
- provide immediate relief to beleaguered state budgets with stipulations that the money be targeted to social programs;
- put major decisions on allocation of resources and investment under public control (this will likely require initiating measures towards nationalizing the tottering financial system);
- provide single payer, universal health care;
- put forward a program for developing alternative, renewable fuel;
- build high-speed inter-city rail and metropolitan regional rail systems;
- provide dignity and security to the elderly by expanding social security and bolstering the shaky pension systems;
- increase the minimum wage to \$20 / hour.

Too expensive? Can’t afford it? Well, somehow “we” can afford to throw \$700 billion at insurance companies and banks. The money

ought to go to the people who need it most (which, not unimportantly, would have the greatest multiplier effect in stimulating the economy, because unlike the bank, poor and working people will of necessity spend what they get rather than hoard it).

OBAMA THE SYMBOL, Obama the brilliant campaigner, never tired of repeating that he would put people first, that he would rebuild the infrastructure. But today, Obama the elected politician sings a different song than did Obama the symbol on the campaign trail. Obama's first priority appears to be bailing out the big American automakers. Obama may argue that throwing billions of dollars at auto is rebuilding the infrastructure, but more likely it's tossing money into a hole. Detroit automakers have shown little ability to operate their companies; there's every reason to believe that whatever public money they're given will disappear down the same hole as have their once vast assets. And, even more fundamentally, bailing out auto ought to be a far lower priority than guaranteeing that people who need housing and food are sheltered and fed, that the nation's cash-starved and contracting public education programs receive the massive funds needed to pay teachers adequately and provide clean decent facilities with small class size and safe, clean facilities.

This country's priorities are upside down. Bailouts for banks. Bailouts for investment firms. Bailouts for insurance companies. And now, bailouts for auto? Obama seems poised to make the wrong choice. And he is choosing an economics team that almost guarantees this.

Shortly after the election Obama unveiled his economic policy transition team. It's a team dominated by representatives of the same forces that have dictated U.S. economic policy for most of the last 30 years: Robert Rubin, secretary of the treasury under Clinton and before that CEO of Goldman Sachs; Lawrence Summers, Rubin's deputy and later his successor as treasury secretary; Laura D'Andrea Tyson, head of

Clinton's council of economic advisers; Paul Volcker (!!), appointed chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank by Jimmy Carter (1979), reappointed by Ronald Reagan (1983); Warren Buffett (world's richest man). Collectively, this group was instrumental in launching and guiding the neoliberal economic policies that have dominated the past 30 years. Thus, Paul Volcker is famous for jump-starting neoliberalism in 1979 with the "Volcker Shock," a harsh anti-inflationary measure that eventually led to the collapse of the Mexican peso in 1982. Robert Rubin has been a consistent advocate of austerity and whatever else is needed to secure the interests of bondholders, and guided neoliberal economic policy through the Clinton years.

We're poised on a cusp. We can assume that our survival depends on bolstering profits by massive subsidization of wobbling corporations by spraying taxpayer money at every industry that shows up, tin cup extended, and says, "Can we have more bailout, please?" The more failing corporations are bailed out, the more will appear. Not only will this reward greed and malevolence, it won't solve the economic problems. It will merely slow the slide to the bottom.

Or: we can assert the public's dominance over privatization and profit. Put the financial sector and decisions of how to allocate capital under public control. In addition to massive investment in social programs. This won't happen today, and it may not happen tomorrow. But it is what's needed, and it's time to educate and begin to organize about it. The increasing failure of capitalism to adequately organize production is manifest not only in the economic contraction, but as well in the mushrooming set of critical dangers threatening to spiral out of control: global warming; resource depletion; despeciation; nuclear proliferation.

Foreign Policy / Defense

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, Obama the symbol was widely mistaken for an antiwar candidate.

He was not. His policy, not well thought-out, is to shift the focus of war from Iraq to Afghanistan, as he has made increasingly clear over the past few months. This is a disaster in the process of unfolding. Afghanistan remains what it has been for millennia: a sinkhole for foreign occupiers. Worse still, it is now difficult to separate the Afghani Taliban from insurgents in northwest Pakistan. Pakistan itself is a time bomb waiting to go off, fueled by growing hatred of the U.S. and long-standing sympathy for Palestinians and hatred of Israel.

Obama has shown little indication that he will appreciably alter long-standing U.S. policy towards Israel and Palestine. Indeed, when he visited the region last summer, he made it a point to visit with Zionist leaders while studiously avoiding contact with Palestinian leaders. Obama's choice of Rahm Emanuel as White House chief of staff signals continued support for Israeli intransigence. So long as the Israel / Palestine conflict remains unresolved, the Near East and Mideast regions will remain in turmoil.

Overall: If Obama is going to strike out on a new direction in foreign policy, he has done a fabulous job of hiding it. From Iran to Georgia to China to Latin America, he has sounded the same themes as his predecessors. The underlying if usually unstated assumptions: American interests — read: corporate profitability, control of oil, geopolitical leverage, and most of all, guaranteeing the security of bondholders' investments — trump all else. World institutions, under this, the dominant U.S. paradigm, exist to carry out American policy, and this policy is backed by the U.S. military's high-tech weaponry.

Like his economic team, Obama is relying on veterans of past administrations who pursue a model now nearly 40 years old. Madeline Albright (Clinton's Secretary of State); Warren Christopher (another Clinton Secretary of

State); Robert Gates (currently Secretary of Defense); Dennis Ross (Clinton's main Mideast envoy).

So in foreign policy, and in economic policy — indeed, in any and all areas, we have to ask: Where are the new ideas? Where's the change? Where are the fresh faces with the bold new ideas that Obama promised? Or was it that he just implied but never really promised? A groundswell of support from insurgents and a rising tide in the black community carried election day for Obama, but these potentially powerful emerging forces are largely unrepresented among Obama's key staff and critical appointee nominees. Does he have any new ideas at all? Because if he does, he's kept them to himself.

But there is another side. Change is possible, and Obama may help facilitate it. The millions who were energized by Obama the symbol have not gone away. They are expecting change, and some of them are beginning to demand it. If they continue — if we continue — to advocate for people's needs over profit — there is going to be a tug of war. On the one side, the finance capital and corporate interests who dominate Obama's transition team will tug hard for directing bailout money to banks, corporations, and bondholders. On the other, the inchoate grassroots supporters will be promoting wealth redistribution, alternative energy programs, and withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as Iraq, a just resolution for Palestinians. Obama is not likely to be pulled across to their (our) side. But surely the old policies have broken down, new ones are needed, and he may be compelled to move part of the way. Whether or not he does, the dynamic tension between the dreams aroused by Obama the symbol and the policies espoused by Obama the politician may well contribute to the growth of movements for social change in the very near future.

President Obama's Foreign Policy The Change We Really Want?

JOANNE LANDY

WITH THE ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA, millions in the United States and around the world are hoping for relief from the dangerous arrogance and destructiveness of George Bush's foreign policy. President Obama is expected to take important positive initiatives — like closing Guantanamo and lifting the rule denying international organizations receiving U.S. aid the right to let women know about abortion. When the inevitable right-wing reaction to these initiatives comes, it will be crucial for us in the peace movement to defend them. On some broader questions, there is a chance that with strong continuing popular pressure — from both within and outside the United States — the pre-election hopes of many Obama supporters can be realized on issues such as an end to the war in Iraq or stepping back from Bush's attempt to install "missile defense" in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The Obama administration will face a host of critical issues in foreign policy, such as how to relate to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Israel and Palestine, Cuba, Russia, China, Latin America, AFRICOM (the new Pentagon structure for Africa), North Korea, NATO expansion, weapons in space, nuclear and conventional weapons — and perhaps most important, the international economy and global warming. Popular movements can succeed in moving Obama to some degree on these questions, and that makes immediate mobilization imperative. But achieving a thoroughgoing and consistent progressive foreign policy will require

a substantive, not just rhetorical, transformational politics in the United States that goes far beyond what we have reason to expect from Barack Obama's presidency.

Obama's foreign policy advisors and appointments, campaign speeches and website remind us that he has already shown his support for many of the central tenets of U.S. imperial policy. More fundamentally, given the corporate interests with which Obama and the Democratic Party are intertwined, there are limits to how far his administration can or will go in transforming U.S. relations with the rest of the world.

But people have been energized by the sweeping repudiation of Bush's policies and the election of a candidate who has spoken broadly, albeit often vaguely, of the need for change. If movements in this country and abroad can build on popular hopes and show that what is needed is genuinely progressive change, they can push U.S. foreign policy to those limits, and place on the public agenda more profound challenges to the way the United States relates to its own people and the rest of the world. In so doing we can begin the process of forging the radical-democratic transformational politics this country requires.

A New U.S. Foreign Policy

THE PEACE MOVEMENT HAS LONG BEEN doing extremely valuable work opposing the many wars, interventions, and weapons systems of the U.S. government. But it is also necessary to step back from these day-to-day defensive battles and think in a broad, positive way about what a progressive U.S. foreign policy would look like. The New York-based Campaign for Peace and

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Democracy (of which I am a co-director) has contributed to the discussion of a new foreign policy, advocating a "détente from below" approach to resolving international conflict by forging an alternative to great power politics, an alternative based on movements for peace, social justice and democratic liberties across national boundaries.¹ The Campaign calls for a new U.S. foreign policy that will:

- Renounce the use of military intervention to extend and consolidate U.S. imperial power. This would mean withdrawing all U.S. troops from around the world and closing down the more than 900 U.S. global military bases.
- End support for corrupt and authoritarian regimes.
- Oppose, and end U.S. complicity in, all forms of terrorism worldwide.
- Reject the notion that great powers have the right to "spheres of influence" that deny smaller nations their rights and autonomy. This means that Russia has no legitimate claim to hegemony over Georgia, Ukraine, or the rest of what it considers its "near abroad," but likewise that the U.S. has no right to intimidate Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, or other countries in the Caribbean, Central America or Latin America.
- Support the right of national self-determination for all peoples; in the Middle East, this would include the Kurds, Palestinians and Israeli Jews.
- End one-sided support for Israel in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
- Take major unilateral steps toward renouncing weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and vigorously promote international disarmament treaties.
- End double standards whereby some countries are unjustly allowed to have nuclear weapons and others are not.
- Abandon and replace a global economic sys-

tem that brings mass misery and insecurity to people around the world.

Perhaps the most disturbing element of Obama's program, repeatedly stated during his campaign and afterwards, is his plan to increase the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.

These initiatives, taken together, would constitute a truly democratic foreign policy. Such a policy could begin to reverse the mistrust and outright hatred felt by so much of the world's population toward the United States. At the same time, it would weaken the rationale for imperial interven-

tions by other great powers, and undercut the appeal of terrorism and reactionary religious fundamentalism. Though nothing the United States can do would decisively undermine these elements right away — they were, after all, a long time in the making — over time a new U.S. foreign policy would drastically undercut their power and influence.

Obama's Foreign Policy

PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE enormously relieved by the defeat of John McCain, and hope that it signals a rejection of eight years of the destructive policies of the Bush Administration. And indeed, we can expect that President Barack Obama will put an end to the macho cowboy style of George W. Bush, with his bellicose rhetoric of "If you're not with us, you're against us," "Bring 'em on," "Axis of Evil," "Dead or Alive," and "Global War on Terror." But the end to such provocations, while extremely welcome, is not enough. And a review of some highlights of Obama's foreign policy positions gives cause for concern, even alarm.²

(1) Afghanistan and Pakistan

PERHAPS THE MOST DISTURBING ELEMENT of Obama's program, repeatedly stated during his campaign and afterwards, is his plan to increase

the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan — above the 30,000 troops already there, and quite possibly above the 20,000 additional troops recently requested by the Pentagon. Obama is also expected to try to pressure NATO countries to increase their military forces in Afghanistan, though he is likely to encounter considerable resistance from governments facing voters unhappy with the prospect of sending their soldiers into what appears increasingly to be a dangerous and unwinnable war.

Obama has threatened to target Osama bin Laden and other “high value” al Qaeda figures in Pakistan, with or without the agreement of the Pakistani government. It is not yet clear whether Obama intends to continue Bush’s policy of using American military power to attack Taliban forces in Pakistan’s northern areas. In any case, U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and Pakistan is doomed to fail, but beyond that, the U.S. ground and air wars routinely kill and wound large numbers of civilians, in the process recruiting waves of new supporters of terrorism and fundamentalism.

Pakistani General Kayani declared after an American ground raid in September 2008 that Pakistan would defend its borders at “all costs” if there were further incursions by U.S. troops, and President Bush was forced, at least temporarily, to cease these ground attacks. At first Pakistani authorities indicated that they would look the other way if U.S. military forces acted only from the air. However, public opinion in Pakistan was so inflamed by the violation of Pakistani sovereignty and the loss of life caused by U.S. air attacks that Pakistani politicians have been compelled to condemn U.S. aggression from the air as well as on the ground. After meeting with the new head of the U.S. Central Command, David Petraeus, on November 3, 2008, Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari revealed the pressure he was feeling when he said, “Continuing drone attacks on our territory, which result in loss of precious lives and property, are counterproductive and difficult to ex-

plain by a democratically elected government. It is creating a credibility gap.”³ Yet the Bush bombing goes on.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has likewise protested against aerial attacks that kill civilians, though it is unclear whether he called outright for ending the use of air power. But if it were so easy to avoid slaughtering civilians when fighting an insurgency from the air, the United States probably would have done so already. However, the alternative Obama has advocated so far, sending in more ground troops so as not to rely so heavily on aerial attacks,⁴ is no more likely to succeed than previous occupations by the British or the Russians. And as U.S. ground troops face near-inevitable defeats in fighting against the Taliban, the pressure to bring in air power will be hard to resist.

Only a political, rather than a military, solution can offer any hope of undermining al Qaeda and rescuing Afghanistan from a restoration of Taliban rule. But this is impossible as long as the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban is seen as part of a U.S. imperial agenda. We need to recall that al Qaeda was founded in the first place in opposition to the post-Gulf War U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia—and it wasn’t just Osama bin Laden’s personal objection; he was able to exploit a deep resentment against U.S. forces throughout the Middle East.

What is needed is precisely *not* to inject U.S. or NATO power into the politics of the region. Many analysts have argued that a stable resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan will require some kind of regional settlement involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Iran. This may well be the case, but as an outside imperial force, deeply and rightly mistrusted, the United States should not be a player in any regional settlement (beyond providing aid and guarantees of non-interference). The United States will inevitably distort and poison the process as it attempts to configure the outcome to serve its military, corporate and realpolitik goals. With-

out the American presence, new, more democratic political groupings — alternatives to both the corrupt Karzai government and the Taliban — could have the chance to emerge over time.

(2) Iran

OBAMA'S ELECTION HAS BEEN MET WITH enthusiasm in the United States, Iran and throughout the Middle East (with the notable exception of Israel, where reaction is noticeably cooler). People hope that Obama's willingness to negotiate without preconditions and to tone down warlike threats can create a relaxation in tensions between the United States and Iran. But there are disturbing signs that the new Obama administration could nonetheless move toward war.

The Washington-based Bipartisan Policy Center issued a report in September 2008 "Meeting the Challenge: U.S. Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development" that not only explored the idea of blockading Iran's gasoline imports, but also said that "a military strike is a feasible option and must remain a last resort." Among the report's authors is Dennis Ross, one of Obama's top Middle East advisers. *New York Times* editorial board member Carol Giacomo wrote a widely circulated editorial comment on November 3, 2008, expressing concern that this report and other Washington discussions about Iran were all too reminiscent of the climate that preceded the Iraq War. On the other hand, another report, the Joint Experts' Statement on Iran (www.justforeignpolicy.org/experts.pdf), points in a less bellicose direction, though one that still sees a role for the exercise of U.S. power in the region. It remains to be seen whether Obama will follow the guidelines of either of these two reports.

Obama has often said categorically that the United States cannot allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. But what if, as is more than likely, the Iranians insist in negotiations on having "everything but" a nuclear weapon — in other words, developing all of the components

needed for a nuclear bomb without actually having one? In the October 29, 2008 *London Review of Books*, the respected scholar Ervand Abrahamian wrote that even the Iranian "minimalists," often defined in the West as "reformists," who see Ahmadinejad as being dangerously provocative, would nonetheless "like to develop the [nuclear] programme slowly, thus gaining the knowledge and equipment needed to produce weapons in the long term. In nuclear parlance, this is known as the Japanese option. Some thirty countries have this option, and it has probably been Iran's unstated goal for the last twenty years."⁵

The Iranian government will probably insist on pursuing at least this "minimalist" option, which is understandable if not supportable given the fact that the United States (along with the other nuclear powers), through decades of both Democratic and Republican administrations, has made clear its commitment to keeping and upgrading its own nuclear arsenal. As the Campaign for Peace and Democracy pointed out in its 2006 sign-on statement "Iran: Neither U.S. Aggression Nor Theocratic Repression":

An end to Washington's belligerence is a crucial step in preventing Tehran from joining the nuclear "club." Beyond that, the only way to stop proliferation is for those countries that have nuclear weapons to begin disarming — something the Bush administration and previous administrations of both parties have refused to do, despite the fact that the U.S. is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty which commits it to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament." At the same time the nuclear powers must work toward nuclear-free zones around the world, but especially in the Middle East, a particularly volatile and dangerous region. www.cpdweb.org/statements/1005/stmt.html

The only effective way to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons to Iran and other

countries is for the nuclear powers to take disarmament initiatives that foster a political climate in which it's more difficult for them to go

Any peace movement call for negotiations with Iran needs to avoid legitimating the idea that military threats should be made against Iran to convince them to abandon their pursuit of nuclear weaponry.

down this road. President Obama needs to feel public pressure to move toward disarmament, and any peace movement call for negotiations with Iran needs to avoid legitimating the idea that military threats should be made against Iran to convince them to abandon their pursuit of nuclear weaponry.⁶ Leading Iranian dissidents like Akbar Ganji and Shirin Ebadi have stressed that such threats, by offering a rationale for cracking down on human rights campaigners, feminists and other independent activists and intellectuals, only serve to strengthen the hand of Ahmadinejad.⁷

(3) Israel-Palestine

RESOLUTION OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN conflict is the cornerstone of any lasting peace in the Middle East. But for too long, U.S. foreign policy and world peace itself have been held hostage to the aggressive policies of Israeli hawks. For decades both Democratic and Republican administrations have given lip service to the rights of Palestinians while giving billions of dollars in economic and military aid to Israel even as it flagrantly denies those rights.

Will the Obama administration finally break from this destructive history and open the way for a real two-state solution? Throughout his campaign, Obama took positions on Israel-

Palestine that were basically indistinguishable from the pandering to Israeli government policy of the Bush Administration, and his appointment of Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff is not encouraging. But it is conceivable — though unlikely — that Obama will move in a new direction on this critical issue. Anyone who hopes for peace in the Middle East should help put the greatest possible pressure on the new administration to make this happen.

(4) Challenging the Empire Itself

A CRUCIAL FEATURE OF A NEW PROGRESSIVE U.S. foreign policy would be renunciation of the idea that the United States must be an uncontested imperial force that dares not lose “credibility” and therefore has to be the “Number One” global military power. A look at the Obama-Biden campaign website shows a very different approach.

Below are excerpts from the campaign positions on foreign policy and defense from the Obama-Biden campaign website. For the fuller positions readers can go to (www.barackobama.com/issues/)

BUILD DEFENSE CAPABILITIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

- **Expand to Meet Military Needs on the Ground:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden support plans to increase the size of the army by 65,000 soldiers and the Marines by 27,000 troops. Increasing our end strength will help units retrain and re-equip properly between deployments and decrease the strain on military families.
- **Fully Equip Our Troops for the Missions They Face:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we must get vitally needed equipment to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines before lives are lost. We cannot repeat such failures as the delays in deployment of armored vehicles, body armor and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles that save lives on the frontlines.
- **Review Weapons Programs:** We must rebalance our capabilities to ensure that our forces have the agility and lethality to succeed

in both conventional wars and in stabilization and counter-insurgency operations. Obama and Biden have committed to a review of each major defense program in light of current needs, gaps in the field, and likely future threat scenarios in the post-9/11 world.

• **Preserve Global Reach in the Air:** We must preserve our unparalleled airpower capabilities to deter and defeat any conventional competitors, swiftly respond to crises across the globe, and support our ground forces. We need greater investment in advanced technology ranging from the revolutionary, like Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and electronic warfare capabilities, to essential systems like the C-17 cargo and KC-X air refueling aircraft, which provide the backbone of our ability to extend global power.

• **Maintain Power Projection at Sea:** We must recapitalize our naval forces, replacing aging ships and modernizing existing platforms, while adapting them to the 21st century. Obama and Biden will add to the Maritime Pre-Positioning Force Squadrons to support operations ashore and invest in smaller, more capable ships, providing the agility to operate close to shore and the reach to rapidly deploy Marines to global crises.

• **National Missile Defense:** An Obama-Biden administration will support missile defense, but ensure that it is developed in a way that is pragmatic and cost-effective; and, most importantly, does not divert resources from other national security priorities until we are positive the technology will protect the American public.

• **Ensure Freedom of Space:** An Obama-Biden administration will restore American leadership on space issues, seeking a worldwide ban on weapons that interfere with military and commercial satellites. He will thoroughly assess possible threats to U.S. space assets and the best options, military and diplomatic, for countering them, establishing contingency plans to ensure that U.S. forces can maintain or duplicate access to information from space assets and accelerating programs to harden U.S. satellites against attack.

THUS, DESPITE SOME WELCOME hesitations on missile defense, Obama has committed himself to building a military suitable for sustaining a foreign policy of threats and interventions abroad.

It was argued during the presidential campaign that Obama needed to say these things “in order to get elected,” but he didn’t really mean them. The time is now to put this hypothesis to the test. If we move quickly, we may be able to get Obama to reverse some of his retrograde campaign pledges, whether he meant them or not.

A good case in point is the proposed U.S. military radar in the Czech Republic and companion Interceptor missiles for Poland. President Bush has already signed agreements with both countries to install these bases. Obama has indicated a positive attitude toward expanding U.S. “missile defense,” but has allowed for a loophole — that he wants to be assured that such systems work before moving ahead. Meanwhile, the movement against the Czech radar has been astoundingly successful. Over 70 percent of the population opposes the radar, and the government has not yet been able to achieve a parliamentary vote in favor of accepting it. The vote has been postponed, and will probably not take place until after Obama is in office. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has worked with several other U.S. peace organizations to support its Czech friends and dissuade the Bush Administration from moving forward with this project.⁸ President Obama needs to hear from the opposition to this dangerous escalation into a new Cold War, not because “it won’t work,” but because it sharply raises the level of nuclear tension in the world.

U.S. GLOBAL POWER AND INFLUENCE ARE on the decline — Latin America’s leftward shift, the growing economic power of China, and European moves toward independence from the United States are all indications of the decline. But President Bush refused to acknowl-

edge this reality and instead tried to compensate for the waning economic hegemony of the

Obama's promises and rhetoric suggest a stepping back from the most reckless adventures of the Bush administration. But the imperial policies he embraces mean that the risk of dangerous confrontation remains substantial.

United States with wild and erratic military moves such as the war in Iraq, NATO expansion, war threats against Iran, attacks on Pakistan, support for the unstable Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, and the escalation of "Star Wars."

How will Barack Obama respond to this horrific legacy? Obama's promises and rhetoric suggest a stepping back from the most reckless adventures of the Bush administration. But the imperial policies he embraces mean that the risk of dangerous confrontation remains substantial. All too often many Obama supporters, and at times Obama himself, go further and suggest that in rejecting the failures of the last eight years, what we need to do is return to the Golden Age of the Clinton Administration, and/or to the more multilateral and restrained *modus vivendi* of the first President Bush.

It is worth going back, then, to take a look at the foreign policy of the Clinton Administration and think about whether this is really where we want to go. Andrew Bacevich, who is far from a leftist, has captured Clinton's foreign policy legacy well in his important recent book, *The Limits of Power*:

During the first year of his administration, Clinton developed a prodigious appetite for bombing . . . Nowhere did Clinton's infatua-

tion with air power find greater application than in Iraq, which he periodically pummeled with precision-guided bombs and cruise missiles.⁹

. . . [In 1993, Clinton] proceeded to foster a Pax Americana-lite, generously seasoned with American military might . . . Bill Clinton dispatched U.S. troops to Somalia, Haiti and the Balkans, as U.S. missiles and bombs blasted Serbs, Sudanese, Afghans, and Iraqis.¹⁰

Democratic Party critics of George W. Bush's foreign policy like Madeleine Albright often make Bush's unilateralism the focus of their critique. But "multilateralism" in and of itself does not necessarily a progressive foreign policy make. While it may restrain the United States from some of its more outlandish projects, multilateralism has typically offered a merely more cohesive and rational basis for imperial politics — for example, the decades of cooperation between Europe and the United States during the Cold War — or the 1991 Gulf War, when George H.W. Bush garnered support for using force from the United Nations Security Council.

Today's dramatic international economic meltdown underscores the need for a radically different kind of multilateralism — a multilateralism of peoples and governments that genuinely represent them, capable of creating an equitable and democratic global economic and political system. In a word, socialism. Today millions are victims of the gyrations of corporations, their markets, and the governments that are subservient to them. While greater corporate regulation should be demanded, the core problem is that the dynamics of capitalism tend to move beyond regulative constraints as the very logic of the system propels investment in the lowest-paid labor for the greatest profit, without regard for the social cost. Today we are suffering the human and environmental consequences of these dynamics.

The reputation of socialism has been tragically scarred by the horrors of bureaucratic Communism, and it will be very difficult to re-

vive the socialist ideal. But revive it we must, making absolutely clear our commitment to democracy as essential to any socialism worthy of support. While socialist victory is not on the agenda today, fewer and fewer people believe in the sanctity of markets and the legitimacy of corporations, which makes it once again possible to begin to challenge the sanctity and legitimacy of capitalism itself. In saying this, by no means do I mean to suggest that we should forget about immediate domestic and international struggles. This is not a time to say "Revolution is the only solution, reform is chloroform," but our work for immediate reform needs to be infused with a broader vision.

It is still hard to believe that this country, with its deeply racist heritage, actually elected an African-American to the presidency. Barack Obama's victory showed that the American people are truly capable of change, and this can inspire us in the work that lies ahead. Although in response to the intensifying crisis and popular pressure, he may take more radical steps than he originally intended, Obama himself is likely to disappoint — he has already begun to do so. But the heightened expectations that Obama has engendered can end up sparking immense new movements for social change. Let us hope that the movements will not only be militant in the streets, but will move toward creating a new political party free of the corporations, with labor and its allies setting the agenda. Such a party can actually begin to reshape our country's political landscape.

—November 19, 2008

NOTES

1. To learn more about the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, visit the CPD website at www.cpdweb.org
2. This article will only take up a few of the key foreign policy issues the new administration will face. A fuller account would address American foreign policy toward Asia, Africa and Latin America in detail.
3. "Petraeus, in Pakistan, Hears Complaints About Missile Strikes," by Jane Perlez, *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 2008.
4. Obama famously said about Afghanistan during his campaign, "We've got to get the job done there and that requires us to have enough troops so that we're not just air-raiding villages and killing civilians, which is causing enormous problems there."
5. "Who's in Charge?" by Ervand Abrahamian, review of *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* by Kasra Naji and *The Road to Democracy in Iran* by Akbar Ganji, *London Review of Books*, Oct. 29, 2008, www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n21/abra01_.html
6. We in the peace movement need to have a serious discussion about what we mean when we call for negotiations by the United States, not only with Iran but also with other countries. The Prussian military historian and theorist Carl von Clausewitz once said that war is the continuation of politics by other means. The reverse also applies, i.e. politics — and negotiations — can be war or intimidation by other means. We need to ask, then, what are the goals of our government (or any other government for that matter) as it enters into specific negotiations. Are they legitimate? Are they worthy of our support?
7. See, for example "Shirin Ebadi: Don't Attack Iran," by Robert Dreyfuss in *The Nation*, April 29, 2008
8. For an account of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy's work against the Czech radar, go to www.cpdweb.org
9. *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* by Andrew J. Bacevich, (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2008) p.55
10. Bacevich, p. 116

Joe the Plumber

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

WHILE CAMPAIGNING IN OHIO in October, Senator Barack Obama was buttonholed by a voter named Joe who worried that he would suffer under Obama's tax plan if he bought out the plumbing business where he worked. "I don't mind paying just a little bit more than the waitress who I just met over there," Obama replied. "Things are slow, and she can barely make the rent . . . Right now, everybody's so pinched that business is bad for everybody. And I think when you spread the wealth around it's good for everybody."

To Republican strategists seeking to resuscitate Senator John McCain's ailing campaign, Obama's "spread the wealth around" comment seemed a gift. Never mind that Samuel J. Wurzelbacher was not a licensed plumber, that he had been fined for failing to pay taxes, or that his annual income is about \$40,000, a fraction of what he would have to make to see his taxes raised under Obama's plan. Joe the Plumber was pure allegory.

McCain mentioned "Joe the Plumber" twenty-one times in the final presidential debate, cobbling together a simulacrum of economic populism from his fear of taxes and big government. In the Republican playbook, Wurzelbacher personified the white working class — the very demographic Republicans needed to peel away in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. McCain hoped, by championing the cause of Joe the Plumber, to make up for his disastrous declaration in the midst of the greatest financial meltdown since the Great Depression that "the fundamentals of our economy are

strong."

Joe the Plumber was obliging. "I'm honestly scared for America," he told the press. "If you look at spreading the wealth, that's right out of Karl Marx's mouth."

More than fifteen years after the demise of the Soviet Union, Marx and socialism were, weirdly, front and center in an American presidential campaign.

"Is this a joke?" Sen. Joe Biden asked when a Republican television news anchor in Orlando, Florida, inquired if Obama was guided by Marx's dictum, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

But joke it was not. McCain began to refer to Obama as "Redistributionist in Chief." Gov. Sarah Palin took to calling Obama "Barack the Wealth Spreader" and laced her speeches with lines like, "Friends, now is no time to experiment with socialism." Even the relatively moderate Republican Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, chimed in, "I left Europe four decades ago because socialism has killed opportunities there . . . Senator Obama says he wants to pursue the same 'spread the wealth' ideas."

Redistribution, in this permutation, was not about socialism alone; it was about race. "Europeans call it socialism, Americans call it welfare, and Barack Obama calls it change," said Douglas J. Holtz-Eakin, McCain's top economic advisor. On Fox News, former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer stated, "He's going to redistribute wealth from people who do pay taxes to people who don't pay taxes. That's not a tax cut. That's putting more help to people on public assistance." It was obvious who McCain had in mind when he spoke of Obama "taking your money and giving it to

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someone else.”

Republican operatives seeking an electoral alliance of capital, white workers, and rural America against the poor, people of color, and urban America took heart when the Drudge Report unearthed a 2001 Chicago public radio interview in which Obama stated that the Warren Court “wasn’t that radical” because it “never ventured into the issues of redistribution of wealth.” One tragedy of the civil rights movement, Obama noted, was its inability to “bring about the coalitions of power through which you bring about redistributive change.”

In the end, however, the Great Redistribution Scare was for naught. The conjecture that Obama would usher in a revolutionary Red state garnered not a single new Republican red state. The charge of “socialism” in a world without a Cold War had no more bite than earlier claims of a radical Obama based on his ties to the figuratively incendiary Rev. Jeremiah Wright and the literally incendiary Bill Ayers. Exit polls showed that far more voters thought McCain had attacked Obama unfairly than the reverse, and a slightly lower percentage of whites voted for McCain than had voted for George W. Bush in 2004.

Despite endless worrying in the press over the racism of blue-collar whites, white-collar and wealthy whites proved more averse to Obama. Obama won 60 percent of all voters making less than \$50,000 and half of those making more than \$50,000. In spite of Obama’s own artless remark in San Francisco that “bitter” rust-belt residents “cling to guns or religion,” he wound up performing just as well as Kerry had in 2004 among white, union, and working-class voters, while benefiting from outsized margins among African-American, Latino, women, and youth voters.

The Republicans’ populist theme disintegrated in part because of their own class vulnerabilities, such as their standard-bearer’s seven homes and the revelation that the Republican National Committee had spent more than

\$150,000, three times the average household annual income, on attire and accessories for Palin — a gun-toting hockey mom married to a Steelworkers member who was supposed to help deliver “Joe Six-Pack.” Obama deftly

The crucial gauge is whether the labor movement, or what remains of it, succeeds in wresting passage of its number one objective, the Employee Free Choice Act.

mocked his own “communistic” sharing of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches as a child, while tirelessly explaining that his plan would actually reduce taxes for most Americans, including 99 percent of all plumbers.

What the corporate media commentators have not fully appreciated, however, is how much the talk of “redistribution” this year may actually have worked to Obama’s advantage. It would be wishful thinking to imagine that most Obama voters thought they were endorsing socialism, but in setting aside the redbaiting bugaboo, many surely projected that “redistribution” — if there were any — could only benefit them. Rather than taking the word as a synecdoche for race, taxes, and radicalism, they may have taken it as a synecdoche for health care, jobs, and fairness. Incomes in the bottom 90 percent of households have barely budged for three decades, while households in the top 1 percent garner a higher proportion of the national income than at any time since 1928. Add to the picture the financial crisis and deepening recession, the hemorrhaging of jobs, home values, and retirement accounts, and the phrase “spread the wealth around” may have seemed, despite Obama’s downplaying of it, to carry a ring of justice.

The irony of it all is that Barack Obama is

a centrist. His health care plan, a far cry from the Canadian single-payer system, is amenable to corporate insurers and employers. His tax plan will merely restore the Clinton-era marginal tax rate for those making more than \$250,000. His largest bundlers were firms like Goldman Sachs, Google, Microsoft, Morgan Chase, Citigroup, Time Warner, and Morgan Stanley. His admirers include Warren Buffett, Paul Volcker, and Colin Powell. His first appointment, Rahm Emanuel as White House chief of staff, signifies that Obama is set to deliver a centrism not even scaled to the peaks of his own inspired oratory.

This has not stopped intellectuals on the right from continuing to harp on the “socialist” fantasy. L. Brent Bozell, writing on the *National Review* web site the day after the election, declared that Obama will “deliver socialism, something too many of his supporters never saw coming.” This does not square with Obama’s record. Like McCain, Obama supported the \$750-billion Wall Street bailout now being used for mergers and acquisitions that will consolidate the banking industry in fewer hands, along with partial nationalizations to restore the financial sector’s profitability rather than extend common democratic ownership.

To packed arenas, Obama frequently vowed that real change comes from below. He was right. The same truth will apply under an Obama administration. The American working class will see its interests advance under Obama only if activity materializes from below.

The crucial gauge is whether the labor movement, or what remains of it, succeeds in wresting passage of its number one objective, the Employee Free Choice Act. Obama supports this reform nominally but did not men-

tion it in his debates or campaign speeches. The Employee Free Choice Act, already passed by the House, would make it possible for employees who want a union to win representation simply by signing cards rather than going through a protracted election process that permits companies to scare and harass workers. Since unions are crucial for upholding wages, benefits, and working conditions, the present injurious maldistribution of wealth cannot be corrected unless the playing field is leveled for labor.

Winning this reform will require mobilizing Maria the Waitress, Juan the Meatpacker, Shawna the Call Center Rep, and Amar the Bus Boy, not just Joe the Plumber. The American working class has always been more diverse — and is now especially so — than the white male iconography favored by Republicans ever since Nixon mobilized hardhats to beat up anti-war demonstrators in 1970. The angry white ethnic is as obsolete a symbol of the working class as is the brawny Communist proletarian of the 1930s.

In the absence of legislation like the Employee Free Choice Act, working-class insecurity will persist. That presents the prospect that a frustrated — bitter — segment of the working class will become disenchanted with the politics of hope and lurch back to the politics of resentment, whose cinders still glow on Fox News and talk radio. Then Joe the Plumber would not seem just a cartoonish footnote to history, but a forerunner of backlash.

The real gift to Obama’s conservative detractors, in other words, will be if his years in office end without substantial progress toward addressing the inequities and hardships now burdening America’s working-class majority. Call that socialism if you must; it’s up to us to make it happen.

Corruption on Display, Democracy at Bay At the SEIU Convention and Beyond

HERMAN BENSON

“WE MAY BE ON THE CUSP OF HISTORY where the world pivots and almost everything is possible,” Steve Lerner wrote on the *Monthly Review* web site. He was obviously self-inspired by the grandiloquent vision he and other leaders of the Service Employees International Union had projected at the union’s convention in June. Still, there was no army of reporters milling about the convention sessions in Puerto Rico to watch the unfolding of great events. Diverted by wars, earthquakes, floods, massacres, and an unconventional presidential election, the mainstream press is not generally interested in what’s doing in unions. And this convention might have seemed like just another old sock union gathering. But, even after discounting for Lerner’s hyperbole, this was more than just another “labor” event.

With a million and a half members and growing, and with an enormous treasury, the SEIU is one of the nation’s biggest and most powerful of our unions. Its international president, Andy Stern, led a consortium of fellow traveling unions out of the AFL-CIO into Change to Win, a new rival federation. His own union, with its base among healthcare workers, building service employees, and public employees, is insulated from the ravages of global capitalism. You can’t outsource nursing home residents and elevator operators to China. But it’s not the millions of members and bulging treasury that command attention, but President Stern’s singular intended use of those resources.

Climaxing Stern’s twelve years in office, a big majority of the 1,900 convention delegates endorsed his program and endowed him with an enormous increase in power, amounting to presidential authoritarianism wrapped in the verbiage of democracy.

Nevertheless, he has paid a high price for that victory. When he first took office 12 years ago, labor activists and pro-labor academics greeted his plans with a near-unanimous enthusiasm, and he was hailed as the great new promising labor leader. He emerged from this convention stronger organizationally and constitutionally but with a diminished image, his glow dimmed. On the eve of the convention, 101 writers, labor educators, and academics expressed concern over the fate of SEIU democracy under his tutelage. Sal Rosselli, a major SEIU leader, broke with the administration and came forward as an oppositionist. Unexpectedly more than a dozen rank and file delegates ran for international positions as insurgents. None was successful, but protest votes on their behalf were recorded from 15 percent of the delegates. (After the convention, they organized SMART, a continuing national independent caucus.)

The union administration summed up its proposed program of action in an ambitious, emotion-stimulating 31-page declaration, “Justice for All.” It began on a high note of great promise and expectation. “We stand for not only ‘Just Us’ but for ‘Justice for All’ workers in our industries and in our country.” It called for “a more just and humane society,” for us and “for future generations.” That lofty theme was sustained and repeated in a multitude of variations. Sadly, that dream of a lovely future must be

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tested against the sordid reality of daily life in the post-convention SEIU.

THE STERN ADMINISTRATION'S PLAN proposes to "involve all local unions to jointly develop one national strategy" to recruit 500,000 more members by the next convention in 2012 and bring the union's membership up to 2.3 million. "All levels of the union," the plan decrees, "will be accountable for their contribution to the strategy." Every local union will turn over 20 percent of its working budget into division "Unity Funds" and 10 to 12 percent into political action. By 2012, a majority of SEIU members should be induced to donate an average of at least \$7 every month to the SEIU political action fund. Resources from the international will be added, at the discretion of the International Executive Board, to implement the strategy. The money from these huge funds will finance organizing and political action. Two hundred thousand members, it promises, will be involved in "leadership roles" and 1,000,000 more in "membership action." In politics, the goal is to elect a "pro-worker" president, 2 or 3 new pro-worker governors and 60 or more Senators, and to win "universal health care reform."

Stern's program, fueled by millions of dollars and masses of people, is touted as a plan to revive the labor movement and change the nation in four years. Any objections must have seemed niggling to Stern's ardent followers. No one faulted the lofty goals. In a post-convention letter to educators, a Rosselli spokesman wrote, "Delegates from our local union . . . supported core parts of a platform proposed by our union's national leadership, including expanding our organizing efforts and improving regional and national coordination among SEIU locals." Who can object to a just and humane society?

Yet there was criticism, and it was just as sharp and emotional as Stern's support was fervid. It emanated from two sources: 140 delegates from Sal Rosselli's 140,000-member United

Healthcare Workers-West and about 100 delegates from other locals, many of whom joined together in a new loose rank and file dissident caucus called SMART (for SEIU Member Activists for Reform Today.)

How to go about revitalizing the labor movement and changing the world? There's the rub.

But the heart of the Stern plan, the magic bullet, is a new approach to organizing, not in conflict or confrontation with multi-million dollar global capitalists and corporate buyout firms, but in cooperation with them.

In the spirit of "one national strategy" and "one voice" (phrases repeated over and again) the administration proposed a bewildering creation of boards, committees, and subcommittees — wheels within wheels — all dominated by the international president. Three Leadership Boards preside over the union's three main divisions with the chair who "can be a fulltime officer" appointed by the president.

The divisions will create National Bargaining Teams, National Bargaining Councils, and Local Bargaining Councils. The president appoints the national bargaining chair and the bargaining team and "authorizes" national bargaining, with different teams and rules for "low density," "high density," and "no density" "settings." Dizzying!

Nevertheless, the convention swallowed the whole program holus bolus, even though no assemblage of almost two thousand delegates could possibly digest all the details. In any event, the critics from UHW-W charge that the new

structure of Division Leadership Boards and National Bargaining Teams is overloaded with international officers and appointive staff and reduces the representation of local leaders and rank and filers.

But the heart of the Stern plan, the magic bullet, the innovative device that he hopes will open the road to a prompt massive rise in membership is a new approach to organizing, not in conflict or confrontation with multi-million dollar global capitalists and corporate buyout firms, but in cooperation with them. Everything is oriented toward that end: The centralization of power in the international, the extraction of organizing funds from the locals to the international, the emphasis, repeated over and again, on “one voice” and “strategic unity,” even its political action program, provide the organizational and psychological justification for Stern’s basic policy.

This central aim was only imperfectly touched upon, and only by implication, in convention documents. (“The organizing process established by the National Labor Relations Act can no longer be counted on to protect workers’ freedom to form a union,” reads the administration’s program and adds, “It takes huge amounts of resources to persuade some of the largest and most powerful corporations in the world to respect workers’ rights . . .”) But the strategic inspiration for the guiding line is explained more explicitly by Steve Lerner, SEIU’s spokesman, in the essay for *Monthly Review’s* website.

Lerner accuses Stern’s critics of business unionism, more exactly of “left business unionism” or “neo-business unionism.” And what precisely is this newly discovered application of that over-whipped horse? According to Lerner, it means “left rhetoric about militant struggle, better contracts, and servicing members through greater local autonomy . . . it is arguing for more of the 1950s strategy of dedicating the union’s resources to existing members instead of building a broader workers’ movement: a prescrip-

tion for the death of the labor movement.” After Lerner, the term “business unionism” loses any value it may ever have had as analysis and is turned into a derogatory epithet like “fascist” or “communist” or “you’re another.”

To put it plainly after stripping away all its history-sweeping dressing, Lerner’s formulation charges his critic Sal Rosselli of being overly concerned with the (trivial?) needs of his own membership at the expense of Lerner’s glorious goal of “changing the world not just their [unionists’] work sites.” Or, as Stern might put it less grandiosely, Rosselli may overemphasize “individual grievances.” Is the charge justified; or, as Rosselli argues, is it a misrepresentation of his view? An answer to that question might be of some minor interest to SEIU members in their internal factional fight. But the very charge itself is loaded with significance. It tells us little about Rosselli but a lot about Lerner’s and Stern’s prescription for the labor movement. Lerner has a talent for deploying the verbiage and ideology of the left to justify quite a different program. It is that talent which has enabled Stern to retain the support of activist union members and radically inclined intellectuals, or at least to neutralize them. Lerner provides the kind of radical aura that reassures socially conscious radicals in and around the labor movement. Stern presides over the earthy reality that aims to satisfy his employer partners.

THERE’S AN IRONY HERE. Lerner’s description of “left rhetoric” is faulty by omission. The left has always criticized the labor movement for concentrating on the “narrow” interests of its members. Lerner’s criticism may seem the same, but his conclusion is quite the opposite. The difference lies in this: the left insisted that the labor movement must broaden its approach to “confront” capitalism and engage in a “militant struggle” against capitalists. Instead of “militant struggle,” Lerner finds the answer in cooperation with those very-big capitalists. He sums up the Stern program as “comprehen-

sive corporate social responsibility campaigns that seek to win employer neutrality.”

Not just for us but justice for all is the Stern watchword, obliquely suggesting that his critics are preoccupied with the narrow, selfish interests of their own members at the expense of the exploited workers of the world. It is startling to realize how closely this appeal gives a radical twist to a familiar argument by right-wingers who charge that unions simply raise standards for a pampered and privileged minority of the workforce at the expense of the low-paid majority. Partisans of the labor movement know that organizing and improving life for union members lifts the status of all labor and exerts an upward pressure on conditions for all labor, organized and unorganized. When an SEIU local charges that a Stern-negotiated agreement is substandard; it is not selfishly demanding “justice for us”: it aims to defend “justice for all.”

Lerner-Stern are unique in this: They seem to see an unavoidable conflict between the direct interests of those already organized and those whom they want to organize. And so they charge that those in the SEIU who insist upon defending the standards and rights of their members under their union contracts are betraying all the other great causes. To pursue great dreams, they are trying to tell us, we must be willing to ignore the needs of those already organized.

Social radicals admire unions which look beyond their own members to serve the interests of workers of the whole nation, even workers of the world. However, it is the dues-paying members who must support every noble cause. No union membership will remain enthusiastic over sacrificing for the rights of others if their union will not vigorously process their own grievances. A union whose leadership neglects its members will pay a price, one way or another. If union democracy remains robust, such leaders are in danger of repudiation and defeat. If they hope to pursue their own vision without

serving their members, they will inevitably seek security by erecting a protective wall against democracy by building a political machine based on patronage for friends and intimidation of critics. To preserve its democracy, a union must combine the campaigns for great social goals with vigorous service for its own members.

Stern is convinced that traditional unionism is not working. Instead of the old-fashioned method of organizing and inspiring workers in a battle for union recognition, he hopes for employers’ cooperation. Many months before the convention, Stern elaborated his program, in words and in action. After interviewing Stern for the *Wall Street Journal*, Kris Maher wrote, “Mr. Stern says he wants to remake the labor movement by shedding the old adversarial image and creating more labor management partnerships.” Stern told him, “We want to find a 21st century new model that is less focused on individual grievances, more focused on industry needs.” Alan Murray, of the *WSJ*, wrote that Stern told him, “he much prefers working with the buyout kings than with their public-company counterparts. ‘I’ve been incredibly impressed,’ he said, ‘. . . these men have much more understanding of what we are trying to accomplish.’” “What all this means in practice is revealed in actual agreements Stern worked out with co-operating employers.

In 2003, Stern negotiated an agreement with the California Alliance, an association representing 284 nursing homes. Earlier the SEIU had campaigned jointly with nursing home employers in a successful political campaign for increased state healthcare subsidies. Owners got \$119 million in 2007 with an additional \$180 million to come in 2008. In agreements with the SEIU, the employers’ Alliance turned over 42 of its homes with some 2,000 members to the union; but the union agreed that it would be barred from trying to organize its 185 non-union facilities. According to the UHW-W critics, the agreement covering the newly organ-

ized sites undercuts union standards in the industry; it provided no vacation, holiday, or sick pay; no seniority rights, strict limits on stewards, and management's right to change the economic terms of the agreement. The SEIU units were, according to UHW, "close to becoming . . . company unions." It was Rosselli's demand for a repudiation of this kind of deal that marked his break with Stern and turned him into an outspoken oppositionist. Under pressure of mass protests from the UHW-W membership, Stern backed off and ended the controversial arrangement. But it soon became obvious that Stern, in a tactical retreat, had not backed off from his basic strategy.

On May 10, Kris Maher of the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the SEIU and UNITE/HERE [Change to Win allies] had entered into secret agreements with two global employers of service workers, Sodexo and the Compass Group. "The old ways aren't working," Stern told Maher, "and we're trying to find different relationships with employers that guarantee workers a voice."

In this illustration of the "new way," unions are formed behind the backs of workers and with the permission and cooperation of the employers. Not just the terms of the agreements, but their very existence is not to be disclosed, not even to the lucky new union members. Of the several hundred thousand workers employed in North America, the unions will be permitted to organize a limited number at designated sites; the companies will cooperate by providing lists of the employees and permitting union access to their work sites. The unions agree to be barred from attempting to organize the others; and they will not post derogatory remarks about the companies anywhere in the world. This secret agreement uncovers the secret of Stern's touted discovery of how to organize in this era of global capitalism. In its report to the SEIU convention, the administration takes credit for organizing 14,000 of those hundreds of thousands.

IN JUSTIFYING HIS NOVEL APPROACH TO organizing, Stern explained, "These workers have no unions; that's where we start from." A Stern supporter wrote to *Labor Notes*, "Are workers better off with no union at all? . . . we should organize workers by whatever means are available." Perhaps she is right. Nevertheless, this is the first time that the idea of building unions jointly with employers has been advanced with enthusiastic ideological underpinnings as the key step toward winning justice for workers of the world. As a sign of how low our expectations have fallen, this approach is received with acclaim by union idealists who serve the labor movement because they want to create a powerful force for democracy and social justice.

Better than no union? The danger is that what is intended as a union in embryo will turn into a new kind of degenerate hybrid. The fast kick can become an addiction. That this danger is real was revealed at the union's convention in June. In the name of modernizing operations, the SEIU has made central telephone or computer lines a main link between its officialdom and its million-member mass. The administration's program adopted by the convention provides that instead of presenting their "job problems" on the work site to a flesh and blood steward-representative, members will log into a "Membership Resource Center" where they will get "expert" advice from a voice at the other end of the line — perhaps human, perhaps electronic.

"Job problems" reviewed by disembodied voices at the end of the phone line; and grievances no longer handled by an actual person at the workplace: this novel system will transform the whole dynamic between the union and its members. Shop stewards under pressure of their constituents day to day on the job, especially those elected, are motivated to take grievances seriously and work hard to satisfy the grievant. But the owners of those telephone voices will know that they are appointed by an adminis-

tration that wants to minimize grievances as a distraction. To please their boss they can slough off those distracting “job problems.” (Stern has given the sign: he wants fewer grievances and more members.) The 31-page administration program, with its thousands of words, submitted to the June convention does not once mention the word grievance; members have “problems” on the job, not grievances against their employer. Grievances, excised from the language, disappear from the work site.

This convention’s blanket endorsement of the administration’s “Justice for All” program can be construed to endow President Stern with virtually unlimited power. It is like Congress’s Tonkin Bay resolution that President Johnson utilized to legitimate his every action in Viet Nam. Everything depends on who will interpret it and how. (President Stern has enormous personal power. Is the international executive board reconciled to being reduced to a mere rubber stamp?)

None of the issues could be adequately thrashed out on the convention floor and clearly posed for the delegates. In this, the SEIU convention resembled most union conventions where discussions and resolutions are filtered through convention committees appointed by the president. Independent-minded delegates must try to slip their ideas to the attention of delegates in the form of amendments to whatever the administration recommends and then squeeze their arguments into their four or five minutes of fame on the floor. Conventions are solemnly proclaimed as the highest union constitutional authority. Actually, except under the most unusual circumstances, they are essentially administration pep rallies.

This time, there was just a little bit more. Larry Bradshaw, a delegate from San Francisco, wrote of his impressions: “For most of us aligned with SMART [the rank and file opposition group] it was our first SEIU international convention. ‘We’ were rag-tag, clumsy, and easily outmaneuvered. ‘They’ were a slick, highly dis-

ciplined, and well-oiled machine. . . . ‘They’ set the agenda, chose the speakers, gave the presentations, and dominated much of the discussion time ‘We’ dutifully lined up at the microphones, often to be bypassed over or ignored . . . ‘They’ resembled an army with their headsets and vests . . . ‘We did not have a single headset, vest, or walkie-talkie . . . on the surface, ‘they’ won everything. Our little motley band of union reformers and rank-and-file dreamers succeeded in starting a debate inside the largest union in North America. We put forward an alternative vision of trade unionism, one for and by the rank and file. . . . On the final day . . . many delegates came up to thank us for being there, for speaking up. . . .”

Ominously, the convention voted to expand the reach of its constitutional ban on supporting “dual unionism.” A member or local union can now be disciplined for “aiding a rival labor organization.” This provision is obviously prompted by the rivalry between the SEIU and at least two other unions: the California Nurses and the Puerto Rico Teachers Federation. The California Nurses Association, an AFL-CIO affiliate, is extending its reach beyond California to the whole nation, thereby offering an alternative to registered nurses who might be dissatisfied with their existing SEIU representation. The bar on “aiding” rival unions can create an awkward problem for SEIU locals which have overlapping, but friendly, relations at some sites with the CNA where it represents nurses and the SEIU all other employees. Despite the hostility between the two national unions, practical necessity impels local unions to cooperate. Stern’s critics are wary of how he will interpret “aiding” a “rival.” Obviously, they fear that he will find a way to use the new provision against them.

In Puerto Rico, the SEIU is embroiled in a bitter dispute with the Teachers Federation, a 42,000-member independent union of public school teachers. After a 10-day strike in February 2008, the Federation was decertified and

lost its status as teachers' exclusive bargaining agent. The SEIU reached an affiliation agreement with a rival teachers' group and supported its petition for a collective bargaining election, which, in effect, could undermine The Teachers Federation. In front of the SEIU convention hall in Puerto Rico, a mass delegation of Teachers Federation members demonstrated with picket signs: "Stop the Raid!" Many of Stern's critics support the Federation's battle for survival. Will the new clause on "aiding" a "rival" make them vulnerable to disciplinary charges for openly expressing that support?

How successful will the Stern camp be in achieving its immediate practical objective of luring, or even pressuring, employers to accept unionism by offering a somewhat housebroken variety? It may not be easy to answer that question, because their claims of achievement are likely to be as exaggerated or illusory as their glowing prospectus. In any event, as the SEIU allocates enormous resources and as its enthusiastic ranks are mobilized for the task, the union is bound to organize new thousands. But that result is just as likely to result from the zeal of its members as from its new employer-oriented ideology. In the field, those embattled SEIU loyalists will probably feel free to violate the code of conciliation and revert to the "outmoded" methods of old-style confrontationist unionism to get the job done.

The core of this union has not been fabricated out of amicable deals with socially conscious employers. The SEIU builds upon an original power base that was created in the old-fashioned way, by the very methods that Stern's philosophy casts out as obsolete. Local 1199 unions in health care, those pillars of SEIU strength, won their place, after decades of militant battle. (Read the excellent history of Local 1199 by Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg.) The SEIU arose as a union of striking building service employees. In the *Nation* (6/16/08), Esther Kaplan writes, "... according to SEIU's own analysis, only a small portion of its explosive

growth springs from the controversial employer agreements. More than half of the new workers organized by SEIU between 2002 and 2006 were government workers . . . who came into the union as a result of pressure campaigns on governors and state legislatures . . . 16 percent came in through old-style Labor Board elections, 13 percent through corporate campaigns (the stick), and 13 percent through agreements that include various quid pro quos (the carrot.)"

Because the SEIU has been built and has acquired power by action of militant union loyalists, not by corporate partners, at some point even many of Stern's own followers are bound to ask, "What kind of labor movement do we really want?" For this generation of young union activists, the question cannot long be ignored. After 50 years of insurgency in unions, with the right to dissent backed by federal law, the spirit of internal union democracy is too deeply implanted to be suppressed. At the SEIU convention, that kind of questioning had already erupted.

The SEIU's rhetorical call for justice for all — for the poor, the immigrants, the minorities, the oppressed — has enabled Stern to rally round him a cadre of social idealists for whom the SEIU has become an extension of civil rights campaigning and community organizing. On the other hand, the SEIU trend toward bureaucratic centralized control, and its justification of a kind of defanged hybrid unionism to be built in cooperation with big domestic and global corporations, has alienated a whole other body of social idealists who view the labor movement as a democratic movement of workers.

Two conceptions of the labor movement are counterposed. This is no crude battle for personal power. It is no conflict between so-called "business" and "social" unionism. Nor between a conservative "right" and a militant "left." Nor between crooks and honest unionists. It is becoming a dispute over the meaning and nature of democracy in the labor movement.

How will it all work out? What is the fu-

ture of that hypothetical mass unionism to be built in cooperation with hedge fund managers and global capitalists? Will Stern's grand scheme fulfill its promise as an artful route toward social justice for all in America? Despite the flowery rhetoric, the basic program remains only a promise. It will take time, perhaps years, to test out the lofty verbiage.

Meanwhile, just months after the June convention adjourned, it became clear that the SEIU is already paying a heavy price for a mere promise. By August, locals with close to 20 percent of the entire membership (half of those in the SEIU main concentration: healthcare) were in locals suddenly subjected to monitorship or trusteeship imposed by the international office. Corruption was in full display. Democracy was under siege.

To get the kind of secondary leadership speaking with "one voice" for "one national strategy" and obedient to his will, Stern has used his commanding authority as president to install his own appointees to run huge locals. The very structure of their sprawling domains makes it difficult for any opposition to emerge. Appointive local leaders, in turn, create their own appointive local executive committees whose members sign oaths of loyalty to the leader. The locals mimic on a reduced scale what they copy from above. Result? Authoritarianism spawns corruption.

Some of Stern's key allies are charged with plundering big moneys from their union treasuries.

- Stern appointed Tyrone Freeman as president of the 150,000-member United Long-Term Care Workers Local 6434. The local is now in trusteeship; Freeman stands accused of siphoning off a million dollars from the union treasury to enrich friends and relatives; he faces internal union charges; a Congressional committee is investigating.

- Stern appointed Richard Jackson as president of the 55,000-member SEIU local in Michigan. He, too, had to step down. He had been part of Freeman's team in Local 6434 and is now accused

of involvement in Freeman's misappropriations.

- Stern appointed Annelle Grajeda president of the 77,000-member Local 721 of Los Angeles County employees, just one stop on her way to the top. When Stern maneuvered to oust Sal Rosselli as president of the SEIU California Council, he picked her to replace him. A second stage in her rise. Stern selected her as an international vice president, so that she became, with Stern, one of the SEIU's top international officers. She was forced to take a leave after reports that she had funneled thousands of union dollars to her boyfriend.

Stern looks for an antidote to corruption by expanding the union's own ethical practices code as though union officers might stop stealing if the guidelines were more unambiguous. Actually corruption is spawned by unchecked power. Part of the answer lies in democracy, in the right of members to criticize their officers without fear, to organize against them and to replace them if need be. But instead of reinforcing union democracy, Stern is grinding it down.

STERN'S VISION REQUIRES MORE THAN a compliant sub-leadership; it demands the suppression of effective critical opposition. Once Sal Rosselli, president of United Healthcare Workers-West, spoke out against the notion of building a big labor movement by cooperating with big capital, Stern obviously decided he had to be cut down. Rosselli enjoys influence and reputation in California as an outstanding labor leader, and he is armed with the money and staff of a 150,000-member local. By now, the Stern camp, deploying the full resources of the national union, is engaged in an unrelenting, multi-faceted drive against Rosselli, and the entire local leadership of UHW-W, and the local itself. Rosselli must be destroyed!

The campaign to undercut Rosselli began before the convention on a note familiar, even conventional, in the labor movement; he was denounced not so much for the content of his criticism as for the very act of criticizing. Rosselli

was president of the SEIU California State Council. Stern solved that problem simply by using his overweening presidential authority to dissolve the council and order elections for a new council, making sure that the basis of representation would assure the election of his more compliant choice. At this writing, the administration is moving to transfer 65,000 members out of Rosselli's UHW.

On the eve of the convention, it appeared for a moment as though a limit might be imposed on Stern's repressive designs. In March, after Stern took the preliminary steps toward trusteeing UHW-W, he seemed to have been forced to backtrack. Those 101 intellectuals and academics, and rank-and-file SEIUs publicly criticized the pending trusteeship as an attack on union democracy. To mollify the protesters, forty-seven high-placed SEIU leaders (three later faced corruption charges!) wrote, "... trusteeships should never be used to limit democratic debate in any union. In the case of the SEIU, your letter addressed a straw man since no such retaliatory trusteeship is under consideration nor would we ever approve one." Steve Lerner, top Stern aide, wrote that the trusteeship reference was a "myth." But after the convention, all stops were removed in the drive against Rosselli.

Three months later, on August 25, Stern instituted formal proceedings against UHW-W as the first step toward imposing a trusteeship; in the interim, he appointed two "monitors" to oversee local affairs and control all its expenditures. One of the monitors, Steve Lerner, is no myth. Those 47 SEIU leaders remained prudently silent; they have not publicly

disapproved.

To assure any skeptical public that the proceedings would be impartial, Stern retained Ray

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Marshall, a university professor and former secretary of labor, to preside over the hearings, which opened September 27 and 28, only to be adjourned until after the U.S. presidential elections. It will take many weeks or months to resolve the trusteeship issue. Stern obviously has confidence in Marshall, who, according to Steve Early, "serves on the board of the Economic

Policy Institute, a progressive think-tank backed by SEIU." Nevertheless, Stern and his followers, taking no chances, continue with their multi-pronged assault on all Rosselli forces:

Stern's followers instituted two separate federal suits both brought against Rosselli and members of the UHW executive board. The first, filed by the SEIU itself, was dismissed by a federal judge. The second, filed by two individual members of UHW-W, is pending. In both cases, the firm of Bredhoff and Kaiser was the complainants' attorney. Note: the suits were directed against the individual leaders of the local, not the local itself. That maneuver is intended to make it difficult for the prospective victims to mount an effective defense during extended legal proceedings. The complaint in one suit explicitly seeks "an injunction prohibiting defendants from using UHW-W funds for their defense. . . ."

Confident as Stern may be in Ray Marshall's performance, the professor still has his own reputation to maintain. Despite the SEIU's political clout, federal courts still remain unpredictably outside its control. And so in reserve, as a last

insurance against all uncertainty, Stern retains his unchecked power as international president in the attempt to dispose of the UHW-W:

California SEIUers are asked to vote in an advisory referendum: Shall all long-term healthcare workers — as in nursing homes — be transferred into one local; or shall all healthcare workers — including hospitals — be combined into a single big local of all healthcare workers. For Rosselli and UHW-W, it's heads you win, tails I lose. In one case, UHW-W would lose 65,000 members; in the other, it would be liquidated as a local, and Stern would appoint the officers of the new local.

Meanwhile, two sets of formal internal union charges and an additional threat hang over Rosselli. Two members of UHW-W have filed charges against Rosselli, accusing him of harassing them for supporting Stern's program. A second set of internal union charges have been filed by two international executive vice presidents against Rosselli and UHW-officers; in this case, the charges repeat accusations already before Marshall in the trustee hearings. In both cases, Stern has exercised his ample powers to assume jurisdiction. He will appoint the committee to try the critics whom he detests.

A third threat has not yet reached the level of formal charges. In a letter to Rosselli In July, SEIU General Counsel Judy Scott demanded that he reply to "some evidence" that his staff had turned over an SEIU membership list to the California Nurses Association in Iowa.

In summary, the UHW-W has confronted an action to weaken or destroy the local, a trustee threat, two federal lawsuits, two sets of internal union charges, and the threat of another. In many of these cases, the SEIU maneuvers to deprive its intended victims of the right to use local funds for legal defense while the full resources of the international are deployed against them. The right of union dissidents to effective legal defense is the key issue in most of these cases.

Earlier, in March 2008, the UHW-W ex-

ecutive board had deposited \$500,000 into a trust account with its attorney to provide for legal defense of the local's autonomy and of the democratic rights of its members and officers against the imposition of an illegal trusteeship. In scheduling the trusteeship hearings, Stern charged, "This is an inappropriate use of union monies." That charge, formulated and reformulated with repetitive emphasis, constitutes Stern's main indictment of Rosselli's local. Catch 22; the UHW faces trusteeship because it established a special fund to defend the local and its elected leadership against an illegal trusteeship!

The puzzling difficulty faced by UHW-W, and which it tried to surmount by establishing the legal defense fund, lies in federal law which provides that any trusteeship imposed by an international union is presumed to be valid for the first 18 months. Once a trusteeship is established, the international takes over the local treasury so that none of its members or elected officers have access to their own local's funds to defend their rights. Starved of money, they find it almost impossible to mount an effective legal case. Meanwhile, the international officials dip into the union's ample resources to defend their every action. Unrestrained for 18 months, armed with all the international and local levers of money and power, free to employ fear, favor, propaganda, and persuasion, the international moves to create its own political machine in the local and eliminate its annoying critics. Stern's trusteeship and internal charges are obviously intended to bring down Rosselli and simultaneously to deprive him of any means of effective legal defense. If he succeeds against Rosselli and his 150,000 members, no one in the SEIU can feel secure. Democracy could remain a word to be mouthed ritually but deprived of substance.

Stripped of its decorative rhetoric, Stern's personal program calls for rebuilding the labor movement in harmony with big capital by offering it a gentle hand. To carry out that program, he demands lockstep obedience from subordinates and harsh repression of critics.

A Brief History of Time

GRETA AART

In his book about the universe, Stephen Hawking states, "An event is something that happens at a particular point in space and at a particular time. So one can specify it by four numbers or coordinates."

A revolution begins
with an accident the drive
to connect swells in the streets,
the dance of a common language
society lost its voice individuals found theirs
Hands full of rocks, you were not playing
heroic ideology nineteenth-century statues watched
how De Gaulle propelled the crowds, perspiring
and measuring his height with students' fists
you shouted out from your lungs there was no echo
A tremor now breaks the surface of your breath
your silence today is a cartography
that's history, *his story* — 'he' is the noun
you label yourself *Verfremdungseffekt*, as Brecht championed
you trace yourself forty years back a young poet with poetry in the streets
Rimbaud's verses were scribbled on the walls
manifestoes flew and knocked out walking corpses
Beauty is in the streets
Write everywhere
spirit is the *raison d'être* undefined but pure
After this year, everything else is an illusion
a sky falling out, just an incidental dream
Reconstruct, you claim, *realistically* —
from dust to dust, without new fears
but not from zero, never from zero
it is not enough when epochs end
1968

GRETA AART, born as Fiona Sze-Lorrain, writes in both French and English. She recently edited *Silhouette/Shadow: The Cinematic Art of Gao Xingjian* (Paris: Contours, 2007), in which she translated the Nobel Prize Laureate Gao Xingjian's poetry from the French. Also a musician, she now lives in Paris, France.

The Taste of Oranges

DESNEE FLAKES

I ONCE HAD A YOUNG WHITE HORSE TRAINER I worked for tell me, a black American woman, that Americans don't want to do this work. I looked him in the eye and said, "Who told you that, you weren't even here when Americans worked here?" I continued, "As a matter of fact, you telling me this, is like a person who never ate an orange describing the taste to someone who has. You have no point of reference." That is how I feel every time I hear that phrase. So I've decided it's time to stand up and be heard by all the bureaucrats and talking heads who have never eaten an orange, but want to tell me how it tastes. In order for me to be heard, what I have to say must be based in fact, as well as anecdotes. With that in mind, what follows is my attempt to bring a new voice to the table.

Four years ago on Super Bowl Sunday, I went to the Smith Hazel Center in Aiken, SC to hear the Rev. Al Sharpton speak during his bid for the Presidency. After his speech he opened the floor to questions. I asked him about his support of amnesty and guest-worker programs in the face of mounting evidence that the presence of illegal immigrants in this country has harmed native blacks more than any other group, and I read from one of those reports. His response in effect was, "Don't victimize the victim." That point is one I hear time and again, so here is the truth. Unlike my ancestors who were brought to this country in

chains, illegal immigrants commit themselves to come to this country any way they can. They determine whether to walk through the desert, ride the back of a tractor trailer, or overstay a visa. No one drags them kicking and screaming from their home to this country. From my experience working on racetracks from California, across the eastern seaboard and the South, I've witnessed illegal immigrants sneak onto the track, approach trainers and offer to work for less than their native laborers. At that point, they become complicit in their condition in this country. And by determining the conditions in which they are willing to work, they have sealed the deal with the employer. Either I don't know the definition of victim, or those who rant about the rights of the "undocumented" do not. Rev. Sharpton placed the entire blame on the employer, but let me ask you this: if you go to a job and tell the employer, "I can do the job for \$20 a day less" and you get hired, how is the boss guilty for paying what you have stated a willingness to work for? I would even venture to say that illegal immigrants are duplicitous, in that they present themselves as having no control over their situation, when in fact, they have bargained for it.

I watched for years how the game is played. After the first illegal is hired, the American is forced to make a choice of working for less or losing his or her job. If you stay, you are forced to train the very person responsible for your pay cut. If you go, the illegal immigrant has a cousin, brother, uncle, or friend ready to take your job. On the racetrack you may have done the work for 10, 20, even 40 years and they will pay you exactly the same as the person unable to communicate in English, with only days of experience. Subsequently, the displaced worker has

DESNEE FLAKES is a 53-year-old African-American woman, who worked for 30 years in the thoroughbred racing industry. She is the first female to groom for the powerful Darby Dan Stable, owned by the Galbreath family (of Pittsburgh Pirates fame). Currently attending the University of Phoenix Online, she plans to write a book about her life in horseracing.

been completely taken out of the equation, while the illegal immigrant becomes a victim of folk hero proportions.

Then the spin begins that Americans “don’t really want these jobs”; we hear the refrain so often even we begin to believe it. Now the Americans stop applying for the jobs, and the bosses say, “See, no Americans want to do this work.” What they should say is, “I don’t want to hire Americans. They want to be treated with some dignity, they want appropriate pay for the work, and they won’t allow me to abuse them in the way an illegal will.” I’ve seen this pattern for over thirty years, and I believe if people like me don’t start telling our story, very little will change.

Over the years I’ve also witnessed the rampant nepotism that exists in this underground network hiring. When trainers pad their payrolls with entire families, they unwittingly give all the power to the illegal immigrant. Once they have saturated the labor pool, as they have in horseracing, and the entire family is the sole source of the daily labor, they attempt to renegotiate the terms of their employment. While trainers in the ’70s and ’80s averaged a twenty horse stable, today many trainers have multiple operations with 50 or more horses at each location. The thought of an entire crew walking away isn’t even fathomable, so they often acquiesce to the demands for better wages. They have limited their labor pool to mostly Hispanic, often illegal help. By doing this, they have a finite group to hire from. When Americans were the predominant source of labor, their children often followed them into the sport. For many illegal immigrants, horseracing is a gateway job, and they soon move into the surrounding community to find other work. Americans worked with horses not out of necessity, but out of love for the sport and the animals that rule it.

THERE HAVE BEEN THOSE WHO SUGGEST that backstretch workers unionize. This idea is promulgated by those who have not a

clue as to how the track works. First, each barn is a separate shop and would have to vote individually. There are 73 barns at Belmont alone,

What the bosses should say is, “I don’t want to hire Americans. They want to be treated with some dignity, they want appropriate pay for the work, and they won’t allow me to abuse them in the way an illegal will.”

and they may be shared with several trainers or individual outfits. Second, every person who works on a track is licensed to do so, and either the state and/or track management would work in conjunction with the trainers to take that license away from you. Third, many people who work on the track also are housed on the track, so if you lose your license to work, you also lose your home. Backstretch workers have tried on several occasions to organize, only to have the leaders banned from racing or ballots overturned. When we attempted to get illegal immigrants to join us, they would not. My feeling about this is they didn’t want to share the spoils with natives, and they feared as long as natives continued to dominate the labor pool, it wasn’t in their best interest to join us. Why would an employer pay an illegal worker market rate, when they could hire an experienced, English speaking native?

Ultimately, the history of immigration leads me to believe that those who set policy have allowed this massive migration to continue because the majority of illegal immigrants are Hispanic, and the majority identify as white. Our immigration policy, whether stated or not, is still rooted in assimilation and amalgamation. The majority culture has historically incorpor-

ated other ethnic groups within the main, especially when their numbers become stagnant, or as with the reconstructed south they are in the minority. In the last 30 years the majority culture has had a stagnant birthrate. Thus we see a 30-year period of unabated illegal immigration. If you look at the 2000 count, you will find the census included Hispanics who reported their race as white, either alone or in combination with other races, were included in the number of whites.¹ When you look further a *New York Times* article written by Steven A. Holmes (March 14, 1996), you find the census figures predicted for 2050 show a decline in non-Hispanic whites from 74 percent to 53 percent of the population; and Hispanics will be 24 percent of the population at the time.² This is Orwellian doublespeak, because the census informed us earlier that Hispanics are included in the number of whites. Consequently, Hispanics, even of mixed race will be nothing more than another white ethnic group, thus expanding the actual number of whites in 2050 to 87 percent of the population, an increase of 13 percent. This informs me that the thirty year lapse in immigration enforcement is not an accident, but rather a policy. In typical fashion, this debate has been framed to obscure the true intent of the policy, through divisive rhetoric; and claiming xenophobic intentions of anyone who opposes “comprehensive immigration reform.” In reality those who have designed the limited, one nation immigration policy, are the xenophobes determined to maintain a numerical and political advantage over native blacks.

Did I mention — and this was told to me by a local congressman — it is illegal for the census to make predictions? Yet academics, re-

porters, and politicians of all stripes, refer to the census predicted racial/ethnic makeup of America in the year 2050.

Also this conversation should include the work of David Roediger, History Chair at the University of Illinois, Urbana. In his book, *Working Towards Whiteness*, he points to Zionist policy makers and academics, whose definition of ethnicity ensured their inclusion into the white race. Today’s debate, when viewed through historical perspective, mirrors almost exactly the way in which ethnic dark whites (Mexicans today) were viewed, excluded, and eventually included within the “white” race.

In fact, Roediger informs us that “By 1948 the Irish had often dropped out of the category,” meaning ethnic/or racial and were largely included in the “white” race.³

I will leave you with two final thoughts. Roediger shares an important point of historian Alexander Saxton: “Saxton carefully demolished Glazer’s use of ethnicity to oppose affirmative action and cutting to the core of the matter, charged that Glazer “consistently blurs distinction by tending to equate ethnic or cultural differences with racial difference.”

We are again seeing a blurring of ethnic vs. racial differences in this new, old debate. And it is my view that the outcomes will also mirror the further isolation of native Blacks, as Hispanics join the “mainstream culture” or white race.¹

NOTES

1. www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-4.pdf
2. <http://query.nytimes.com/gstfullpage.html?res=980DEFDF1639F937A25750C0A96095>
- 3 David Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 2005) pp. 22, 26, 27, 31.

Albert Shanker's Legacy

Comment on Norm Scott and Vera Pavone's Review in #45

MICHAEL HIRSCH

LEON TROTSKY'S TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM begins with words that have made the left nuts ever since. "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat," the old exiled Bolshevik and Red Army founder wrote. That analysis was arguable in 1938, when it was written, less so in the 1960s, when the United Federation of Teachers was formed. Would that it were remotely plausible today.

Yet that stilted frame of looking less at the development of social classes or class institutions and more at the maneuvers and peccadilloes of alleged elite "misleaders" characterizes what's so wrong with Vera Pavone and Norman Scott's review of Richard Kahlenberg's *Tough Liberal*, his political biography of teacher union leader Albert Shanker.

Now Kahlenberg's book is hard to like. It's a defense attorney's brief for a highly controversial figure, and Pavone and Scott are not wrong to call it hagiographic, or the life of a saint. Shanker, whatever his strengths and failings, was no saint, yet the biography does read as if Kahlenberg's hand were manipulated by divine forces to write an institutional history that even few in the present teachers union would stand by.

Yet in place of hagiography, the authors opt for demonology, the study of fallen angels, and their idealized approach shares far more with the hagiographers than they know. They blame Shanker and his democratically elected successors for every ill that befell educators in the last

40 years. For them, Shanker is the mustachioed villain in a silent film, his signature heavy-frame glasses in place of facial hairs; the "ruthless neo-con" regnant.

Why that picture is worth taking issue with — the authors are themselves longtime critics of the UFT's successive leaderships and are entitled to their views — is that their take on unions is emblematic of a weakness on the left: where rank-and-file maunderings of any sort are valorized, while elected leaders are excoriated, whoever they are and whatever their histories and strengths.

Full disclosure. In my day job, I work for the man. Or at least the woman. My boss is Randi Weingarten, president of both the 200,000 member United Federation of Teachers in New York City and — since July — president of the 1.4 million strong American Federation of Teachers, too. This reply is not an official union communiqué, merely a perk of being a *New Politics* editorial board member. I'm not even a UFT member or a former classroom teacher, but a union staff writer, though in a former life I was a college teacher and a delegate to two national AFT conventions, the second of which saw Shanker ascend to the presidency. I claim no right to challenge the authors' views on specific internal union matters, nor will I do so. But surely the point of view of habitual dissidents whose union caucus garnered just 7 percent of the vote in the last presidential election, and who remain a null factor in union politics is itself a telling critique. These were the wrong reviewers to take on Kahlenberg.

This isn't to dismiss a minority of one, or deny Gandhi's injunction that "In matters of conscience, the law of majority has no place." I've been in that minority frequently enough,

MICHAEL HIRSCH is a New York-based labor journalist and is a member of the editorial boards on *New Politics* and *Democratic Left*.

including as a former steelworker who despised a leadership that stood stock still as the mills closed. Being in the minority can be an honorable place to be. But it also can be a self-interested, self-justifying place. The least a minority can do is speak as if it deserves to be a majority

The truth is that Al Shanker was more a tragic figure than an evil one. A brilliant union organizer, his virulent anti-communism and his ties to the AFL-CIO's egregious George Meany put him on the wrong side of history.

and act as a shadow leadership, though prominent members of "out" caucuses are by nature no more the bearers of truth and virtue and no less self-interested than are caucus leaders who are also elected union officials..

No wonder the reviewers' critique of Shanker and his successors is so sweeping. They even blame Shanker for the Bush assault on education through the misnamed No Child Left Behind Act. Since Shanker died years before the coming of the NCLB, this is like blaming Edmund Burke for the massacre at Peterloo.

Long after Shanker's passing, NCLB was sold to Congress as something that would narrow the yawning achievement gap between white and minority students by making schools accountable. Many are not, and it's one reason that numerous civil rights groups today support reauthorizing the law, despite its dangers to public education. Among the law's many faults, it emphasizes testing as a one-stop means of assuring accountability, leaving students and teachers ill-served. Tests don't measure higher-order skills, and contemporary supporters of the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," least of all

Shanker, never saw testing as key to the report's recommendations.

Then the Bush administration's NCLB radically underfunded remedial programs. It also exaggerated what any schools could accomplish, unlike the group Bold Approach, which urges instead moving beyond just reforming schools to tackling social and economic disadvantages in the larger world, so that pre-schoolers entering school come prepared to learn.

No wonder both the teachers unions — the AFT and the NEA — concluded that NCLB was just a tool to bust unions, eliminate tenure, create more turnover and hire younger, inexperienced, lower-paid educators. Among the problems: NCLB was done on the cheap. Again, this was nothing Shanker predicted, advocated or accepted.

The truth is that Al Shanker was more a tragic figure than an evil one. A brilliant union organizer, his virulent anti-communism and his ties to the AFL-CIO's egregious George Meany put him on the wrong side of history. But to posit a 40-year record of class collaboration and teacher union defeats orchestrated by a ruthless personality — as Pavone and Scott do — is over the top. When the authors wonder "how Kahlenberg could square Shanker's reputation for militancy with support for a regime that has weakened teacher unionism, demeaned teachers, and undermined public education," I don't recognize the UFT here. I don't even recognize the United Auto Workers, which it can be fairly argued has done a poor job of defending members against concessions, plant closings and offshoring of jobs.

Yes, another man or woman might have handled the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control fight better, and the split between African-American community activists and what was then a predominantly white union was a wound that took decades to heal. But what sparked the battle wasn't Shanker's doing; it was the unilateral move of the experimental district's

leadership to transfer teachers — mostly union activists — without due process. The bottom line for the union had to be defense of members' job security, especially given the "let's you and him fight" perspective of the Ford Foundation, a principal supporter of the experimental district.

Every union — especially a public sector union — should put a premium on forming and maintaining excellent relations with the surrounding communities. In fact the future of trade unions may lie not so much in organizing sectorally as geographically and class-wide — as Bill Fletcher Jr. observes. But if a union betrays its own present members' palpable interests, it's lost its reason to exist.

The fact that within two years of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville debacle the UFT succeeded in winning representation rights for the workforce of largely African-American and Latino school paraprofessionals suggests the racial wounds were already healing. A racist union couldn't have sparked that organizing drive. Neither could a broken union.

And it is disingenuous to write, contra Kahlenberg's assertion that the union's critics were "a coalition of wealthy whites and angry blacks," that "one would be hard put to find people in the black community who feel they have or have ever had the support of wealthy whites." Have the authors never heard of united fronts from above? The Lindsay administration certainly did.

The authors are also factually wrong about Shanker being responsible for the givebacks during the city's fiscal crisis of the 1970s. It was Victor Gotbaum of AFSCME DC 37 and

Barry Feinstein of IBT Local 237 who delivered municipal workers and their pensions into the arms of the bankers and the bond raters.

As to the union's not calling strikes in some 30 years: the strike isn't the point; it's the inevitability of a unified strike and its crippling effect on the employer that matters. It's strike preparation that matters. The best strike is one that doesn't get called. With half of all new teachers leaving the city schools in their first seven years, building a strike consciousness alone is Herculean. Should it be considered? Yes, in spite of New York State's Taylor Law, which heavily penalizes strikers and their unions, strikes must never be written off.

But organizing a successful strike action takes more than calling upon the creatures from "the vasty deep," like Shakespeare's Glendower, when the real question is "will they answer?" just as the city transit workers learned from their aborted 2005 job action when, as critics of that union's leadership say rightly, little strike preparation was done or outreach to the public planned.

Yes, strikes and strike preparation have even greater value than what is on the table during a labor dispute. They're a teachable moment of the best kind. Rosa Luxemburg's idea that "Those who do not move, do not notice their chains," is as true today as when the German revolutionary wrote it. But there are numerous ways to move and strategies and tactics for choosing when and how to move. Even the seemingly intractable Lenin knew about tactical retreats.

That's also why cars come with multiple gears.

Albert Shanker's Legacy

Reply to Michael Hirsch

NORMAN SCOTT AND VERA PAVONE

MICHAEL HIRSCH'S CRITIQUE misleads, or outrightly distorts, many of the points we made in our review. *

Shanker and NCLB

THE TWO-DECADE LONG ROAD from "A Nation at Risk" to NCLB runs right through Shanker and is paved with Shankerisms: accountability, standards, high stakes tests, narrowing curriculum to what's "measurable," identifying and punishing schools (and ultimately, teachers), and charter schools as an alternative to public schools. Clinton's "Goals 2000" plan, which Shanker mostly endorsed, was a predecessor to NCLB. Kahlenberg praises Shanker's role in the process through his alliances with the business community.

Hirsch claims the AFT was opposed to NCLB when in fact, Shanker's successor, Sandra Feldman, sat on the NCLB committee and lauded many of the provisions, something the NEA did not do. Since then the AFT/UFT has consistently signed on to the standards/accountability bandwagon, giving short shrift to lower class size and other essential learning conditions.

*Our response is limited by our allotment of space. A more comprehensive response will be posted on the web site and the Education Notes online blog (<http://ednotesonline.blogspot.com/>).

VERA PAVONE taught in Brownsville in the mid-1960s, later served as school secretary, retiring in 2002. She is a founding member of the Independent Community of Educators (ICE), an alternate caucus in the UFT. NORMAN SCOTT spent 35 years in the NYC school system. A former chapter leader and delegate at the UFT Delegate Assembly, he began publishing *Education Notes*, a newsletter for NYC teachers in 1996. He, too, is a founding member of ICE.

The 1968 Strike

HIRSCH BUYS THE KAHLENBERG POSITION that the 1968 strike was about job security and due process and Shanker had no options, a fairly simplistic approach given that the UFT has always counseled teachers to transfer when under attack. Hirsch misses the irony of shutting down the entire school system due to the transfer of 11 teachers, when today the union has agreed to the transfers of hundreds of teachers out of DOE-labeled "failing" schools, teachers unable to get positions and forced to work as day-to-day subs due to the union's giveaway of seniority rights.

Podair's more nuanced analysis in *The Strike That Changed New York* indicates that Shanker had more of an agenda than just defending due process rights.

The 1975 Fiscal Crisis/Strike

HIRSCH BLAMES GOTBAUM instead of Shanker for the givebacks and pension bailouts. In his "Where We Stand" column (Oct. 19, 1975), Shanker contradicts Hirsch, justifying the use of \$300 million in teacher retirement funds: "[T]eachers stepped forward when no one else would. They resisted the normal human instinct to slash back at those who had torn into them. The bankers interrupted their incessant prattle about civic responsibility just long enough to refuse pleas that they help bail the city out." Shanker forced the end of an effective and powerful strike, agreeing to a contract that ensured the layoff of 10,000+ teachers.

Attempt to Marginalize Us

HIRSCH PORTRAYS US as disgruntled, ineffectual leftists, tied to outdated ideological baggage.

Our thrust has always been to build an active and informed membership. UFT leaders have not always been wrong, nor do we claim the rank and file is always right. Leaders should be responsible, honest, and promote democracy: a dynamic relationship between leadership and membership that allows a variety of views to be aired.

From Shanker on, Unity Caucus has used its power to stifle critical voices challenging its positions. It attempts to deny opposition access to teacher mailboxes, despite the fact that the right was won in a grievance without any help from the union.

Using an erroneous analysis of the results of the citywide union elections, Hirsch tries to marginalize our critique and us. In the 2007 election only 21 percent of active teachers voted. The opposition ICE/TJC slate received over 22 percent of the vote of classroom teachers and 12 percent of the total vote, not the 7 percent Hirsch claims. A remarkable 47 percent of the vote cast was by retirees (out of the reach of the opposition) who voted 90 percent for Unity/Weingarten who promote themselves by using dues to fly around the United States to meet with retirees. Unity earned 14 percent (10,000) of the 70,000 classroom teachers, a drop by a third from 2004 (15,500). These results point to a significant loss of legitimacy and support

for the union leadership.

Numerous members of the opposition serve as school delegates and Chapter leaders, despite often vicious campaigns in chapter elections, which sometimes include interference by Unity Caucus reps and collusion with principals.

As individuals and through our caucuses and organizations, we have been critical of the union leadership from Shanker through Weingarten. Hirsch knows full well the level of attention the UFT leadership pays to what we have to say, often adopting our language and pretending to support our positions, while undermining attempts to build activism that can challenge NYC DOE's attacks on public education, educators and union members.

Conclusion

ONE CANNOT UNDERESTIMATE Shanker's role in shaping the UFT, the AFT, and the union movement, principally through SDUSA, its front organizations, its ties to government institutions and elected and appointed government officials, and its influence among union hierarchies. This raises many questions concerning the role of leadership and the piecemeal destruction of a labor movement both in this country and abroad.

Thanks to Ira Goldfine for his help with this reply.

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Olympic Challenge Indigenous Women, “No to 2010” and the Emergence of a New Movement

JEFFREY SHANTZ

THE VANCOUVER-WHISTLER OLYMPIC Winter Games are scheduled to take place on un-surrendered Native lands in British Columbia (BC), Canada, from February 12-27, 2010. For growing numbers of Indigenous people, anti-poverty activists, homeless people and low-income tenants, the Olympic Games represent a continued history of colonization and “social cleansing” of poor communities. The development and social restructuring that have been underway in the lead-up to 2010 have already had severe negative impacts on communities that have suffered decades of conflict.

Women, and especially Indigenous women, play central roles in the “No to 2010” movement, both at the grassroots level and as national and international spokespersons. This movement provides a compelling model for the development of a global women’s movement. It highlights important connections between economic liberalism, displacement of local communities, and violence against women. It also shows some of the organizing work that can be done to address these interconnected issues in a manner that brings together women of diverse backgrounds.

Indigenous women have been at the forefront of this struggle, including efforts to internationalize its scope. In 2002, a 76-year-old Secwepemc Elder, Irene Billy, travelled to Eu-

rope to deliver an official request to the International Olympic Committee not to choose Vancouver-Whistler’s bid for the 2010 Olympic Games. She spoke on behalf of grassroots Indigenous communities, the Earth and the generations not yet born.

Kanahus Pellkey is a Secwepemc and Ktnuxa Warrior and a spokesperson for the Secwepemc chapter of the Native Youth Movement (NYM). She has been jailed before for fighting against the illegal occupation and theft of Secwepemc lands for the Sun Peaks ski resort, and is active in opposing the 2010 Olympics. Pellkey explains that NYM is opposing the Olympics not only because of unresolved land claims issues, but also due to the threat the Olympics poses to the local land and low-income communities in the city.¹

With the 2010 Vancouver Olympics rapidly approaching, groups in Canada are protesting that the events, to be held on unceded Salish, St’at’imc, and Squamish territory, will wreak environmental and social destruction. Olympic speculation and development has greatly accelerated gentrification and the building of highways, resorts, and condos. The construction of infrastructure for the 2010 Olympics itself is adding to extensive destruction of traditional homelands of the local Indigenous peoples, while contributing to the displacement and increased criminalization of people living in poor urban neighbourhoods.

The growing anti-2010 movement suggests important possibilities for a revitalized alternative global social justice movement. What differentiates the growing anti-Olympic mobilizing from earlier demonstrations in Seattle, Que-

JEFF SHANTZ is a longtime anti-poverty organizer, environmentalist, and rank-and-file unionist. For seven years he hosted *The Anti-Poverty Report* on community radio stations CKLN and CHRV in Toronto. He currently teaches community advocacy and social justice at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Vancouver.

bec City, and elsewhere, according to NYM organizer Dustin Johnson, is that its leadership consists largely of indigenous women — “the people that are most affected by what 2010 represents.” As has already been witnessed with regard to organizing against the 2008 Beijing Olympics, this has the potential to become a significant global movement.

This article outlines the contours of this emerging movement. It identifies the key areas around which community members have organized and attempted to build connections between the different issues impacting their diverse communities.

Impact on Women

SPECTACULAR EVENTS SUCH AS THE OLYMPICS, which draw hundreds of thousands of male tourists with disposable income and the cover of anonymity contribute to large increases in prostitution and trafficking of women. One social impact that is a regular feature of the Olympic Games is the increase in the trafficking of women and prostitution. In Seoul 1988, there was increased prostitution for the Games. In the Athens Games of 2004, 40,000 prostitutes were brought in from Asian countries and elsewhere. This trafficking is carried out by violent networks that subject women to abuse, torture, and identity theft. Such is expected in Vancouver for the 2010 Olympics according to the Vancouver Police Department (VPD).² As opponents of 2010 note, this is particularly troubling given the recent history of violence, including the abductions and murders of sex workers in Vancouver over the last decade. More than 68 women are missing and/or murdered in Vancouver alone. Many were Native, and many were reportedly involved in the sex trade. A Joint Taskforce of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Vancouver Police Department investigating the disappearances reports that at least sixteen of the missing women are Indigenous, a number that greatly exceeds the proportion of women living in Vancouver. Unfortunately police had refused to

devote resources to investigate the disappearances, denying that there was any pattern or particular danger despite the backgrounds of the women and their connections with the sex trade. On December 9, 2007, William Pickton was

It is estimated that for Beijing in 2008, approximately 1.5 million have been displaced.⁵

convicted of second degree murder for six of these murders, and he is to be tried for an additional 20 more.

In northern BC, more than 30 young women, mostly Native, are missing and/or murdered along Highway 16, a route that has been dubbed “the highway of tears.” Unfortunately, despite disappearances of Indigenous women over a decade, it was only in 2002, following the disappearance of a non-Indigenous woman, that the media and police focused any attention on the disappearances and killings.

In their report on discrimination and violence against Indigenous women in Canada, Amnesty International notes: “The social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women, along with a history of government policies that have torn apart Indigenous families and communities, have pushed a disproportionate number of Indigenous women into dangerous situations that include extreme poverty, homelessness, and prostitution.”³

Opponents of the 2010 Olympics are concerned that the Games will only increase this violence against women. This is especially likely given that, as part of economic restructuring to fund the Olympics, the provincial government has cut funding for social programs, social housing, and healthcare programs that poor and homeless women and women working in the sex trade rely on.

Government expenditures on the Games,

including the clearing of woodlands on which many communities rely, will total approximately 6 billion dollars which will be paid for through public debt. That is money that could have been spent on social services, housing, drug treatment, healthcare, and so on.

Homelessness

SINCE WINNING THE 2010 WINTER GAMES IN 2003, Vancouver has lost more than 850 units of low-income housing, while during the same period, homelessness has increased from 1,000 to more than 2,500 people. It is estimated by 2010, the number of homeless may be as high as 6,000. Much of this increase will come from the large-scale closure of social housing and low-income hotels in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area that is already the poorest neighborhood in Canada. Closures have already been driven by the Olympics as developers seek to create more high-end, and high profit, spaces for tourists and corporate investors. In Vancouver, anticipation of the 2010 Olympics has led to rent increases and the transformation of low-income housing into upscale condos. According to the report "Fair Play for Housing Rights" by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, Olympic Games have caused the displacement of over two million people since the 1980s.⁴ In Seoul 1988, approximately 750,000 poor were displaced, while in Atlanta in 1996, more than 30,000 people were displaced. It is estimated that for Beijing in 2008, approximately 1.5 million have been displaced.⁵

There has been a steady growth in the number of Indigenous women living in predominantly non-Indigenous towns and cities in Canada, largely as a result of the uprooting of women and children and displacement of Indigenous communities over decades.⁶ Growing numbers of the women who find themselves in urban centres such as Vancouver experience economic precarity and homelessness. As Kanahus Pelkey suggests: "The UN human rights index will show Canada [ranked] right near the top, but registered Status Indians will be in the 50s,

near any third world country."⁷

On average, however, Indigenous women in Canadian urban centers are unable to earn enough money to meet their own needs, much less support a family. In the 1996 census, the average annual income of Indigenous women with status living off-reserve was \$5000 less than that of non-Indigenous women and substantially less than the amount Statistics Canada estimated people living in a large Canadian city would have needed to provide food, shelter, and clothing for themselves. Homelessness and inadequate shelter are believed to be widespread problems facing Indigenous families in all settings.⁸

For the urban poor of Vancouver, which includes many Natives, 2010 has already meant hundreds evicted from low-income housing, more homelessness, criminalization, and increased police repression. Aggressive policing in the Downtown Eastside has also involved immigration officers targeting immigrants. Organizations such as the Anti-Poverty Committee, Downtown Eastside Residents' Association, No One Is Illegal, Downtown Eastside Women's Center, and the PIVOT legal society have been the most vocal and active in challenging these conditions.

Criminalization

REPRESSION HAS INVOLVED ATTACKS on anti-Olympic groups and individuals, including arrests of protesters, raids of offices, surveillance, media smear campaigns, cuts to funding programs, and so on: all in an effort to undermine anti-2010 resistance. This repression has already been used against anti-poverty and housing groups, environmentalists and Natives, in Vancouver.

Indigenous women have been targeted by the state for punishment. In some cases Indigenous women have received harsher penalties than other, non-Native, protesters. Pacheedaht, Nuuchahnulth Elder Harriet Nahanee was arrested and sentenced to fourteen days in jail by the Supreme Court of British Columbia because

of her role in blocking the expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway, which destroyed the area of Eagleridge Bluffs for the 2010 Olympics. Others arrested for the same action were released. On Saturday, February 24, 2007, the 73-year old Pacheedaht elder and great-grandmother Harriet Nahanee died from health complications arising from her imprisonment.

The Native Youth Movement stated in response to the arrests that, "Human and Indigenous rights violations here in Canada must stop; the governments and corporations continue to drive our people from our homeland and destroy our food and medicine harvesting areas and basic necessities to survive in our traditional, ancestral way of life. The Olympics is a global event and it will take the global community to awaken their conscience to boycott this 17-day event."⁹

NYM members, many of whom have been previously arrested and jailed for defending their communities, are well aware of what the state apparatus is like for security. As many as 13,000 police and military personnel are set to patrol the Games and demonstrations. "Even the most moderate, conservative person will find this disturbing," says NYM organizer Dustin Johnson.

Colonialism by Other Means

AS THE RECENT REPORT BY AMNESTY International points out, violence against women and children within Indigenous families and communities is "part of a broader spectrum of social stress and turmoil that has resulted from government policies imposed on Indigenous peoples without their consent."¹⁰ These policies include the Indian Act which took away Indigenous women's status as Indigenous people and which further removed their right even to live in their home communities if they married a non-Indig-

enous man or a man from outside their community. The Indian Act served to uproot tens of thousands of Indigenous women, threatening

their social ties to families and communities.¹¹

Until as recently as the 1970s, the government of Canada required Indigenous children to be educated off-reserve, outside of their home communities. In notorious residential

schools, operated by Christian churches, children were punished for speaking their language or pursuing cultural practices. Physical and sexual abuse were common within the residential schools. Many children were forbidden from seeing their parents. These practices have impacted generations of Indigenous communities in Canada. As Daphne Bramham notes, the sexual and physical abuse and the separation of children from their parents, and loss of culture and language have translated "into adults who were unequipped to be parents and who have continued the sexual and physical abuse in first nations' communities."¹²

While the residential schools are now closed, the Canadian state continues to separate Indigenous children from their families. At the height of their operation in the 1940s, residential schools housed approximately 9,000 children. Today nearly 27,000 Indigenous children are under government care in Canada, including 5,200 in British Columbia alone.¹³ Indigenous children account for one percent of all children in British Columbia, but 49 percent of children in government care. This has far reaching generational impacts. Only 13 per cent of children in care graduate from high school.¹⁴ For Bramham, this amounts to ongoing policies of attempted cultural genocide.

These specific policies, however, must be contextualized and understood as specific moments in an extensive, and ongoing, history of

Indigenous children account for one percent of all children in British Columbia, but 49 percent of children in government care.

dislocation, displacement, cultural erasure and genocide. Throughout Canadian history, “the land and resource base essential to the viability of Indigenous economies and ways of living has been dramatically eroded by the failure of governments to consistently recognize and uphold Indigenous title.”¹⁵ For contemporary Indigenous activists, the 2010 Olympics represent a continuation of those historical practices by which the land and resource bases of Indigenous communities are stripped further from those communities and the cultures that rely upon them are rendered even more precarious. This is displacement and dislocation by other names: tourism and economic development.

As Amnesty concludes: “Repeated assaults on the culture and collective identity of Aboriginal people have weakened the foundations of Aboriginal society and contributed to the alienation that drives some to self-destruction and antisocial behavior.”¹⁶ Among the horrible legacies of the Indian Act and the residential schools has been that Indigenous women, who were respected and honored in their own societies, central figures in community governance, have become marginalized. As Daphne Bramham notes: “Not only do they have fewer rights and less power than aboriginal men, they have fewer rights than any other Canadian women.”¹⁷ Through the Indian Act, the Canadian government established and maintains a patriarchal system of governance and land tenure in which community tribal councils, often with full participation of women, were replaced by government approved band councils. Reflecting the governance structures of the historically male-dominated federal parliament, the band councils were similarly male-dominated.

The very definition of status Indian, a government created designation that has served to divide Indigenous communities, has tied women’s identity to the status of their husband. Neither the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including its equality provisions, nor provincial matrimonial property laws apply on

reserves. Women can be evicted if their husband dies and many face the horrible choice of staying in abusive relationships or becoming homeless because they have no claim to the family home.¹⁸ As Amnesty concludes: “The legacy of these policies has been the erosion of culture, the uprooting of generations of Indigenous women, the separation of children from their parents, and a cycle of impoverishment, despair and broken self-esteem that continues to grip many indigenous families.”¹⁹

The legacy of colonial dispossession and cultural erasure has also left Indigenous women living in urban centers in Canada vulnerable to heightened levels of violence. Generations of Indigenous women and girls have been dispossessed and displaced by government policies and corporate activities.

Many now face desperate circumstances in Canadian towns and cities, a situation compounded by sexist stereotypes and racist attitudes toward Indigenous women and girls and general indifference to their welfare and safety. The result has been far too many Indigenous women and girls placed in harm’s way, denied adequate protection from law, and marginalized in a way that allows some men to get away with carrying out violent crimes against them.²⁰

Almost 60 per cent of Indigenous people in British Columbia currently live off reserve in urban areas. One quarter of Indigenous families live in inadequate housing. One quarter of households is headed by a single mother. As Bramham notes: “Mothers and grandmothers often carry the heaviest burden. They are more likely to live in poverty and experience violence than any other men or women in Canada.”²¹

Conclusion

IN OCTOBER 2007, MORE THAN 1,500 Indigenous people representing communities across the western hemisphere held the Gathering of the Indigenous Peoples of America, on Yaqui territory in Vicam, Sonora, Mexico. They stated in their final declaration, “We reject the 2010

Winter Olympics on sacred and stolen territory of Turtle Island–Vancouver, Canada.”²² In addition to the statement officially denouncing the Olympic Games, delegates called upon indigenous people to travel to Vancouver for the massive demonstrations that are planned for February 2010 to oppose the Olympics.

The “No to 2010” movement situates itself as part of a potentially global movement against destructive development projects that serve to displace indigenous communities from their lands. This movement includes the Zapatistas and the newly established camps in Cocapah and Mayan Territory. It also includes the thirteen Native Nations fighting against sewage being made into snow and put on San Francisco Peaks in Arizona; the Diné Elders fighting a power plant in New Mexico; Lakota and Ponca warriors and the many Nations who are uniting to protect Bear Butte in South Dakota; the Anishinabe fighting logging in Grassy Narrows, Ontario; the Pitt River People fighting for Medicine Lake, California; the Thaltan of British Columbia and the Mayan of Guatemala and Mexico fighting mining; and the people of Six Nations in Ontario fighting an exclusive housing development. It also includes the Mapuche in Argentina and the Kuna in Panama.

Because of the many diverse social issues and communities 2010 negatively impacts, there is much potential for a strong anti-Olympics movement to develop. It might also provide a catalyst from which new social movements and resistance can emerge.

Due to the diversity of social sectors and concerns, any anti-Olympic movement must include respect and tolerance for a diversity of tactics as a basic principle. The recent movements against the Beijing 2008 Olympics have shown some of the organizing possibilities of Olympic opposition as a global movement.

Even if the growing anti-2010 movement is unable to succeed in preventing the Olympics from taking place, an admittedly monumental

task, it has already served to empower Indigenous, poor, and working class women. It has also provided an important example of organizing in which women of varied backgrounds are able to make important connections across issues and build relationships bridging diverse experiences.

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Olympic Dream

BILL LITTLEFIELD

Last night I had the strangest dream. I dreamed about the Games.
The dreaming came in colors, and there was some naming names.
It all began with Michael Phelps. You may think me a fool.
But Phelps, who was completely dressed, would not jump in the pool.
“I can’t compete here in Beijing; they’re dying in Darfur.”
The crowd within the Water Cube was stunned, and there was more.
“There must be free speech in Beijing,” said Phelps, and then, by God,
The dream went to another place. In dreams that’s not so odd,
And all the Chinese gymnasts stood, and though it was a shock,
They said as one they’d not compete while war raged in Iraq.
As if in solidarity, the members of the team
Playing softball for Australia rose and in this crazy dream,
They told the umpire they’d not ever take the playing field —
And in this firm decision they were certain not to yield —
As long as Russian troops were marching into Georgia’s space,
And athletes from around the world, of every creed and race,
Agreed that there would be no Games, for none of them would play,
Until the soldiers everywhere had put their guns away.
And furthermore, the athletes said, if you would have us run
And swim and jump and hit and throw and kick — all for the fun
Of many millions watching — then you all must now agree
That no one will go hungry and that people will be free.

Now, that might seem a crazy hope, except that in this dream,
The corporations running things began to loudly scream

That they’d invested billions, and that they were damned if they
Would take the loss they’d have to take if athletes didn’t play,
And all the corporate honchos called the heads of all the states,
And said “Knock off the wars and the oppression, boys, the fates
Have changed, and we’ve a bundle on the line, so we need quiet.
And peace there was, throughout the world, because those guys could buy it.

There ends the story, like the dream, although I hope that when
I go to sleep again tonight, I’ll have that dream again.

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Dirty Business, Dirty Wars: U.S.–Latin American Relations in the 21st Century

CYRIL MYCHALEJKO

MUCH IS BEING MADE ACROSS the political spectrum in the United States about Washington's waning influence in Latin America. The region has seen an emergence of left and center-left presidents voted into office, many as a result of budding social movements growing democracy from the grassroots. Some pundits and analysts are suggesting that this phenomenon is occurring because of the Bush Administration's perceived neglect of the region. Rather, what is happening is blowback from Washington's continued meddling in the economic and political affairs of an area arrogantly referred to as the United States' "backyard." Latin America's growing unity in rejecting the Washington Consensus remains fragile in the face of U.S. opposition. Washington has been quietly using the war on drugs, the war on terrorism, and a neo-cold war ideology to institutionalize a militarism in the region that risks returning us to the not so far off days of "dirty wars."

Breaking the Chains

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ's election in 1998 sparked the beginning of the leftward electoral paradigm shift in the hemisphere. After he orchestrated a failed coup attempt in 1992, he was elected six years later based on a campaign that promised to lift up the impoverished nation's poor majority through economic policies that ran counter to the free

market fundamentalism and crony capitalism pursued by the country's oligarchs, with the aid of Washington and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Chavez also began to challenge the idea of U.S. hegemony in the region by advocating a united Latin America based on the ideas of one of his intellectual mentors, Simón Bolívar, the 19th century revolutionary instrumental in defeating Spain's control of the region. Chavez, who also claims to be influenced by the teachings of Karl Marx and Jesus Christ, has championed what he calls a "Socialism of the 21st Century." A fierce and outspoken critic of neoliberalism, Chavez has said, "I am convinced that a path to a new, better, and possible world is socialism, not capitalism," words that have been scarce in the region's capitals with the exception of Cuba.

Since Chavez's ascent to power, we have seen presidents elected in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay which translates into a majority of countries in the region advocating center-left and left-wing political programs (while Mexico and Peru missed joining this new Latin American consensus by narrow, if not fraudulent, election outcomes).

While it is true that, despite these developments, socialism is a long way off from taking hold in the region, the rejection of Washington's Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) back in 2003, long before the left had firmly taken hold in the hemisphere, marked the beginning of an outright challenge to free market orthodoxy, U.S. hegemony, and corporate power. Since then we have seen multinational corporations booted out of countries and

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defiantly confronted by social movements, U.S. ambassadors expelled from three nation's capitals, free trade agreements protested, illegitimate foreign debts challenged, and U.S. drug policies rejected. In addition, alternative political and economic institutions and policies have been advocated and created.

Venezuela's Chavez developed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an antithesis to the FTAA that advocates a trade regime based on economic, social, and political integration guided by the principals of solidarity and cooperation. Even Honduras, long seen as a U.S. satellite state dating back to the days it assisted Washington in overthrowing Guatemala's government in 1954, has joined ALBA, showing that the creeping tide of Bolivarianism is extending to the still fragile Central America. Meanwhile, Brazil's Lula de Silva, viewed by Washington and the U.S. corporate media as part of the "acceptable" or "responsible" left, declared in 2007 that "Developing nations must create their own mechanisms of finance instead of suffering under those of the IMF and the World Bank, which are institutions of rich nations . . . it is time to wake up." And the region has woken up as the "Bank of the South" was formed to make development loans without the draconian economic prescriptions of Washington-controlled financial institutions, which in the past have forced countries to cut social spending, deregulate industries, and open markets to foreign capital — policies that have exacerbated poverty and inequality in the past and as a result compounded dependence on foreign capital and Washington.

In terms of security cooperation, both Brazil and Venezuela have led efforts to create a South American Defense Council, a NATO-style regional body that would coordinate defense policies, deal with internal conflicts, and presumably diminish Washington's influence in its "backyard." While U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said back in March that Washington "had no problem with it" and

looked "forward to coordination with it," *Bloomberg News* reported that Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim told Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley that the United States should "watch from the outside

Since Chavez's ascent to power, we have seen presidents elected in a majority of countries in the region advocating center-left and left-wing political programs.

and keep its distance," and that "this is a South American council and we have no obligation to ask for a license from the United States to do it." In a similar challenge to U.S. military presence and influence, Ecuador's President Rafael Correa decided to force the United States to close its military base in the port city of Manta. And then there is China's and Russia's growing economic and political ties to the region — something that would not only be unheard of in the past, but not tolerated.

Developments such as these led the Council on Foreign Relations to declare in May that the "era of the United States as the dominant influence in Latin America is over." Frank Bajak, writing for the Associated Press on Oct. 11, echoed this observation when he wrote, "U.S. clout in what it once considered its backyard has sunk to perhaps the lowest point in decades" and that "it's unlikely to be able to leverage economic influence in Latin America anytime soon." Meanwhile, The *Washington Post* took a more indignant and belligerent position in an Oct. 6 editorial when it questioned whether Washington should "continue to subsidize governments that treat it as an enemy" while "a significant part of Latin America continues to march away from the 'Washington consensus'

of democracy and free-market capitalism that has governed the region for a generation.”

A Laboratory for Counterinsurgency

WHILE CONVENTIONAL THINKING has led many to believe that Latin America’s independence from the United States may be an irreversible paradigm shift, behind the scenes Washington has put into place policies that could unleash a reign of terror not seen since the 1980s. Colombia has served as laboratory for this new counterinsurgency program that can be interpreted as a continuance of U.S. supported state terrorism and a re-emergence of the national security state in Latin America.

The U.S. government has sent more than \$5 billion in mostly military and counter-narcotics assistance to Colombia since 2000 to fund “Plan Colombia,” a counter drug program said to be designed to fight cocaine production and narco-trafficking, as well as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in turn further intensifying the country’s long-standing civil war. But as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) reported in 2001 in a study sponsored by the Center for Responsive Politics, “The protection of U.S. oil and trade interests is also a key factor in the plan, and historic links to drug-trafficking right-wing guerrillas by U.S. allies belie an exclusive commitment to extirpating drug trafficking.”

The ICIJ investigation also found that “Major U.S. oil companies have lobbied Congress intensely to promote additional military aid to Colombia, in order to secure their investments in that country and create a better climate for future exploration of Colombia’s vast potential reserves.” In addition, corporations with interests in the region were reported to have spent almost \$100 million lobbying Congress to affect U.S. Latin America policy.

Eight years later, Colombia has evolved into a full-fledged paramilitary state. President Álvaro Uribe, Washington’s staunchest ally in the region, his extended family, and many of

his political supporters in the government and military are under investigation for ties to paramilitaries and right-wing death squads. As far as U.S. corporate collusion goes, Chiquita Brands International Inc. was forced to pay the U.S. Justice Department a \$25 million settlement in 2007 for giving over \$1 million to the right-wing terrorist organization United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). Even more damaging is the fact that Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, at the time assistant attorney general, knew about the company’s relationship with AUC and did nothing to stop it. Alabama-based coal company Drummond Co., Inc. and Coca-Cola have also been accused of hiring right-wing death squads to intimidate, murder, or disappear trade unionists. This is what the ICIJ meant when they wrote about securing investments and creating a “better climate” for business.

According to the U.S. Labor Education on the Americas Project, Colombia accounts for more than 60 percent of trade unionists killed worldwide. There have also been at least 17 murders of trade unionists just this year, which, according to a report released in April 2008, accounts for an 89 percent increase in murders over the same time period from 2007. Meanwhile, the *Washington Post* reported in August that the collateral damage from Colombia’s civil war has resulted in more disappearances than occurred in El Salvador and Chile, while Colombia’s attorney general believes there could be as many as 10,000 more bodies scattered across the country — meaning totals would surpass those from Argentina and Peru.

Despite what should be considered as a total failure from a policy and, more importantly, human rights standpoint, this same Colombian model has been promoted by Washington to other nations in the region, and — remarkably — has been embraced by these countries. In 2005, Guatemalan officials called for their own “Plan Guatemala,” while Oscar Berger, president at the time, asked for a permanent DEA

station in the country and for U.S. military personnel to conduct anti-narcotics operations. In addition, he was a proponent of a regional rapid deployment force, initially conceived to fight gangs, but later adjusted to include counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism in order to attract U.S. support. It should be noted that the AFL-CIO, along with six Guatemalan unions, filed a complaint, allowed through labor provisions of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), on April 23, 2008, charging the Guatemalan government with not upholding its labor laws and for failing to investigate and prosecute crimes against union members — which include rape and murder. This speaks to the idea of securing a “business-friendly” climate like in Colombia, which many in Washington want to reward with a free trade agreement. Guatemala’s government is currently led by President Alvaro Colom, a politician who represents the country’s ruling oligarchs. Pre-election violence during his campaign claimed the lives of over 50 candidates (or their family members) and political activists, in a country Amnesty International reports is infested with “clandestine groups” comprised of members of “the business sector, private security companies, common criminals, gang members and possibly ex and current members of the armed forces” responsible for targeting human rights activists.

This regional militaristic strategy finally materialized into policy on June 30 when President Bush signed into law the Meridia Initiative, or “Plan Mexico,” which according to Laura Carlsen of the Americas Program “could allocate up to \$1.6 billion to Mexico, Central American, and Caribbean countries for security aid to design and carry out counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, and border security measures.” Just one day later, investigative journalist Kristen Bricker reported that a video had surfaced showing a U.S.-based private security company teaching torture techniques to Mexican police. This led Amnesty International to call for an investigation on July 3 to determine

why techniques such as “holding a detainee down in a pit full of excrement and rats and forcing water up the nostrils of the detainee in order to secure information” were being taught. Later in July the Inter Press Service published a story about a 53-page report on Human Rights and Conflicts in Central America 2007-2008 that suggested “Central America is backsliding badly on human rights issues, and social unrest could flare up into civil wars like those experienced in the last decades of the 20th century.”

Nevertheless, Washington continues to push for the re-militarization of the region, as evidenced by a \$2.6 million aid package given to El Salvador in October to “fight gangs.” Coincidentally, this was announced just months after the Inter Press Service reported in a June 16 article that U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte “expressed concern over supposed ties between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN),” while also announcing that “the Bush administration is on the alert to Iran’s presence in Central America.”

Playing the Terror Card

IN ORDER TO UP THE ANTE as a means of promoting this militaristic vision for the Americas and to vilify strategic “enemies” such as Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales, Washington has added the “War on Terror” into the equation by spreading unfounded allegations about Islamic terrorist infiltration into the region.

Journalists Ben Dangl and April Howard of *Upside Down World*, reporting for EXTRA! in Oct. 2007, wrote “In the Cold War, Washington and the media used the word ‘communism’ to rally public opinion against political opponents. Now, in the post-September 11 world, there is a new verbal weapon — ‘terrorism.’” This puts into context Washington’s evidence-lacking assertions that the Tri-Border

Area, where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet, is a hub for Islamic terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, claims the mainstream media have obsequiously parroted, yet Dangel and Howard helped disprove. Dangel and Howard, reporting from Ciudad del Este, a city located in the center of this alleged “hotbed” of terrorism, talked with Paraguayan officials, as well as local residents, all of whom denied there was any presence of foreign terrorist groups. They pointed out that the governments of Brazil

and Argentina have also denied the claims. But the terrorist assertions haven’t stopped there.

Norman A. Bailey, a former U.S. spy chief for Cuba and Venezuela, testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on July 17 that “financial support has been provided [by drug traffickers] to insurgent groups in certain countries, most notoriously to the FARC in Colombia, as well as to ETA, the Basque separatist organization, and most importantly to Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad, through their extensive network in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.”

The State Department’s David M. Luna, Director for Anticrime Programs, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, gave a statement on Oct. 8 claiming that international terrorist organizations will collaborate with regional criminal networks to smuggle WMD’s across the U.S.’s border with Mexico.

“Fighting transnational crime must go hand in hand with fighting terrorists, if we want to ensure that we ‘surface them,’” stated Luna. He also went on to regurgitate the empty claims of the Tri-Border Islamic threat.

This led Amnesty International to call for an investigation on July 3 to determine why techniques such as “holding a detainee down in a pit full of excrement and rats and forcing water up the nostrils of the detainee in order to secure information” were being taught.

That same day the Associated Press reported that U.S. officials were concerned with alliances being formed by terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and Hezbollah and Latin American drug cartels.

“The presence of these people in the region leaves open the possibility that they will attempt to attack the United States,” said Charles Allen, a veteran CIA analyst. “The threats in this hemisphere are real. We cannot ignore them.”

And on Oct. 21 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that U.S. and

Colombian officials allegedly dismantled a drug and money laundering ring used to finance Hezbollah.

This post-Sept. 11 fear-mongering, being carried out for years now, has served as a pretext for Washington to deploy Special Operations troops in embassies across the globe, including Latin America, “to gather intelligence on terrorists . . . for potential missions to disrupt, capture, or kill them.”

The *New York Times*, which broke the story on March 8, 2006, reported that this initiative, led by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, was an attempt to broaden the U.S. military’s role in intelligence gathering. The soldiers, referred to as “Military Liaison Elements,” were initially deployed without the knowledge of local ambassadors. This changed after an armed robber in Paraguay was killed after attempting to rob a group of soldiers covertly deployed to the country. Senior embassy officials were “embarrassed” by the episode as the soldiers were operating out of a hotel, rather than the embassy.

But in a follow-up by the *Washington Post* on April 22, “the Pentagon gained the leeway

to inform — rather than gain the approval of — the U.S. ambassador before conducting military operations in a foreign country” when deploying these “elite Special Operations Troops.” This development has remained largely under the radar, with the exception of analysis by Just the Facts, a joint project of the Center for International Policy, the Latin American Working Group Education Fund, and the Washington Office on Latin America.

A New Cold War?

IN OCT. 2006, PRESIDENT BUSH SIGNED A waiver that authorized the U.S. military to resume certain types of training to a number of militaries in the region which had been suspended as a result of a bill intended to punish countries not signing bilateral agreements that would grant immunity to U.S. citizens from prosecution before the International Criminal Court.

Bush was forced to act as a result of Venezuela’s growing influence in the region, as well as the “red” threat that China’s growing business in the region presented.

“The Chinese are standing by and I can’t think of anything that is worse than having those people go over there and get indoctrinated by them. And I think maybe we should address that because that’s a very serious thing,” said Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK), at a March 14, 2008, hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY), at the same hearing, said this was “a serious threat” and called for ending the restrictions on U.S. military training programs imposed on Latin American nations for refusing to sign the bilateral immunity agreements. Of course, Latin American nations should not be subject to sanctions for quite properly rejecting the immunity agreements; but neither should there be training programs for their repressive militaries, to teach these militaries repressive practices.

The Associated Press reported in Oct. that

“China’s trade with Latin America jumped from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$102.6 billion last year. [And] In May, a state-owned Chinese company agreed to buy a Peruvian copper mine for \$2.1 billion.”

These developments should further perpetuate the “Red Scare” making its way through the Senate. Then there is Russia’s military sales and cooperation with Venezuela. *U.S. News and World Report’s* Alastair Gee wrote a fear-mongering article on Oct. 14, 2008, in which he stated, “This is not the first time Russians have sought close links with Latin America. In 1962, the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba nearly precipitated nuclear war with the United States. The Soviets also funded regional communist parties and invited students from the region to study in Soviet universities.”

But more importantly, it is the region’s “march away from the ‘Washington consensus’ of democracy and free-market capitalism” that has drummed up a cold war mentality in Washington. With democratically elected presidents in the region openly embracing socialism and socialist-style policies, economic programs in various countries that include nationalizing industries and “redistributing the wealth”, and social movements ideologically and physically confronting free market capitalism, it should come as no surprise that anti-globalization movements have found themselves classified as a national security threat to the United States. A declassified April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate entitled “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,” states, “Anti-U.S. and anti-globalization sentiment is on the rise and fueling other radical ideologies. This could prompt some leftist, nationalist, or separatist groups to adopt terrorist methods to attack US interests.”

Moving Forward

DEVELOPMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA are reason for hope and optimism that “a new, better and possible world” could be on the horizon.

But these very same reasons are cause for concern.

With Washington's imperial stretch on the decline, both militarily and economically, both history and current conditions suggest it will try to reassert itself in Latin America — just as it did after Vietnam.

But because of the deeply embedded and institutionalized nature of Washington's imperial machine, it doesn't matter much which party

controls the White House and Congress. To fight these developments, we need to continue to grow grassroots media projects and support independent journalists, build long-term solidarity with Latin American social movements and build social movements in the United States, fight free trade and do our part to shed light upon the structural violence threatening Latin America's promising future — which is directly tied to ours.

B. J. Widick, 1910–2008

NEW POLITICS NOTES WITH SADNESS the death of B.J. Widick — a labor organizer and a working-class intellectual, and an occasional contributor to this journal. He died on June 28, 2008, at the age of 97.

Born in Yugoslavia in 1910, Widick arrived in the United States with his family not long before the outbreak World War One. During the 1930s, he worked as a researcher and journalist for the rubber and auto workers' unions. Inspired by the role of the Communist League of America in the Minneapolis Teamsters strike in 1934, Widick became a partisan of the anti-Stalinist left. He met with Leon Trotsky in Mexico to discuss the labor movement in the United States and remained part of the socialist tendency associated with Max Shachtman through the 1960s. At the time of his death, Widick was a professor emeritus of economics at Wayne State University.

The socialist magazine *Against the Current* has published two accounts of Widick's life and work that we recommend to readers. Alan Wald's obituary in the September/October 2008 issue provides a detailed account of Widick's affiliations within the labor movement and the left. Nelson Lichtenstein's piece in the November/December issue focuses on Widick as both an analyst and partisan of the Reuther leadership in the United Auto Workers.

Both articles are also available online:

Alan Wald, "B.J. Widick, 1910–2008," www.solidarity-us.org/node/1893

Nelson Lichtenstein, "B.J. Widick and the UAW," www.solidarity-us.org/node/1958

Did 1968 Change History?

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN

BEFORE WE CAN ASK IF “1968” CHANGED history we must first define it. Of what are we speaking and remembering?

What does it mean, these magical numbers, 1968? First of course, it can stand for the entire 1960s, which accommodates quite a bit: the Civil Rights movement of course and the civil rights legislation that flowed from it, as well as the rise of African-American radicalism and nationalism, in the streets and factories of Detroit, as well as the points South. 1968 can stand in for the Great Society as well, although by 1968 it was clearly in retreat. It can stand in for the second wave of American feminism and for the gay rights movement, which was already becoming a movement even before the Stonewall riots of 1969. And 1968 can mean all the tumultuous events in the political campaigns of that year: the Tet Offensive, the Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy primary challenges to President Lyndon Johnson and to each other, the “abdication” of the President, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and the Chicago Democratic Party convention, the emergence of George Wallace as a political and social phenomenon, and the presidential campaign that fall.

Of course, that is just the United States. In Europe and in Mexico events were equally tumultuous, with a general strike in Paris, huge demonstrations in London, and regime shaking upheavals in Czechoslovakia, Spain, Yugoslavia, and Poland.

However, in this offering, 1968 means what

most in the political culture think of as “1968”: the largely student, mainly left-wing, predominantly male, Euro-American moment in which a generation of radicals entertained what seemed even at the time utopian hopes and postures in the streets of Paris, Berlin, New York, and Mexico City. It was a New Left, which saw itself as distinct from both the Communists or the Socialists, as well as being a left that stood against the mere social democratic reformism of many of the parties which had then been in or near power in North America and Europe.

Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of the world wide New Left in 1968 is that it arose not in the face of political reaction, but in a rebellion against a reformism grown stale and complacent. Thus, in Britain and the United States the New Left flourished under Labour and the Democrats, and in West Germany the Social Democratic entry into a coalition government persuaded many young people of the need for a vigorous extraparlimentary opposition. In France, Charles de Gaulle presided over a conservative regime that nevertheless greatly accelerated the many social changes that were bringing French education, industry, and agriculture into a closer alignment with northern Europe. And even in Eastern Europe, Stalinist regimes had moved well beyond the institutionalized terror of the early 1950s.

It is easy to ridicule the student generation of 1968: the young, the privileged, the white and male. Revisited today, much of the Marxist, Trotskyist, Maoist, or anarcho-liberationist rhetoric of ‘68 does sound ridiculous, even morally irresponsible. It was, as George Orwell put it in another context, a kind of playing with fire by people who don’t even know that fire is hot. For any radical looking back from the first

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decade of the 21st century, the slogans of the year 1968 sound stale and absurd. “What do we want? Everything! When do we want it? Now!” This is narcissism with a red flag.

Nevertheless, the spirit was there, it was big, and it captured the imagination of millions. The world-wide character of the movement was noted at the time. The British anarchist publication *Black Dwarf* headlined “We Shall Fight, We Shall Win — Paris, London, Rome, Berlin.” Indeed, 1968 deserves to be compared to 1848 and 1919, also years of great collective, multi-national hopes and failures. In France, perhaps the worldwide epicenter of “1968,” the insurgents shook the system, with almost 10 million workers on strike at the end of May. Workers and intellectuals assumed the role of heirs and custodians of an “alternative” France evoked by the memories of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Popular Front factory occupations of 1936. But as David Caute wrote in his comprehensive survey, *The Year of the Barricades*, “The strikers of May 1968 were playing Republicans against Kings on an historical board game that is not available . . . in the British or German cultures, and still less in the American.”¹

Indeed, the ebullient spirits that were released in 1968 could not transcend the political sociology of the various states in which the movement found itself imprisoned. In West Germany and Great Britain, student radicalism never sparked a large social movement, but, as in the United States, the university occupations and occasional violent clashes with police engendered a severe political backlash. While both Tito and DeGaulle had made dramatic and conciliatory television appearances at the height of the student rebellions in June 1968, government and educational leaders in North

America and northern Europe found that the greatest political rewards were won by a defense of the existing order. Most Americans and most

British applauded the use of police to clear student radicals from the university classrooms and the streets of Chicago and London.

In Eastern and Latin Europe, on the other hand, the ruling elites felt themselves on far more unfavorable ter-

rain, largely because students and young intellectuals were able to forge links with wider strata of the population. The insurgencies there demonstrated how rapidly a transnational social movement could shake the symbiotic structures of power that had long held Europe in a cold-war embrace. These eruptions were also marked with some of the same avant-garde aspirations as those of Western youth, but here the attempt to liberate a region of autonomous cultural life meshed easily with the long-suppressed effort to end censorship and restore a measure of civic freedom. In Madrid, students, academics and workers rekindled something of the spirit of 1936 during their bitter yearlong struggle against Franco’s repressive apparatus. In Warsaw, students chanted “Free art, free theater!” after government censors closed a 19th century drama that contained anti-Russian references. Charles University students in Prague crowned the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg “King of the May” in 1965; 30 months later, a clash with police over a university power shortage set in motion the reform movement that came to be known as the Prague Spring. In many of these authoritarian states, opposition movements that were defeated in 1968 re-emerged a decade or more later, providing the leadership and a good deal of the spirit for the velvet revolutions that brought down the Eastern European regimes in 1989.²

DID 1968 CHANGE HISTORY? One thing it did, for ill or good, was to create a generation. In every country, in Europe especially, there is the generation of 1968, far more decisively shaped than the generation of 1989 or even that of the World War II years. A good deal of this generational identification is highly negative, of course. David Horowitz has built a career denouncing the “destructive generation.” Another contemporary critic asserts “The distinguishing feature of the 68ers has continued to be their capacity for self-indulgence, and their blindness about the consequences of their actions for others.” But far more remember the generational experience with fondness, even if they have ceased to identify with the politics and culture expounded by the 1968ers. As Denis MacShane, a British Labour MP, put it in a recent retrospective:

Before 1968 all was grey, conservative, male and old. After 1968, it got a lot better. I was 20 in 1968, and I cannot think of a better year in the last 200 to have been 20 in . . . Capitalism won as most 1968ers morphed into Richard Bransons with greater or lesser success, and 1968 produced no enduring reformist politics. But to be young in 1968 was very heaven, and today’s Blimpish attacks prove just what a great moment in history it was.³

Timothy Garton Ash, who is of a younger generation, and whose greatest interests lie in recording the history of the events leading up to the genuine revolutions that transformed Eastern Europe in 1989, nevertheless pays his respects to the generational memory of 1968:

It’s a general rule that the events we recall most intensely are those we experienced when young. The dawn you glimpsed when you were 20 may turn out to have been a false dawn; the one you witness at 50 may change the world forever. But memory, that artful shyster, will always privilege the first. Moreover, while 1968 happened in both the western and the eastern halves of Europe, in Paris and in Prague, 1989 only really happened in the eastern half.

And then Ash goes on . . .

The 68ers are a uniquely well-defined generation all across Europe — probably the best defined since what one might call the 39ers, those shaped for life by their youthful experience of the Second World War. Having been students in 1968, they now — at or around the age of 60 — occupy the commanding heights of cultural production in most European countries. Think they’re going to pass up a chance to talk about their youth? You must be joking. Not important, moi?⁴

In the United States, these generational remembrances are a good deal more muted, if only because the generation of ’68 has been such a cultural and political punching bag for so many years. Moreover, in the United States the leftwing ’68ers have a powerful set of conservative competitors, whose consciousness was also forged in the 1960s, albeit the year of Goldwater — 1964 — rather than the year of McCarthy, King, Mark Rudd, and Robert Kennedy.

In the United States, the year 1968, or the Sixties more generally, should not be divorced from the long era of social reform which, with a few setbacks, extended all the way from 1932 until the early 1970s. Indeed one might well argue that the 1930s and the 1960s share a lot more in common than was once thought. From a policy level, the 1960s were indeed the fulfillment, especially in terms of race and gender, of much that was implicit in the the Rooseveltian project of 30 years before. And from a cultural perspective, we can now see, courtesy of Michael Denning, Alan Wald, Robin Kelley, and Gary Gerstle, that the 1930s had their own avant-garde, their own culture wars, their own ethnic and racial awakening. Likewise, the 1960s, even that defined by the generation that would become “1968,” were not hostile to the project that we identify with the CIO, the New Deal, and in Europe, the tradition of social democracy.⁵

But let us get on with the ostensible subject: “Did 1968 change history?” Here I want to take a look at three issues: first one of politi-

cal structures, the second of international affairs, and the third of culture. One could find more, but these will be representative enough.

The Democratic Party nomination process in 1968 was a mess. The Democrats nominated Hubert Humphrey, even though many Demo-

One aide to Johnson remembered that the president “could not go anywhere . . . that was disastrous.”

LBJ’s successor, Richard Nixon, labeled these conditions a “war at home.”

crats abhorred his muddled position on the Vietnam War and he hadn’t entered a single primary.

Party reformers, associated mostly with antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy, were outraged. They proposed studying the delegate selection rules, and their cause got an enormous lift from the famously disastrous Chicago convention, where tens of thousands of young people battled the police in the city streets. On August 27, the second night of the convention, Democratic delegates voted for a commission that would seek to ensure that “all Democratic voters have had full and timely opportunity to participate.”

The McGovern commission, chaired first by Senator George McGovern and then Congressman Don Fraser of Minnesota, was stacked with party reformers, many of whom were deeply opposed to the war. It ended the old boss system of choosing presidential nominees and helped create the modern presidential primary system. Soft quotas were established for delegates. Women, young people, and blacks would have to be represented in numbers “in reasonable relationship” to their demographic presence

in the party. And there would be an end to the practice of appointing ex-officio delegates (i.e., the cronies of the bosses) to the convention. The influence of the big city machines, of organized labor, and of the party apparatus itself declined. This led to a class shift in each party, as affluent liberals gained more power in the Democratic Party while ideological conservatives won more say in the GOP.

No longer would party bosses have control over two-thirds to four-fifths of the delegates. Not only could they no longer appoint ex-officio delegates, but just as importantly — and against the desires of many on the commission — a number of state legislatures decided to institute new elections in order to comply with the jumble of new rules. Thus, the modern presidential primary was born. In 1968, 16 states held primaries. By 1972, 28 did. Last year, we seem to have passed through an existentially endless primary season with at least 35 primaries, and several more states holding caucuses.

The McGovern commission also changed the makeup of the party’s followers. No longer would nonunionized working-class whites have the same influence in party affairs. As polls have consistently shown, they don’t tend to vote in primary races, while college-educated professionals do. The latter are not only more civically engaged in general than their working-class counterparts, they are more knowledgeable about party affairs.

This reform within the Democratic party soon produced its own conservative response. After the defeats of George McGovern and Jimmy Carter, elected office holders believed that these changes had unduly diminished the role of party leaders and elected officials. The Party appointed a commission chaired by Jim Hunt, then governor of North Carolina, to address this issue. The Party abolished the mid-term mini-conventions which had been a platform for influence by the Democratic left in 1974 and 1978. And the Hunt Commission created the super delegates, about 20 percent of

all delegates, who at one point in the spring of 2008 seemed to hold the choice of party nominee in their hands. However thrilling the election of Barak Obama, the process by which he became the Democratic Party nominee left much to be desired. Indeed we have the worst of both worlds: endless primaries which privilege media, upscale voters, and candidate charisma, combined with a set of “superdelegates” whose influence remains sufficient to distort the nominating process in a crisis.⁶

BUT ENOUGH OF THIS INSIDE BASEBALL. When readers of *New Politics* think about 1968 they are interested in far larger structures and ideologies, including the Cold War and the era of détente that began right around 1968. University of Wisconsin historian Jeremi Suri argues that this purposefully constructed rapprochement was in fact a direct response by elites on both sides of the Iron Curtain to the youth-led social movements that had arisen in the late 1960s. As the CIA reported to Lyndon Johnson in the summer of 1968, “dissidence, involving students and non-students alike, is a world-wide phenomenon.” Organized militants were challenging leaders in France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. One aide to Johnson remembered that the president “could not go anywhere . . . that was disastrous.” LBJ’s successor, Richard Nixon, labeled these conditions a “war at home.”⁷

In his *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, Suri argues that détente flows from chronic Cold War tensions which are brought to a head by the upheavals of 1968. There was an inherent irrationality to the nuclear Cold War, a chronic insecurity made more unacceptable by Vietnam. Détente, writes Suri, is a political response by ruling elites who seek to accommodate not just each other, but the populace at home who will no longer tolerate Cold War tensions and traumas.

Détente had its origins in Germany, the cockpit of the Cold War, where Willy Brandt

inaugurated a policy of *Ost Politik* toward the Communist German state. Soon Nixon also came to understand that with the Vietnam war sapping the legitimacy of his rule, a demobilization of Cold War rhetoric, even arms, was necessary. To the extent that Nixon had a plan to actually end the Vietnam war on favorable terms, it was to enlist China and the Soviet Union in a deal to cool off Southeast Asia; this did not work, but the larger structure of détente would continue nonetheless. Thus Willy Brandt, Richard Nixon, and Leonid Brezhnev abandoned the muscular rhetoric and charismatic politics of their Cold War predecessors.

But none of this entailed an ideological truce at home. As Rick Perlstein shows in his new narrative, *Nixonland*, at the same moment that President Nixon is inaugurating détente with the Soviets and opening the door to China, his Administration mobilizes its forces for a season of “positive polarization” against the “radical liberals” whom he seeks to identify with the worst excesses of the generation of 1968. Nixon’s second front, the home front culture war, would long outlive his own presidency. As Suri puts it in *Power and Protest*, “The promise of détente became a stick with which to beat domestic critics.”⁸

Détente, like the Democratic Party reforms, was but a temporary stopgap. It collapsed in less than a decade, but not before it had some remarkable long range consequences. In the United States détente infuriated the Cold War Right even more than it frustrated what remained of the New Left. Once this collaboration with the Communist regimes had served its purpose, the political immorality of the project became easy to see, which gave a sense of élan to the neo-conservatives and the Reaganites as they began their short march to power.

Meanwhile in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, in East Germany, détente meant opening up to Western loans and standards of living, attempt-

ing a Goulash Communism to satisfy or thwart the spirits released in 1968. The indebtedness of the Eastern European states exploded. In Poland by 1980 annual debt service exceeded the total income generated from its exports to the West. This meant that the regime could sustain living standards only by juggling cutbacks and concessions in a series of legitimacy-draining crises that culminated in the Solidarity strikes of 1980-81. Thus it was hardly the Reagan arms buildup, but rather the rumblings from below, perhaps infused by some of the still vibrant hopes of 1968, that prepared the way for the fall of Communism, in which so many veterans of the late 1960s played such prominent roles.⁹

Now, let us finally turn to the culture wars, undoubtedly the greatest legacy of 1968 in the United States, and some would argue, the most important way in which “1968” changed history. Ironically, this claim comes as much, or more, from the conservative side of the political divide as from the old New Left.

Indeed, American conservatives have been heavily invested in the cultural revolution of the 1960s, far more so than most on the left. It is the Right and not the Left which infuses culture change with the largest consequences, finding in an ill defined set of ideas and values the cement that holds together civilization itself. The Right has long turned Marx on his head, finding in a set of cultural tropes and ideological postures the foundational structures for the society they propose to maintain or build anew.

CONSERVATIVES, MARK LILLA HAS reminded us, do not speak much about the strictly political consequences of the Sixties, perhaps because these have proven ephemeral or indirect. President Nixon actually put in place many of the regulatory reforms that came out of the environmental movement. It was his Republican Administration that finally integrated most Southern school systems and indexed social security to the CPI. For a time the presi-

dency became weaker while Congress and the Courts became stronger. Reform of the seniority system took place in Congress, not always to the benefit of the liberals, but that transformation was not really a product of the Sixties, but had its origins in the earnest liberal reformism of the 1950s. Furthermore, conservatives are stumped when it comes to an explanation for the cultural revolution they detest so much. Instead they are content to endlessly recount its horrors, thereby inspiring the faithful, and putting themselves at the service of whatever questionable political forces might hold back the tide.¹⁰

The chief problems, say neoconservatives like Roger Kimball, who once wrote a book called *Tenured Radicals*, and Myron Magnet of the *City Journal*, is that 1968 inspired a delegitimization of public authority in virtually every aspect of American life and letters. The nation’s difficulties arose not out of structural poverty or deindustrialization or even the social and cultural pathologies of the poor themselves, the “culture of poverty” or “ghetto culture.” Rather the problem has arisen out of the “majority culture” itself, Magnet wrote in *The Dream and the Nightmare: the Sixties Legacy to the Underclass*.

Led by its elite institutions — the universities, the judiciary, the press, the great charitable foundations, even the mainstream churches — American culture underwent a revolution in the 1960s, which transformed some of its most basic beliefs and values, including its beliefs about the causes of poverty. When these new attitudes reached the poor, and particularly the urban, minority poor, the result was catastrophic: many of the new culture’s beliefs downplayed the personal responsibility, self-control, and deferral of gratification that it takes to succeed.¹¹

The family has taken a particular blow, with birthrates down, illegitimacy up, and divorce more the rule than the exception.

But if the fruit of the 1960s was this decline in public and private morality, then why

did it take place then and there? What were the ingredients that generated this phenomenon just two decades after the end of the “Good War,” even less since the onset of the moral and military conflict with the Communists? Once you define the Sixties as a cultural revolution, then it becomes exceedingly difficult to explain it in something less than religious or metahistorical terms. After all, Conservatives in the U.S. romanticize the affluent Fifties and are therefore reticent to seek the causes of the cultural revolution there. Likewise it would be taboo, although I think altogether appropriate, to blame the civil rights movement itself for what conservatives saw as the decline in public morality, a view that was in fact the view of a lot of white Southerners in the 1940s and 1950s who saw every reform leading to intermarriage and sexual promiscuity. That argument is off limits, which may be why a number of conservatives, starting with William Buckley in the 1950s, but continuing long afterward, have set their sights not only on 1968, but on the entire Enlightenment tradition.

Then there is the accusation that a new class of intellectuals — teachers, reporters, and civil servants — have sprung up on American soil and captured our leading institutions. But for decades before 1968 the politics of that new class was hardly left-wing, even in the eyes of the right. For every secular academic condemned by William Buckley in his 1951 *God and Man At Yale*, there were technocratic conservatives like William Conant, theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr, or journalists like Walter Lippmann, all of whom were part of an influential class who commanded enormous respect from the conservative establishment.

The most sophisticated interpretation of the cultural radicalism which flowed out of the 1960s comes from the work of Daniel Bell, who distilled much of Joseph Schumpeter’s dark forebodings about the trajectory of modern capitalism into his 1976 book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, originally begun as

an essay that Bell started writing in the autumn of 1969. Bell argued that the eruptions of the late 1960s were not a deviation from the orderly bourgeois path marked out for modern capitalist society, but as Schumpeter had warned

Daniel Bell: There was a tension
between what capitalist society
required of its citizens as
producers and the habits it
fostered in them as consumers.

years before, a working out of the logic inherent in capitalism itself. With Max Weber, Bell argued that capitalism developed and drew its strength from an ethic of sobriety, saving, and deferred gratification — but he added the observation that free-market capitalism itself worked powerfully to undermine those qualities and stimulate hedonism and the desire for self-realization and instant gratification. There was a tension between what capitalist society required of its citizens as producers and the habits it fostered in them as consumers. This contradiction, Bell argued, would leave advanced capitalist societies without the moral basis they needed for continued prosperity and cohesion. Conservatives, who have always liked Daniel Bell for his condescension toward the left, have nevertheless been unable to stomach this argument. If capitalism generates 1968 style hedonism, then how can they continue to celebrate the free market? ¹²

Not all those who see the cultural evanescence of 1968 as its most important legacy stand on the right. Virtually every textbook we use and every Democratic Party politician celebrates the new freedoms generated by that generation, those of racial minorities and women first and foremost, but also the general transformation of mores found in education, journalism, cloth-

ing, literature etc. Michael Kazin is writing a history of the American left, in both the 19th century and the 20th, that makes this explicit. Most radical movements, he argues, from the abolitionists to the New Left, have failed to achieve their stated political goals, but they have nevertheless triumphed in the realm of culture and ideas. “Making values explicit” should be the central task of politics, declared the Port Huron statement, the most important and long lived manifesto of Sixties radicalism. “We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love . . .” Thus the phrase “the personal is political” has become a cliché, but there are profound reasons that it has outlasted “Off the Pig” as a catchphrase from that era.

As Kazin puts it:

The long march of the post '68 left made its influence felt in many institutions. In the United States, it achieved something close to dominance in two particularly powerful ones: academia and Hollywood. That fact has long alarmed the American right, and with good reason. The anti-authoritarian, left-populist viewpoint taught in most history, literature, sociology, and government classes shows up, in wittier form, in films and television programs by the likes of Michael Mann, Spike Lee, Michael Moore, Oliver Stone, etc. And such products of mass culture reinforce the reigning wisdom in colleges.¹³

Barack Obama could not exist except for the cultural and social transformations of 1968. Likewise in France, Nicholas Sarkozy, the divorced son of migrants, who entered office declaring himself at war with the legacy of 1968, maintains a lifestyle of which many an aging cultural radical might well approve. As that quintessential rebel of the year 1968, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, put it, “We have won culturally and socially while, fortunately, losing politically.”

But I don't agree with this species of left-wing cultural analysis, neither the part about it being a good thing to have lost on the terrain of politics nor the triumphalist bit about suc-

cess in the realm of social mores and culture.

Daniel Bell's notion that the individual self-expression promoted by 1960s radicals was itself a product of capitalism has been widely echoed in recent times. But the idea that an ethic of self-realization was inimical to the further flourishing of capitalist societies now looks highly problematic. This was not just a matter of the emblematic children of the 1960s who went on to become millionaires, like Steve Jobs, Jerry Rubin, and Richard Branson. The development of a capitalist mode of production based on the interpersonal relationships found in the creative industries of Hollywood, the Web, or in Silicon Valley, or based in retail trade, health care, and education, have involved the elevation of employee initiative, or at least consent, above the hierarchy of the old-fashioned goods producing sectors of the economy. Individual self-expression and capitalist production have joined hands. The radical manifestos of 40 years ago have become the business school clichés of today.

TOM FRANK CAPTURED MUCH OF THIS phenomenon in his first book, *The Conquest of Cool*, (1997) a history of hip advertising in the 1960s. His second work, *One Market Under God*, (2000) carried on this mode of analysis, but noted its Christian inflection. In my own work on Wal-Mart I have found the same phenomenon, namely the capacity of business management to adapt to and incorporate the innovations that first emerged on the left, sometimes giving to them a Protestant connotation.

Take the idea of “servant leadership” for example. This is an idea, often popular in labor-intensive service and retail industries, that arose out of the late 1960s. Although we often think of it as Biblical in origin, its author was actually Robert K. Greenleaf, a career personnel director at AT&T who rose to become head of that corporation's management research before he retired in 1964. Greenleaf was caught up in the intellectual ferment of the late Sixties, and in

particular the need of large organizations like the telephone company to find new sources of institutional legitimacy to win the allegiance of both customers and employees. Older motivational ideas emphasizing personal security, organizational efficiency, and career enhancement seemed to be losing their appeal as the spirit of the times seeped even into the most traditional enterprises. So Greenleaf founded a “Center for Applied Ethics” in his native Indiana and in 1970 wrote “The Servant as Leader.” Servant leadership emphasized a holistic approach to work, a sense of community, and a sharing of power in decision making. The Lilly Endowment funded the early work of Greenleaf and his followers, but the servant leader concept has been popularized by business writers, some with an explicitly evangelical orientation, like Ken Blanchard, Steven Covey, and Larry Spears.

It is precisely this kind of Christian teamwork that has become the functional ideology for those millions of mega church goers, from the Carolinas to Orange County, that constitute the vast reservoir from which labor-intensive companies like Wal-Mart draw their managerial cadre and their hundreds of thousands of loyal employees. In an economy increasingly devoted to sales, service, and commoditization of the self, the servant leader idea rationalizes self-exploitation and lends a sacerdotal air to the corporate hierarchy. Thus in 2007 Wal-Mart announced that some 13,400 hourly workers with more than 20 years of service would take home an extra week’s pay, a “Servant Leadership Bonus,” perhaps designed to compensate them for the wage caps the company imposed on veteran employees just the year before.¹⁴

But when it comes to cultural transformations in general or the generation of 1968 in particular, I don’t want to end on a note of cyni-

The radical manifestos of 40 years ago have become the business school clichés of today.

cism. All revolutions, successful or not, link a transformation of the cultural and ideological terrain with a shift in power and governance. This was as true in the 1930s as it was in the late 1960s. Indeed, now that the New Deal is 70 years past and the year 1968 two-score old, one can glimpse more clearly the similarities, both cultural and political, that existed between these two eras of reform, which often spanned the life of a single generation or

which linked together parents and offspring. The laborite New Deal had its own culturally radical flavor, far more than the partisans of 1968, rightwing or left, have been willing to credit. As Michael Denning has shown us, Popular Front culture had a lot to say about artistic and musical innovation as well as multi-racial pluralism. There were culture wars in the 1930s as well as in later decades, which meant that one reason FDR was such a polarizing figure was that he embodied in his administration and in his persona the “class treason” that was so hateful to a generation of Yankee conservatives who had been the natural arbitrators of power and taste for so many decades. But unlike the generation of 1968, the New Dealers established a ruling order that lasted for two generations. Its cultural and social radicalism was backstopped by a transformation in the political economy that made it all seem highly naturalized. Thus while Barbara Bush could never stand Eleanor Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, that lower middle class product of an alcoholic father, always held a candle for the New Deal president, even as he dismantled FDR’s accomplishments.

And just as the 1930s are now seen as much more of a cultural revolt than was once thought likely, so too is the era of 1968 much more reformist than we once imagined. Despite all the talk of revolution, the economic program of the

generation of 1968 was often rather incremental, in a New Dealish sort of fashion. The Port Huron Statement, which was written at the UAW summer education camp, is best remembered for its long prologue in which the phrase “participatory democracy” is made famous.

But the remaining 40 odd pages of programmatic reform might well have been passed at virtually any trade union convention of that era. There is much discussion of raising the minimum wage, empowering trade unionism in the white collar and pink collar world, rebuilding the cities, improving education, and the like. Indeed, the real problem faced by the generation of 1968, when it came to the economy, was that they thought capitalism far too stable. It was not a crisis of capitalism that confronted these young radicals, but a claustrophobic economic system that seemed like a huge bureaucratic machine, well lubed and efficient. They wanted to overthrow capitalism not because it faced a crisis, or even because it did not produce for the majority of the population, but because it was such a sturdy iron cage. And this was their greatest ideological failure, because it would be the Right and not the Left that would prove most successful in taking advantage of the radical shifts in the nature of world capitalism that were about to come.

NOTES

1. David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 91, 254.

2. *Ibid.*, 71; and see Paul Berman’s *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 195–219 passim.

3. Denis MacShane, “The Heaven of 1968,” *Prospect Magazine*, May 2008 as part of an on-line symposium, “1968: Liberty or Its Illusion?”

4. Timothy Garton Ash, “This Tale of Two Revolutions May Yet Have a Twist,” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2008, on-line edition.

5. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the 20th Century* (New York: Verso, 1997); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Peter Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

6. Much of this discussion of party politics is taken from Mark Stricherz, “Primary Colors: How a Little-Known Task Force Helped Create Red State/Blue State America,” *The Boston Globe* on-line edition, November 23, 2003.

7. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

8. *Ibid.*, 261.

9. *Ibid.*, 249–50.

10. Mark Lilla, “A Tale of Two Reactions,” *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 45, Number 8, May 14, 1998.

11. Myron Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties’ Legacy to the Underclass* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 1993), 1.

12. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism: 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

13. Michael Kazin, “1968: Lessons Learned,” *Dissent*, Spring 2008, 16.

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Utopia: A Bet You Can't Refuse

RICHARD GREEMAN

LET'S BE OPTIMISTIC! Let's bet there's still one chance in a hundred that the Earth will be habitable at the end of the 21st Century. Think I'm exaggerating? Try answering the following questions honestly:

Do you personally think that weapons of mass destruction are likely to stop proliferating? Do you sincerely believe that pollution is going to stop getting worse? Do you honestly consider that forests will stop disappearing? That the climate will stop heating up? Do you actually foresee an end to glaciers melting? oceans rising? coastlands flooding? famines and epidemics spreading? poverty increasing? cities deteriorating? global unemployment rising? armed conflicts erupting? refugees multiplying? petty crime flourishing? corporate crime expanding? real wages declining, religions fanatizing? nationalists killing? women being degraded? Do you personally foresee an end to wars dragging on forever? nuclear bombs proliferating? nuclear power plants melting down? useless wealth piling up? rich people withdrawing into gated communities? youth despairing? drugs spreading? AIDS spreading? security-driven, governments becoming totalitarian? prisons boiling over? droughts getting longer? Violent storms increasing? desertification extending? world hunger expanding? the struggle for water intensifying? the air becoming unbreathable? the ocean going sterile? the trees, animals and fish disappearing?

Need I go on? You know as well as I do that each of these trends will lead over time to

foreseeable disasters if left unchecked. Now imagine all these trends interacting in horrid synergy. "One chance in a hundred?" Call me an optimist!

So for the sake of argument, let's assume that there is one chance in a hundred for a livable world in 2100. If that one chance exists, shouldn't we be able at least to imagine it, visualize it like a realistic sci-fi movie? Shouldn't we be able to invent one or more future scenarios — historically and technically possible scenarios — in which Spaceship Earth is saved from self-destruction? Let's put our imaginations to work. Can we imagine a realistic salvation scenario for a planet in the thralls of a powerful social and economic system (capitalism) which seems inexorably to be leading us to predictable catastrophes? If we exclude divine or extra-terrestrial intervention, then we need to imagine the emergence of some kind of positive revolution in human relations, that is to say in global society. "But that's not practical," you object. "It's purely utopian." So be it. When reality becomes practically impossible, the impossible may become the only practical way out.

The Power of Utopia

IN ANY CASE, THE HUMAN IMAGINATION IS A powerful thing, and utopian ideas expressed in myths and the writings of Plato, Augustine, Thomas Moore, Edward Bellamy, and William Morris, have long been a major influence in human society. Indeed, utopian visions of humanity's oneness and holiness have inspired vast peasant revolutions down through history. During the English Revolutions of the 17th century, the "Diggers" and "Levelers" shared out the land and wealth; in Germany in 1563, the

RICHARD GREEMAN *invites readers of New Politics to check out his new book of political commentary, Beware of Dangerous Shortcuts and Vegetarian Sharks at www.lulu.com/content/923573*

city of Münster Germany was transformed into a radical commune by Anabaptists under Jan of Lyden; and in China, beginning in 1851, the idealistic Ta'I-p'ing rebels practiced equality and occupied major provinces for over a decade. Meanwhile, in the West, secular utopian socialist schemes were elaborated in France by Fourier, Saint-Simon and Proudhon, while the British philanthropist Robert Owen established successful utopian colonies in Britain and the United States.

Utopian thinking also gives humans the intellectual power of historical perspective, freeing them from the unhistorical prejudice that the present system is somehow immutable or natural. Only from the perspective of our one-chance-in-a-hundred utopia we can look backwards, in the guise of historians of the year 2100, and ask the essential historical questions: how did we get here from there? What technological/material and ideological/spiritual elements — latent in early 21st Century globalized capitalist society — enabled the emergence of planetary social movements leading to sustainable post-capitalist societies?

In the 1840s the works of the utopian socialists inspired the historically-minded German philosopher Karl Marx to see that capitalism as a transitory stage of human society preceded by feudalism and likely to be followed by socialism, the historical expression of which is in the practical struggles of the working people of all lands. These were the “proletarians” or wage-workers who, tired of waiting for philanthropists to set up ideal communities, were beginning to unite, struggling against the employing classes — even organizing internationally with socialism as their avowed goal. These workers, with their vast numbers, concentration in factories, key role in the economy, and growing self-awareness, seemed to have potential force to take

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put into practice by the
(mostly anarchist!) workers
and craftsmen of Paris.

power away from the capitalist owners and to unite all the world's producers in creating a co-operative commonwealth. Thus Marx viewed

history as a succession of class struggles between exploited majorities and small, but powerful, elites: slaves against masters, serfs against landlords, commoners against nobles, workers against capitalists (billions against billionaires in our day) leading either to

a new society or to mutual destruction.

Utopia's Tragedy

IT IS OFTEN FORGOTTEN THAT FOR MARX, the essence of socialism was democracy — the government of the majority based on free speech, free press, free assembly — to which socialism added equality — democracy carried into the economic sphere. Marx lived to see his vision put into practice by the (mostly anarchist!) workers and craftsmen of Paris, who in 1871 armed themselves to save the city from the invading Prussians, elected their own self-governing Commune to run their political, economic, and military affairs, and held out for three months before being crushed when their revolution failed to spread nationwide. But even worse revolutionary tragedies took place in the 20th century, decades after Marx's death, in Communist Russia and China, where socialism was separated from democracy and new bureaucratic elites turned the utopian dream into totalitarian nightmares of forced labor. The horror inspired by such Communist dictatorships has naturally left succeeding generations afraid of all utopian and socialist dreams. But is it logical to condemn all utopian ideas, and with them all hope for a better world — as necessarily totalitarian? By the same logic we would have to reject Jesus' “Love each other like yourselves” message because it led to the corrupt Borgia Popes and the terrorist Spanish Inquisition!

Nonetheless, utopia continues to have a bad name, and it's a sad commentary that in the 21st century, only wackos, racists, survivalists, and end-of-the-world fundamentalists seem to have a vision of the future, however negative. Yet our strife-torn world cries out for positive visions. To move forward, we need a goal, a dream. It isn't enough for good people merely to protest, to struggle eternally "against" the latest outrage. Of course we must resist war, racism, sexism, police-state repression, and a host of other evils. But what is missing today is a vision of a possible future without which our awareness of the endless evils of this world only makes us passive and cynical. Without utopia, the only alternatives are despair or "realistically" choosing the lesser (!) of two evils while things go from bad to worse.

Mutiny on Starship Earth

THE MEN IN SUITS WHO RULE THE WORLD today have no plan for the future. Their main preoccupation is holding onto their power and wealth. Their perspectives are limited to inflating quarterly balance sheets and winning biennial election campaigns. If they don't see any further into the future, it's also because they unconsciously understand that there will be no future — since they are busy murdering it. They are the officers of a ship drifting rudderless toward a rocky shore, busy looting the cargo, locking up the passengers and crew below decks, and fighting among themselves for the booty. The name of that vessel is Starship Earth. Its only hope is that the passengers and crew can figure out a way to get organized and take over the bridge before it is too late. Even with the odds against us, it's a bet we can't refuse. Because like it or not, we are the all in the same boat, passengers and crew alike — far out at sea and drifting toward shipwreck.

One chance in a hundred may seem like pretty slim odds, but look at it this way: The bad news is that we have nothing to lose but the dismal spectacle of a dying world — made

uglier every day by increasing injustice, suffering, and stupidity. The good news is that we have a finite chance to save a beautiful planet with all our friends on board. Nothing to lose against an infinity of life and beauty? Mathematically speaking, it's zero against infinity — pretty good odds in my book. Talk about a bet you can't refuse!

And if planetary destruction is an idea that confronts us as an absolute end, it follows that its opposite, Life itself, must also be taken as an absolute end. Assuming, then the necessity of utopia, how will we get from here to there? In other words, what are the technological (material) and ideological (spiritual) elements — latent in globalized capitalist society — that can combine to enable the emergence of the planetary social movements capable of stripping the billionaires of their power and creating sustainable post-capitalist societies?

"I Will Raise the Earth!"

THEY SAY THAT IN ANCIENT TIMES, that bold philosopher and inventor Archimedes boasted: "Give me a lever long enough, a fulcrum, a place to stand, and I will raise the Earth!" Of course, we know Archimedes' amazing feat was only a hypothesis — a "thought experiment" that could take place only in the mind. But Archimedes' discovery was no less powerful for being a mere idea dreamed up by a philosopher. In the centuries after Archimedes, inventions based on his hypothesis vastly multiplied the puny strength of human beings so that they were able to circumnavigate the globe and eventually to dominate it — for better or for worse. Can anyone then doubt the ability of an idea — a thought experiment — to multiply human power?

Our problem, if we want to successfully imagine a plausible science fiction with a happy ending, is to think up a similar hypothetical formula for multiplying human power so that our passengers and crew can "lift the Earth" before it is shipwrecked. Our mutineers will need a lot of leverage to overpower the officers who are

fighting among themselves, looting the ship, and steering it toward disaster. How to imagine such a lever, platform, and fulcrum? History seems to indicate that whenever people are ready to pose new questions, the answers are already present — if only as possibilities for science fiction.

The Modern Archimedes Hypothesis

IN THE SCENARIO “Spaceship Earth in the Twenty-first Century,” the three elements are already on board, ready to be configured into a new power strong enough to halt the onrush of planetary self-destruction and release the human energy to build a new society: the social lever, the electronic platform, and the philosophical fulcrum.

- The Social Lever is the vast untapped power of planetary solidarity. Once the billions of passengers and crew members aboard Spaceship Earth unite and act together, no force can stop them. Divided, they are pitiful and weak. United, their power is irresistible.
- The Electronic Platform is the World Wide Web. Its emergent technology is tentacular, infinite in its connections, interactive, and indestructible because its center is everywhere and nowhere. As accessible tomorrow as the tele-

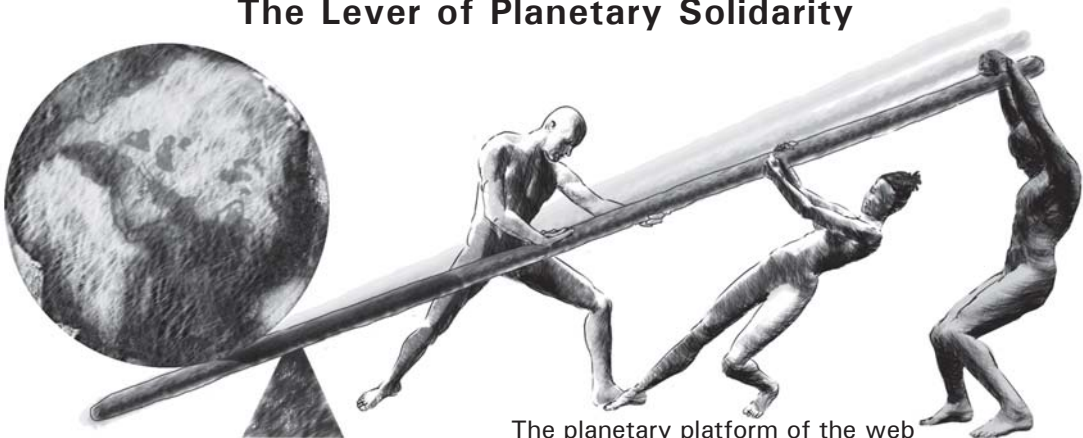
phone is today, the Internet provides a place to stand large enough for billions to interact. The Web is a planetary platform where each can speak for her/himself on equal footing, where billions of passengers and crew-members can connect, unite, empower themselves, and take initiatives on a planetary scale — the only scale on which it makes sense to confront the power-mad officers of predatory global capitalism.

- The Philosophical Fulcrum is planetary consciousness: the awareness that planets are mortal. It is a vision which places the survival of Spaceship Earth and its inhabitants at the center of all things. It is the affirmation of Life on Earth as a new universal, as the common spiritual and practical basis around which billions can unite.

The Lever of Planetary Solidarity

SOLIDARITY IS THE MOST FAMILIAR OF THE three powers. We all know that there is strength in numbers. As the sayings go: “United we stand, divided we fall.” “An injury to one is an injury to all.” “Better to hang together before we all hang separately.” Ever since the revolt of Spartacus and the Roman slaves, the poor, the downtrodden, the exploited have shown their power to unite and use their numbers to win

THE MODERN ARCHIMEDES HYPOTHESIS The Lever of Planetary Solidarity



The planetary platform of the web

The fulcrum of planetary consciousness

concessions from their wealthy, powerful oppressors — even to overthrow them. This power of the people united has been demonstrated down through the ages — from the vast peasant uprisings in feudal times to the mass revolutions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Only by getting together can the passengers and crew of Spaceship Earth — locked below decks in separate compartments and divided by language and religion — ever hope to take over the bridge from the well-guarded, power-drunk, money-crazed officers?

Make no mistake. In no time or place have the wealthy ever shared any of their power or privileges without a struggle. It was only by uniting in mass movements, unions, and political parties that the working people won such democratic rights as universal suffrage, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the eight-hour day, and legislation mandating universal education, healthcare, job safety and social security. Moreover, such reforms have been achieved only in Europe, the Americas, and a few Asian and ex-colonial countries and only after generations of struggle.

Today, these rights are under attack on a global scale, even in the economically advanced countries. Of course, in vast portions of the world the common people still have not won personal freedom, civil liberties, a say in government. As a result, their labor is cheap. Globalization allows transnational businesses to exploit that cheap labor, and capital has been flowing from the democracies — where workers can protect themselves — to the dictatorships, where they can't. Moreover, authoritarian rule — the business-friendly police state — seems to be strangling democracy in the “advanced” countries, as Second and Third World poverty spreads to the West.

Thus advantages won by people-power have remained partial and temporary largely because they remained isolated. Just as Spartacus' rebel slaves were eventually hunted down by Legions brought in from other provinces of the vast Ro-

man Empire, so in modern times, isolation seems to have condemned every revolution to a similar sorry fate. The common people in France, Russia, Spain, China, Hungary, Poland Czechoslovakia have successfully united in times of crisis to wrest power from the hands of their overlords — whether feudal, capitalist or Communist. But as long as their revolutions were confined to one city or country at a time, they were doomed to either military defeat — like Spartacus and the slaves of Rome — or to degenerate into bureaucratic dictatorships.

Solidarity must be international to be effective, as the workers of Europe concluded after the defeat of the Europe-wide 1848 revolutions by forming the first International Workers' Association (1864). Nearly a century and a half later, under globalized corporate capitalism, it is obvious that unless the lever of solidarity is extended across borders, it is no longer an effective tool against the profit-driven “race to the bottom.” Without it, the billionaires, who can move their money from country to country, will always dominate the billions, who are rooted at home and barred from crossing national borders seeking work. Today's ruthless corporations move their operations from impoverished Mexico to countries in Asia where the wages are even more pitiful. On the other hand, the ongoing wave of international popular movements — sweeping across Latin America, into the Hispanic U.S. and even reaching out to Asia — holds a real promise. To remain secure, the same rights, benefits and popular reforms must be enjoyed by working people in all countries. If they are not achieved in the poor lands, they will disappear (along with jobs) within the rich. In a globalized economy movements for peoples' rights must be planetary to succeed. But how can such global solidarity be organized?

The World Wide Web: A Planetary Platform

HISTORICALLY, ADVANCES IN COMMUNICATION

and transportation have generally enabled advances in popular self-organization. During the democratic revolutions of the 18th Century, cheap printing and the post office (both recent developments) enabled revolutionary committees of correspondence in the American colonies and France to share local grievances, inform each other, discuss ideas, organize con-

Thus advantages won by people-power have remained partial and temporary largely because they remained isolated.

gresses, publish and circulate revolutionary pamphlets. In the 19th, the railroad, the steamship, the telegraph and the daily newspaper spread the democratic revolutions of 1848 all across Europe within months. On the negative side, radio and later television — organized in the 20th century as one-way, top-down broadcast media — became the favorite tool of 20th Century totalitarian dictatorships, while today right-wing commercial media monopolies dominate the airwaves in the democracies.

In the 21st century, the Internet promises to give the advantage back to people-power. It also may give a new meaning to democracy. For the first time in history, this new technology has placed at the disposal of the billions a platform large enough and accessible enough for all to participate, decide and act together. With its infinite interconnections, the World Wide Web enables groups in struggle to communicate, exchange information, discuss ideas, work out common programs and coordinate actions on a planetary scale in real time. Translation is apparently becoming less of a problem. The technology of the Internet has the potential of creating vast, world-wide assemblies where true international democracy can take form; forums

where consensus can be reached on an ongoing basis; platforms where massive planetary actions can be coordinated from hour to hour around the globe. Precisely what the passengers and crew of Spaceship Earth will need to break out from below decks and take over the bridge from the officers who are looting the hold, fighting over the spoils and driving the ship into the abyss.

The Web is also a vast public library where the passengers and crew can find (among other things) the uncensored information and revolutionary ideas they will need to unite. The collective creation of Wikipedia, the ever-expanding, self-correcting resource, is a model of Internet emergence. For the first time in history, the storehouse of revolutionary internationalist thinking and the recorded experiences of centuries of struggle is accessible to all. Thus the Web weaves together ideas and planetary communication, connecting the Lever of solidarity with the Fulcrum of planetary consciousness.

Democracy, Internet, Emergence

BEFORE GOING FURTHER, I WANT TO MAKE IT clear that I do not believe that technology can substitute for active human solidarity and collective organization on the ground. “Revolutionary” chat rooms can never replace face-to-face workplace and neighborhood organizing; radical Websites are no substitute for popular movements, unions, parties, newspapers, alternative broadcasting, international meetings and other forms of human interaction. Nor do I maintain that the Web is immune to police-state censorship and spying by authoritarian regimes like China, which simply blocks certain subjects (with the complicity of “do no evil” Google) and mines emails and postings (with the help of Yahoo) in order to arrest and punish dissidents. On the other hand, hackers in China and around the world often find ways to get around police-state censors and their U.S. corporate accomplices. (Indeed, the hacker

mentality and the “freeware” movements incarnate a Utopian spirit and are the allies of social movements around the world.) And when the Burmese dictatorship shut down the Internet during the monks’ rebellion, the demonstrators used their cell-phones — another new form of electronic networking in the hands of the people — both to coordinate their movements and to get photos of the repression to the world press.

What I am suggesting is this:

1. The Internet is a powerful new tool for struggle whose revolutionary potential is beginning to be understood by popular movements around the globe.
2. The Internet makes technically possible the old internationalist dream of a global movement of working people establishing a harmonious, self-governing post-capitalist world.
3. The model of the Internet’s global network, whose “center” is everywhere and nowhere, may turn out to be a more effective model for the emergence of planetary, democratic and working-class movements than the traditional hub-and-spokes, center/periphery, top down model of centralized parties and “internationals.”

To begin with, the Internet has already been appropriated by global justice movements and proven itself an invaluable tool on the ground. For example, by the Zapatistas who opened the anti-globalization era with their anti-NAFTA rebellion in 1994 and used the Internet to gather global support against the invading Mexican Army, by the locked-out Liverpool dockers who organized a successful international dockers’ boycott of scab shipping in 1997, the anti-corporate globalization protesters in Seattle, Genoa, Cancun and who eventually crippled the IMF and WTO, the global social movements that have connected at the World Social Forums, the demonstrators who freed President Chávez from the coup plotters in 2002, the millions of demonstrators in 57 different countries who protested invading Iraq in April 2003, the workers and students of the Korean General Strike of 1997, the rebels in China, who

reportedly pulled off 83,000 strikes and uprisings against overwork and pollution in 2006, the many blogs and alternative news sites around the globe that get behind the “official” story put out by governments and the billionaires’ corporate media.

The Web has also enabled and perhaps influenced new types of organization, based on the network model rather than the traditional hub-and-spokes model. The symbol of the web, powerful yet delicate, had already been proposed by activist women as an alternative to male-dominated, top-down power. In Latin America, for example, new forms of horizontal organizations are emerging, rooted in urban neighborhoods and rural communities, in factories and on the land, yet networked nationally and even internationally. For example, self-organized, autonomous groups of peasants and indigenous peoples have been networked all over the Americas since 1992, when the Internet helped bring them together to celebrate 500 years of survival and resistance to colonialism.

Today, they meet online and at World Social Forums, connect with networks of workers, ecologists, and activists, compare conditions, discuss strategy, and organize global solidarity with similar movements in Asia. In the context of national politics, these autonomous networks are at the base of the vertical power of progressive presidents like Lula, Kirchner, Correa, Chavez, and Morales — pushing these governments to challenge the power of local landowners and the global corporations. Far from being “historically backward,” these rural communities have successfully appropriated 21st Century capitalist communications technology at its highest level and used it as a weapon for their own emancipation. They are in today’s planetary vanguard, challenging capitalism, protecting the land, saving nature from the ravenous corporations.

If the Web model of a network of networks continues to prove effective as a structure for an expansive, flexible, practical transnational organizing, might it not also foreshadow the struc-

ture of a future self-organized planetary society? The Achilles' heel of democracy has always been the necessity of delegating authority to representatives, who all too often end up forming a separate political class with its own interests. But what if direct 'town-meeting' type participatory democracy could be organized not only locally, but also regionally, and globally via Internet hookup? What if every citizen of the planet could make her/his voice heard equally with every other? Have access to experts' advice? Unite with others of the same persuasion. And then vote — whether in their own mass assemblies or internationally via a secure Internet hookup. What if the great issues facing humanity could be debated everywhere and then decided in global referendums via the Internet? What if the necessity of economic planning on a global scale could be combined with worker self-management and maximum local autonomy? What if every individual could participate in each of her capacities as resident, producer, consumer and citizen? What if, after centuries of successful revolutions being hijacked and perverted by new “democratic” or “Communist” elites, the common people were able to control the destiny of a new society as it emerges from below?

Back in 1958, when computers were in their infancy, the (then) Marxist philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis was the first to imagine such a computer-connected self-managed society in *The Content of Socialism*.¹ A professional economist, Castoriadis was able to elaborate in concrete detail a complete national economy, free of all the waste and coercion of Communist or corporate central planning. There, in “Planning Factories” produced alternative plans — to be debated and eventually voted by the producers via wired hookups — explaining in simple terms the relative costs and consequences of each proposal in labor time, resources, growth and consumption levels. The concrete images in Castoriadis' Utopian model made such an impression on me a half-century ago that I have

never since doubted democratic socialism's practical “do-ability.” Castoriadis' vision derives the Marxist notions of revolution as “evolution in the fullness of time,” and of “the new world emerging out of the shell of the old” — adopted by the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in 1905, the year Rosa Luxemburg analyzed the revolutionary mass strikes in Poland-Russia as emergent forms of spontaneous self-organization. What was original in 1958 was Castoriadis' appropriation of the theories of the socialist-minded mathematician Norbert Weiner, the pioneer of computer science, who explored the feed-back principle and recognized the emergent quality of cybernetics.²

Connectivity, Chaos, Complexity, and Emergence

TODAY, PHYSICISTS, BIOLOGISTS, mathematicians, cyberneticists, and scientists in other fields are studying and analyzing the emergent phenomenon of spontaneous self-organization from below in the context of Chaos/Complexity/Emergence theory. Emergence — the spontaneous creation of order and complexity out of chaos — is observed in various natural phenomena which were previously inexplicable in terms of the standard top-down scientific models of cause/effect, leader/follower, Quantum physics being the most celebrated example.³

For those of us without access to higher mathematics, biology provides a more graphic example of emergence in the slime molds that suddenly appear out in the woods. Under certain favorable conditions thousands of autonomous cells spontaneously come together and form new, more complex autonomous organism — a goopy vomit-like blob, which emerges, changes shape and moves. However, when conditions change, the organism disaggregates into individual cells and seems to vanish. Emergence is also observed in insect colonies when thousands of chirping cricket and flashing fireflies suddenly start chirping or flashing in unison — just as human concert audiences sometimes start

clapping in unison, without any leader intervening; it is observed in the development of the infant human brain, where billions of brain-circuits spontaneously grow out of a few cells and connect into complex networks; we see it in the history of the world's cities where people of many trades came spontaneously together, each pursuing his/her own interests, and "accidentally" produced what we call civilization. Order and complexity thus emerge out of chaos, based on connectivity between large numbers of free agents following their own paths.

However, for this complexity to emerge, there must be a critical mass of individuals. "Many is different" is the rule in Chaos-Complexity-Emergence theory. The other critical condition is freedom to communicate and interact "horizontally" free of distortions imposed by a one-way organizing power, for example state and corporate mass media. A corollary of complexity theory is that free from such interference, tiny events may trigger huge changes, like the proverbial beat of a butterfly in China provoking a hurricane in Bermuda. Such is the nature of epidemics, fads, and religions, which grow exponentially once they reach the "tipping point." Utopia may turn out to be such an "idea virus," spreading through the Web and provoking the emergence of planetary consciousness. In any case, the recognition of emergence as a powerful natural phenomenon makes it scientifically plausible to imagine a world-wide movement of multitudes of ordinary working people rising up to save the planet.

The new factor that makes the age-old dream of humanity rising actual in the 21st Century is connectivity. There are on an average only six degrees of separation between each of the six billion humans on the planet. That means that you probably know someone, who knows someone else, who knows someone, who knows someone, who knows someone who knows me — or even more unlikely, who knows a certain poor peasant in China. These are weak connections, of course, but another of the paradoxes

of Emergence is that weak connections are the fabric that makes up the strength of complex structures like the Internet and the human brain.

Connecting up the cells of collective brain of humanity is precisely what is needed to save the world from the pseudo-rational liberalism that is consuming it like a cancer. The Internet provides the connectivity for the Emergence of what I call "Planetary Consciousness" — the fulcrum of the modern Archimedes Hypothesis. And although the phrase "the collective brain of humanity" sounds mystical, recent experiments and research have confirmed what *Wall Street Journal* writer James Surowiecki calls "The Wisdom of Crowds." (Subtitle: "Why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies and nations.") It turns out experimentally that the judgment of large numbers of randomly chosen people is often strikingly superior to that of the experts. What is the explanation? The diversity and impartiality of opinions in a freely associated group or random mass apparently combine in positive ways to create this collective intelligence. But it works only when people are free of the kind of hierarchical constraints that produce "group-think" in committees.

This can be seen as a wired version of the "wisdom in the heads of many" we old socialists used to talk about. In any case, there is nothing impractical or unscientific in the romantic image of the collective brain of humanity connecting up its myriad nodes through cyberspace. Or of humanity acting with collective wisdom and strength of billions to take charge of our poor world. "Only connect!" as they say. But to stay connected, people around the world will need a purpose, a common vision around which to unite, a "fulcrum of planetary consciousness" on which to ground the force of billions.

The Fulcrum of Planetary Consciousness

PLANETARY CONSCIOUSNESS IS STILL IN ITS infancy. Only recently have the earth's human

inhabitants become aware of lands and continents beyond their own village or country. Only in the 19th Century did humans discover they belong to a recently evolved animal species sharing the planet with other species; only recently has history been conceived as peoples' history — rather than as the official chronicle of dynasties, wars, kings, emperors and popes acting out God's will; only since the two World Wars have we begun to think of history as world history or as planetary history (including geology, ecology and the evolution of species).

Indeed, only in the past half-century — since Hiroshima and Nagasaki — has it become evident that our survival as a species is threatened by our own ingenuity in inventing machines of unprecedented power and destructiveness. Since the annihilation of the two Japanese cities — followed by sixty years of nuclear proliferation and stockpiling — awareness of humanity's mortality has slowly been imposing itself on all but the simple, the selfish and the self-deluded. Likewise, awareness of the slower, yet deadly destruction of the natural world, ruthlessly ravaged for corporate profit, is becoming universal.

Such awareness is the first stage of planetary consciousness: stepping out of denial and acknowledging the possibility — increasingly probable — of the destruction of life on earth. We now understand that we live on a planet where life has evolved from viruses through plants and animals down to our own species of intelligent toiling monkeys who, too smart for our own good, have monkeyed around with the atomic structure of matter-energy and unleashed powers we are unable, within capitalist society, to control. The planet that emerged out the first Big Bang is now heading for another Big Bang if we don't take control of our technology, that is to say if we fail to connect up our collective brain before engaging gears!

The material prospect of universal Death forces us to consider Life — Life on this planet — as a new universal. For no other reason than

that all other ideas would be unthinkable without it. The second stage of planetary consciousness is making the unavoidable existential choice between irreconcilable absolutes: People and Profits. Nature and Money. Life and Death.

The third stage consists in realizing we need a positive revolution in human relations, a new society based on solidarity and cooperation rather than greed and oppression. This planetary consciousness speaks in the new voices now being heard around the planet. Thousands, perhaps millions of people have begun proclaiming in chorus: "Another world is possible!" "The Earth is not a Commodity" to be bought and sold for money. By organizing and resisting corporate globalization, by educating themselves and others, these global justice movements are helping to save the planet on a practical level by fighting pollution, forest-destruction, privatization of social and natural resources. In the meantime, these alter-mundialistas — like all of us — are searching for alternatives, for a planetary vision of a possible better world, for an idea capable of drawing together billions and focusing their power. In other words, for utopia.

Conclusion

IN CONCLUSION, THE ARCHIMEDES Hypothesis poses a theoretical model for visualizing the material-historical possibility of a planetary revolution in our age of globalized corporate capitalism and planetary connectivity. The power of solidarity has proven itself capable of overcoming tyranny again and again, wherever people have united. The consciousness that a positive revolution is necessary if the planet is not to be destroyed is more and more widespread. Today's revolutionary Internet technology at last provides a space for people around the planet to connect and take positive action on a global scale. Scarcity is no longer an issue. Modern technology produces such an abundance of food and material goods that overproduction undermines market stability. Inequal-

ity, not scarcity, is the cause of want. Utopia may thus be a realistic possibility — however remote it may seem at the moment. At the very least, the Archimedes Hypothesis permits us to imagine realistic science fiction scenarios about successful Mutinies on Spaceship Earth. It gives us the theoretical right to dream. And if one or more of these scenarios is compelling enough to fire the imagination of people around the world, who knows what may result from small beginnings when the idea-virus of utopia reaches the tipping-point and becomes epidemic?

That, at least, is our utopian bet. Between nothing to lose but the dismal spectacle of a dying world against a chance to save the beautiful planet we live on. In any case, it's a bet we can't refuse. In the 18th century — the age of scientific and political revolutions — radical writers like Voltaire, Diderot, Thomas Paine and the Encyclopedists boldly proclaimed, "The pen is mightier than the sword." History proved them right. Feudalism was overthrown. Today in the 21st Century — the age of connectivity and retrogression — the Archimedes Hypothesis entitles us to state a claim of our own: "The electronic keyboard is mightier than the nuclear missile!"

All Power to the Imagination!

NOTES

1. 'Sur le contenu du socialisme' by P. Chaulieu (pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis) was first published in *Socialisme ou barbarie* (Nos 22 and 23, 1957-58) a year before I joined the group in Paris. It was from Castoriadis that I first heard about Norbert Weiner (then

at Harvard) and cybernetics. This inspiring text was quickly translated and published in England as a *Solidarity* pamphlet and eventually, in 1979, in French under Castoriadis' name (Paris, UGE, "10/18"). At that time Castoriadis (who also signed "Paul Cardan" and whom for some strange reason we called 'Barjot') was Greek revolutionary refugee living as an alien in a France militarized by the Algerian revolution, which *Socialisme ou Barbarie* supported. In his "above ground" career he worked as a top-level professional economist for the OCED.

2. See Norbert Weiner, *The Human Use of Human Beings* (NY: Anchor, 1954)

3. The grandfather of Chaos/Complexity/Emergence theory was probably Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French mathematician, scientist and religious philosopher — from whose *Pensées* I borrowed the "Bet" argument and who developed probability theory, the infinitesimal calculus, and the mechanical computing machine. In the early 20th century the Soviet geologist Vladimir Vernadsky developed his theories of the interconnected geosphere, the biosphere and the noosphere (human thought) which seem to be confirmed by modern science. My own highly superficial knowledge of the subject comes from reading the books of Edgar Morin (who was part of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in the early '50s) and scientific popularizations, often written by practicing scientists, for example Steven Strogatz (Cornell Applied Math), one of world's leading researchers into chaos, complexity and synchronization, *SYNC: The emerging science of spontaneous order* (Penguin Science 2003); Mark Buchanan, former physicist and *Nature* editor, author of *Small World. Uncovering nature's hidden networks* (London: Phoenix 2002); Albert-László Barabási, (Physics, Notre Dame) *Linked* (NY: Penguin 2003); science writer Roger Lewin, *Complexity, Life at the Edge of Chaos* (London: Phoenix 1993); John Gribbin, *Deep Simplicity, Chaos, Complexity and the Emergence of Life* (Penguin 2004); James Gleick *Chaos, Making a New Science* (NY: Penguin 1987). See also "Quantum political economy" by Marxist physicist David Hookey (Univ. Liverpool) <http://hometown.aol.co.uk/davehookey/Moscow2.pdf>

Actuarial

PETER LAMBORN WILSON

Invest in Death Bonds

here's how it works. I call up yr
aged Aunt Gladys & offer to purchase her
life insurance policy — if she hasn't got one
we'll buy one for her — 10 million dollars —
she sells it to us for ten thousand

She gets a Florida vacation or some Canadian drugs
we get to issue bonds on the policy
we spread the derivatives around like
sub-prime mortgages till no one knows
who owns Aunt Gladys's fate —

A classic win/win situation
how can you lose going long on the
futures exchange of Death itself?

PETER LAMBORN WILSON *is an anarchist activist, author of many books, long-time commentator on WBAL, and has taught at Naropa University*

In Defense of Washington and Wall Street

ROBERT FITCH

1. The Crisis of 2007–2008

THE VERY ELDERLY ARE PRONE TO FALL. And unlike infants who also tumble frequently, each time seniors stumble, they risk a disabling or even a fatal injury. On August 9, 2007, after an unparalleled quarter century long expansion, which had been checked in the developed countries only mildly and briefly, capitalism finally tripped and lost its balance with predictable results: banks tottered, while credit and commercial paper markets writhed in paralysis.

After about a month, though, notwithstanding the failure of the markets to unfreeze, the crisis was declared over. The palsied patient was deemed well enough to resume normal activity — a diagnosis apparently confirmed when two months later, on October 9th, the Dow Jones Industrial Average reached 14,164, an all time high.

The March 2008 meltdown of two hedge funds belonging to Bear, Stearns suggested otherwise. A pillar of the “shadow banking system” that had emerged over the last two decades, Bear was forced into liquidation, sold to J.P. Morgan for \$256 million. Scarcely more than a year earlier it was said to be worth \$68.7 billion. Yet this stunning write-down barely moved Wall Street’s needle. The market continued to move choppily until September 14, 2008, when Mr. FIRE (as in finance, insurance and real estate) fell again, with even more dire consequences. That Sunday, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Later in the day, Merrill, Lynch an-

nounced its liquidation. Just two days later, AIG, the world’s largest insurance company, was taken over by the government. This time, Wall Street had suffered the equivalent of a broken neck.

Even in the immediate aftermath of the 1929 Crash, the biggest Wall Street banks didn’t fail. They continued to lend. (The wave of failures by thousands of heartland banks came later.) But in 2008, it was precisely the big banks which formed the leading vector of the collapse. Within a period of 200 days, the five biggest U.S. investment banking houses — the institutions that since the Reagan era had given Wall Street its swagger and identity — had either gone bankrupt, or forced to find a merger partner or re-organized themselves as bank holding companies.

Whenever the spinal cord is severed at the top two vertebrae, i.e., at the neck, the greatest immediate peril is that the victim stops breathing. The September 2008 crisis was marked by increasingly desperate measures to keep big FIRE from asphyxiation. The measures taken included flooding the system with liquidity — almost unlimited loans and loan guarantees. The Bush Administration came up with a \$700 billion plan to deleverage the banks (i.e., raise their dangerously low ratio of equity to debt) by buying their bad mortgage-backed securities. And when that didn’t work, passed legislation which amounted to a semi-nationalization of the remaining big banks — the equivalent of cutting a hole in the patient’s trachea.

By October’s end FIRE was breathing, albeit with a tube provided by the U.S. guarantee of inter bank loans. But breathing is not walking. A financial system in which banks lend only to other banks refusing to act as intermediaries

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to the non-financial sector — is still non-functional.

In the midst of the anarchy, the headline “Capitalism in Convulsion” appeared not in *The Militant* or *The People’s World*, but in the august, salmon colored pages of *The Financial Times*. The Unlike Long Term Capital Management (LTCM) crisis or the dot.com bust which were more or less confined to the G-7 countries, or the

Asian, Mexican, Argentinean crises — which remained localized within the Third World — the crisis of 2007-8 was truly global. It spread from America to Europe to Latin America to Asia and even to remote Iceland which was all but officially bankrupt and forced to await rescue from the IMF. Nor was the crisis confined to capitalism’s financial sub-system. Production was shrinking, consumption was off. Even foreign trade, the main driver of the world economy, was contracting. “There is a real possibility of a real, deep, international depression,” said one senior monetary official at a G20 meeting in Dubai who spoke on the condition of anonymity, calling the crisis “the worst in 100 years.”

2. The Meaning of the Meltdown

IN 1989, THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL was widely interpreted as a failure of the Communist system. But not by its supporters. They favored minimalist interpretations. Liberal Stalinists saw it as a reaction to certain overzealous GDR officials in the security apparatus; conservatives as the failure of those same officials to contain the illegal exodus. Still others blamed Soviet Premier Gorbachev’s blundering efforts to deregulate the Soviet system, which they insisted was still fundamentally sound.

Similarly, the present crisis can be interpreted in various ways. Not as the result of inherent, structural, repeated, and irredeemable tendencies within the capitalist system. But as

“There is a real possibility of a real, deep, international depression,” said one senior monetary official, at a G20 meeting in Dubai, calling the crisis “the worst in 100 years.”

altogether something more surmountable. Democrats have pointed to a failure of capitalism’s financial sub-system, i.e., of Wall Street — where greed ran amok — and in Washington where officials refused to rein in the Street’s wildest prop-

ensities. By repealing the depression era Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, the argument runs, Congress demolished the pillar of the old regulatory architecture. And it declared off limits any supervision of the new, escalating trade in opaque forms of over-the-counter derivatives.

Republicans, while not immune to the widely popular “greedy” banker trope, tended mostly to blame capitalism’s regulators — above all blundering by Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, who allegedly, in the aftermath of the 2001 dot.com collapse, held interest rates “too low, too long.” He should have kept his hands off the monetary joystick.

The implosion interrupted what might be called “The Big Sleep of the American Left”: our failure to exert a detectible influence on working class institutions or on American political life as a whole. The sleepy time coincides roughly with the quarter century long boom which began in 1983 with the recovery from the stagflation crisis of the seventies. Throughout the period, as the global economy continued its unparalleled dizzying ascent, 19th century supply side economics experienced a revival. Not just the napkin version preached by Arthur Laffer, who argued that if you want to increase tax revenues, cut tax rates. But an overarching argument about the nature of capitalism and its powers of adjustment.

The 19th century classic writers — James Mill, J.B. Say, David Ricardo — taught that market failures or “gluts” were impossible. Temporary over-supply in this or that market for shoes or hats or handkerchiefs, yes. A generalized over-supply, of shoes, hats and handkerchiefs all at the same time, no. So absent meddling by government authorities, depressions were not a possibility. Markets would always self-adjust because market agents — suppliers of labor and capital — would behave rationally. Workers, seeing that they had priced themselves out of the market, would work harder and lower their wages. Holders of capital would lower interest rates, which would reduce saving and spur investment.

Acceptance of the simple supply side formula, “supply creates its own demand” bred confidence among the believers. The concerns of Keynes, who worried about “effective demand,” and the notions of Marx, who argued that the scramble for profits created its own barrier, could be dismissed as groundless. And as America’s ruined central cities sprang back to life from the arson and abandonment of the seventies and the stores filled up with cheap Asian goods and American designed microchips powered a global technoboom, with unemployment falling to record lows, a lite version of supply side economics quietly permeated the Left — in the assumption that “post-industrial” capitalism was more or less impregnable in its First World stronghold.

Perhaps understandably, sections of the Left began to lose interest in the struggles going on in the material world around them, re-grouping around the priority of culture wars and even for some science wars. And while economic radicalism didn’t disappear, the burden of its critique lay in the idea of an unequal exchange between first and third world countries, which prevented less developed raw material producing nations from industrializing. The idea of class wars within nations gave way to the notion of “proletarian nations.” Socialism became

strictly a Third World option. The Left could try to assist the special victims of First World capitalism — blacks, women, minorities, immigrants. But not American workers. As Michael Kazin observed, very few American leftists invoked the link between labor and the creation of wealth and capital and the appropriation of that wealth which had been at the core of American radicalism from the 19th century to the 1940s. Speculation about transforming first world capitalist institutions became about as respectable as spoon bending.

One consequence of the 2007-8 economic tsumani is to wash away the foundations of the intellectual world of the sensible center. But much of the Left’s outlook rested tacitly on those same foundations. As well as its secret sense that it had no genuine vocation for politics except on the margins of American life.

Perhaps the collapse of financial markets hasn’t yet produced a mass market for ideas about democratic control of the economy. Yet there appears at least to be a niche. Are markets always wiser than majorities? Would the majority of Americans have voted in a plebiscite for deindustrialization? At a minimum, now that a Republican administration has ordered a semi-nationalization of banks and insurance companies, the supply side era is over, creating the potential for a Left socialist revival. But not without challenging the minimalist interpretations of the great meltdown put forward by the two mainstream political parties.

3. Three Things I Learned About Crises From Marx

THE DEPTH AND SCOPE OF THE MELTDOWN have made Marx fashionable once again at least in Europe, the BBC reports. But acquiring the intellectual resources for the challenge is not simply a matter of mining Marxian texts. If there is a Marxian road to understanding the crisis, it’s a cloverleaf highway — with many ways to get on and get off, and each turn-off resulting in a different political direction. There

are many Marxist schools. And each explains crises in different ways — as the result of underconsumption; of overproduction; in terms of the falling rate of profit; or as a consequence of the disproportionality between growth rates in consumer and producer good sectors.

Notwithstanding the impossibility of establishing a true Marxist interpretation of the crisis, his powerful, suggestive, but mostly undeveloped crisis analysis contains three contentious insights which provide a scaffold for grasping the present events. The first might be called the “universal dynamism” thesis. Supply-siders accept it but most modern Marxists don’t. Marx portrayed capitalism as an inexorable accumulation machine whose dynamism is fed by the behavior of multiple competitive capitalists all forced to consume productively rather than personally, all relentlessly recycling their profits back into the enterprise. All searching for a way to reduce costs. This feature turned capitalism into a uniquely dynamic and expansive system: one whose dynamism could not be confined to its Western countries of origin. The spread of English commerce, he argued, albeit restricted at first to opium, would “lay the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”

At the same time — and here’s where supply-siders get off the bus and neo-Marxists get back on — Marx recognized capitalist development traced no smooth, upward, untroubled arc. Growth was achieved only through system shattering crises — “business cycles” — which proved comprehensively destructive. In the abrupt swing from world prosperity to world depression, tens of millions were doomed to unemployment and the dole; economic upheaval would shatter normal trade relations, freeze immigration and promote economic nationalism and political dynamite — in the form of left/right polarization leading to dictatorship, fascism and war.

Finally, there’s the least accepted Marxian argument about crises: his claim that they have their origin in the “real” sector of the economy

— where commodities were produced — not in the financial sector where the crisis almost invariably breaks out. “At first glance,” Marx writes, “the whole crisis seems to be merely a credit and money crisis.” But look again, he advises, and you see that the unsaleable securities represent unsaleable commodities. Or in our own immediate case the oversupply of mortgage backed securities represents the oversupply of houses and ultimately an oversupply of capital in general. In this way, the crisis expresses in a violent way capitalism’s fundamental conflict: Capitalism develops awesomely large productive forces whose limits are checked by the requirement that production be profitable. To avoid depressing the profit rate, productive capital saves instead of investing, transferring its saving from the productive sphere, seeking shelter in the financial system where productive capital is turned into credit or financial capital. Indeed, too much. “But credit,” Marx wrote, only “*accelerates* the violent outbreaks of the crisis.” To accelerate something is not to cause it.

4. Explaining The Meltdown

THE PROXIMATE CAUSE OF THE 2007-8 CRISIS was the imploding of what Yale Professor Robert Shiller called the greatest real estate bubble in U.S. history or possibly even world history. Between 1996 and 2005, house prices nationwide increased about 90 percent. In the five years between 2000 to 2005 alone, house prices increased by roughly 60 percent. That hadn’t happened even in the real estate boom of the 1920s, whose premonitory bust in 1926 gestured wildly but vainly at the still greater collapse to come in 1929. While the inner mechanics of the individual parts that make up the self-destructive bubble apparatus are famously complex — the SPVs SIVs, the CDOs, CDSs and other “financial dark matter” — the mechanics of the collapse itself are fairly straightforward.

It’s not necessary to understand quantum mechanics to grasp why an apple falls to the ground. Newtonian mechanics will suffice. Nor

do we need to study the structure of DNA to know why old people fall — they take slower and shorter steps. Similarly, by concentrating on the intricacies of frenzied finance on Wall Street and faulty regulatory mechanisms in DC, we lose perspective on the ultimate as opposed to the proximate causes of the world crisis.

The ultimate cause of the 2007-8 crisis was not the pricking of the real estate bubble in the United States, but the implosion of the greatest and longest global expansion in the history of capitalism going back to the first industrial revolution (1760-1830). The rapid transformation, particularly of the Chinese and Indian economies, produced a super boom that blew away all norms for economic expansion. World GDP rates rose to unprecedented levels — peaking at 6 percent in 2007, six times higher than the rate during the first industrial revolution.

And what drove the boom? Notwithstanding the core claim of the sensible center that the nature of the period was defined by the rise of post-industrialism and the fall of the blue collar worker who would go the way of the peasant, the boom was shaped by record rates of manufacturing growth and even higher rates of growth in manufacturing trade. The increase in manufacturing itself was fed by a world-reshaping, mass migration of manufacturing capital from the more developed to the less developed countries. Capital was attracted by appalling, but ultimately ravishingly high rates of labor exploitation — to India, which was emerging as the world's back office, but above all to China, which became the world's workshop, employing 109 million manufacturing workers. (Versus 53 million in the G7 countries.) In the United States, median hourly manufacturing wage was \$17.85 an hour. In China, manufacturing workers in the coastal provinces earned 91cents an hour at productivity rates increasingly converging with those in the United States (inland workers earned 57 cents an hour.)

The long boom that began in 1983 saw as-

tonishing reversals of economic structure — particularly in the U.S. where the FIRE industry displaced manufacturing and all others — as the leading industry by GDP share. In 1983, at the beginning of the boom, manufacturing was still larger than FIRE. By 2007, the FIRE sector had become 1.8 times the size of the manufacturing sector.. There were equally bizarre reversals of economic fortune, as the United States once the world's prime creditor nation, became its greatest debtor nation, with poor nations — most prominently China — among its largest creditors.

Yet despite these startling novelties, the present boom has ended in overproduction and over-consumption just like the classic booms of the past. Consider the world depressions that began in 1837, 1873 and 1929. For these crises, like the implosion of 2007-2008, the following seven stage sequence can serve as a model:

- (i) A fall in the rate of accumulation, or at least a fall in the rate of acceleration; actual profit rates may even rise just before the collapse, but the high rates are sustained by a slowing down of accumulation rates.
- (ii) Formation of surplus capital hoards. Unable to return "home" for productive re-investment, the surplus seeks to preserve itself by moving into financial channels.
- (iii) Capital over-supply forces down interest rates, clearing the way for asset inflation and financial excess. First because low interest rates automatically increase the value of fictitious capital in land and in securities; and second because low interest rates cause risk premiums to fall, promoting riskier behavior as *rentiers* chase yield.
- (iv) Asset bubbles form as speculators are attracted by the seemingly inexorable rise in asset prices. Prices accelerate further because of rampant bubble psychology.
- (v) The chain letter snaps. Housing prices burst the bounds of household incomes. Stock prices soar far beyond historic price/earnings ratio. Prices collapse. A local financial crisis breaks out among the most vulnerable borrowers, who

can no longer re-finance, leaving the most recent round of developers and mortgage holders unable to pay off their loans, and/or stock speculators can't cover margin calls from their brokers. Asset prices collapse, taking down credit suppliers.

(vi) A spreading of the financial ripples outward from their point of origin, as asset deflation produces a global panic. And finally — but not yet of course in 2007-2008:

(vii) Protracted economic stagnation; widespread double-digit unemployment rates; falling wages and commodity prices; growing economic nationalism and a tendency towards “organized capitalism.”

There are two main differences between this seven step scenario and the mainstream accounts. Regulatory and monetary explanations see the problem as U.S. centered. Obviously the United States can't be ignored — the meltdown began here. But the emphasis must be on global imbalances. True, the United States is over-consuming. But the rest of the world is over-producing. The second difference is the emphasis on how excesses in the real sector — the capital glut and the resulting low interest rates — produce wilding in the FIRE sector. By contrast, mainstream models reverse the causal arrow so that financial and real estate excess bring down an essentially healthy real sector.

Except for the wrongheadedness of Greenspan or the antics of a comparative handful of hedge fund operators, mainstreamers then see no reason why the expansion should not go on indefinitely. They don't look at a twenty-five year expansion as being the equivalent of a twenty-five year old dog. The bubble simply erupted. But whence? Either exogenously — outside the system — by dodgy regulators who disrupted the economy's natural path towards self-correction — in the Republican version; or in the Democratic version the bubble is produced endogenously — in the FIRE sector — aided by dodgy regulators who look the other way at speculative excess.

The Democrats cite a whole host of regu-

latory failures. There's the problem of fragmented regulation — the Fed regulates banks; the SEC stocks; the states insurance companies. They point to de-regulatory measures like the repeal of Glass-Steagall. Then there's the embarrassment of private regulation — ceding securities rating to the conflict-of-interest laden private rating agencies. Even more serious perhaps is the absence of new regulation for new institutions — e.g., failure to bring Over-the-Counter derivative trading under control; ditto the emergence of a shadow banking system, which created “a de facto assembly line for purchasing, packaging, and selling unregistered, high-risk securities.”

The Republicans — along with their economic mentors in academia — supply-siders, monetarists, Austrians and Chicagoans — often talk about too stringent regulation — like the passage of the Community Reinvestment Act of 1978. The Democratic Administration, they allege, allowed community groups like ACORN to coerce giant banks into making hundreds of billions of dollars in loans to unqualified minority borrowers. But mostly they focus on the interest rate activism of Alan Greenspan. The “too low too long” mantra — the fed funds rate, they point out, remained below two percent from 2002-2004.

One problem with the explanation is that the bubble didn't start in 2002. It was already underway in 1996. As Robert Shiller points out, it lasted three times longer than the period of monetary laxity. Bubble growth continued to accelerate even in 1999 when the Fed was tightening. Moreover, 30-year mortgage rates were mostly unresponsive to Fed moves at the short term end of the interest curve.

What's more, if the U.S. bubble was simply the result of a Fed policy error — why did real estate bubbles form all around the world? Bubbles in Spain, Ireland, U.K. and perhaps the mother of all bubbles in Shanghai, where 1 million apartments were built in a single year — as opposed to 2 million in the peak year for

the entire United States. And the average apartment was \$300,000 in a city where the median household income is \$2,000. By comparison, the median household income in Queens is \$42,000. If the same income to housing price ratio obtained in Queens, the average housing price would be \$6.3 million.

Perhaps even more challenging to the Greenspan as the Grinch Who Stole Prosperity model is the comparable behavior of German bank regulators. Roughly speaking between 2002-4, overnight interest rates charged by German banks were only about a percent higher than the federal funds rate. German rates were kept low for longer than in the United States. Yet there was no German real estate bubble. The same could be said for Switzerland and Austria: very low interest rates, no real estate bubble.

What German banks, along with their Swiss, Austrian and west European counterparts, do have instead is an emerging market nations bubble : \$4.7 trillion in cross-border bank loans to Eastern Europe, Latin America and emerging Asia extended during the global credit boom. It's a sum, according to a Bank for International Settlements reckoning, that "vastly exceeds the scale of both the U. S. sub-prime and Alt-A debacles."

There are many ways to build a bubble. Different countries have different architectural styles. America with the most advanced entrepreneurial culture, has the most complex: a financial engineering industry — the United States invented such financial gimmicks as securitization, the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs), and the Collateralized Debt Obligations (CDOs). But the central European method, while more traditional, works just as well. Austrian bankers simply lend huge amounts to their favorite clients, the Hungarians. Lending money to Hungarians who can't pay them back is an Austrian tradition that goes back to the early 19th century when the Rothschild Creditanstalt no sooner financed the Hungarian railway system when it abruptly failed.

Hungarian loans were a major factor in the collapse of Creditanstalt again in 1931 which took down an estimated 60- 80 percent of Austrian

But in what world do regulatory bureaucrats, barking and snapping like Welsh corgis herding cattle, determine the moves of bankers? Certainly not in ours.

industry, triggering the European great depression. This time Austrian banks have lent 85 percent of their GDP to Hungarians, who have an external debt worth about 100 percent of their GDP.

Ideally, strict, comprehensive, incorruptible regulation could have stopped all this over-lending to under-qualified borrowers dead in its tracks. But in what world do regulatory bureaucrats, barking and snapping like Welsh corgis herding cattle, determine the moves of bankers? Certainly not in ours, where the relevant laws that create the framework for regulation are passed by legislatures influenced not by concerns for macro-economic stability, but by the strength of relevant lobbies. In our world, the FIRE lobby is the largest by far.

Even if the regulators had more power, and there were a lot more of them, it's not clear how they could be so effective as to prevent another Long Term Capital Management (LTCM) from happening. LTCM showed that one renegade hedge fund is all it takes to ignite a crisis when the fields of capital are very dry. What regulator would second guess a team of Nobel Prize winners or fathom their formulas for risk or even decipher their complex trades? And even if legislators and regulators somehow summoned up the political will and financial sophistication to tame rogue genius lenders, why wouldn't the traders who like to discount risk

simply de-camp for some less regulated place? As Chairman Bernanke observed in the immediate aftermath of the Bear Stearns collapse: “The oversight of these firms must recognize the distinctive features of investment banking and take care neither to unduly inhibit efficiency and innovation nor to induce a migration of risk-taking activities to institutions that are less regulated or beyond our borders.”

Historically, the influence of regulators is pro-cyclical, least evident when it’s most needed. Regulations are strictest in the aftermath of a collapse, weakest during the manias. Glass Steagall, comprehensive legislation taming the securities behavior of big banks, passed in 1933; it was repealed in 1999 at the height of the dot.com boom.

Evidently, what chiefly regulates bankers’ behavior is not regulators but conditions in the money market. What the great depressions of 1837, 1873, and 1929 share with the present crisis is a huge inflow of surplus capital into financial centers which drives down interest rates and alters banking standards and norms.

That such a surplus formed prior to the 2007–8 crisis there is little doubt. A big policy debate broke out in 2005 involving Bernanke, and critics of U.S. monetary policy over its provenance and meaning. Both pointed to the U.S. current account deficit as proof of the surplus. But Fed critics called it a “liquidity glut.” The hundreds of billions flowing uphill each year from poor Asian countries to wealthy America were driven by the hydraulics of U.S. monetary policies. Overly stimulative U.S. policies enabled the U.S. to over consume and over borrow. Martin Wolf, editor of the *Financial Times*, noted that the United States had absorbed 70 per cent of the rest of the world’s surplus capital, while its consumption accounted for 91 per cent of the increase in gross domestic product in this decade.

Bernanke, who in 2005 was just a Fed governor, defended U.S. posture and policies. He took note of the bizarre role reversal — Scrooge

borrowing from Tiny Tim — but argued that the surplus took the form of a “savings glut.” And the Chinese were its agents. The United States was just reacting to the Chinese decision to save so great a portion of their income. Well over a trillion was now mostly invested in U.S. Treasuries and government sponsored enterprises. China’s savings rate — managed by the state — had reached a staggering 50 percent. Even Chinese households on their comparatively tiny incomes saved 30 percent. The U.S. private households, which at the beginning of the superboom were saving nearly 10 percent, now have negative savings. But Americans were making the best of a situation not of their making, acting as Stakhanovite consumers in order to promote the continuation of global expansion. U.S. borrowing was necessary to protect the world from imminent collapse.

A striking feature of Bernanke’s account — as well as that of his adversaries who assert the liquidity thesis — is that neither think trade has anything to do with the trade deficit. Explains Bernanke, “The U.S. trade balance is the tail of the dog; for the most part, it has been passively determined by foreign and domestic incomes, asset prices, interest rates, and exchange rates, which are themselves the products of more fundamental driving forces.”

For the economists, the financial markets determine the markets for commodities. Any nation could have a giant trade surplus; it’s ultimately just a policy choice about savings behavior. The country with the giant surplus just happened to be China. Utterly ignored is the fact that trade surplus/ capital glut could never have formed without staggeringly high rates of labor exploitation in the strict Marxian sense: the ratio of value added by labor divided by wages. As far as what drove the boom and what caused the bust, it’s the rate of exploitation that’s the dog. The savings rate is the tail.

Conclusion

MARX TALKS FREQUENTLY about the capitalist’s

“wolfish hunger” for profit and his ravenous appetite for capital accumulation. It’s no small irony that the most wolfish and ravenous capitalists in history should turn out to be Chinese Communist Party officials trained to revere Marx. But that doesn’t detract from the serviceability of Marxian premises about capitalist dynamics. Whose fault is the crisis? Chinese over-exporting or American over-importing? “It should be noted in regard to imports and exports,” Marx observes, “that one after another, all countries become involved in a crisis and that it then becomes evident that all of them with few exceptions, have exported and imported too much. So that they all have an unfavorable balance of payments.”

Marx wouldn’t have been surprised at the failure of the once highly touted \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program. “The entire artificial system of forced expansion of the reproduction process cannot, of course, be remedied by having some bank, like the Bank of England, give to all the swindlers the deficient capital by means of its paper and having it buy up all the depreciated commodities at their old nominal values.” Making the swindlers whole does nothing to restore profitability in the real sector.

The global rupture that’s taken place over the last 15 months suggests a pattern of growth — a global division of labor — that has grown not just increasingly unwieldy, but probably unsustainable. How can the “imbalances” be fixed unless the United States becomes a producer as well as a consumer of commodities? But how can the United States become a producer on the world market given the vast disparity in rates of exploitation? Only in a post-industrial world which never existed. How can

the United States continue to consume Chinese products without Chinese credit — which is dependent on unsustainable American consumption? No doubt adjustments can be made — both China and the United States can de-globalize. But such necessarily wrenching transformations take time, more like decades than years.

No doubt there is something comforting about the world of the sensible center where greedy bankers, bad regulators or too much regulation brings doom and disaster. At least we remain masters of our fate. At least the virtues still count — if we can only renew our commitment to them. In the capitalist world as described by Marx — and this is perhaps the insight most in need of refurbishing — we think we’re actors but we’re not. Capitalism is the form of society that must ruthlessly develop the productive forces, but it develops them in a form that turns their agents into passive victims of the process.

The reassuring side of Marx’s view of capital expansion and collapse is the opportunity it offers for a revival of the spirit of resistance among the working people:

“Without the great alternative phases of dullness, prosperity, over-excitement, crisis, and distress, which modern industry traverses in periodically recurring cycles . . . with the up and down of wages resulting from them . . . the working class . . . would be a heart-broken a weak-minded worn-out unresisting mass whose self-emancipation would prove as impossible as that of the slaves of ancient Greece and Rome.”

Class struggle is the best stimulus package.

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

Hoax and Reality

JEROLD TOUGER

I N 1996, THE ACADEMIC JOURNAL *Social Text*, self-described as “a daring and controversial leader in the field of cultural studies,” published an article by physicist Alan Sokal in which Sokal argued that in quantum gravity, “the foundational conceptual categories of prior science — among them, existence itself — become problematized and relativized.”

What did Sokal mean by this? In Sokal’s own words, “This . . . statement is utterly meaningless, but it sounds good in certain circles.” Sokal’s intent was to parody the post-modernist, relativist views of science that he felt were prevalent in *Social Text* and other like-minded academic venues, and to see if by speaking the language of proponents of these views, he could get his parody published as a serious academic paper. In short, “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” was a hoax. Its acceptance and publication reverberated beyond the academic world to the front page of the *New York Times*.

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Beyond the Hoax

ALAN SOKAL

Oxford: Oxford University Press
2008, 448 pp., \$39.95

In fact, Sokal is a strong proponent of the rationalist view of science that his *Social Text* paper calls into question. His new book, *Beyond the Hoax*, presents the full hoax article, extensively annotated by the author. The remainder of the book is a series of essays in which he argues passionately and

insightfully for the evidence-based reasoning of the sciences. (Sokal briefly addressed these issues in the winter, 1997 issue of *New Politics*.) He critiques, at length and with an abundance of examples, approaches to reality that hold all truth to be subjective, relative, and dependent on cultural norms and biases.

Sokal’s motivations in raising these arguments go beyond the defense of his own intellectual turf. “I confess that I am an unabashed Old Leftist who never understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class . . . My concern,” he stresses, “is explicitly political: to combat a currently fashionable postmodernist/poststructuralist/ social-constructivist discourse — and more generally a penchant for subjectivism” which he believes to be “inimical to the values and future of the left.”

Quoting Alan Ryan, he continues. “. . . The minority view was always that power could be undermined by truth . . . Once you read

[Michel] Foucault as saying that truth is simply an effect of power, you've had it . . . But . . . large numbers of self-described leftists . . . have confused radical doubts about objectivity with political radicalism, and are in a mess." He worries that "much of present-day scholarship marks . . . a retreat from real politics into careerism disguised as progressive politics."

A couple of cases, the first discussed by Sokal himself, will serve to illustrate the rationalist, objectivist view of science that Sokal defends with passion and conviction:

Suppose I am asked to pick a number from 1 to 99,999,999,999. I claim to have a method for getting it right on the first try despite seemingly insuperable odds. If I then proceed to do so, it gives my claim enormous credibility. If others claiming the same method likewise get it right, or pick numbers clustering closely around the correct one — perhaps differing only in the last one or two places — it does not in a strictly logical sense prove my claim is correct, but makes the case for it compelling, as our legal system would put it, "beyond a reasonable doubt." This, in essence, is what happens when an experimental measurement of the electron's magnetic moment agrees with what theory predicts to eleven decimal places. This outcome, as Sokal says, "would be utterly miraculous if quantum mechanics were not saying something at least approximately true about the world [and] . . . if electrons did not really exist in some sense or another."

The "method" for getting the right number in this case involves a dense web of prior evidence and reasoning including the assertions that subatomic particles called electrons exist and have very particular properties, and that their behavior is governed by the equations of quantum electrodynamics.

Sokal: "Large numbers of self-described leftists have confused radical doubts about objectivity with political radicalism, and are in a mess."

Cut away now to a more macroscopic but equally miraculous prediction. Suppose I produce two agglomerations of wires, silicon, and other materials arranged in a minutely specific configuration. I then make the claim that when you press a particular sequence of buttons on the smaller of the two, the voice and image of Barack Obama making his acceptance speech will emanate from the larger. Some of the same principles — the exist-

ence of electrons and quantum-mechanical reasoning about them — allow us to expect (predict) very specific outcomes when we use our TV remotes. The confidence that we can have that our modern electronic technologies will behave in particular ways, glitches notwithstanding, further reinforces our belief that the theories giving rise to these technologies are correct, at least to a very high degree of approximation, "beyond a reasonable doubt."

This, in brief, is the rationalist view of science, a view that prevails among the mainstream of its practitioners, and, as Sokal argues, a view that also informs the more mundane activities of plumbers and electricians, who routinely and without deep philosophic reflection use evidence and reasoning to draw conclusions about the presumably real state of your pipes or wiring.

Sokal contrasts this with ideas that he labels postmodernist, acknowledging that he is using this term in a more limited context than is usual. Specifically, he is using the term to denote "an intellectual current characterized by . . . a cognitive and cultural relativism that regards science as nothing more than a 'narration,' a 'myth,' or a social construction among many others." According to this view, as Sokal characterizes it, " 'truth' is relative to some social or cultural group," so that assertions about the social or natural world cannot "be objectively (and

hence transculturally) true or false.”

Most scientists acknowledge, as does Sokal, that scientific thinking can be influenced by the social and cultural context in which it takes place. But those scientists aspire to objectivity, and they impose stringent evidentiary demands on one another's ideas to provide a basis for judging how closely those ideas correspond to an objective external reality. The insistence on what Robert Boyle called producibleness in the 1680 edition of his *Sceptical Chymist*, and indeed that very spirit of skepticism that Boyle espoused, lie at the heart of the successes of Western science. So Sokal argues vehemently against views which hold that there may be multiple and conflicting “truths” and thus “tend to reject objectivity even as an ideal towards which to strive (however imperfectly).”

HAVING THROWN DOWN THE GAUNTLET against those who view truth simply as an effect of power, Sokal minutely details the ways in which he sees this relative view of truth to have negative consequences. His targets range from “creation science,” to which he devotes surprisingly little attention, to a range of New Age practices, to the rejuvenation of Vedic science by Hindu nationalists in India, to feminist science-criticism and ecoradicalism, and — more controversially — to several of the world's main religions.

In one of the more successful portions of his book, he takes the reader on a wild ride through the convolutions of New Age thinking. To a mainstream scientist, some of the most alarming come from the field of nursing. In the practice of Therapeutic Touch (TT), as described by its inventor Dolores Krieger, “the healer need not make physical contact with the patient . . . the work . . . has as its primary focus the modulation of the healee's energy field.” Krieger, a nursing professor at New York University when she developed this practice in the early 1970's, enjoined practitioners to assess the energy fields of pets and trees as well as hu-

mans. From eastern philosophies, she invoked the role of prana, a Sanskrit term for — in her words — “what we in the West think of as the organization of energy that underlies the life process.” In her evidentiary arguments, she took accounts in her students' journals as “indications of the use of telepathy” resulting from TT.

Other proponents of TT, lacking positive evidence either that human energy fields actually exist or that TT “healers” can sense them, assure their readers that “more definite proof will come from the process of TT, that is, the intentionality involved in the conscious desire to help or heal another.” Yes, and in James Barrie's play, the children in the audience can save Tinker Bell by shouting, “I believe in fairies!”

Martha Rogers, then the Head of the Division of Nursing at NYU, went further in her Science of Unitary Human Beings. Basic to her system were “energy fields, openness, pattern, and four-dimensionality . . . Specifically,” she contended, “human beings and environments are energy fields.” Her four-dimensionality was “a nonlinear domain without spatial or temporal attributes,” in contrast to the Einsteinian notion of space-time. Having thus emptied the concept of content, she then asserted, “All reality is postulated to be four-dimensional.” The reader seeking some rigorous logical connectivity will hardly be reassured by her claim that “in a universe of open systems, causality is not an option . . .”

Though this reviewer is not qualified to judge fully whether these examples and quotes come from the mainstream or the fringes of the nursing profession, Sokal points out that in 1996, two years after her death, the American Nurses Association inducted Rogers into its Hall of Fame, citing her as “a proponent of rigorous scientific study.”

What are some of the salient issues here? In the rationales for these practices, concerns for evidence and causality are minimized or set aside entirely. Terminology is adapted from

mainstream science, but here the concepts become too vaguely defined to admit of strict logical analysis, and the rigorous evidentiary demands of mainstream science are not present. It then becomes all too easy to make facile associations between concepts in, say, physics and concepts in eastern philosophies. The concept of prana, for example, is not the same as the concept of energy in Western science. It lacks the quantifiability that makes possible the prediction and verification of specific measurable outcomes. There may be analogous ways in which the terms are used, but analogies are all too easily overextended.

This facile association between concepts from traditional cultures and those of modern science recurs in another context. Hindu-nationalist intellectuals have argued that modern Western science is oppressive and exploitative and that the Indian scientific mind needs to be decolonized, rejecting objectivity as illusory and instead accepting science as one of many “imperfect traditions.” Some “post-colonial” intellectuals have asserted that modern scientific discoveries are only re-discoveries of ideas in the Vedas, the ancient scriptures of Hinduism. Thus, the description of prana in Vedic cosmology — “It vibrated without vibrations” — is claimed to antecede Maxwell’s linking of electricity and magnetism in electromagnetic waves. As an extreme case, Sokal quotes an assertion that “the Vedas are a coded book . . . of particle physics and cosmology,” and that, for example, verses about wild and domestic animals are really referring to fermions and bosons.

This loose free association is in contrast to what Nehru (quoted by Sokal) admiringly called “the adventurous and yet critical temper of science . . . the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence, the reliance on observed fact and not on preconceived theory . . . the hard discipline of the mind.” But Hindu nationalists militated for equal time for such scripture-based “sciences”

as Vedic astrology, and political pressures led in 2001 to the approval in principle of departments of Vedic astrology in Indian universities, with programs through the Ph.D. level. The decision, not surprisingly, was met with a storm of protest from Indian scientists, who in fact have

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made so-called “Western” science their own at a level that generates Nobel Prize winners. Although Sokal doesn’t pursue the comparison, American readers may see similarities here to the politics of equal time for creation science or intelligent design.

Nehru’s few sentences are a nutshell summary of some of Sokal’s key ideas. Nehru’s stress on the “hard discipline of the mind” reverberates in Sokal’s defense of “the rigorous analysis of evidence” and his attack on critics of science who proceed from a lay understanding of the science they are addressing. “After all,” Sokal reminds us, “doing real science is *difficult* [emphasis added]. Why bother to invest the time to seriously learn physics, biology, and statistics if it’s all, in the end, just a matter of opinion anyway . . . your paradigm against mine . . . ‘one among many truth games’ . . . It’s a lot quicker, and more exhilarating as well, to erect a revolutionary system based on verbal manipulation of phrases culled from vulgarizations or popularizations of relativity or quantum mechanics.” He fairly bristles with indignation that “nowa-

days a significant minority of humanist intellectuals feels entitled to pontificate on these subjects in spite of their ignorance,” and cautions that skepticism must be “informed skepticism.”

It is partly on these grounds that Sokal takes issue with post-modernism, feminist science-criticism, and ecoradicalism, or at least with a substantial subset of those espousing these views. He stresses that he is supportive of both feminism and environmentalism, but objects strongly to non-scientists playing fast and loose with science ideas when they lack the depth of hard science understanding to assess their validity.

He objects strongly as well to the unexamined premises from which some proponents of these “post-modernist” views proceed. How does any scientist, male or female, contend with an assertion that in the seventeenth century the “female world-soul . . . was murdered . . . by the mechanist re-visioning of nature” or French feminist Luce Irigaray’s contention that (in Sokal’s paraphrase) “fluid mechanics is underdeveloped with respect to solid mechanics because solidity is identified with men and fluidity with women”? At a time when shattering glass ceilings is resurgent in our national dialogue, it is bewildering to find the stereotyping of sex roles creeping in as the premise of a feminist argument.

Likewise, the premise of some radical environmentalists that pre-industrial humans lived in harmony with nature ignores evidence for ecological devastation and the hunting to extinction of various species even in Paleolithic times. But some radical environmentalists even question the importance of evidence. Geographer David Demeritt urges environmentalists to “end their search for foundational authority . . . in science or elsewhere, and appeal instead to diverse moral, political, and esthetic criteria to arbitrate between particular representations of nature . . .” “The universe,” Sokal cautions in response, “may not turn out to conform to our desires.”

SADLY, THE BOOK AS A WHOLE FALLS WELL short of its most compelling arguments. Its tone, its length and repetitiveness, and flaws in editorial judgment will undermine its effectiveness as a persuasive argument for readers not already firmly aligned with Sokal’s views. In his preface, Sokal, never shy about his opinions, expresses “a visceral distaste for books . . . concocted by pasting together a collection of loosely connected, previously published essays,” and then asks, “Am I not now publishing just such a compilation?” For Sokal, “The answer, of course, is no.” To use one of Sokal’s own recurrent phrases, this reviewer begs to differ.

Either Sokal or his editors should have noticed that half of p. 346 characterizing religion as pseudoscience is repeated almost verbatim on p. 377. When Sokal writes, “At the risk of beating a dead horse, let us rephrase our critique . . .,” the reader may well moan audibly. The trouble is that most of Sokal’s chapters were previously published, and become painfully repetitive at times. Chapter Nine was not previously published, and Sokal is not embarrassed to tell us why: “This essay was originally commissioned by the journal *Science & Society*, but it ended up being more than seven times their maximum allowed length!” And yes, the exclamation point is his.

The compulsion to include every case and every nuance at times weakens Sokal’s arguments. After acknowledging that he found many fewer examples than he had expected of postmodernists explicitly endorsing pseudosciences, he then goes on to discuss those examples in detail. Surely he is aware of how misleading it can be to focus on cases that are not representative of the overall distribution of evidence.

The book’s footnotes are more than occasionally interesting, but their protracted use makes an already overlong book even more ponderous. The use of both footnote numbers and annotation numbers in the annotated hoax article and the embedding of annotation numbers

within numbered footnotes is almost in itself a parody of academic writing. Yet Sokal's preface praises his editor's "courage" for not treating footnotes as the kiss of death for a book aspiring to some non-academic readership.

The tone in the early portion of the book is also problematic. Scholars with whom Sokal agrees are "eloquent" and "brilliantly scathing." Excerpts with which he takes issue are "hilarious" and "howlers". He may be right, but dissing the opposition is no way to win converts.

All this is unfortunate, because by the time you get to the best reasoned sections, sections that strike a more moderate tone and implicitly acknowledge that there may be intelligent readers who need persuading and are worth persuading, you think, "Why didn't he say that earlier! And more succinctly!" And if you are a scientist in agreement with at least most of Sokal's positions, you lament that his editors did not take a stronger hand in reining in some of his most unfortunate tendencies.

There is an irony in this, because one of the recurrent objects of Sokal's criticism was the failure of the editors of *Social Text* to exercise critical editorial judgment. In their case, of course, the failure of judgment was a far more crucial one — accepting the hoax article without referring it to referees with expertise in its scientific content. In contrast, consider how the editor of *Physical Review Letters*, a premier publishing venue for physicists, responded to a hoax article on a new force submitted by a young Yale professor in 1986. As recalled in the October

2008 issue of *Physics Today*, the editors sent back six reviews from referees ("one for each force"), all of which had in fact been produced in house.

"Although all advise publication . . .," Editor George Basbas wrote in the accompanying letter, "the Editors, in their usual arbitrary and capricious manner, do not come to this conclusion." They were astute enough to

respond to parody with parody.

In fact, one wonders about the decision to begin the book with a fully annotated version of the hoax article, running to over 80 pages. When Martin Gardner did *The Annotated Alice*, it was clearly out of admiration for Lewis Carroll. When Sokal does an annotated Sokal — in which, among other things, "I explain the various jokes and solecisms" — it can appear entirely too self-congratulatory. An annotation that reads, in its entirety, "I am very proud of this paragraph: it is elegant bunkum" does nothing to dispel this notion. For most readers, a few well-chosen examples of how the parody parodied and a briefer selection of quotes from the cited references would have sufficed.

Overall, Sokal's book presents compelling intellectual arguments on both scientific and philosophical grounds for respecting the centrality of evidence and demanding a strong evidentiary basis for positions taken, whether in the scientific or social arena. I share his suspicion that "credulity in minor matters prepares the mind for credulity in matters of greater import." My major concern is that at times he argues not wisely but too well.

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The New Class Struggle

MILAN RAI

REAL UTOPIA IS A WIDE-RANGING BOOK that can deliver for the open-minded reader. It relates ideas and actions that develop naturally out of commonly held values, but that can still bring surprise, the shock of revelation, the rearrangement of familiar territory, and a different framework for us to see ourselves within.

Who is the “us”? People who subscribe to the cry of the World Social Forum: “Another World Is Possible!”

The questions many of us urgently want answers to are: What is this “other world”? What does it look like? And: How will we get there? *Real Utopia* doesn’t pretend to have all the answers to these questions, but it has many more of the answers, and more satisfying answers, than any other single book I know of.

I’m not convinced by every single claim or argument put forward in *Real Utopia*, but I am convinced that everyone who seriously wants “another world” in the spirit of the World Social Forum should engage with this readable, remarkable book.

The point of *Real Utopia* is to counter despair, and to present a credible vision of the future that can meet the growing desire for a humane social order that eliminates centralized power and oppression. According to the “complementary holistic” theory underlying the book, such a vision should address simultaneously gender, power, race, and class, without giving any one sphere primacy over the others.

Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century

CHRIS SPANNOS, ED.

U.K.: AK Press, 2008, 416 pp., \$21.95

There are therefore thoughtful and attractive contributions from Cynthia Peters, on a vision for “family, sexuality, and caregiving in a better world”; Stephen Shalom on possible new political structures in such a world; and Justin Podur on race and culture.

The heart of the book, however, and the overwhelming bulk of its 400-odd pages, lies in a proposal as to how our economic lives could be transformed by a new set of structures known as “participatory economics” — “parecon” — for short. Even within “complementary holism” (previously known as “totalism”), class is still the central concern.

One possible justification for the greater emphasis on economics is that undoing capitalism would help to undermine other forms of oppression. Cynthia Peters observes: “The principles that guide a pareconish society would do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to addressing gender imbalances outside the home.” The elimination of sexist income inequality and women’s economic dependence on men, and the creation of workplaces that “ensure equal access to decision-making, so women and men would be equally experienced at taking on empowered roles,” would all create systematic pressures towards gender equality (though not guaranteeing it), in her view.

For people sickened by patriarchy and capitalism, this should be very attractive. Similar remarks could be made in relation to other forms of oppression. However, parecon has met with a great deal of hostility in just the circles one would expect it to be welcomed.

There are two strands to *Real Utopia*: ex-

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perience and theory. My advice to someone new to parecon would be to first turn to the brief chapters dealing with experience of parecon enterprises, such as Jessica Azulay's essay on *The NewStandard*, a trail-blazing radical online hard news paper that lit up the U.S. scene for four years. The editors and journalists of *The NewStandard* collective divided the work of the business into four categories: managerial, content, administrative, and a mixed category they called "conmin." (There would have been a janitorial category, if they hadn't all been working in separate physical spaces.)

"Managerial" work included participating in collective meetings and other policy-related decision-making. "Content" work included reporting, editing, and website development. "Administrative" tasks were bookkeeping, answering email, providing technical support for users, taking minutes, and so on. The point of labeling tasks in this way was to ensure that each person in the collective experienced as much empowering work, or as much tedious rote work as everyone else. The "conmin" category was invented to account for the fact that there were tasks which were less desirable than most content work, but more empowering than most administrative work.

Azulay writes: "When we divided up the work, we tried to make sure that each staffer was assigned roughly the same number of hours of each kind of work." In parecon, this is known as a "balanced job complex."

In a parecon society, job complexes should be balanced not just inside a workplace, but across the economy, a point made forcefully by Paul Burrows in his valuable reflections on his five years working in Winnipeg's Mondragón Bookstore and Coffee House collective.

Together with Lydia Sargent's typically brisk and bold account of the creation of South End Press and *Z Magazine* (heroic endeavors both), these are inspiring and enriching examples of radical cooperative enterprises surviving — and upholding anti-capitalist values

— under highly stressful conditions.

On the wider scene, parecon is a proposal for a new way of organizing the economy as a

The point of *Real Utopia* is to counter despair, and to present a credible vision of the future that can meet the growing desire for a humane social order that eliminates centralized power and oppression.

whole, with a new pay system (remunerating for effort and sacrifice rather than the economic contribution made) and a set of structures for collective, participatory economic planning.

LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM IS BASED ON THE claim that a future society can be constructed in which working people directly control their own destinies — in their own workplaces and neighborhoods — without the need for any form of external control by state, corporation, party, or other managerial elite. Different proposals have been made over the last 150 years or so as to how these networks of workers' cooperatives and neighborhood assemblies could work.

Parecon contains a rigorous, theoretically consistent, and economically valid model that has been developed for workers' and consumers' councils to engage in participatory planning. This model is not spelled out in *Real Utopia*, but an intriguing relevant example is sketched out: the development of participatory, bottom-up (upside-down) planning in the Indian state of Kerala between 1996 and 2001, involving over 3 million households in local associations. Other inspiring and fascinating large-scale efforts touched on in *Real Utopia* include the factory takeovers in Argentina and the extraordi-

nary participatory democratic initiatives in Venezuela.

There is much to learn from these initiatives, from the history of the Russian factory committees in 1917 (discussed by Tom Wetzel), and from the anarchist transformation of much of agricultural and industrial life in Spain during the Civil War (examined by Dave Markland). I personally learned a great deal from these essays — and even more from Robin Hahnel's extraordinarily rich discussion of social democratic reformism and anarchist purism.

These analytical and historical contributions are worth the price of *Real Utopia* by themselves. However, the real value of *Real Utopia*, and of parecon, comes from a rather sharper challenge.

The central value of anti-capitalism is that class is wrong. It is wrong that a small minority who hold power by reason of ownership, by reason of wealth, should dictate the lives of society as a whole, forcing people to rent themselves out as tools used for purposes they do not choose.

Anti-capitalism, if it means anything, means a commitment to classlessness. Yet it is clear from 150 years of revolution that working class people have more to fear than the investing/owning class. As Bakunin foresaw long ago, the educated, intellectual classes can also seize hold of the reins of power, often in the name of the people, so that the people will be beaten with "the people's stick." There are actually three classes at work in industrial societies — capitalist owners, workers, and an intermediate stratum, which Bakunin called "the new class" and in parecon is known as the "coordinator class."

When I first became aware of parecon, I was fully aware of, and subscribed to, Bakuninist critiques of Leninism and "the new class." Still, I had a number of questions and concerns about parecon (some of which are expressed by Barbara Ehrenreich in her semi-debate with Michael Albert in *Real Utopia*).

One thing I was not convinced about was the idea of "balanced job complexes," and the suggestion that we should try to implement these now, in our current progressive organizations. I'm a writer, an editor, a speaker, a facilitator. I have specialized skills. It seemed irrational, if not bizarre, to expect me to do a lot of other forms of (disempowering, rote) work as part of my radical "job complex," when this would reduce the amount of time I spent doing the things which I am good at, and which are badly needed.

I carried on feeling this way until the summer of 2006 when, as part of a special *ZNet* conference, I watched Michael Albert ably and patiently fending off disbelief and fairly hostile criticisms of parecon from radical intellectuals just like me. Unbidden, two ideas rose up inside me. Firstly, I thought: "Michael Albert is a great man." (Now why did I think that?) Secondly, it came upon me that the real reason I was resistant to the idea of the "balanced job complex" was I have a class interest as an intellectual in expecting other people (less educated, confident, articulate, word-skilled people) to do the boring work that has to be done in any movement for social change. I was ashamed of myself.

The value of parecon at this point is, in my view, two-fold. It provides a rigorous model for a future society that "works" theoretically, giving credence to the idea that there is no worked out non-authoritarian alternative to capitalism that is worth pursuing. Much more important, in my view, is that it sharply confronts the class interest of intellectuals working in progressive movements. Such as myself.

Lydia Sargent writes that when she helped to set up South End Press, one (invaluable) radical publishing house was run by three white men; well-educated white women did most of the editing; a black woman was the receptionist; and Latinos packaged and shipped material from the warehouse. It seems safe to assume that class differences aligned with gender and

race inequalities.

In the essay I have already referred to, and which I cannot praise too highly, Paul Burrows writes: "We should not tell people anything, unless our movements, our own alternatives, our own institutions embody the values we profess to hold." We need to build the future now, in what we do now.

I believe in classlessness. I've had a revelation about the balanced job complex. I'm a committed activist — I've been to prison four times (admittedly for the briefest of sentences) for political action. On the British scene, many people who know me see me as near the radical extreme. And yet.

Have I tried to create balanced job complexes at *Peace News*, where I am a co-editor? At the peace group Justice Not Vengeance, where I am one of three organizers? In Rootstock, the radical social investors' co-operative, or Walden Pond, the radical housing co-operative, I am part of? Have I even raised the subject for discussion?

If we are going to replace capitalism with a decent society, we are going to have to deal with the new class as well as the owning class. I've met the class enemy. It's me. And probably you.

I can't think of a better place to start the new class struggle than by studying *Real Utopia*.

A NEWER TESTAMENT



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by Reneau H. Reneau

A Newer Testament: Misanthropy Unleashed by Reneau H. Reneau

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YAM: When nudge comes to shove, what matter most: country, education, religion, or money in the bank? Why did "women and children first" only apply to firstclass women and firstclass children on the Titanic, regardless of race, ethnicity, or country of origin? The firstclass Prussian and the firstclass Brit waltzed away to the lifeboats while behind locked iron gates the third class Kraut and the thirdclass Limey, with their thirdclass babes in tow, haplessly hokeypokied to the bottom of the sea. And that's what it's all about.

BIG MAC: Bolshevik!

YAM: Well, what alternative is there? Sadducee aristocrats point to the ants and the bees and say, "Look, that's just the way it is. Now lick my boots and may God bless." Enlightened Pharisees point to the ants and the bees and say, "Look, we all prosper from a share-the-wealth society. Now lick my boots and I'll give you a shiny quarter."

Bolshevism and Revolutionary Democracy

PAUL LE BLANC

GIVEN THE COMPLEXITIES AND CRISES OF our time, we may see increasing numbers of thoughtful people and rising layers of young activists once again asking, “What is socialism and how can it be achieved?” Impacting on the answers to this question are the questions wrestled with in the books under review, which give attention to the fact that, as Simon Pirani puts it, “the Russian revolution of 1917 was a defining event, maybe the defining event, of the twentieth century,” and that “the retreat from, or failure of, the revolution’s aims . . . have, no less than its achievements, been a central problem for all those concerned with progressive social change.”¹

Back in 1917, when the workers’ and peasants’ upsurge in Russia culminated in the triumph of the revolutionary-democratic councils known as soviets, Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik party (soon renamed “Communist Party”) at the head of the upsurge, declared: “Comrades, workers, soldiers, peasants, and all working people! Take all power into the hands of

your soviets. . . . Gradually, with the consent and approval of the majority of the peasants, in keeping with their practical experience and that of the workers, we shall go forward firmly and unswervingly to the victory of socialism — a victory that will be sealed by the advanced workers of the many civilized countries, bring the peoples lasting peace, and liberate them from all oppression and exploitation.” As John Reed reported in his eyewitness account *Ten Days*

The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24: Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite

SIMON PIRANI

London/New York: Routledge, 2008, 289 pages. \$160

Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy

SOMA MARIK

Delhi: Aakar Books, 2008, 537 pages. \$55

That Shook the World (corroborated by much serious scholarship since then), “the only reason for Bolshevik success lay in their accomplishing the vast and simple desires of the most profound strata of the people, calling them to the work of tearing down and destroying the old, and afterward, in the smoke of the falling ruins, cooperating with them to erect the framework of the new.”²

Yet within a decade the bureaucratic and murderous dictatorship under Joseph Stalin was — in the name of Lenin and Bolshevism — consolidating its hold over the Soviet Republic. In fact, as Pirani argues, “within months of the October [1917] uprising, the revolution was in retreat from the aims of social liberation it had proclaimed. It was confounded by circumstances, and pushed back by the state.”³

Pirani adds that “the retreat, like the revolution, was not uniform or unidimensional. Workers, communists, and others kept trying to push the revolution forward.” Many histori-

PAUL LE BLANC is a longtime activist in Pittsburgh, where he is presently Professor of History at La Roche College. His most recent books are *Marx, Lenin and the Revolutionary Experience* (Routledge, 2006) and an edition of *Lenin’s writings*, *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism* (Pluto Press, 2008). He is an Associate Editor of the 8-volume *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

ans would agree with the assertion of Moshe Lewin, in his 2005 summation *The Soviet Century*, that “the year 1924 marks the end of ‘Bolshevism’” — with the new bureaucratic layer led by Stalin defeating, one after the other, a succession of Communists still animated by the ideals of 1917.⁴ Many had earlier contributed to their own defeat. Soma Marik asserts — in terms that Pirani would certainly endorse — that “all too often, in place of admitting that acute crises were causing departures from workers’ democracy, the Bolsheviks justified those departures as developments superior to bourgeois democracy. This caused a severe retreat in the theoretical field and ultimately affected their political practice seriously.” She goes on to insist (with a perspective similar to Lewin’s — but perhaps not Pirani’s): “Nonetheless, the process of bureaucratization and the rise of Stalinism meant a decisive break with the Bolshevik legacy, rather than an essential continuity.”⁵

In most cases, such questions are not adequately explored by scholars whose primary experience happens to be outside of the labor and socialist movements. More helpful is an immersion not only in the literature and historical material of Marxism, socialism, and communism, but also an intimacy with the practicalities of left-wing organizations and with the interplay of such organizations with the larger working class. It helps especially if a person with such experience has been shaken into a critical-mindedness. Such people are more inclined to know which questions to ask, and where to look for the answers to such questions.

Pirani accepts the conception of the Bolshevik-led 1917 revolution as a profoundly democratic and promising reality, and he seems to accept the need to have postponed that glowing promise in 1918–1920, in the face of foreign invasion and brutal civil war.

It is fortunate that in our own time there is a flow of important work from such people, two of whom are under review here. British scholar Simon Pirani was once a prominent activist in

the Workers Revolutionary Party, now obviously disillusioned with the orthodoxies of that now-imploded super-Trotskyist sect. He has produced an extremely important piece of research — *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24*. Soma Marik is an Indian scholar. Her adherence to the Fourth International of Trotskyist origin, perhaps tempered

by difficulties in building a revolutionary organization in her native land, has certainly been impacted by a commitment to feminist perspectives. Her book is as awkwardly named as it is rich with information and insight — *Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy*.

What Marik does — aptly explained in the laudatory foreword by prominent Marx scholar David McLellan — is to explore “the revolutionary and democratic core of Marxism” and to offer “a careful dissection of the ways in which Marx and the Bolsheviks united theory and practice.” What Pirani does — aptly noted in the blurb by Diane Koenker, herself a pioneer in the study of the Russian working class — is to take “a close look at the relationship between the Bolshevik party and the democratic aspirations of rank-and-file workers in Moscow in the crucial early years of the Russian revolution.”⁶

Primarily a work of intellectual history, Marik’s study is thorough — combing through the mass of primary and secondary sources related to her subject, not least of which is a splen-

did utilization of Hal Draper's rich body of work (which also informs Pirani's study). As do Draper and a number of other prominent scholars (David McLellan, Richard N. Hunt, Michael Löwy, August Nimtz, etc.), Marik produces a clear, coherent, fully documented, and stimulating discussion of classical Marxism informed by the notion that, as she puts it, "central to Marx's concept of workers' democracy was the principle of working-class self-emancipation." While this is ground well covered by others, whose contributions she capably summarizes and synthesizes, Marik's effort contains two additional components: (1) almost every chapter of the book contains material critically examining how questions of gender and issues of feminism relate to, and shed light on, the "larger issues" under discussion; (2) there is an exploration of the interrelationship between Marx and Bolshevism.

Pirani's book is — in some ways — much narrower in scope. A work of social history, it focuses on realities in Moscow in a five-year period. Its publication coincides with the appearance of two other important volumes wrestling with similar issues — Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* (2007) and Kevin Murphy's splendid *Revolution and Counter-Revolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (2005), which looks at a single workplace from roughly 1900 to 1932.

THESE THREE BOOKS ARE PART OF A MUCH larger stream of scholarship, which suggests an important limitation (yet also a strength) of Pirani's work: far from having the finality of a synthesis, it is a contribution to a much larger collective work-in-progress. The weaknesses in Pirani's book, it seems to me, arise when he strains against the limitations of his study, reaching for generalizations that distort rather than shed light on the valuable new information that he is sharing with us.

At the very beginning of his book is a sum-

mary of Pirani's thesis: "The working class was politically expropriated by the Bolshevik party, as democratic bodies such as soviets and factory committees were deprived of decision-making power [as] the Soviet ruling class began to take shape. . . . Some worker activists concluded that the principle of 1917 had been betrayed, while others accepted a social contract, under which workers were assured of improvements in living standards in exchange for increased labor discipline and productivity, and a surrender of political power to the party."⁷

It is difficult to convey in a short review how valuable is the new material that Pirani presents in this compelling study. The essential outlines of what he offers will hardly be news to those who have engaged with, for example, Paul Avrich's fine old account *Kronstadt 1921* or the narratives, memoirs, and novels of Victor Serge, Robert V. Daniels' substantial 1960 work *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*, or Samuel Farber's more recent *Before Stalinism, The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy*. But Pirani utilizes new materials (including contemporary reports, speeches, articles, and interventions by dozens of Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik workplace activists, factory managers, dissidents, and bureaucrats — culled from minutes of various soviet, trade union, and party meetings, from newspapers of the time, as well as from detailed reports of the Cheka, not to mention a considerable body of Russian-language post-Soviet scholarship). Pirani accepts the conception of the Bolshevik-led 1917 revolution as a profoundly democratic and promising reality, and he seems to accept the need to have postponed that glowing promise in 1918-1920, in the face of foreign invasion and brutal civil war. But once the Bolsheviks won the civil war, he asks, what explains the reason for the promise not simply being deferred but abandoned?

Some scholars have drawn on Lenin's own partial explanation: "an industrial proletariat . . . in our country, owing to the war and the des-

perate poverty and ruin, has become declassed, i.e., dislodged from its class groove, and has ceased to be a proletariat. . . . Since large-scale capitalist industry has been destroyed, since the factories and works are still at a standstill, the proletariat has disappeared." Lenin's view was that only the Communist Party, largely composed of those who had been workers, and committed to a revolutionary working-class program, could hold the new Soviet Republic together. Isaac Deutscher made this a central component of his own influential account of Russia's post-revolutionary realities. More recent historians such as Diane Koenker have effectively challenged this as exaggerated, though Koenker's own data indicates elements of truth in Lenin's formulation: dramatic socio-economic disruptions, combined with revolutionary workers being drawn into the Red army and state apparatus, obviously impacted on the vitality and political cohesion of the Russian workers' movement. Pirani observes, however, that "the working class was far from non-existent, and when in 1921, it began to resuscitate soviet democracy," responses from powerful elements in the Communist Party worked not for its revival but its limitation and even elimination.⁸ Tensions and conflicts sharpened with implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), beginning in 1921, reviving the devastated economy with market mechanisms but also fostering inequality and corruption.

Vibrant details emerge from this — connected with specific tensions and conflicts, passions and personalities — which provide patches of color, motion, and flavor that help us understand in new ways what is going on in the five eventful years that Pirani examines. At times, the complex swirl of what he unearths and presents is almost overwhelming — and at times, it seems to me, he tries to pull it all into a more coherent package than is justified by the more jumbled and fluid realities. But essential elements of the Bolshevik and Soviet tragedy do emerge, nonetheless, and with uncommon

freshness and poignancy.

One Communist militant remembered of the revolutionary years: "We all lived in a state of revolutionary romanticism: weary and exhausted but happy, festive; unkempt, unwashed, long-haired, and unshaven, but clear and clean of thought and heart." A Communist returning from the civil war wrote to Lenin that "in the heart of every conscious comrade from the front, who at the front has become used to almost complete equality, who has broken from every kind of servility, debauchery, and luxury — with which our very best party comrades now surround themselves — there boils hatred and disbelief." A disillusioned party member explained in a letter of resignation: "I cannot be that sort of idealist communist who believes in the new God That They Call the State, bows down before the bureaucracy that is so far from the working people, and waits for communism from the hands of pen-pushers and officials as though it was the kingdom of heaven." In 1920, a leader of the Democratic Centralist faction in the Communist Party snapped: "Why talk about the proletarian dictatorship or workers' self-activity? There's no self-activity here!"⁹ A 1923 manifesto from the dissident Workers Group asserted:

What are we being told? 'You sit quietly, go out and demonstrate when you're invited, sing the Internationale — when required — and the rest will be done without you, by first-class people who are almost the same sort of workers as you, only cleverer.' . . . But what we need is a practice based on the self-activity of the working class, not on the party's fear of it.¹⁰

Among the early working-class oppositional groups in and around the Russian Communist Party, the best known is the Workers Opposition led by Alexander Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai. While they figure in Pirani's account, he gives much more attention to other (and in some ways more interesting) formations — the Democratic Centralists led by Timofei Sapronov and Valerian Osinskii,

Workers Truth whose activists included such female militants as Polina Lass-Kozlova and Fania Shutskyever, and the Workers Group whose leading personality was the tough, thoughtful worker-Bolshevik militant Gavriil Miasnikov. It is one of the great tragedies of Bolshevism that such oppositional currents were

Trotsky: If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need to prohibit the other Soviet parties would immediately have fallen away.

crushed by 1923, and that aspects of their perspectives, rooted deeply in the Bolshevism that culminated in the 1917 triumph and initially enjoying significant working-class support, were not allowed the space to challenge the ominous and ultimately murderous bureaucratization. Beginning with Lenin himself, and then Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, and others (all of whom had “pragmatically” yet myopically worked to eliminate these early currents), the bureaucratic-authoritarian onslaught dealt them defeat after defeat after defeat.

Marik sees the decisive moment occurring at the Tenth Party Congress of the Communist Party in March 1921, when a ban on organized opposition was codified both inside and outside of the Communist Party. “Yet, in 1921, it seemed to be only another temporary measure,” she writes. “Lenin pleaded for time, thereby creating the impression that eventually, in one or two years, matters would change. But the effect of the changes of 1921 was devastating. The danger of bureaucratization had been ever present from the early days of the revolution. Once workers’ democracy was throttled, this bureaucratization could proceed unhindered.”¹¹

It is worth reflecting, however, on Trotsky’s classic essay of 1937, “Stalinism and Bolshevism”:

As far as the prohibition of the other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any “theory” of Bolshevism but was a measure of defense of the dictatorship [of the proletariat, i.e., the workers’ state] in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies. For the Bolsheviks it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party itself, signaled a tremendous danger. However, the root of the danger lay not in the doctrine or in the tactics but in the material weakness of the dictatorship, in the difficulties of its internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need to prohibit the other Soviet parties would immediately have fallen away.¹²

Yet Marik identifies a key problem embedded in Leninist theory, whose negative effects crop up over and over in Pirani’s account. “The lack of discussion about the role of political parties in *The State and Revolution* remains a significant flaw,” she writes. “Lenin’s account of representative democracy can be criticized for being silent on the question of plurality, rival programs within the workers’ state, and on the distinction between counter-revolution and opposition.”¹³ She and Pirani document the fact that Lenin, Trotsky, and other leading Bolsheviks idealized the Communist Party under their leadership as the only legitimate political expression of Russia’s revolutionary working-class.

Marik notes that this was related to the fact that initially “most non-Bolshevik parties, who were chosen by the workers, peasants, and soldiers to represent them in the soviets, decided to turn their backs on the soviets and even to join hands with a bourgeois-aristocratic counter-revolution.” But she also insists (drawing on the work of another Indian scholar, Kunal Chattopadhyay’s *The Marxism of Leon Trotsky* [2006]) that the multi-party socialism Trotsky had insisted on as early as 1904 — which he had abandoned when the other so-

cialist parties turned against the Russian Revolution, but returned to by the 1930s — was the key to avoiding the disaster that befell Soviet Russia.¹⁴

There were others, however, who were insisting on the same point at the very moment when Lenin and Trotsky were inadvertently helping to engineer the revolution's defeat. Pirani draws our attention to a 1922 declaration of the Workers' Group, calling for "the resurrection of workers' democracy in the form of workplace-based soviets," that seems to hit the nail on the head:

It argued that, whereas during the civil war the emphasis had been on suppressing the exploiters, NEP required rebuilding such soviets as the "basic cells" of soviet power. There could be no free speech for those who oppose revolution, "from monarchists to SRs," and curtailing democracy during the civil war had been an unavoidable necessity. But under NEP "a new approach" was needed, including free speech for all workers: "there is no such thing in Russia as a communist working class, there is just the working class, with Bolsheviks, anarchists, SRs, and Mensheviks in its ranks," among whom "not compulsion, but persuasion" had to be used. . . . The manifesto lambasted the use of "bureaucratic appointments that brush aside the direct participation of the working class" to run industry.¹⁵

ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS with Pirani's account is a tendency to accuse the Bolsheviks (or Communists) as a whole, and Lenin in particular, of authoritarian ideological inclinations and goals which, at best, seriously oversimplifies the realities. According to his own account many Bolsheviks opposed and fought against manifestations of what he presents as "the Bolshevik position." The label "anti-worker" is applied very freely, sometimes to corrupted and tyrannical officials, to be sure, but also to some Bolsheviks who had been workers for most of their lives and who saw themselves as attempting to defend the medium-term and long-term interests of the work-

ing class in the face of understandable but problematical short-term discontents.

Certain conceptions are pushed further than the facts will bear. Here are two examples: 1. Pirani writes that Marx "asserted that the abolition of bureaucratic hierarchy and the introduction of officials paid a skilled workman's wages . . . would be integral to 'the political form of . . . social emancipation,'" and then announces: "In Bolshevism, this aspect of Marx's thought was almost completely obliterated." There are a number of first-hand accounts that contradict this. For example, in the remarkable memoir of a Communist survivor of the gulag, Joseph Berger's *Nothing But the Truth* (also published under the title *Shipwreck of a Generation*): "In the early years of the regime the ascetic tradition of the revolutionaries was maintained. One of its outward manifestations was the 'party maximum' — the ceiling imposed on the earnings of Party members. At first this was very low — an official was paid scarcely more than a manual worker, though certain advantages went with a responsible job. Lenin set the tone by refusing an extra kopeck or slice of bread. . . ." There were certainly exceptions to this — Trotsky records with distaste the case of his own brother-in-law, Lev Kamenev, who threw little parties during the stark civil war period, supplied with "bottles and dainties" furnished by the somewhat corrupt but affable Abel Yenukidze.¹⁶ With the New Economic Policy, as many (including Pirani) have been able to show, immense inequalities became far more common. But our understanding is not enhanced by denying the realities that Berger and others attest to.

2. Pirani tells us: "The most influential socialist analysis of the USSR, Trotsky's, . . . relied heavily on the Bolsheviks' old discourse about 'alien class elements,' and excluded from examination the party's political expropriation of the working class." This is not true. From exile, Trotsky wrote: "On the foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat — in a backward country, sur-

rounded by capitalists — for the first time a powerful bureaucratic apparatus has been created from among the upper layers of the workers, that is raised above the masses, that lays down the law to them, that has at its disposal colossal resources, that is bound together by an inner mutual responsibility, and that intrudes into the policies of a workers' government its own interests, methods, and regulations." Trotsky was merciless in describing the ex-working-class functionary: "He eats and guzzles

and procreates and grows himself a respectable potbelly. He lays down the law with a sonorous voice, handpicks from below people faithful to him, remains faithful to his superiors, prohibits others from criticizing himself, and sees in all of this the gist of the general line."¹⁷

Pirani (perhaps understandably) turns on Lenin. The wonderful quality of Lenin's Marxism for most of his life, and especially in 1915-1917, was the unity of the revolutionary strategy and the revolutionary goal, each permeated by a vibrant, uncompromising working-class militancy, insurgent spirit, and radical democracy. The culmination of this in the 1917 revolution was Lenin's triumph. His tragedy was that it broke down in 1918 — not simply because of the immense violence for foreign invasion and civil war, not to mention the earlier devastation of World War I, but because the simple solution of "workers' democracy" became problematical when the abstract visions were brought down to the level of concrete realities. Workers' committees and councils in the factories and neighborhoods did not have enough information and knowledge to form practical decisions nor enough skill and practical experience to

carry out decisions for the purpose of running a national economy, developing adequate social services throughout the country, formulat-

ing a coherent foreign policy, or even running a factory that would be interconnected with a larger economic system.¹⁸

This was especially so in the horrendous context in which revolutionary Russia found itself by 1921. The unexpected reality that the Bolshevik Revolution did not succeed in sparking international revolution, in the wake

of global radicalization fostered by the imperialist slaughter of World War I, was a key factor in the tragic equation — the Soviet Republic's isolation in a hostile capitalist world. There were thus no socialist regimes in more advanced industrial economies of Germany and other European countries to help in the development of revolutionary Russia, as had been expected in 1917.

Pirani makes much of a fragment of Lenin's 1922 speech which he interprets as defining the Russian working class out of existence. The speech actually contains various good, bad, and contradictory formulations as Lenin grapples with the kinds of problems alluded to above, which tend to be avoided in Pirani's narrative. He could just as well have drawn our attention to the words of Leon Trotsky. "Under the form of the 'struggle against despotic centralism' and against 'stifling' discipline, a fight takes place for the self-preservation of various groups and subgroupings of the working class, with their petty ward leaders and their local oracles," Trotsky wrote in 1921. "The entire working class, while preserving its cultural originality and its political nuances, can act methodically and

The wonderful quality of Lenin's Marxism for most of his life, and especially in 1915-1917, was the unity of the revolutionary strategy and the revolutionary goal, each permeated by a vibrant, uncompromising working-class militancy, insurgent spirit, and radical democracy

firmly without remaining in the tow of events and directing each time its mortal blows against the weak sectors of its enemies, on the condition that at its head, above the wards, the districts, the groups, there is an apparatus which is centralized and bound together by an iron discipline.”¹⁹

Although Pirani does not put this quotation in his book, this could also be seen as a rationale for “the new ruling class.” While there may be truth to Pirani’s analysis, however, there may also be elements of truth in Trotsky’s comments — reflecting the tragic dilemma facing Bolshevism in the early 1920s. And the fact remains that a number of apparent representatives of this “new ruling class” had spent most of their lives fighting for workers’ democracy and socialism and would soon end their lives in continuing to wage that struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy. The realities seem far more contradictory and fluid than Pirani will allow.

Nonetheless, Bolshevism failed to sustain its own revolutionary democracy, and what Bolsheviks did and failed to do are part of the equation. While this defeat resulted from factors beyond their control, fateful choices by Lenin and his comrades were also among the negative factors. Those who seek to do what they tried to do, but to do it better, should reflect over these works by Pirani and Marik.

NOTES

1. Pirani, 1

2. Lenin, *Revolution, Democracy, Socialism, Selected Writings*, edited by Paul Le Blanc (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 279–280; John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (New York: Signet, 1967), 256.

3. Pirani, 1–2

4. Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005), 308

5. Marik, 7

6. Marik, vi; Pirani, i

7. Pirani, iii

8. Lenin cited and his comments discussed, along with Koenker’s critique, in Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1993), 304–305, 335; Pirani, 22–23.

9. Pirani, 45, 53, 55, 91–92

10. Ibid, 142

11. Marik, 477

12. *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936–37* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 426.

13. Ibid, 379

14. Ibid, 380

15. Pirani, 195–196

16. Pirani, 166–167; Joseph Berger, *Nothing But the Truth* (New York: John Day Co., 1971), 89; Leon Trotsky, “Abel Yenukidze,” *Portraits Political and Personal* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 179.

17. Pirani, 167; Leon Trotsky, “What Next?” in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), 213.

18. Among sources that provide information and insights are: Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies, Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); William Henry Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1921* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1935); Edward Allsworth Ross, *The Russian Soviet Republic* (New York: Century, 1923).

19. Pirani, 163; Leon Trotsky, “Lessons of the Paris Commune,” in *Leon Trotsky on the Paris Commune* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 56. Lenin’s 1922 speech deserves extended scrutiny and reflection — see Lenin, “Report of the Political Committee of the RCP(B), March 27,” *Collected Works*, vol. 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 263–309 — the comments on which Pirani focuses can be found on 299.

20. *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936–37* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 426.

Belief, Work, and Tears

ROBERT JOE STOUT

ABSURD! Thus the man known around the world as Subcomandante Marcos, soldier, revolutionary, poet, philosopher, and spokesman for the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), describes the political situations that exist in the world today. It is absurd that he lives in a country that has produced the world's most wealthy individual but in which over 40 percent of the population lives in dire poverty. It is absurd that people, because of the color of their skin or the language they speak, should be denied access to food, water, parcels of land on which to live, health care, and/or education. It is absurd that powerful nations like the United States spend unlimited billions of dollars on implements of destruction and hoard food while others in the world are starving.

It is absurd that armed soldiers, many of whom have indigena backgrounds, harass, arrest, and kill neighbors whose skin is the same color as theirs and who merely want to govern themselves. It is absurd, he admits, that he and a small coterie of comrades prepared for ten

years to initiate an armed revolution only to do an immediate about face and initiate a peaceful one.

It is absurd, but it also is the way things are. One's choices are to be victimized passively or to forge ahead and try to create something good in a world that is, and is going to continue to be, absurd.

Although the Sup, as he is called in the Mexican state of Chiapas' rain-swept eastern selva, is the only one of three authors cited above who uses absurd to define the situation about which he is writing, all three books detail the absurdities of the world in which peace-

ful peoples are criminalized for striving to live in dignity with a minimum of material goods. Marcos emphasizes that gaining personal dignity was one of the major aims of the Zapatista rebellion. And Joseph Nevins, in *Dying To Live*, describes over 200 years of a people's striving — often against incredible odds — for the dignity they feel and have been repressed for expressing.

Marcos' book, *The Speed of Dreams*, is a collection of translated writings arranged in more or less chronological order by the editors. They include presentations that Marcos made at forums and during marches throughout Mexico and delightful philosophical musings that Marcos attributes to devils, children, and a hard-shelled Lacandón beetle named Durito who rides a skateboard and calls the Sup "used-un-

Dying To Live

JOSEPH NEVINS

San Francisco: Open Media/City Lights Books, 2008

The Fire and the Word

GLORIA MUÑOZ RAMÍREZ

San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008

The Speed of Dreams

SUBCOMANDANTE INSURGENTE MARCOS, EDITED BY CANEK PEÑA-VARGAS AND GREG RUGGIERO
San Francisco: City Lights, 2008

ROBERT JOE STOUT *lives in Mexico after a career as a magazine editor and newspaper reporter, editor, and columnist. Algora Press brought out his* The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives, *a mosaic of Mexican faces, places, and experiences, and his book about immigration, Why Immigrants Come to America came out earlier this year from Praeger.*

derwear face.”

Marcos condemns the capitalist system and the neoliberal policies it aggressively has pushed throughout the world. But he never foregoes being a poet and chronicler of human events. Interspersed with his — and Durito’s — biting analyses of economics and politics are reminders of how human and subject to foibles we all — even revolutionaries — are. He laments the lack of

Viagra in his wilderness survival kit, describes him and two companions walking naked (except for ski masks) through the selva because they forgot to take towels with them when they went swimming, and he tells the story of the pet chicken that saved itself from the stew pot by pretending to be a penguin.

Life in the selva, as Marcos describes it, includes days and nights of rain and fog, meager diets, impassable roads, deprivations and improvisations. But it also is a place of sharing and cooperation. Despite the fact that many European and American supporters have put on zapatismo — a leaderless communally governed autonomy where all decisions are group decisions and everyone is equal — Marcos candidly admits that “we still have a long way to go” to achieve gender equality, and points out that the “good government communities” were not created until August, 2003, nineteen years after the birth of the Zapatista army. For ten years (1984–1994) the small core of insurgent founders lived and organized in a rigidly disciplined fashion that included military designations of rank (*comandante*, *subcomandante*, *coronel*, *capitán*, *teniente*, down the ladder to *compañero*). During those ten years they carefully recruited and indoctrinated villages throughout Chiapas, taking painstaking care to make sure that each person, each village that became Zapatista was ready to join the cause.

“Governing by listening” is a
centerpiece of Zapatista
philosophy.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s rumors circulated through Chiapas that revolutionary forces were recruiting and maneuvering in the selva. Speculation had it that they were Guatemalan guerrillas or foreign-inspired militant communists. I lived in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, during two of those years. The youth who worked for my landlord took me on a visit to his home pueblito, where he said people knew of

the existence of these guerrillas, but no one there appeared to have any real knowledge of them. Almost ten years later I found out that that pueblito had been a Zapatista support base when I visited it, but not one of dozens of people that we talked to gave the least indication that any such organization existed, so tight was the EZLN’s discipline.

“We thought we were going to die,” Marcos admits, and affirms that the EZLN made its move on January 1, 1994, expecting to stimulate similar uprisings. Much to his and his companions’ surprise, he writes, people throughout Mexico rose in support — but not of armed overthrow of the government. Overnight the EZLN brain trust had to change course, put down arms, and advocate change through peaceful means.

“We listened to the people,” he writes, “and learned that we needed to govern by listening.”

“GOVERNING BY LISTENING” is a centerpiece of Zapatista philosophy. All too often socialist reformers attempt to impose ideas, rather than listen to the peoples they wish to represent. A case in point in the collapse of the People’s Popular Assembly of Oaxaca, which at one time had 800,000 marching in its support — over one-fifth of the state’s population — but after brutal militarized repression it fell apart, largely because of petty infighting among

the leaders of its various factions. Meanwhile, the vast majority of former supporters turned away because they were not being heard and their needs were not being met.

(“Governing by listening” does not mean listening to Televisa or Fox News but listening to individuals who make their wishes known in great enough numbers that they point the way to the kinds of government they want.)

Marcos’ literary flare makes reading *The Speed of Dreams* delightful. He is playful as well as insightful, for example in describing the Zapatista visit to Mexico City in January, 2003:

This city presents an illusion. It appears to be inhabited by broken-down automobiles, by sterile shopping centers, by news programs that are torn between lies and facile scandal (although sometimes they are combined), by television programs that reward the ridiculous on primetime, by swift convoys replete with bodyguards transporting officials or tycoons who are not going anywhere, but who are moving because believe it is necessary to remind the city that they exist.

In *The Fire and the Word* (subtitled “The History of the Zapatista Movement”), also published in translation from the original Spanish, Gloria Muñoz chronicles the progression of zapatismo from its armed emergence through ten years of systematic Mexican government containment — the so-called “war of low intensity.” Unfortunately much of the narrative reads like a business reporting its yearly activities for an annual board of directors meeting. There is no mud, nor rain, no hillside burials, no crying babies. She often chooses not to identify who makes speeches or who authors accounts, identifying them only as “EZLN speech, January 1, 2001,” etc., making zapatismo seem like a faceless collective of automatons without human aspirations or human needs. I found this surprising since Muñoz, in writing for Mexico’s daily *La Jornada*, doesn’t sheer away from biting opinions and descriptions.

The book’s opening section includes three

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos’ offerings and commentaries by members of the EZLN describing the army’s recruiting and organizing efforts before 1994 and the opening weeks of armed conflict. The final section is a transcript of an audio recording made by Marcos in September, 2003, and a summation written by Muñoz in conjunction with Hermann Bellinghausen, who has covered the uprising in Chiapas since its beginning for *La Jornada*.

Muñoz’ chronological approach prevents deeply delving into the complexities of zapatismo and its effect on Mexico’s cultural and political life. It does, however, enable her to summarize internal and external events that often are overlooked or have been forgotten by those interested in or affiliated with the movement. It is marvelously illustrated: the photographs, illustrations, and sketches are presented with detailed clarity on high-quality paper. The photos bear no captions (except those beneath the EZLN authors of the pre-1994 commentaries); this at first is disconcerting, but if one pages through the book without reading the text the photographs evoke what really is at the heart of zapatismo: individuals building a self-sufficient community through belief, discipline, work, music, and tears.

Here and there Muñoz breaks the business report pattern with revealing side issues, including the founding of *Rebeldía* magazine, which included contributions from Durito the Philosopher Beetle (viz. Marcos), and how the EZLN leadership’s support of foreign causes and socialist endeavors in other countries linked the Zapatistas with groups like Batasuna in Spain. So effective was anti-Zapatista propaganda that people throughout Mexico believed that zapatismo was connected with criminal and anti-government activities throughout Latin America despite the EZLN’s insistence that it did not support armed or non-pacific uprisings of any kind.

She describes the founding of the Caracoles, the August 2003 creation of

Zapatista good government communities in Oventik:

Oventik was dressed for a party. Thousands of indigenous and nonindigenous people arrived at the Caracol to celebrate, accompany and be part of the new Zapatista challenge. The increase in military movements did not keep members of the EZLN General Command from fooling the surrounding forces and showing up at one of the five new Caracoles. Highways and dirt roads were invaded by thousands of men, women, and children from the base communities who were headed to the party, to the celebration of autonomy.

Marcos, in his audio recording, summarizes:

I think our biggest accomplishment is the willingness and capacity to learn, first to learn to fight, then to learn to recognize the enemy, to learn to recognize who isn't the enemy, to learn to talk, to learn to listen, to learn to walk together alongside others, and to learn to respect and recognize difference. And above all, to learn to see ourselves as we are and as others see us.

Lamentably, the translation is plagued by some erroneous renderings of Spanish to English, the most blighting of which is the translators' insistence on reducing Mexico's *secretario de Gobernación* (Secretary of Government) to "Secretary of the Interior." No similarity whatsoever exists between the two cabinet posts. Mexico's federal system does not include a vice-president; the Secretary of Government is the second most powerful figure in the federal hierarchy. (At times the secretary's authority has usurped that of the president, specifically during the administrations of López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz and often during Fox's 2000-2006 tenure in office.) Several secretaries succeeded the president they served as the nation's chief executive; even when not chosen or elected they were considered prime candidates. To force the removal of the Secretary of Government would be equivalent in the United States to forcing the resignation of the Secretary of State, or the

leader of the U.S. Senate. To reduce him to "Interior Secretary" totally misrepresents the importance which the Salinas government placed

The turmoil and bloodshed of the Mexican Revolution in the early part of the century prompted hundreds of thousands of Mexican to cross the border.

on the Chiapas uprising.

Other wrenchings of Spanish into invalid English include calling the *guardias blancas* "white guards." This is totally inaccurate. Blanca in this case refers to *arma blanca* — "cold steel, or firearm"; *tiro al blanco* is the term for target shooting. The *guardias blancas* are paramilitary sharpshooters, why not call them that? Particularly since "white" has racial connotations for many American and English readers and the majority of the paramilitaries in Chiapas are in fact indigena.

Such inaccuracies made the reader wonder if there aren't other mistranslations that she or he may not be aware of. This casts a cloud of doubt over the entire book.

Munoz' book nevertheless presents a very valuable review of zapatismo from 1994 through 2003. It unfortunately is not indexed, which forces the researcher to page through the chronology if he or she doesn't know the exact year that a certain event occurred.

JOSEPH NEVINS' *DYING TO LIVE* also describes a developing community, but the community being built is more ephemeral than real: Thousands of miles separate its two main components, California's Imperial Valley and the mountain town of Juchipila, Zacatecas, Mexico. Over half of the native-born population of Juchipila lives in the United States, Nevins re-

ports. At least one of them, Julio César Gallegos, is buried there. His death by hypothermia on blistering desert sands twenty-five miles north of the Mexican boundary is the incident around which Nevins' centers this investigation of "American Apartheid."

Although Nevins doesn't use the label absurd as Marcos does, his careful and well-written documentation of the historical and social antecedents of immigrant deaths on the desert conveys how absurd United States's politics of immigration and exclusion play out. By focusing first on geography — specifically the U.S.-Mexico boundary and all that it implies in political and sociological terms — Nevins produces an ongoing accumulation of the prejudice and abuse that culminated in Gallegos' — and hundreds of other immigrants' — deaths.

Virtually uninhabited and unexplored until the 1900s, the Imperial desert began to develop with the advent of irrigation on both the Mexican and U.S. sides of the boundary line. American developers, among them Harry Chandler, the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, evicted Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese small acreage farmers from their holdings on both sides of the border and promulgated a pattern of Anglo ownership and Mexican manual labor that exists in even greater dimensions throughout the United States — and in many parts of Mexico — today.

That homophobia accompanied the growth of the area is evident, Nevins points out. Even a 1951 report of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor blamed Mexican immigrants for everything from depressing wage rates in the Southwest to warning of implications for public health and housing standards, crime and the threat of Communist subversion — allegations which had no basis in fact but which reflected the virulent anti-Mexican sentiment of American Apartheid prevalent at the time.

He also quotes an Immigration and Naturalization Service official defining extralegal entrants from Mexico as "the greatest peacetime

invasion ever complacently suffered by another country under open, flagrant, contemptuous violations of its laws."

The pattern of Anglo ownership and exclusion included the one-time Mexican village of Los Angeles, which by the beginning of the First World War was almost entirely Anglo and which now contains one of the largest Hispanic populations of any city on the continent. Nevins traces its growth and development, continually stressing the boundaries — invisible lines across the desert dividing the two countries — which geographically were easy to cross and the equally invisible ones that separate darker skinned and Spanish-speaking people from lighter-skinned and English-speaking inheritors of belief in Manifest Destiny (i.e. racial superiority).

In addition to being a center of dynamic growth and creative development (Los Angeles) has always been a city that embodies the processes related to the very making of the U.S.-Mexico boundary — ones involving conquest, dispossession, subordination, domination, and nationalization.

This pattern doesn't disappear even in central Mexico. Juchipila, where Nevins lived for a time thanks to a faculty research grant from Vassar College, is almost totally dependent on its U.S. residents — authorized and unauthorized immigrants — for financial survival. Nevins describes a Juchipila parade in which the town princess is conveyed on the hood of a big pickup bearing the bumper sticker Proud to be American. The links between those who actually reside in Juchipila and those who support them with remittances from the United States are so inseparable Nevins devises the term MexUSA to describe where and how they live.

As he does with the Imperial desert and Los Angeles, Nevins details Juchipila's geography and history, which included several bloody repressions and, more recently, its agricultural decline. Throughout the twentieth century, migration from northern and central Mexico to California and other parts of the United

States ebbed and flowed in response to economic and political situations. The turmoil and bloodshed of the Mexican Revolution in the early part of the century prompted hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to cross the border. The flow reversed during the Great Depression, resurged during World War II, and was reversed again by “Operation Wetback” of the early 1950s.

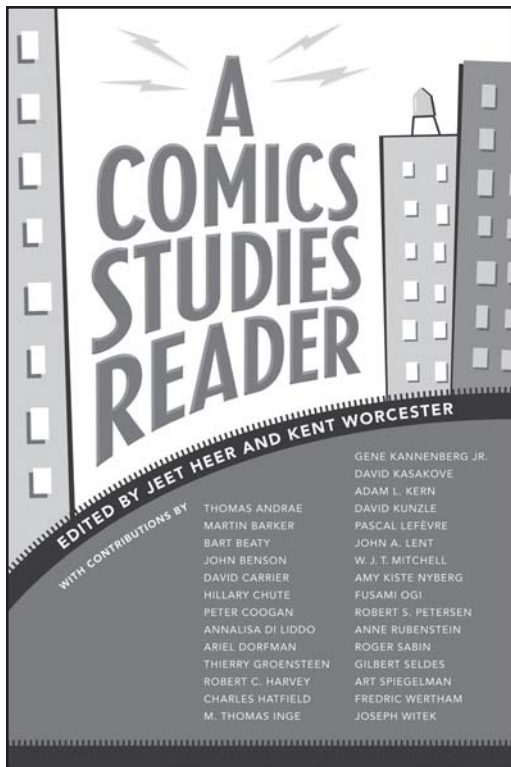
Focusing on the geographical locations with which Julio Gallegos was involved — Juchipila, Los Angeles, and the Imperial desert — enables Nevins to go into detail about past and present conditions in those areas and at the same time present a graphic portrayal of the attitudes and responses of the American Apartheid: geographical segregation in Los Angeles,

owner-worker separation in the Imperial Valley, economic barriers that force Juchipilan schoolchildren to assume that they will have to cross the border to earn enough to support their families.

In spite of its title, *Dying To Live* is no tearjerker. Although Nevins makes no attempt to conceal where his sympathies lie, and pointedly criticizes U.S. policies and aggression, he focuses on facts, quotes, descriptions. And although one feels an immense sympathy for Gallegos and his American-born wife and children, the book engenders outrage, not tears.

How can any government be so duplicitous? So cruel?

It's absurd! Totally absurd!



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Architect of Illusion

LOUIS F. COOPER

IS IRAQ ANOTHER VIETNAM? While some on the left may think so, the differences between the two wars are more striking than the similarities. The neoconservative rationale for the invasion of Iraq was that it would remove a brutal, dangerous dictator and lead eventually to the democratization of the entire Middle East. By contrast, the Vietnam War, in the minds of most of its planners, was about containment: its main aim was to prop up a Cold War ally and prevent the advance of Communism in Asia. Spreading the supposed benefits of democracy and capitalism to the Third World was a strictly secondary consideration for most American policy-makers at the time.

The most prominent exception to this generalization was Walt W. Rostow (1916-2003). Among the key civilian advisors to presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Rostow was the most ideological, the most hawkish, and in some ways the closest in sensibility to today's neocons. Rostow's 1960 book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* argued that all societies pass through the same stages of economic development en route to liberal capitalism. He believed that the U.S. had a duty to help poor countries along this path while ensuring that they avoided the historical cul-de-sac of Communism, which he called "a disease of the transition to modernization."

In *America's Rasputin*, David Milne, a

America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War

DAVID MILNE

New York: Hill and Wang
2008, 320 pp., \$26.00

young British scholar, portrays Rostow as the embodiment of Cold War liberalism carried to its extreme. Rostow's unwavering belief in the importance of the Third World as an arena of ideological struggle set him apart from those he derisively called "Atlanticists" and informed his generally belligerent approach, an approach that proved disastrous when applied to Vietnam.

Rostow was an academic prodigy who entered Yale at fifteen, won a Rhodes Scholarship, and was offered a tenured professorship at Harvard when he was twenty-nine. An economic historian who also wrote about foreign policy, he was teaching at MIT when he entered government in 1961 as John F. Kennedy's deputy special assistant for national security affairs. Kennedy had long been committed to supporting a non-Communist South Vietnam. As a senator, he had declared in 1956 that "Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike." Kennedy had the sense not to commit American soldiers in large numbers to Vietnam, but neither Kennedy nor Johnson viewed the "loss" of Vietnam as remotely acceptable. Once the stakes were defined in these terms, the eventual use of military force was a foregone conclusion.

Some of the measures Rostow advocated, such as a ground invasion of North Vietnam by American troops, were too much even for Lyndon Johnson, who was constantly worried about the possibility of China entering the war. However, as counterinsurgency efforts like the strategic hamlet program showed few signs of

LOUIS F. COOPER's reviews have appeared in *Millennium*, *New Politics*, and other journals.

success, Johnson somewhat reluctantly authorized a bombing campaign, which Rostow had been strenuously urging for years. The initial idea, implemented in the evocatively named Rolling Thunder campaign launched in March 1965, was a “graduated” attack on North Vietnam. As this proved ineffective, however, restraints dropped away, and after Rostow replaced McGeorge Bundy as Johnson’s national security advisor in April 1966, the U.S. bombing of the North increased substantially.

As an analyst with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in London during World War II, Rostow had picked German targets for Allied bombers, and this experience convinced him of the effectiveness of properly directed air power. He believed, despite much available evidence to the contrary, that bombing oil storage facilities would have the same significant impact on North Vietnam that it had had on Nazi Germany. In a memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Rostow wrote that bombing North Vietnam would succeed because “Ho [Chi Minh] has an industrial complex to protect, he is no longer a guerilla fighter with nothing to lose.” This analysis confused Ho Chi Minh’s actual priorities with those of Rostow’s own ideal Third World leader. What Ho Chi Minh cared about was the reunification of Vietnam. Protecting North Vietnam’s tiny industrial base was a minor concern by comparison. Thus, as Milne puts it, “Rostow ultimately failed to appreciate the power of an ideology not beholden to the economic sources that informed his own.” (p. 13) This failure was linked to an even more basic failure to understand that Vietnam was a civil war and that the communist insurgency had indigenous roots. (p. 140)

One of the merits of Milne’s careful study is that it places Rostow’s career and outlook in the context of long-running debates about U.S. foreign policy. Here the contrast with George Kennan is revealing. Kennan, the father of the containment policy in its original form, was a critic of the Vietnam War, believing that Viet-

nam was not a U.S. vital interest. Not much concerned about the Third World, Kennan did not think that it was capable of moving toward American-style liberal capitalist democracy.

Rostow’s influence on policy started to decline in mid-1967 and waned further after the Tet offensive in January 1968.

Criticizing a 1962 policy paper by Rostow, Kennan wrote that the capacity for democratic development is “peculiar to peoples who have had their origins on or near to the shores of the North Sea” (quoted by Milne, pp. 114-15). Foreign aid, Kennan thought, was largely wasted on the newly independent countries. Understandably, Milne finds Kennan’s “ethnocentric chauvinism” unappealing by contrast with Rostow’s “progressive views on global poverty.” If only those views “had been married to a more reasoned appraisal of Communism’s threat to peripheral theaters, then Rostowism might have been an enduring force indeed,” Milne contends. (p. 116)

For reasons Milne himself notes, however, such a “marriage” was never in the cards, at least not as far as Rostow was concerned. Rostow’s theory of modernization, with its postulate of universal stages of growth, implied that there were in fact no peripheral theaters. Milne writes that Rostow was “wholly sincere in his desire to fashion a new kind of liberal capitalism that ridged the world of poverty and allowed the potential of all the world’s citizens to be realized, irrespective of their geographical location.” (p. 67) This desire, however, was inextricably tied to, and ultimately trumped by, Rostow’s zealous anti-Communism. Thus the “liberal, cerebral development theorist” became the “belligerent aficionado of tactical bombing.” (p. 7)

Rostow's influence on policy started to decline in mid-1967 and waned further after the Tet offensive in January 1968. He retained enough clout, however, to reinforce Lyndon Johnson's reservations about the peace negotiations just getting under way in Paris and thus to incur the wrath of chief U.S. negotiator Averell Harriman, who dubbed Rostow "America's Rasputin." When Nixon and Kissinger improperly interfered with the negotiations just before the 1968 election, Rostow urged Johnson not to make public the evidence of meddling by the Nixon campaign. Johnson settled for sending Nixon "a politely worded, private rebuke," (p. 238) and Nixon proceeded to narrowly defeat Hubert Humphrey. The 1968 episode was only one of several junctures at which Rostow helped derail potentially promising peace negotiations.

After Lyndon Johnson left office, Rostow went (at Johnson's invitation) to the University of Texas, where he spent the rest of his career. In the 1990s, he engaged in a debate with Robert McNamara following publication of the latter's *In Retrospect*, in which McNamara wrote that the war had been a mistake. Rostow was entirely unrepentant about Vietnam and his role in it, his only regret being that the U.S. had not prosecuted the war more forcefully. In an argument picked up by the right-wing press, Rostow contended that American involvement in Vietnam had given other countries in east and southeast Asia the necessary "breathing space" to pursue economic growth. In fact, however, the Vietnam War increased regional instability, and it led to the devastation of Cambodia.

Could the war have been won if Johnson had followed Rostow's advice and invaded the North? Milne does not address this question directly, but the most plausible answer is negative. The basic problems were the weakness of the South Vietnamese regime and the tenacity of its opponents. Given these conditions, it is unlikely that anything short of a second Hiroshima could have "won" the war. As it was, the U.S. dropped more bombs on North Vietnam than were dropped in all theaters during the entirety of World War II.

In tracing Rostow's influence on America's Vietnam decision-making, Milne offers a cautionary tale, with obvious contemporary relevance, about the hazards of trying to combine "aggressive and altruistic interventionism." (p. 117) In the end, Rostow, for all his brilliance, emerges as a prisoner of his background, temperament, and experiences. He picked bombing targets in World War II but declined to participate in the survey that evaluated the effects of bombing in that conflict. He saw post-war Europe at first hand but he did not have the direct experience of war that an infantry soldier or a pilot would have had. Disinclined to be self-critical, imbued with enormous confidence in his abilities, and positive that he knew how to defeat Third World insurgencies, Rostow was ill matched to the situation in Vietnam. Although structural pressures and bureaucratic imperatives will always play a major role in shaping foreign policy, *America's Rasputin* is a valuable reminder that there is no substitute for sound individual judgment.

Guaranteed: The Hardest and Most Dangerous Job and the Lowest Pay

MICHAEL WRESZIN

AS I SIT DOWN TO WRITE THIS REVIEW in mid-July, the political scene is absorbed by the strength of an African American candidate for the presidency. The *New York Times* announces the results of an extensive poll which asserts that the Obama candidacy is not closing the divide on race in America. Two days later New York's Governor, in an address to the NAACP, warned of "racism's lingering power." The Obama candidacy points to the tremendous progress made in race relations, while at the same time the poll shows white Americans and black Americans looking at very different worlds. Andre Hacker made the same historical observation sixteen years ago in his *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (1992). It was in 1968 that the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders observed, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal." But it is obvious that this was true from the start yet whites repeatedly state that the racial divide has declined or even disappeared. Black Americans still suffer from discrimination and feel that they are seldom competitive with whites for employment, education, housing, and other necessities of daily life. Many are waiting for the results of the election to discover the depth of continuing racism in America.

MICHAEL WRESZIN is a retired historian from Queens College and the City University of New York. He has written several intellectual biographies and taught African-American history for a decade.

For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865

ROBERT H. ZIEGER

Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007 276 pp., \$37.50

Robert Zieger's book, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* is a comprehensive study of the history of continuing racial discrimination and the struggle for equality since the end of the Civil War to the present day. While it is a synthesis of the enormous body of

work on the subject, it draws the material together in an intelligent and organized way that increases the value of this important book as a narrative history and as an encyclopedic reference work. It will be of great value to both teachers and researchers. Zieger appears to have read everything and his extended annotated bibliography is remarkable.

This is also a depressing trip that lays bare the intensity of racism in this country for 140 years. There has been progress and Zieger provides the statistical evidence. Nevertheless, after constant and debilitating struggle, reforms have often been calculatedly reinterpreted to threaten and reverse the gains made. Success is repeatedly followed by terrible disappointment. Things just didn't turn out as imagined. The Brown decision comes to mind — great hope and then disillusionment.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITH Reconstruction. It is the familiar story of the Radical Republicans' attempt to bolster their party by demanding black participation in the political processes in the South. Zieger insists that African-American employment must be at the core of any study of freedom and equality. While the thrust of the Radicals was to demand voting

rights, in the long run Reconstruction was far less successful when it came to securing blacks decent jobs with decent wages. For voting rights to achieve a measure of equality, they had to be accompanied by economic opportunity. While Reconstructionists' efforts made some remarkable achievements at the ballot box, the victories were short lived. The so called

Southern "redeemers" — forerunners of the KKK and White Citizen's Councils — "who threatened the white radicals through violence and intimidation drove the radicals and their supporters out of the South. They fought any attempt to allow blacks to engage in free labor. The South was intent upon creating gang labor. "A nigger won't work without a whipping" was the prevailing opinion among Southern planters; therefore the blacks were denied the land that had been promised to them (forty acres and a mule), and evicted off whatever land they had occupied. The Freedman's Bureau, allegedly designed to protect the blacks from slave labor laws, was notoriously weak and ineffective. Freedman spokesmen told blacks to work hard and obey their former masters. The sharecropper system became a method of forcing blacks into debilitating debt with no possibility of escape from the devastating exploitation. It was a brutal form of peonage. Zieger cites the Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney in the racist Dred Scott decision: "The black man has no right that a white man is bound to respect." The American people, declared one anti-slavery advocate, are "emphatically a Negro-hating people."

Blacks from the very start responded not only with bitterness and resentment but with collective resistance. Despite the homilies of Booker T. Washington, there was much violence in the sugar and rice fields. Zieger discusses more militant activity than is usually cited. But the state militia responded by killing the work-

ers, "gunning them down like dogs." It was thought by many that drastic action was necessary in order to "settle the question of who is to rule[,] the nigger or the white man."

By the turn of the century, the convict leasing system was prevalent in the South. Prisons were built for incarceration. The conditions of black workers were appalling. They

The South was intent upon creating gang labor.

were guarded by gun toting, whip wielding guards who beat the workers constantly. At Parchment Prison in Mississippi after the turn of the century, prisoners were beaten with brutality using the water cure, hanging by the thumbs, and daylong sessions in the hot box. The Southern railway system was literally built on corpses. One Southern employer of convict labor told of the convict lease system: "If a man had a good nigger before the war he could afford to take care of him. . . But these convicts: we don't own em. One dies, get another." Readers may be interested in a more recent and detailed study of the convict lease system and chain gangs found in Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Reenslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (2008).

Throughout this period, according to Zieger, the struggling new labor movements did not have an expressed racist ideology. Their rhetoric was invariably egalitarian. But in reality they were deeply racist. The Knights of Labor which practiced industrial unionism insisted that blacks and whites work together and set aside racial antagonisms. But Terence Powderly as well as Samuel Gompers were outspoken foes of Asian immigration. Powderly hated the Chinese.

THERE WAS A CONSTANT WAVE OF BLACK migration from the South to the North. It was an escape from the Southern system of brutal agricultural peasantry. Often the North was

romanticized, but the reality of racism was not simply a Southern phenomenon. Leroi Jones (not cited by Zieger) put the situation clearly: "In the cities which were once the black man's 20th century Jordan, promise is a dying bitch with rotting eyes. And in the stink of her dying is a deadly killing fume. . ."

Racism was just as prevalent in the North. Almost all jobs were in service industries or laboring. Blacks were not accepted into most craft unions. They were always consigned to the worst, most dangerous and lowest paying work. That condemnation is repeated over and over throughout this long study. Richard Wright's novel, *Lawd Today*, is a vivid description of the impoverished life and horrendous labor of a postal worker in Chicago. One worker remarks: "The only difference between the North and South is them guys down there will kill you, and these up here'll let you starve to death." Zieger does not use literary evidence, but the literature of African-Americans vividly supports the devastating details of his study. There were harsh living conditions in the North, segregated housing, impoverished rat-ridden slums. There was always discrimination in housing and in the work place. Women could find work only in domestic service.

African-Americans continued to migrate to the North because they felt they were better off than chopping cotton in the South. There was little desire during these years to return to the South despite the poor conditions and lack of opportunities.

From the turn of the century until the first World War there was considerable union activity, but the United Mine Workers, the Railroad Brotherhoods, Steel Workers, and countless other unions were all rhetorically egalitarian and racist driven. Blacks were called a "scab race" at the same time they were denied union membership and the AFL and the CIO, while rhetorically denouncing discrimination did little about it. Zieger is critical of Samuel Gompers for his hypocrisy and his refusal to force union

chapters to meet his alleged egalitarian standards.

During these years A. Phillip Randolph was earning the title of the most "dangerous negro in America" in the opinion of the Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer. For this kind of racist consistency see J. Edgar Hoover's similar views of Martin Luther King. Both were outrageously demanding rights guaranteed by the constitution. Gompers was always for integrated unions but Randolph frequently scorned Gompers' failure to challenge the discriminatory sovereignty of each separate craft union in the federation.

With the Depression and the war there was much more black activism and involvement in union activities. The CIO, formed by John L. Lewis, also claimed egalitarian principles but many of the unions barred blacks. Nevertheless, the CIO was different and there was a genuine attempt to bring all workers into the unions, black and white. African-American workers played a leading role in the building of a CIO packinghouse workers union. The Communist Party's Packing House Workers Industrial Union insisted on total equality and integration. They were enormously successful and Zieger states that they "played a key role in bringing the major meatpacking companies to the bargaining table." The CIO rode to success, Zieger claims, "on the backs of black workers in Chicago stockyards in the 1930s" One black worker testified that he "had found equality in the CIO."

The auto industry in Detroit presented a more complex story. The major auto companies, General Motors and Chrysler, hired few blacks for the worst, lowest paying jobs. When the unions gained organization they did not effectively protect the blacks from the usual job discrimination. Ironically the racist, anti-Semitic Henry Ford hired blacks at the River Rouge plant because he felt it would weaken the union movement. He believed Negroes were inferior people, child-like, but his hiring policy

was fair and he earned their loyalty. When the United Auto Workers signed with General Motors and Chrysler, there were 14,000 non-

The CIO was different and there was a genuine attempt to bring all workers into the unions, black and white.

unionized African-Americans at Ford. They were reluctant to support UAW organizing activity because they had seen how the UAW accepted racist membership. Blacks had no leadership roles in their union. After complicated struggles in the first year of the war, the UAW did gain union recognition in the Ford plant and blacks were able to keep their skilled jobs with equal pay.

THE BLACK UNION WORKERS WERE increasingly militant, vociferously proclaiming their double V slogan—victory over fascism abroad and racism at home. The days of Booker T. Washington's humble accommodation were over. Again Randolph led the battle, threatening a March on Washington of 100,000 black workers if the federal government did not protect employment rights. Franklin Roosevelt, who always had to deal with the Southern racist contingent in the party, was somewhat more responsive to black demands, undoubtedly encouraged by Eleanor. But despite the establishment of the Federal Employment Practices Committee and Roosevelt's executive order 8802, which Randolph called the "second emancipation," weak enforcement remained the rule. As in the past, the worst and most dangerous jobs went to the blacks. There was virulent white worker racism in the unions, particularly in the South. "I would rather see Hitler and Hirohito win than work next to a nigger." Even moder-

ates began to insist that racism could not be ended by the forcible, federal measures that Randolph advocated. Gunner Myrdal, of *The American Dilemma* fame, remarked at one point that the "fact that the AFL is against racism doesn't mean much.

In the post-war years there was always rhetorical lip service supporting racial equality. Northern migration of African Americans continued to urban centers but they no longer functioned as a minimal escape from poverty and racism. Black unemployment after the war was double that of whites, and the younger generation of black youth were becoming an urban peasantry, locked into a dead-end life and abandoned. Soon they crowded the prison population.

The Cold War anti-Communist hysteria also hurt the black labor movement because even making a case for civil rights and equality was seen by many as part of the Communist line. Since the Communists in several of the unions were seen as supporting the blacks and civil rights, they and those they championed were soon targeted. It has never paid to be both red and black in America.

Even in the CIO auto industries racism was rampant. In the UAW blacks constituted 2 percent of the craft workers. In the fifties and sixties Reuther was the target of much criticism, as was Meany. Randolph, speaking as the head of the Negro-American Labor Council, stated we "reject tokenism masquerading as democracy." When Randolph was rebuked for his "extremism" Ziegler noted that the rebuke revealed the emptiness and hypocrisy of the labor establishment's racial attitudes and policies. One of the militant activists wanted to know "Where was David Dubinsky, where was Walter Reuther. . . Where were all those liberals" on the executive council of the AFL and CIO?" But because Randolph still wanted to work inside the union movement, the black radicals now saw him as "the greatest Uncle Tom in the American labor movement." Randolph insisted

that the existing labor movement was, in Zieger's estimation, "a flawed but essential ally."

For a while the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing discrimination in employment was neither self-defining nor self-enforcing, but real gains were made, particularly in public employment. Herbert Hill, a frequently cited authority on black labor, insisted that only federal legislation could effectively confront racial discrimination. Even in racist Southern textile mills black employment grew. But at the same time the resistance gathered strength. Affirmative action programs were charged with "reverse racism" because blacks and women were favored over exploited and oppressed white workers. This interpretation of affirmative action was promoted by liberal as well as conservative academics.

Zieger deals with Martin Luther King's work on behalf of Black workers. He has an eloquent section on the Memphis garbage strike and King's assassination. He also deals in a nuanced way with the complicated Ocean Hill, Brownsville struggle over local control and the declared rights of the unionized teachers challenged by black proponents of local control.

A conservative reaction denounced the black workers because of their union activism transforming them from impoverished and exploited workers into "greedy saboteurs of economic progress." Even Maynard Jackson, the African-American Mayor of Atlanta under budget constraints, fought the union movement and condemned the black workers. Reagan's firing of 11,000 striking air traffic controllers normalized anti-unionism and legitimized the fir-

ing of strikers.

The tragic demise of black workers came with the global economy and the end of the textile industry, the auto industry, and the steel industry. These were the industries where the black workers had made the most gains. Now the jobs were gone. Zieger notes that no sooner had affirmative action programs begun to build an industrial presence in the South than the region's mainstay industry collapsed, ending the jobs of thousands of black workers.

Zieger points to a current theory that the only real hope of reviving and revitalizing labor is with blacks at the head. But the current resistance is not weakening and the unions are.

Zieger concedes that black working men and women have made remarkable gains. There is now a thriving black middle class, and an increasing black professionalism, but at the same time there are terrible ironies. Black joblessness is much higher than that of whites. All the statistics on longevity, criminal incarceration, and poverty point up the limits of the economic advancement of the black working class. When one walks the streets of the major cities, the preponderance of black homelessness is obvious. It is a hundred years since W. E. B. Dubois' declaration that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line. Despite a white population that refuses to recognize the problem, it is still with us in the twenty-first century. Robert Zieger's careful and intelligent study deserves a prominent place in this tragic and ongoing history of American race relations.

Dubious Advice for Young Radicals

SAM WAITE

COMING OF AGE AT THE END OF HISTORY is a curious book. Written by Camille de Toledo (né Alexis Mital) — filmmaker and novelist — it purports to be a sort of manifesto for young dissidents of all kinds, particularly those of the generation that became socially engaged in the period between those “two strangely symmetrical dates: 11/9 — November 9, 1989 — and 9/11.” Yet its author takes no account of the ways in which events subsequent to the latter date have demonstrated how shoddy the bases of so much liberal triumphalism actually were — and how limited those forms of resistance sharing its assumptions.

Toledo would doubtless take issue with this characterization. He is, after all, forthrightly dismissive of two major forms progressive activism took in this period: Adbusters-style culture jamming (which “replaces the critique of the existent with a critique of the image”) and identity politics. But the book bears the marks of both of these; and indeed the reader will question how consistently Toledo breaks with them, or with any number of currents that (at least for a while) seemed convinced that neoliberalism and multilateralism, the death of socialism and the new economy were all here to stay as ideas and as actualities.

This is not to say that *Coming of Age* is a

totally uninspired work. Its method of presentation, at least, is interesting. Toledo oscillates between autobiography and social commentary, punctuating his prose with vivid, emotionally-charged imagery. These are then utilized to try to make sense of what Toledo sees as a radical restructuring of the world order in this period and the collapse, then reconstruction, of subversion.

The New Architecture of the United World is Toledo’s term for this restructured order — an order which, he claims, has made rebellion all but obsolete. The dominant conviction that history had been concluded condemned anyone who questioned the market to be looked at as a dinosaur. Co-option declawed oppositional cultures. Dispersal of power guaranteed that we wouldn’t know whom to turn our guns on even if given the chance.

Toledo’s screenwriting background is evident. He treats the reader to fast-paced, surreal anecdotes and imaginings at once sharp and ludicrous: “[W]e should meditate a little on the abyss that separates us from the Ideal . . . Dany le Rouge is there, now a bloated sermonizing bore, as repugnant as fat Elvis, desperately clinging to a chunk of green sod to keep from plummeting further. . . .”

Such passages form *Coming of Age*’s powerful backbone. Not all of Toledo’s targets, though, are as deserving as the now-pathetic hero of May 1968. Also on the chopping block are the Enlightenment, Situationism, and of course Marx. “The right to forgetfulness” is what he demands, and in that spirit all theory is to be more or less equally condemned. Only

Coming of Age at the End of History

CAMILLE DE TOLEDO

Brooklyn, N.Y., 2008, 161 pp., \$14.95

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those who purge themselves of history can escape censure for wanting no part of its end.

Obviously, this fairly reeks of a well-worn “skepticism toward metanarratives.” How new, then, was the New Architecture of the United World — and how real? As a member of the generation in question, I can attest anecdotally that it is at least a modestly accurate description of certain conceptions harbored among activist circles in the period leading up to and immediately following Seattle. These same conceptions proved inadequate in the face of post-9/11 realities. Global justice coalitions were torn apart or rendered inept when what was taken to be Empire was confronted with imperialism.¹

All the same, certain aspects of Toledo’s New Architecture did have and continue to have relevance, at least at the level of impressions. Although the phenomenon has been noted for decades, the ease with which corporations now co-opt counterculture is startling. Witness how, just a few years after the al-Aqsa Intifada, the wearing of the Palestinian keffiyeh has been transformed from gesture of solidarity to token of hipsterdom. And in the era of outsourcing, work teams, and temporary staffing firms, the drive toward decentralization of production seems an obvious reality even to many Marxists.

An obsession with what seems, however, is exactly *Coming of Age’s* shortcoming. A tension between Toledo’s social and artistic commitments — a tension that he acknowledges — is essential to the text. Too often, when his task is analysis, he retreats to art. He never bothers to ask: Can’t hegemony be contested? Couldn’t mass movements have the capacity to bring the contradictions intrinsic to dominant cultural forms to the fore, imbuing them with more emancipatory meaning? And couldn’t it be, as Harland Prechel has argued, that what looks like decentralization actually “centralizes authority while decentralizing responsibility for decisions”?²

Toledo’s acknowledgement serves as a nod

to Boltanski and Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which he draws on in describing the extrication of social concern from cultural dis-

If we join Terry Eagleton in seeing postmodernism — and, by implication, poststructuralism — as the products of 1968’s defeat, one that amounts to a kind of “vaguely anarchistic belief that system is oppressive as such,” then we can see how easily it might come to falter before and even serve power.

sidence which allowed so many of the intelligentsia to be seduced by the New Architecture. This extrication was accomplished, he holds, through a succession of cultural movements — beginning with and perhaps best exemplified by cyberpunk — increasingly disdaining the biological as such, idolizing everything free of mass and flesh. Here as before, he tells a good story while explaining next to nothing. Never broached is the question of what made the intelligentsia receptive to these trends, or even how the trends themselves originated. Tellingly, though, for Toledo it is in “idiotically misreading Deleuze and Guattari” that they reach their nadir. If we join Terry Eagleton (and this reviewer does) in seeing postmodernism — and, by implication, poststructuralism — as the products of 1968’s defeat, one that amounts to a kind of “vaguely anarchistic belief that system is oppressive as such,” then we can see how easily it might come to falter before and even serve power. It is not too much of a stretch, therefore, to think of these trends as embodying

poststructuralism's transition from withdrawn mood to serious condition.

I MUST TAKE ISSUE, moreover, with devoting a whole section of *Coming of Age* to discussing this process (and not only because of the sort of changing tenor that has turned Wired from the voice of annoying techno-libertarianism to a fairly standard business magazine). Especially when virtually no mention is made of class struggle except in mockery, one gets the distinct impression that Toledo sees history as the movement of a mass not acting, but acted upon. "They vote for pigs that despise them and condescend to them. Television lulls them to sleep in making them believe that seeing is the same as acting," he writes. This belief, more than anything, demonstrates how small a challenge he can pose to the masters of his New Architecture.

Somewhat predictably, the practical consequence of Toledo's conceptions is to call for the establishment of free-floating "temporary autonomous zones" — essentially, to be perpetually on the run from various oppressions — through the agency of minorities, whether NGOs (!) or communities of the specially oppressed. He calls this lucid romanticism, and attempts to situate it in the "progressive" current of romanticism identified by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre. Löwy and Sayre, however, have already identified a better term for the type: resigned romanticism.³

For Toledo, then, the New Architecture of the United World has not been and cannot be transcended. It can only be evaded here and

there. It is unclear why he marks the end of this period with 9/11, other than that it occurred at around the time when the global justice movement (which he strangely identifies with this strategy of evasion, despite its overall striving for fairly concrete institutional reforms) had peaked. In any case, we needn't be so resigned.

Just a few years after *Coming of Age* was originally published in France, workers and students in that country mobilized to reject both the European Constitution and a brutal assault on young workers in the form of the First Employment Contract. Die Linke has grown into the third-largest party in Germany. And for the first time in decades, unionization rates have begun to rise in the United States.

These are partial gains. They are all already in danger of disappearing, and will not be consolidated without further movement. This task, however, is one that does not tolerate "forgetfulness". It requires that we remember — and that we learn.

NOTES

1. For one example of the profound confusion sown by such conceptions, see Chris Harman, "The Wrong Attack," *Socialist Review*, January 2002, (www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=7806).

2. "The Labor Process and the Transformation of Corporate Control in the Global Economy," Berch Berberoglu (ed.), *Labor and Capital in the Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 51-68.

3. "The grudging acceptance of capitalism brings resigned romanticism close to the conservative type, but its social critique of industrial civilization is more intense." Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham: Duke, 2001), 70.

Not Working Very Well

CHRIS TILLY

RICHARD FREEMAN'S *AMERICA WORKS* IS an important analysis of U.S. labor market inequality, and an important manifesto for a social democratic, "third way" approach to regulating work and labor markets in the United States. It is important, not because it introduces new information, interpretations, or arguments, but because it pulls together a wide range of information, interpretation, and argument in compact and relatively popular form. Freeman, the preeminent labor economist of his generation, sets out to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the "exceptional" US labor market — exceptional in its lack of regulation and social supports, and its reliance on market forces to shape job outcomes. Readers of *New Politics* will not be surprised that he identifies many weaknesses, and in a brief final chapter he outlines policy proposals to overcome them.

Over the last several decades, Freeman has made his bones as an empirical researcher, producing landmark studies on the financial payoff to attending college, the impact of unions, racial discrimination in the labor market, and income inequality, among other topics. In this volume he draws selectively on this wide range of expertise, focusing above all on comparing U.S. institutions and outcomes with those of other "advanced economies."

Although Freeman declares at the outset that the first eight chapters will present "just the facts," the entire book is suffused with a tone

of alarm and outrage at what's happening to workers in the United States. At one point he quotes wealthy acquaintances as arguing that "there is [a] moral logic for giving the [Bush] tax cuts to the rich. It is their money," but then retorts that the real reason for supporting such cuts is "economic greed." "Morality? Not in any religion I know of." (p.108) At the same time, Freeman is scrupulous about present-

ing the basic facts accurately, avoiding the temptation of cherry-picking data to make his case. "Economics is not about faith in the unfettered market to resolve all problems," he declares. (p.57) "It is about learning the reality of how markets operate and what they can and cannot do." His conclusion is not to condemn capitalism, but rather to condemn the excesses of the fierce, less regulated U.S. variant. When he turns to policy options in his last chapter, he sets the goal of "mitigate[ing] the weaknesses of the exceptional labor market while preserving its strengths." (p.142)

Freeman's brief against U.S. labor market lays out two main critiques. The first (and foremost) is high and rapidly growing inequality. He reviews the by now well known finding that between 1972 and 2001, the median worker essentially treaded water after accounting for inflation (advancing a paltry 0.4 percent in real wages), whereas earnings of the top .01 percent leaped forward 497 percent in real terms. As a result, booming productivity growth, especially during the 1990s, did not translate into significant increases in living standards for the majority. For Freeman, such unequal gains color

America Works: Critical Thoughts on the Exceptional U.S. Labor Market

RICHARD B. FREEMAN

New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007,
148 pp. + notes, index. \$19.95

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other economic outcomes as well. For example, commenting on the growth in US workers' annual hours of work, noted by economist Juliet Schor¹ and others, he states that he would not view this as a bad thing if workers were working longer and harder but reaping rich rewards; for him the real problem is that people are working more just to stay afloat.

Freeman's second beef is the power imbalance between employers and workers. With virtually unbridled power, large businesses have the discretion to treat their employees very well . . . or very badly. For most companies, regrettably, this plays out in stagnating wages and benefit rollbacks, as well as the other side of the coin, soaring compensation for CEOs and top-ranking managers and professionals. But it can also spill over into a variety of other abuses — arbitrary discipline and firing, forcing employees to work off the clock, placing safety and health at risk, and simply disrespecting workers and flouting their ability to participate in decision-making. Freeman cites eye-opening opinion polls that show only 18 percent of workers give management an "A" grade on sharing power with workers (compared to 21 percent who give a D or F); a slightly higher 23 percent give management an A on concern for employees.

Freeman also assesses possible counterbalances to management power — above all unions, but also government regulation, alternative dispute resolution, and litigation. In the United States, this set of tools is thin on the ground. A majority of workers would prefer to have a union (and the percentage has increased over time), but the percentage unionized has decreased virtually without interruption for fifty years as unions have been battered by increasingly ferocious employer opposition. Freeman explains why economic incentives for opposing unions are so strong in the U.S.: health insurance and pensions are provided (or not) by employers, and the fact that unionized workers are a small minority means that unionized companies can face a serious competitive disadvan-

tage. With government regulation also light, workers' main recourse for unfair treatment is to sue. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) can offer a constructive option, but as Freeman points out, increasing numbers of companies with ADR are requiring new hires to surrender their right to sue, converting arbitration into a requirement rather than an option.

Having spelled out this set of indictments, Freeman considers possible effects of the "great doubling" — the entry of the workers of China, India, and the former Soviet bloc into the capitalist market (bringing with them far less capital per worker than their counterparts elsewhere in the world). He concludes that it will take decades for Chinese and Indian workers to approach wage levels prevailing in richer countries — and that the experience of workers across the world over this period will depend crucially on the strategies adopted by corporations and governments.

Freeman closes with a list of compressed policy proposals — almost bullets. His list is simultaneously ambitious and circumscribed. In terms of steering the economy toward higher productivity and widespread higher compensation, he has much to say. To spur productivity, he calls for major public investments in infrastructure and the environment, R&D, and science and engineering education. To spread compensation, he endorses public provision of health insurance along with significant boosts in the minimum wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit, which offers refundable tax credits to low-wage earners. In terms of worker power, Freeman's proposals are considerably more limited: opening space for new forms of worker representation, greater worker control over pension funds, tax incentives for offering all employees stock options, and licensing of corporate board members. This is what I characterize as "Third Way" policy, akin to many of the economic policies of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair: robust advocacy of productivity-enhancing government investments and supports for

the earnings of low earners, but cautious and constrained proposals for shifting the balance of power between classes.

In addition to this ambivalent embrace of power-shifting measures, Freeman makes a number of other judgments and choices that *New Politics* readers may find disappointing. For instance, Freeman classifies 1996's welfare reform as an area in which "the Right [was] right," pointing to the leap in employment of single mothers that persisted even after the late 1990s economic boom ended in 2001. To me this glass looks half-empty. As he acknowledges, increased employment of single mothers did not dent the poverty rate for this group, and what "upwards of two-thirds of people leaving welfare found employment" (p.99) leaves unsaid is that nearly one-third are now surviving with no known source of income.

Freeman's characterization of the U.S. labor market as unregulated is also open to debate. As co-authors Annette Bernhardt, Heather Boushey, Laura Dresser, and I have pointed out², minimal regulation of employers' ability to dispose of labor as they see fit is coupled with increased regulation of the supply of workers. Escalating control over labor supply includes a criminal justice system that incarcerates millions of potential workers and stigmatizes an even greater number of ex-offenders, an immigration system that allowed over ten million undocumented workers to slip into the country but now consigns them to a shadowy existence in which fear of being discovered curtails their willingness to claim labor rights, and on a smaller scale, the revised welfare system that pushes single mothers into the workplace. Bernhardt, Boushey, Dresser, and I argue that limited regulation on the employer side along with this particular brand of activist government on the worker side have compounded into an even more severe power imbalance.

Freeman's lens on inequality is the gap between high and low earners. Readers will look

in vain for discussions of earnings or employment gaps by race and gender. He is certainly aware of these issues, having published important research on racial inequality and devoted a (small) portion of this book to the dramatic increase in women's employment in the U.S. The tradeoff here is giving up a more comprehensive overview of labor market inequality in order to focus much more closely on the class dimension of that inequality — which is, after all, the dimension in which U.S. inequality has grown rapidly and greatly exceeds levels in other rich countries.

Freeman writes clearly and compellingly. Most of the book is tightly organized and argued, although two of the nine chapters (6 and 7) wander a bit, incorporating points that are interesting in their own right but that contribute little to the overall sweep of the argument. He spices up the prose with colorful illustrations, analogies, and pop culture references (and has even helpfully footnoted references to 1960s TV, for those too young or old to remember it). Tables and charts don't include anything more complicated than percentages and scatter plots, making the book accessible for a broad audience. And the book weighs in at a readily digestible 148 pages of text.

The cumulative effect is a must-read book for people concerned about wage inequality and power imbalances in the US workplace. Freeman's lucid, deeply informed treatment makes *America Works* an instant classic. It is not the last word on the US labor market, but it is an indispensable contribution to the conversation.

NOTES

1. Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
2. Annette Bernhardt, Heather Boushey, Laura Dresser, and Chris Tilly, "An introduction to the gloves-off economy," pp.1-29 in Annette Bernhardt, et al., *The Gloves-Off Economy: Workplace Standards at the Bottom of America's Labor Market* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2008).

The Anti-Comics Crusade

KENT WORCESTER

HARRY WILDENBERG, A SALES MANAGER for Eastern Color, a New York City print shop, came up with the idea of folding newspaper sheets into pamphlet-sized comics in the early 1930s. Two decades later, Wildenberg was interviewed by *Commonweal* for a piece on “How the Comic Book Started — and How the Originator Looks on It Now.” As it happens, the “originator” regretted his role in creating the modern comic book. “If I had an inkling of the harm they would do,” he mused, “I would never have gone through with the idea. I’m glad parents and educators are waking up to the menace of comic books.” Wildenberg told the reporter he was “‘happiest’ when he read about schoolchildren burning comics.”

While no one has — as yet — compiled a complete tally of organized comic book burnings in the late 1940s and 1950s, David Hadju recounts the story of several of these inherently dramatic spectacles in his latest book on mid-century popular culture, *The Ten-Cent Plague*. They serve as flashpoints in a larger narrative that explores the anti-comics backlash that drove a dozen or more companies out of business and hundreds of artists, writers, and editors out of work. “The comic book war was one of the first and hardest-fought conflicts between young people and their parents in America,” Hadju says. The “story of the comics controversy is a largely forgotten chapter in the

history of the culture wars.”

One comic book burning took place in Binghamton, New York at the tail end of the

1940s. The instigator was a high school junior, John Farrell. “John was a religious guy, and he was irritated by all these comic books and the content in a lot of them,” one neighbor recalled. Farrell and his supporters visited soda

fountains, drugstores, and newsstands, asking them to post the following notice: “I will support the drive to end indecent and objectionable literature, comic books and the like, by withdrawing them from my newsstand, and will do all in my power to stop their sale.” They subsequently organized a comics bonfire that lasted for four hours, with flames reaching “as high as thirty feet.” “I remember it very vividly,” said one former student. “I thought it was a good thing, and I was impressed that John had been able to pull it off.” As the fire raged, students from a local school sang “The Catholic Action Song”:

An army of youth flying the standards of truth
We’re fighting for Christ, the Lord
Heads lifted high, Catholic Action our cry
And the Cross our only sword.
On earth’s battlefield, never a vantage we’ll yield
As dauntlessly on we swing
Comrades true, dare and do, ’neath the Queen’s
white and blue
For our flag, for our faith, for Christ the King

Inspired by the protests in Binghamton, students at a parochial school in nearby Auburn took “quick action” and burned as many four-color pamphlets as they could lay their hands

The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How It Changed America

DAVID HADJU

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008
334 pp, \$26

KENT WORCESTER is the coeditor (with Jeet Heer) of *A Comics Studies Reader* (University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

on. Some of the biggest bonfires were held in other small towns, such as Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; and Spencer, West Virginia. In Decatur, Illinois, students and teachers at St. James Catholic School burned comics and carried signs that said, "Burn the Bad, Read the Good." Meanwhile, in the town of Indiana, Pennsylvania, a Girl Scout troop organized a "Bonfire of the Future" as part of a campaign to "rid the homes of Indiana" of disreputable comics.

Big cities were not immune to the anti-comics virus, however. Hadju reports that thousands of comic books were burned by students at St. Gall's School, in Chicago, "in a campaign reported to have been suggested by a ten-year-old fourth-grade girl, Marlene Marrello." Students and teachers in several major cities organized book swaps, where kids would receive approved books, such as *Lassie* or *Anne of Green Gables*, in exchange for a specified number of comics. The most successful bonfires and book exchanges were organized on a grassroots basis by moral activists who were willing to pledge, as high school students did in Spencer, that "comic books have caused the downfall of many youthful readers. . . . Believing that comic books are mentally, physically, and morally injurious to boys and girls, we propose to burn those in our possession. We also pledge ourselves to try not to read anymore."

The anti-comics campaign was not confined to school settings. As Hadju notes, "more than a hundred acts of legislation were introduced on the state and municipal levels to ban or limit the sale of comics." Several cities banned the sale of crime, horror, and/or adventure comics, and in the early 1950s "Congress took action with a set of sensational, televised hearings that nearly destroyed the comic-book business." At least one publisher was the target of a police raid, and several prominent newspapers ran multi-part features on the "comics menace" on their front pages. Public intellectuals also contributed to the anti-comics cause. Irving Howe,

Dwight Macdonald, Robert Warshaw, and Delmore Schwartz all fretted in print over the impact of comics on a wayward postwar gen-

Public intellectuals also contributed to the anti-comics cause. Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, Robert Warshaw, and Delmore Schwartz all fretted in print over the impact of comics on a wayward postwar generation.

eration. As *The Nation* opined: "a generation of Americans has been driven several degrees toward illiteracy by the 'comic' book . . . it is appalling that 60,000,000 comic books are sold in this country every month."

THE BEST-KNOWN INTELLECTUAL adversary of comics was Dr. Fredric Wertham, a German-born psychiatrist who opened the Lafargue House, a free psychiatric facility in Harlem, in 1946. (Ralph Ellison later called Lafargue "one of Harlem's most important institutions and one of the few institutions dedicated to recognizing the total implications of Negro life in the United States.") For the most part, Wertham used scientific-sounding research findings, rather than religiously inspired rhetoric, to attack the comic book field. His thesis, that comic books were a root cause of juvenile delinquency, was memorably summed up in his 1954 best-selling book, *Seduction of the Innocent*. While he came from an academic background, he was sometimes scathing in his remarks. "I think Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic book industry," he wrote. "The time has come to legislate these books off the newsstands and out of the candy stores."

Specialist accounts of the anti-comics cam-

paign have largely focused on a few key individuals, such as Estes Kefauver, who led the anti-comics fight in the U.S. Senate; Fredric Wertham, who started sounding the alarm in the mid-1940s; and William Gaines, the founder of *Mad* magazine and an enthusiastic promoter of crime and horror comics. Hadju's book, by contrast, pays close attention to the voices of high school students and rank-and-file cartoonists as well as elected officials and public-minded citizens. He faithfully reproduces the slogans of anti-comics activists, but leaves room for contrarian perspectives. He cites the words of David Wigransky, a sophomore in Washington, D.C., who said it was "time that society woke up to the fact that children are human beings with opinions of their own" in a letter published in *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Or, as group of high school students usefully pointed out in the *Syracuse Herald-American*: "the reading matter in comic books may not be of the highest caliber but it is mild in comparison with that found in adult books."

In an appendix, Hadju lists nearly one thousand "artists, writers, and others who never again worked in comics after the purge of the 1950s." As his well researched study makes clear, "purge" is an apt term. The mid-century anti-

comics campaign offers an important but largely overlooked example of brisk, no-nonsense cultural cleansing. Young people were the primary target of anti-comics activism, but they also provided the shock troops and in some instances the movement's leadership. If the 1950s were an era of nascent generational conflict, as Hadju argues, then at least some of that conflict was centered within as well as across specific age cohorts.

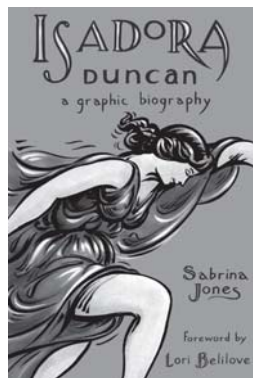
The many parallels between the anti-comics movement and the anti-Communist campaign of the same era are worth noting. Both movements sprang up after World War Two but could trace their origins to the 1920s if not earlier. Both inspired grassroots protest as well as scholarly polemics and Congressional hearings. Religious activism was an important factor in both cases. Moral crusaders played a critical role in arousing public sentiment against the threat of outside forces, whether in the form of illustrated entertainment or socialists and Communists. And as David Hadju's compelling history makes plain, anti-comics campaigners not only shifted public discourse but threatened people's livelihoods. The history of book burning is a malevolent one.

Isadora Duncan

SABRINA JONES

SABRINA JONES is a designer, artist, and cartoonist whose work has appeared in a variety of radical and underground publications. She also paints scenery for film, theatre, and television, as

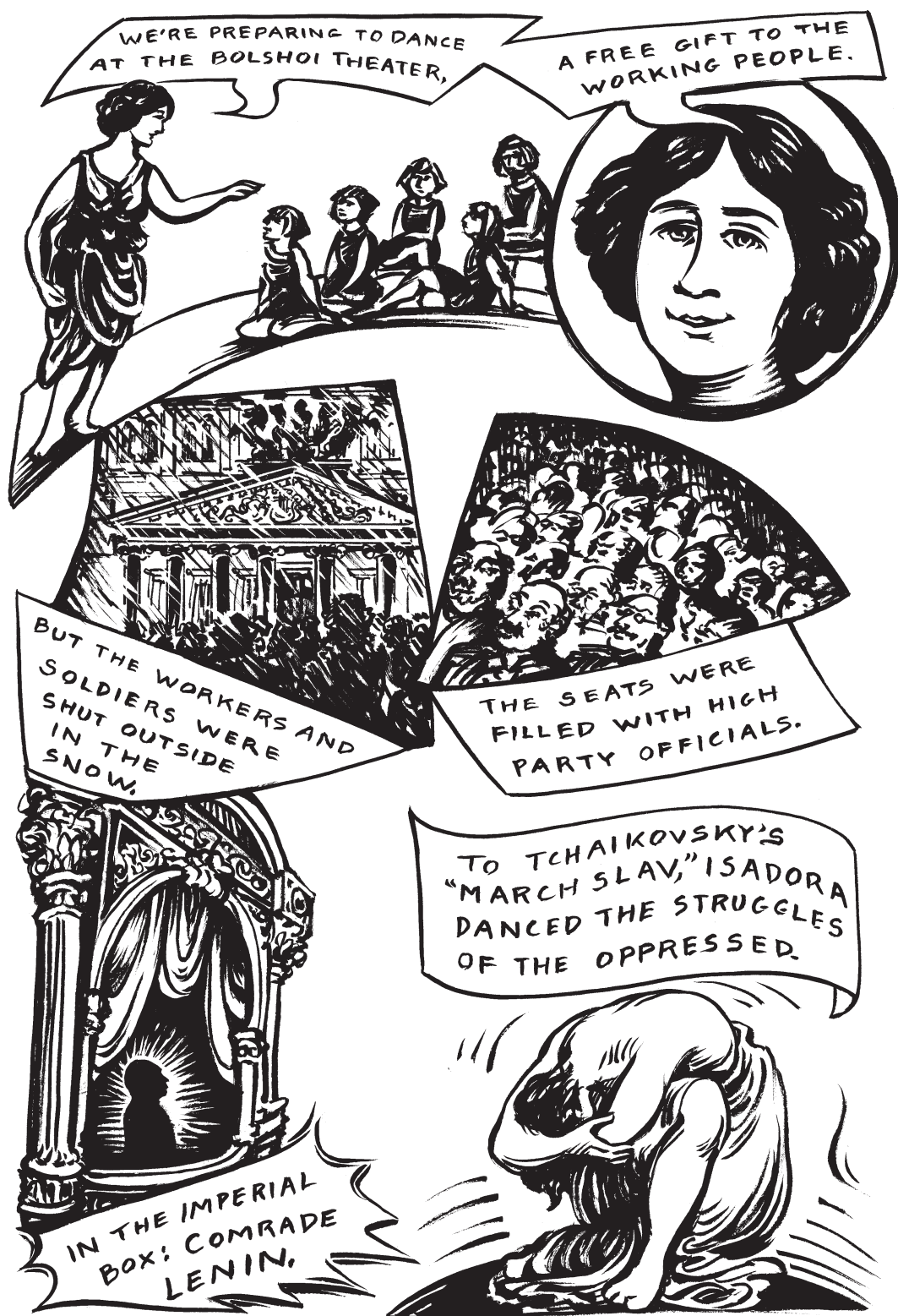
a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829. She cofounded an anthology of



women's autobiographical comics, *Girtalk*, that was published by Fantagraphics in the 1990s, and she is a longtime editor of *World War III Illustrated*. Her comics are featured in *Wobblies! A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (2005) and *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix* (PM Press, 2008), which addresses the war on drugs, the economics of the prison boom, and the impact of incarceration on women and children.

Sabrina's first complete book, *Isadora Duncan: A Graphic Biography*, has just been published by Hill & Wang. The book offers a graphic art celebration of one of the founders of modern dance. We are pleased to feature several images from *Isadora Duncan*, which is one of a number of recent graphic books on nonfiction subjects that are helping to redefine and even reinvent comics for a new century.

KENT WORCESTER



SYMPHONY HALL,
BOSTON:

THIS IS RED,
AND SO AM I!

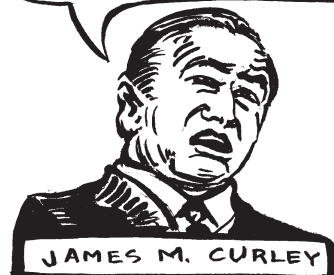
ISADORA WAS
EMBELLISHING
HER USUAL POST-
PERFORMANCE
SPEECH BY
BRANDISHING
HER RED
SCARF.

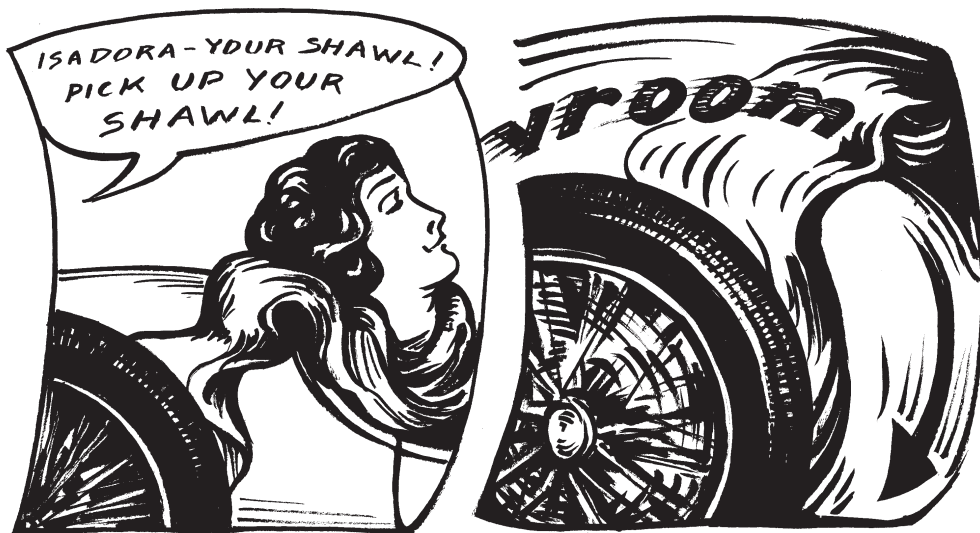
oops!
... accident?
OR
provocation?

HEADLINES BLAZED:



SHE WON'T GET A
LICENSE TO PERFORM
AS LONG AS I AM
MAYOR OF BOSTON.





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IN THIS ISSUE

One aide to Johnson remembered that the president “could not go anywhere . . . that was disastrous.” LBJ’s successor, Richard Nixon, labeled these conditions a “war at home.”

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN
DID 1968 CHANGE HISTORY?

Escoffier: [The liberation movement] celebrated the otherness, the differentness, and the marginality of the homosexual; whereas the gay politics of citizenship acknowledges the satisfaction of conforming, passing, belonging, and being accepted.

DOUG IRELAND
SOCIALISM AND GAY LIBERATION

This is no crude battle for personal power. It is no conflict between so-called “business” and “social” unionism. Nor between a conservative “right” and a militant “left.” Nor between crooks and honest unionists. It is becoming a dispute over the meaning and nature of democracy in the labor movement.

HERMAN BENSON
AT THE SEIU CONVENTION AND BEYOND

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