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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 Fall 2009 or Spring 2010. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, August 1, 2009. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500.

MARVIN AND BETTY

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# From the Editors

**H**AS THE OBAMA CAMPAIGN MANTRA of “Yes, we can” morphed into “No, we can’t rock the boat”? When someone asked Obama how his policies have differed from Bush’s, he used the boat image to compare his actions to moving a giant ship around. But is his administration moving it at all? Toward what?

In this issue, Thomas Harrison shows in painful detail how the Obama Administration thus far has been the faithful steward of U.S. empire.

And on the home front? Look at the White House press conference of April 14\*. Reporters asked:

Why is the President blocking habeas corpus from prisoners at Bagram? Are these prisoners a threat to us? Why are non-Afghan prisoners flown to Bagram, where they have no rights? Would the U.S. government cooperate with Spanish prosecutors if they indict former Bush officials for torture? Any White House comment on the Kennedy-Lahey-Feingold bill to roll back use of state secrets privilege for the Dept. of Justice?

To each of these questions Robert Gibbs replied with Orwellian gobbledegook, not a bit different in evasion and obfuscation, as far as we can see, from what Bush-Cheney’s press agents ladled out.

Hundreds of billions of dollars given by the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) have somehow disappeared. On Feb. 6, *Time*’s Kate Pickert reports, “The Treasury Department, in its panic over the collapse of banks on Wall Street, rushed to get TARP out the door — no doubt about it. The government didn’t require banks to keep track of the money, report how

they were spending it or loan it out to free up credit markets.” TARP was passed by a Democratic Party majority congress. Where were the liberals before this money was shoveled into a black hole? Where was Barney Frank, Chair of the House Financial Service Committee?

The May *Atlantic* tells us that “the finance industry has effectively captured our government.” No big news to *New Politics* subscribers! Simon Johnson concludes that “the government’s velvet-glove approach with the banks is deeply troubling.”

Everyone is concerned about the huge national debt. But after World War II, the debt was even larger relative to the Gross National Product. It was repaid in full mostly by a levy of 90 to 91 percent tax on the top income bracket. Obama has already said he would not touch the Bush tax reduction for the very rich until it runs out in 2010. And even then the change would be only from 35 to 39.6 percent. Not enough!

What is hopeful is that Obama can be moved. First, he said there would be no prosecutions for torture. Diane Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, challenged this, and she was supported by thousands of progressives. He backed off and opened the door to prosecution. Soon the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) will be before Congress. Again, we must apply pressure, as we must

- against the drug wars which have imprisoned over half of the two million people now locked up;
- for the single payer health plan;
- for removal of the cap on income taxed by Social Security and against attempts to privatize SS;

*continued on page 6*

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# LETTERS

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## Homeless Shelters: A Feeble Response to Homelessness

AS A STAFF MEMBER OF A HOMELESS SHELTER, I read with discouragement Ms. Mandell's viewpoint on homeless shelters (*New Politics*, #43, Summer 2007). There is always room for improvement in any area of service to the homeless; however, if the homeless shelters across the nation all closed tomorrow, where would all the people go for help? You think there are problems and issues now? We have underpaid, minimal staff and volunteers to contend with the growing need of those seeking shelter and food. We can all see the problems and issues, what we need are answers that work. Pointing out all

the flaws and making shelters sound like the enemy is not the answer.

DIANNE HUFFORD  
*Walla Walla, WA*

### *Reply*

I CERTAINLY AGREE that shelters are an indispensable stop-gap measure to house the homeless until they get permanent housing. However, the only way that the problem of homelessness will be solved is for the government, at all levels, to build affordable housing and to give people vouchers to subsidize their rent.

BETTY REID MANDELL

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## From the Editors/*continued*

- for the break-up of financial institutions “too big to fail”;
- and on and on: our work must not let up. But there are limits to how far a party dominated by corporations and finance can be moved, which is why socialists and progressives need to move beyond single issue campaigns to build

a party independent of corporate and financial interests.

This issue's special section features reports and analyses of how people are fighting back all over the world.

MARVIN AND BETTY

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

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# The World Economic Crisis: Labor's Response

**I**N HIS INTRODUCTION to the Winter 1998 *New Politics* symposium (Vol. VI, No. 4) marking the 150th anniversary of *The Communist Manifesto*, Julius Jacobson, co-editor and co-founder of this journal, noted that “symptomatic of the crisis in Marxism” is not only the “failure of the working class to act as the agency for social transformation but the changing nature of the working class itself which is a legitimate area of concern and debate” (p. 47). This special section renews the challenge that New Politics symposium set out, of understanding what has happened to the working class and labor unions internationally, and how they have — and have not — responded to the greatest financial crisis in capitalism we have witnessed in generations. All of the authors are activists in the labor movements in their respective countries. We asked them to describe and analyze how workers in their countries are responding to the world economic crisis, noting what they see as the role of the revolutionary socialist left in all of this, if it has a role, and describing the prospects. Their essays reflect the great differences in political life, social class relations, and union organization in various nations. We anticipate that two additional contributions will be posted on our website ([www.newpol.org](http://www.newpol.org)) by the time the print edition is in your hands. We intend this as the beginning of an ongoing discussion in *New Politics* and invite readers' submissions on the subject.

DAN LA BOTZ AND LOIS WEINER

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DAN LA BOTZ is the author of several books on labor and politics in the United States, Mexico, and Indonesia. He is a member of the editorial board of *New Politics*.

LOIS WEINER a member of the editorial board of *New*

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## The Global Crisis and the World Labor Movement

DAN LA BOTZ

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**T**HE WORLD'S WORKING PEOPLE FACE the greatest challenge in three generations.\* The economic crisis that began in the banking institutions of the United States last year has

rapidly spread around the globe, creating a financial and industrial disaster. In one country after another banks have failed, corporations have gone bankrupt, and millions around the world have lost their jobs. Governments from

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\*This introduction borrows from an essay of mine published in the *Mumbai Economic and Political Weekly* in March 2009. This Introduction to our Summer issue's labor section was completed in late April 2009.

*The editors wish to thank Lois Weiner and Dan La-Botz for organizing the special section, The World Economic Crisis: Labor's Response.*

the United States, to Europe, to Asia and Latin America have responded by putting up trillions in one form or another to save the banks, to stabilize endangered corporations, and to stimulate their economies. Many nations have spent billions to create public works programs and have expanded unemployment benefits and new

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The working class does not have  
independent organizations with  
which it can fight for itself and for  
society at large.

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social programs, though no one believes that these begin to adequately deal with the problem. Working people around the world face all that goes with a crisis: joblessness, poverty, hunger, sickness, depression, drugs and alcohol, domestic abuse, and a rise in criminality, and, worst of all, the fear for their future and their children's.

### The Economic Crisis

THE FINANCIAL COLLAPSE TRIGGERED a more profound general economic recession, what is in its fundamental features a classic overproduction crisis. Underlying what seemed to be simply the collapse of a financial bubble is a more fundamental problem, the decline of the rate of profit in manufacturing. This is not simply a minor cyclical recession, but rather it is as Marxist economists such as Anwar Shaikh argues a genuine economic depression that will be severe and long lasting.<sup>2</sup> The fall in the rate of profit in manufacturing led some investors to move into real estate and finance in search of higher profits, resulting in the bubble. With the burst of the bubble, the broader and deeper economic crisis in industry has been revealed. We now appear to be entering a classical depression, likely to be accompanied by deflation,

that will last until enough capital has been destroyed through the elimination of outdated plants and equipment, to once again attract investors.

If this does prove to be a deep and long lasting depression that is feared by some, that will shape and condition the nature of working class response. During the Great Depression of 1929-1939, it took four years before workers in the United States began to organize and fight back, creating a new labor movement and reshaping American politics. The depth and length of that economic crisis led to a new social compact, but also to the reincorporation of labor into the Democratic Party. Whether this crisis will also produce a working class response, and whether this time America's working people will be able to create their own political party, will only become clear in the next few years.

The central preoccupation for the labor movement is unemployment, an issue the seriousness of which has been recognized by various international organizations. The International Monetary Fund's January 28 news release read: "World Growth Grinds to Virtual Halt, IMF Urges Decisive Global Policy Response." "The ILO message is realistic, not alarmist," said Juan Somavia (Director General, ILO). "We are now facing a global jobs crisis." The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said in Paris at the end of March 2008 that the economy of its 30 developed member nations will contract 4.3 percent this year while unemployment across its bloc will reach 10.1 percent by the end of 2010. The OECD also predicted unemployment in the Group of Seven (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan) would reach 36 million late next year. China alone, according to some experts, could lose 50 million jobs just among its internal migrant workers. Unemployment in March was 4.4 percent in Japan, 10 percent in Indonesia, 12 percent in Russia, and 20 percent in Spain.

## Working People Unprepared

WORKING PEOPLE ARE HARDLY PREPARED to face this crisis. The working class does not have independent organizations with which it can fight for itself and for society at large. The so-called parties of the working class—Democrats, Labour, Socialist, and Communist — long ago gave up their role as the champions of wage labor. Labor unions in most countries have long been subordinated to capital and government, and have become thoroughly bureaucratic and unresponsive to workers' needs. In some places company and gangster unions dominate the scene, while in other countries the so-called unions are really state institutions created to control workers.

Ideologically, the mass media, government institutions, and religious organizations have convinced many working people that capitalism has no alternative. In some countries the experience of bureaucratic Communism or neoliberal Social Democracy has given socialism a bad name. And, in terms of their capacity and willingness to struggle, the working class in most countries with some very important exceptions — Latin America and China — has not gone into motion yet. The crisis spreads like a tsunami washing away the institutional gains of decades, destroying organizations, and threatening all in its path, yet in many places the workers do not even have an organization to help them retreat to higher ground in the face of the rising water.

In this issue of *New Politics* we have asked several authors to write articles on the labor movements of their countries, reflecting on the current crisis and its implications for working people. We offer here a brief introduction to the crisis and its impact on the labor movement, putting current developments in historical context.

## Not Your Great-Grandparents' Capitalism

THIS IS NOT YOUR GREAT-GRANDPARENTS' capitalism. Capitalism in the twenty-first cen-

tury is, more than ever, a world system. Since the 1930s the world capitalist system has changed in several ways, all of which affect both the nature of the current crisis and the response of the working class. Capitalism has expanded, and its penetration of peoples, states, and regions of the world has deepened. At the same time, almost everywhere the system has reduced government social welfare budgets and reorganized social welfare programs. In the course of these developments, capital also transformed its relationships to unions in the workplace and to labor parties in society.

How did all of these changes come about? With the end of World War II, the process of decolonization began in Africa and Asia as former colonies became independent nations, now open to new investment and trade relationships. The fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe by the early 1990s also opened up that region to private capitalist investment from the West. The collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union, China's evolution to a capitalist economy, and the opening up of India's economy have brought about what Thomas L. Friedman called "the great doubling" of the world capitalist labor force, adding 1.3 billion workers.

Capital simultaneously reconfigured itself, organizing world production both through multinational corporations and through extramural buyer-supplier relations, with many industrial manufacturing jobs moving from developed countries to developing countries. Throughout the post-World War II period, then, capital flowed into these vast new regions, such as Asia, and Eastern Europe which had been thrown wide open to investment. Latin America also saw significant growth in foreign investment. Africa, except for South Africa, for the most part continued to have a post-colonial economy much like the old colonial one with investment in some agricultural export products, oil and mining.

## **The Expansion of Capital in Asia and Latin America**

MOST OF THE CAPITALIST ECONOMIC GROWTH in the developing world occurred in Asia—countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—though after 1980 the Chinese Communist government began to oversee a transformation to a capitalist economy through the use of state capital, off-shore Chinese capital, and investment from countries such as the United States. Within little more than a decade, China had been transformed into the fastest growing capitalist industrial economy on earth, its production largely driven by the U.S. market. India, too, entered upon the path of rapid capitalist industrial development by the 1990s. In Latin America, Brazil grew into one of the world's largest ten economies, with greater industrialization also taking place in Mexico.

During this same period, capitalism changed its methods from the Taylor-Ford model of industrial production, based on scientific management and assembly line production, to the post-Fordist, Japanese or lean production model, sometimes called “management by stress.” Production managers in workplaces around the world introduced just-in-time warehousing and parts delivery systems, created workplace quality circles or teams, cut the workforce, and introduced more intense supervision. At the same time, corporations reduced the size of their core facilities and workforces through subcontracting or contracting-out, a strategy which also tended to reduce the role of labor unions and collective bargaining agreement. Japanese and Korean success in the auto industry, later imitated by European and American manufacturers, was largely based on these new production models.

One of the most important new developments in world capitalism, beginning around 1980, was the growth of the worldwide manufacturing model, that is, a manufacturing system based on production of parts taking place

in various countries later to be assembled in another nation, and perhaps sold in yet another. The growth of satellites, fiber optic cable, and cell phones, the computerization of communications and of production controls, the development and spread of the inter-modal containerized cargo system adaptable to trucks, trains, ships, and planes, and the creation of a world finance system facilitated by information technology made such a world production model possible.

All three of these developments — the expansion of capitalism to the post-colonial and post-Communist worlds, the development of lean production, and the world production model—were accelerated by the appearance beginning in 1980 of the neoliberal economic policy. Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the United States first began to introduce the neoliberal model based on deregulation and privatization, open markets and free trade, tight money fiscal policies, cuts in government social welfare spending, and a concerted attack on labor unions. Later the international financial institutions — the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO — formerly the GATT), would use structural adjustment policies to press these measures on developing countries.

## **The Post-War Arrangement**

TO UNDERSTAND THE LABOR MOVEMENT'S response to the crisis today, we have to see it in the perspective of the post-war labor and political experience. There was a radical upsurge from below led by the resistance movements in France and Italy in the last years of the war. At the war's end, the Socialist and Communist Parties, however, succeeded in keeping the movement from taking a revolutionary turn. Still, the revulsion against Fascism and Nazism and the conservative political parties in Europe, led the populations to elect the Social Democratic parties in Western European govern-

ments.

While the situations and the timing varied from country to country, the tendency was toward the creation of Social Democratic welfare states in the post-war period; moreover these institutional reforms in labor relations and social welfare remained intact even when Conservatives or Christian Democrats came to power. At the same time, in most Western European nations, the government and political system tended toward the integration of the labor unions into the political system as an electoral apparatus, just as the various forms of social democratic union participation or joint-management schemes integrated the unions into the economic system as junior partners.

The general post-war prosperity of the United States and the consistent improvements in the standard of living in Europe, combined with the welfare state measures, led to a period of relative social stability lasting from 1945 to about 1965 during which the labor unions and labor parties atrophied. In the United States the post-war New Frontier, Great Society, and War on Poverty measures of Democratic presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson established a similar though narrower and weaker welfare state in America. By and large, collective bargaining became ritualized as unions traded shop floor control for wage increases, cost-of living clauses, and health and pension benefits. Automation of the plants in the 1950s and 60s led to a combination of intensified production and the gradual reduction of the size of the industrial workforce.

### **The Insurgency of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s**

WHEN A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC CRISIS and social conflict erupted in the late 1960s and 1970s, a New Left and a new worker insurgency in countries like Greece, Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, and to a lesser extent in Germany, led the resistance. The French general strike of 1968, the Italian “hot autumn” of 1969-1970,

and the nearly revolutionary upheavals of 1974-75 in Spain and Portugal raised the prospect of socialist revolution but proved incapable of breaking the grip of the reformist Socialists and Communist Parties and their labor federations over the largest and most strategic sections of the European working classes. Nevertheless, the tendency toward the absorption of the Socialist and Communists into the parliamentary system as moderate reformers, together with the institutionalization of labor relations, meant that the working class was too weak to stop imposition of the new capitalist order of post-Fordism, world production, and neoliberalism.

The labor insurgencies in the United States and Mexico in the same period found themselves thwarted in the first case by management and the labor bureaucracy and in the second case by the state party and its captive unions. In the United States, rebellions among miners, postal workers, teamsters, telephone workers, and African-American auto workers proved capable of overturning the old bureaucracy only in the case of the miners. In Mexico, the independent unions were created among university workers, established a small foothold in auto parts, and built a democratic current in the Mexican teachers' union. The Democratic Tendency led by the Mexican Electrical Workers, however, went down to defeat at the hands of the Army and the official union in 1975.

### **Neoliberalism and the Response**

THROUGHOUT EUROPE, JAPAN, AND the United States, with competition increasing and profits stagnating, it was the employers who in turn went on the offensive in the second half of the 1970s. The employers launched what shocked union officials called “class warfare,” during a decade when every contract negotiation seemed to lead to conflict. When the economic offensive proved insufficient to recoup profits, the employers turned to political measures. The neoliberal period that began in 1980 saw the further political degeneration of left and

nationalist political parties around the world. While the Labor, Social Democratic, and Communist parties of Europe had already begun in the pre-World War II or Popular Front period to play the role of reformist parties that would seek to administer the capitalist economy and its state rather than to transform or overthrow them, by the 1980s these parties had become in most cases little more than tepid center-left parties carrying out programs little different than their conservative and liberal counterparts.

The neoliberal offensive had more onerous impacts in other countries. In Mexico the Institutional Revolutionary Party stole the election of 1988 and installed Carlos Salinas de Gortari as president. It was he who privatized virtually all of the state industries except petroleum and power generation. In China in 1989, the Communist government smashed the democracy movement at the Tien An Mien square, a blow to both society at large and to the labor movement in particular.

By the 1990s, the Social Democrats of Europe and President Bill Clinton and the Democrats in the United States now converted to neoliberalism, enthusiastically privatized, deregulated, opened markets, cut the social welfare budget, and restrained labor unions. Consequently, as the working class saw its standard of living decline, its parties and unions lost their support. Throughout the neoliberal period of the 1980s and 1990s, in countries around the world, unions were driven from the halls of government, lost their weight in political party conclaves, and found themselves driven out in the cold. Unions, in fact, became the targets of a concerted attack by government and employers. In the neoliberal world, the union was at best a pathetic dependent and at worst a pariah.

Neoliberal policies affected unions in various ways: closing of older industrial plants often wiped out the strongest labor unions; direct government attacks on unions eliminated others; changes in labor legislation, particularly

the promotion of “flexible” labor laws weakened union protections; contracting out (or outsourcing) replaced union workers with non-union contract workers, while an employers’ offensive debilitated unions and eroded contracts. Employers also hired immigrant workers at lower wages, often without benefits and frequently off the books.

While the government and employer attack on unions proceeded, it was often accompanied by a restructuring of production which resulted in a reconfiguration and a recomposition of the working class such that even in developing countries, industry and industrial workers tended to decline, while services and service workers grew, and casual employment multiplied. In developing nations there was a tendency for much of the workforce to become part of the underground economy. In some developing countries as much as quarter, a third, or even half of all workers labored in the informal economy without social security (health and pension), without labor unions, and without paying taxes. As the process advanced, workers often found job security imperiled, wages falling, and benefits diminishing. All of this was accompanied, of course, by a gradual and general decline in the standard of living of workers. Social inequality grew and poverty increased in developing countries.

During this period the ties between government and Communist, Social Democratic, Labor, nationalist, and populist parties and their respective labor federations were weakened. Whether in the former Soviet Union, Indonesia, or Mexico, the government-party-union connection — a connection often built on patronage and rife with corruption — was severed. In several countries — including the United States, Mexico, and Venezuela — under the pressure of events, the old political labor federations cracked up, rival labor federations multiplied, and in some cases the unions were virtually pulverized. Unions which once found strength through their ties to a leftist

party that for long periods of time controlled one or another government, now found themselves cut loose from both government and party and set adrift in the choppy economic seas.

In most countries, during this period, unions suffered damaging attacks and sometimes crushing defeats. At the same time, in Bolivia or India for example, new social movements arose, sometimes calling themselves “unions,” but representing not the industrial working class or government employees, or service workers, but rather groups such as the unemployed, the self-employed, the landless, the indigenous, and women. New unions for casual workers arose in Japan, Korea, and India. Combinations of the old unions, the new movements, the indigenous groups, dissident military factions, and old left political parties created new political forces, especially in Latin America, where massive struggles eventually brought some of them to power in one or another country.

### **Latin America: The Neoliberal Trend Resisted**

THE SITUATION WAS DIFFERENT in Latin America from that in other parts of the world. The disappointments in democratization and the failures of the economy in the 1980s and 1990s led to the rise of social movements, political parties, and candidates that opposed neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus. Latin Americans resisted neoliberalism in various countries through a series of national general strikes, popular uprising, and attempted coups. By the late 1990s the struggle found expression in political campaigns. The continental shift to the left can be seen clearly in the series of elections over the last decade which brought to power in seven Latin American nations a series of presidents with politics described as ranging from populist, to social democratic, and, in some cases, some claim, revolutionary socialist.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, a charismatic

military officer and coup leader was later elected in 1999 and reelected in 2000 and 2006. He proclaimed a struggle for a Bolivarian socialism, what he calls “socialism for the twenty-

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**Militant minorities, acting independently of the labor bureaucracy and of the liberal and Social Democratic parties, have the capacity to set larger forces in motion.**

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first century.” Chávez has won support from sections of organized labor, mobilized Venezuela’s poor, and has used the nation’s oil wealth to finance campaigns — the Bolivarian Misiones — to bring health, education, and welfare to the nation’s needy. He has worked to build unity among Latin American nations to resist the United States. Chávez has in the past few years created the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and the National Union of Workers (UNT) as political instruments of his government’s power. A charismatic populist whose methods involve a combination of direction from above and mobilization from below, Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution has been paused but not paralyzed by a reactionary bourgeois opposition, the power of the United States, and the vicissitudes of oil prices. More democratic forces with other visions of socialism tend to operate within the broad chavista movement rather than outside of it.

Ignacio “Lula” da Silva, a former steel worker, organizer of the Metalworkers Union, then of the Brazilian Labor Federation (CUT), and of the Workers Party (PT), has pursued more cautious and traditional economic programs. His government has been aligned with the banks and big construction companies, kept its support of the CUT and PT, and created a

welfare program for the nation's poor. In the international arena, he has formed an alliance with China and India to block the United States in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and he too has worked for Latin American unity under the leadership of Brazil.

Evo Morales represents the explosion of the indigenous people onto the Latin American scene. An indigenous person himself, the head of a union of coca growers, a self-proclaimed socialist and leader of the Movement to Socialism (MAS), Morales has fought both to keep control of the country's national resources (gas and lithium) and for a national land distribution. His radical program has won broad support from the country's indigenous and poor people of the altiplano and fierce opposition from the European or mestizo people of the lowlands.

Within all of these countries there exist mass labor and popular movements and revolutionary groupings, though nowhere does socialist revolution appear to be on the immediate agenda. While the most radical situations exist in Venezuela and Bolivia, to be successful there social movements would have to overcome both Chavez's personalistic model and the limits of the petroleum-based economy, while in the second it would have to surpass Morales' cautious pursuit of reform. Neither of those seems highly likely.

### China in Crisis

AT THE NEW HEART OF CONTEMPORARY world production in Guangdong Province, China, the sudden collapse of the American market and other world markets led to abrupt plant closings, layoffs, and in some cases worker protests and riots. China's growth rate fell to 6.8 percent in the last quarter of 2008, ending five years of growth at 10 percent or more. The IMF predicts China will grow by only 6.7 percent this year, though some think growth might only be 5 percent. Economists say that China needs an 8 percent growth rate to provide jobs to new

entrants to its labor force.

Already by February there were 20 million Chinese without jobs heading home to their villages. "It's expected that 40 to 50 million or more migrant workers may lose their jobs in urban areas if the global economy keeps shrinking this year," wrote Tsinghua University's Professor Yu Qiao in a recent paper. And this does not include the permanent urban residents who will also lose jobs in this downturn. "Jobless migrant workers on this mass scale implies a severe political and social problem," said Yu. "Any minor mishandling may trigger a strong backlash and could even result in social turbulence." According to official Chinese government statistics of 2006 and 2007, the country's manufacturing industry then employed 44.5 million migrant workers and 33.5 million urban residents.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences asserted in January that the real unemployment rate was 9.4 percent, and could be expected to rise.

The Chinese Ministry of Security reported that "mass incidents"—such as strikes and riots—numbered 10,000 in 1994, but by 2005, that had risen to 87,000. While the government stopped publishing the statistics, observers believe the numbers have risen even higher. "Without doubt, now we're entering a peak period for mass incidents ... In 2009, Chinese society may face even more conflicts and clashes that will test even more the governing abilities of the party and government at all levels," according to senior Xinhua agency reporter, Huang Huo.<sup>4</sup>

While the state, party, and union ties broke in many countries, in China the Communist Party jealously guards its power and protects the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). Yet even in China, the ACFTU has evolved in complex and varied ways and sometimes functions somewhat more independently and sometimes, even if rarely, in one or another situation in defense of workers. The local ACFTU union finds itself both assisted and

challenged by independent workers' centers. Whether the state will be able to contain the rising tide will depend on whether or not workers can build labor and political organizations independent of the government, the Communist Party, and the ACFTU.

### **The Crisis, the Movement, the Left, and the Future**

THE LEFT AROUND THE WORLD finds itself in a difficult position, without in most places a strong socialist organization or a powerful labor movement. History suggests that from the onset of a depression to the beginning of a mass movement it may take years for the working class to absorb intellectually and emotionally what has happened to them and then finally assert their righteous indignation and begin to act. The key to the development of the labor and social movements and of a socialist movement in the United States and in Europe will be, as it was in the early 1930s, the development of militant minorities, ginger groups in the workplace and unions, in communities, and in the various social movements who take actions that challenge the status quo. Militant minorities, acting independently of the labor bureaucracy and of the liberal and Social Democratic parties have the capacity to set larger forces in motion. Once large numbers begin to go into motion, history suggests that that will lead suddenly to the development of new tactics and new strategies and of new political alternatives. We see perhaps the first signs of this in the appearance of the new Anti-Capitalist Party in France.

Even without forces, however, the incipient movement desires to put forward an alternative. The revolutionary left — tarred with the failures and atrocities of both Social Democracy and Stalinism and recognizing that programs are something to be constructed not pro-

claimed — hesitates to put forward a full-blown plan which it recognizes that it does not have the arguments to justify, the forces to fight for, or the power to impose. The development of a program will have to come with the development of new socialist left and, more important, of working class and popular movements.

We already begin to see such first attempts to project a program—not yet on a revolutionary basis—in the declarations of the Asia-Europe People's Forum in Beijing and the Social Forum in Belém.<sup>5</sup> Their calls for socialization of finance and industry and for the administration of the economy democratically, raised by movements from below, point toward a possible future. Yet those programs and demands will be meaningless unless the labor and social movements can build labor and social movements with the power to push them forward. During this period the revolutionary left, through militant minorities and the development of its programmatic ideas, may be able to lay the basis for revolutionary organizations, and even in some countries to construct a revolutionary party.

### NOTES

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2. John Garnaut, "Spectre of 50m job losses looms in China," *The Age*, Jan. 19, 2009, <http://business.theage.com.au/business/spectre-of-50m-job-losses-looms-in-china-20090118-7k1b.html>
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4. "The global economic crisis: An historic opportunity for transformation," at: [www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article11729](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article11729) and, "We won't pay for the crisis. The rich have to pay for it!" at [www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12821](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12821)

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# China: End of a Model ... Or the Birth of a New One?

AU LOONG YU

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CHINA'S THIRTY YEARS OF NEARLY uninterrupted high growth has encountered great challenge as the global economic crisis has hit China's export hard. Since China's trade as a percentage of GDP is as high as 70 percent, the export-led growth mode has practically ended. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is aware of this. Back in April, 2008 President Hu Jintao spoke of the need to change the mode of development from export-led growth to domestic-led growth by expanding domestic demand. In November the 4 trillion RMB (*rinminbi*, "people's currency") of rescue package followed. The economy is slowing down, and the target of the rescue package at "Baoba," or keeping the growth rate at 8 percent, is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, a slower growth rate of 5-6 percent, which most commentators are speculating, is still outstanding when the United States and EU are sinking further into deep recession. The global downturn on one hand and China's relative strength in containing the crisis on the other makes the topic "the rise of China" more heated than ever.

## China's Advantages

THE REASONS FOR CHINA'S PERFORMANCE must first be sought from the one party state's exceptional success in restoring capitalism over

an exceptionally long period of 25 years. Deng Xiaoping's motto "Crossing the rivers by feeling the stones" has enabled the top leadership to integrate with global capitalism in a gradual and prudent way, so that as the global financial crisis set in, the state still retained control over commanding heights of the economy, giving China more leverage than the United States or UK in containing the present crisis. China's capital account control is still largely in place; her currency, RMB, not yet convertible. Her banks, though floated inside and outside China, still have their major shares controlled by the state. Thus China has no shadow banking, nor toxic debts, as do the United States, UK, or even Hong Kong. Due to vast underground banking, billions of RMB have escaped foreign exchange control to flow in and out of China, a factor that may prove problematic to China in the downturn cycle. Still, state control over cross border capital movement is not totally ineffective. In sum, a firewall, though one with holes, still exists for China's financial markets for the moment, and therefore China is to some extent able to insulate itself from the global credit crunch. This makes China's economic downturn more resemble the classic model: an overproduction crisis accompanied by credit overexpansion, but with a credit crisis far from the scale of what is happening in the United States or the UK. Moreover, China had experienced her banking crisis at the turn of the past cen-

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Note: This article has drawn several paragraphs from the author's two recent essays, "Disposable Labor" and "A Human Right Charter that Excludes Working People," and also "Preliminary Report on China's Going Global Strategy," where the author is the leading member of the research team.

ture, and had overcome it at the expense of working people, particularly the sacked bank workers in the tens of thousands. The government also cleared billions of RMB of bad debt from the banks. The banks have become healthier since then, with non-performing loans having dropped from 40-50 percent of their assets to the present 6 percent. On top of that, both household debt and public debt are small in proportion to GDP and much smaller than that in most countries.

A word of prudence is necessary, though, about these statistics. In China, no figure is reliable, especially when we talk about company debts and bank loans, domestic and overseas. The Asian crisis ten years ago revealed just how serious the problem of hidden debts was among those SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) which invest overseas. The global crisis will still have an impact on China, and if the crisis expands, China's "firewall" will not hold. Although China has not experienced what some term "financialization" and has thus been spared the worst financial crisis, a traditional over-production crisis could develop into depression, as the 1930s have shown.

The high economic growth rate has tempted many, including some on the left, to make an exceedingly favorable assessment of China. But economic growth has had little bearing on the well being of working people, because China's growth has been close to jobless. A 2005 ILO (International Labor Organization) study on the relationship between economic growth and job creation found out that in the period of 1990-2002, an average 9.3 percent growth only brought about 0.8 percent of employment growth, and for manufacturing jobs, the change was negative. No wonder the high growth rate has been accompanied by high unemployment rates.

### Social Factors

IN ORDER TO CORRECTLY ASSESS China's economic and social situation, the scope of inves-

tigation must be broadened to take account of societal changes as a result of the 1949 revolution. The revolution had a contradictory effect on peasants and workers. On the one hand it

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Even in Mao's era when the bureaucracy was fiercely anti-capitalist, it was also extraordinarily privileged, a ruling elite which exercised the exclusive right to distribute social surplus through its monopoly of the state.

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accomplished land reform, and on the other it gave birth to a highly centralized and bureaucratized party state which maintains incredibly tight control over peasants and workers. The subsequent evolution of land ownership into the "household responsibility system" entitles peasants the right to use a small plot of land, which today acts as a kind of social security for the returning rural migrant workers, who, because of the downturn in manufacturing due to the global economic crisis, fail to find a job in the urban areas. For them, going back to their home village is better than starving in the city. It also works to the benefit of the party state, though. The state can simply treat these migrant workers as disposable labor: when crisis sets in, it just tells the migrant workers to return to their home village and their miserable piece of land. This actually helps the municipal government in defusing a social time bomb. It may not be effective in the long run, but it may have partial effects in the short and medium term.

If dissolving the angry jobless migrant workers into the vast countryside is not enough, there is always the coercion of the state, which is particularly harsh and effective. While the South Korean state before 1990 was as ruthless

as the CCP's state, it never had the ability to wipe out all civil associations; the church, for instance, always provided some space for initial worker organizing. In contrast, the CCP has succeeded in accomplishing precisely this since the 1950s. All Chinese traditional religious and civil associations either disappeared, that is, were destroyed or were co-opted into the bureaucracy, to the extent that even Taoist or Buddhist monks had practically turned into public employees and were paid by the state in accordance with the same pay scale of the bureaucracy, before they were forced to renounce their faith altogether during the Cultural Revolution. There was, and is, no civil society. There was, and is, no organized social movement, let alone organized political opposition. This social and political reality explains why when Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, failed in her attempt to force poor women to sterilize in the name of birth control in early 1980, China could be terribly successful in imposing a one child policy on her 1.3 billion people. Ironically, the rebirth of capitalism did create some space for *weiquan*, literally "rights activists," but no autonomous trade union is possible. The absence of organizations independent of the CCP and state holds true even for the bourgeoisie. Nearly all chambers of commerce or industrial associations are founded and run by the party state or its agents. In her book *China's New Business Elite*, Margaret Pearson explains why the market reform and the birth of this class have not led to civil society or democratization:

Members of China's business elite have shown few signs of becoming an independent, activist political force. They desire to escape from politics, not to engage in it or to create a "civil society" . . . Having gained structural independence, they try to rebuild informal ties to the state. Members of the business elite are characterized by neither strong horizontal ties to each other, nor strong links to other societal actors, both of which we expect in an emergent civil society.

The absence of civil society is hugely profitable to business. China's attraction for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), for which it has been top-ranked in the world, lies not only in its cheap wages. In fact, her wages are not the lowest among developing countries. Rather, it is the institutionalized barracks-like factory regime that gives China an advantage over other developing countries in attracting transnational corporations (TNCs) all over the globe to use China as the world sweatshop for export. While the power of Indian bourgeoisies and their government are being constantly checked by liberal democracy and organized labor, her Chinese counterpart is free from such constraints. In a report released by Globalization Monitor, the Maersk container manufacturing plant in Dongguang, Guangdong Province, was reported as making workers there obey seventy-three rules as laid down by the "employees' manual." Apart from banning leafleting, petition, and strikes, punishable by instant dismissal if anyone violates, there is . . .

Clause 18: Violating canteen regulations, damaging canteen equipment and disturbing order, including but not limited to: destroying utensils, not queueing for meals, leaving utensils on the table or failing to put them back into the designated place after meals: failing to put scraps and rubbish in designated places: or leaving food, soup, fruit skin, drinks, etc, spattered on the table or floor. 1st and 2nd offences: demerit recorded; 3rd offences: dismissal.

The Dongguang Maersk workers responded to the prison-like factory with two violent strikes in 2008, but with the help of local government they were repressed and subsequently only achieved minimum improvement. We may add in passing: the plant is hugely productive.

China's success in her export drive has been to a great extent dependent on the China-US economic partnership. While China acts as a global supply engine, the United States plays

the role of demand engine. The relationship is due to the neoliberal new world order since 1989, as pointed out by David Harvey.

### The State: Solution or Problems?

FOR THE NATIONALISTS AND MANY “new leftists,” the state is a solution to both the problems of the capitalist market failure and the West/Japan’s attempt in containing “the rise of China.” They fail to see the other side of the coin, the state’s problematic role. The state is never neutral, especially so when the bureaucracy that constitutes the state apparatus is free of all social control from all classes. In China, since the 1950s, the bureaucracy has practically hijacked the state and uses it as the machinery for its own appropriation of social surplus. From late 1980s on, the bureaucracy has chosen to restore capitalism and has plundered the country to the point that it is driving working people more and more to the brink of rebellion. It is the evolution of the bureaucracy into a new appropriating class that one must take into account in any correct understanding of China’s state-controlled capitalism, both for its strength and weakness.

In the course of the past 25 years of reform, the CCP could not enrich itself without first nurturing a private capitalist class, but any major measure of reform has been first and foremost aimed at enriching the bureaucracy itself. In the late 1980s, the price reform created the so called *guandao*, or officials who engaged in speculation. Meanwhile nearly all levels of state departments set up different kinds of companies to make money. The bureaucracy was beginning to transform themselves into capitalists as well. This enraged the people who rose in protest against the government in 1989. The CCP’s crackdown crushed all opposition to capitalist reform — workers bore the main blow — and led to the further enrichment of the bureaucracy. Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 tour to the south signified that the CCP had taken another big leap forward again, towards full integration

with global capitalism. To make the leap successful the terror of the aftermath of 1989 crackdown was no longer enough, though. It was imperative to inflict more defeat on the SOE (State Owned Enterprise) workers, who accounted for the overwhelming majority of urban workforce. This time the purpose of the crackdown was to downsize the workforce of the state sector in order to turn these enterprises into competitive “modern corporations.” More than 40 million workers were sacked, and protests against dismissal were all crushed. Small and medium-sized SOEs were privatized, with municipal level bureaucrats and former SOE directors as the greatest beneficiaries. The big SOEs fell into the hands of higher level bureaucrats and turned into commercial entities, mostly floated in domestic and overseas markets. Since the state or municipal government always retains the controlling shares, this level of bureaucrats and their cronies can simultaneously enjoy the benefits of “state ownership” as well as of the “free market.”

Meanwhile, a second wave of privatization of urban land (including those rural lands close to city suburbs) has also begun, enriching again the municipal government officials and their cronies.

Government departments at all levels run their own companies to make money for the bureaucrats, despite the official ban in effect since the late 1980s. For instance, the police department runs its own security guard companies; the labor department runs its own labor dispatch companies; the fire fighting department runs its own companies to sell fire extinguishers; and so forth. Their companies are always successful because they always use their coercive power to sell their services to firms and factories under their jurisdiction. For instance, the fire fighting department will require factories to buy fire extinguishers from a particular company run by them, or else face the consequences: the factories in question may end up being fined for the most minor offences. Their

operations resemble the mafia; in fact, these officials often use local gangsters to do their jobs.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE bureaucracy from fiercely anti capitalist to bureaucrats/capitalists has thus been completed. This is not something new, though. The KMT party state of the 1930–40s has been described, ironically, by the then CCP as “bureaucratic capitalists” as well. The only difference is that the current CCP party state has institutionalized this on a phenomenal scale, which profoundly surpasses the KMT model. To cast the present Chinese state as autonomous, or even somewhat independent of the bourgeoisie, to contend that it has not been subordinated to their class interest, and hence that China remains non-capitalist or even “socialist,” as Giovanni Arrighi does in his new book *Adam Smith in Beijing*, is wrong. Based on Western European experiences, this analysis treats the bureaucracy and the capitalist class as necessarily two entirely different or even opposing social groups. In contrast, the Chinese bureaucracy is the capitalist class. Martin Hart-Landsberg has argued convincingly that China’s economy has long become capitalist, but he traces the point of departure from the “slippery slope” of market reform on which the CCP embarked. I would argue, in contrast, that it has been the conscious choice of the bureaucracy to restore capitalism rather than a wrong choice of policy, because apart from losing faith in socialism, they themselves want to be capitalists. Deng Xiaoping was already feeling his way in 1984 when China signed the agreement with the UK, which is entirely against socialist principle: Hong Kong laissez-faire capitalism is to be maintained for fifty years after being handed over to China. Later he was reported as saying that HK capitalism should be allowed to continue beyond the timeline. In 1987 he told an African delegation, “Do not follow socialism. Do whatever you can to make the economy grow.” His

subsequent crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement signified that his party had decisively and qualitatively transformed into a capitalist party.

It is utterly unconvincing for some Maoists to put all the blame on Deng Xiaoping alone, however. Deng encountered no significant opposition. On the contrary he received an enthusiastic response from the bureaucracy, which suggests that he was carrying out the bureaucracy’s wishes. This situation should not startle any socialist. Even in Mao’s era when the bureaucracy was fiercely anti-capitalist, it was also extraordinarily privileged, a ruling elite which exercised the exclusive right to distribute social surplus through its monopoly of the state. Like any other ruling elite, they were never content with their salary – which was ten to 30 times that of the ordinary workers’, and always wished to appropriate more social surplus than they deserved. Their fundamental interest lies in restoring private property rather than being the faithful public servant defending common ownership indefinitely.

To argue that in Mao’s era the Chinese bureaucracy was already capitalist, as some Maoists have, is like confusing the present continuous tense and the future. The argument wrongly accepts Mao’s view that Liu Shaoqi was a “capitalist roader.” There was not a single piece of evidence that Liu wanted capitalism then. Liu, or the bureaucracy in general, could not have been capitalist in the 1960s because by then they only appropriated an unusually large share of social surplus in the form of use value and small sum of exchange value (money wages), but never surplus value, as there was little commerce. But the bureaucracy, by their nature, could not be content with a kind of ownership which denies them the right to pass their privileges to their children, and after Mao’s death the realignment of relationship of social forces both in China and the world provided the bureaucracy with the best opportunity to break the constraint on private property and

evolve into a capitalist class. To argue now that the present Chinese bureaucracy is still in the service of socialism is dead wrong.

An inquiry into the present rescue package is illustrative of the hidden agenda of the

bureaucracy: The government still resists giving any detail even to the People's Congress, the supposed highest government body in China, regarding the rescue package. Subject to neither transparency nor democratic control, when the government hands out the rescue money it is not going to be done impartially. Even the censored press finds it

necessary to warn against corruption. *The Legal Daily* says that the package will "bring about a fierce competition between provincial governments for projects" and "behind these big projects there is always big corruption." That is also why the package focuses on investment on infrastructure rather than on raising the share of wages in the national income, although the latter measure is more effective in addressing the problem of lack of consumer demand. It reminds us again that the self-interest of the bureaucracy defines the package, or any reform.

To conclude: in contrast to the former Soviet bloc, the CCP is exceptionally successful in restoring capitalism, because it achieves this without paying the cost of its own disintegration. It is this which gives all the advantages and leverage to the present party state. Only with this accomplishment could the bureaucracy drive wages down to a horrible level that allows a crazed accumulation of capital. According to a World Bank report, wages in China as a share of GDP declined from 53 percent in 1998 to 41.4 percent in 2005, as opposed to 57 percent

in the United States. The other side of the same coin is that profit as a share of GDP has risen dramatically in the same period. A Chinese scholar named Wang Lianli, wrote that in manufacturing the proportion of wages to profit

rose from 1:3.1 in 1990 to 1:7.6 in 2005. Apart from spending extravagantly, the newly rich either invest or save their money, hence the exceedingly high saving rate and investment rate. For decades the share of investment in China's GDP has exceeded 40 percent, which is twice as high as that of the United States and is top among the major Asian coun-

tries, including Korea when she was at the height of industrialization.

Nevertheless, the forces of capitalist development cannot promote the polarization of rich and poor without at the same time creating obstacles for its further development. High profit squeezes wages, further creating long-term decline of private consumption. Private consumption as a percent of GDP has declined from 47 percent to 36 percent between 1992 and 2006, whereas the figure in South Korea, India, Britain, Australia, and Japan was over 50 percent. The World Bank reported that much of the decline of private consumption in China can be explained by the decline of wages as a share of GDP. Thus, China's rapid accumulation, bought at the price of brutal exploitation of workers and farmers, in turn creates severe imbalances in consumption and investment, or more precisely, under-consumption and over-investment, leaving productive capacity idle, and in turn causing increasing reliance on export of goods and capital to pay for the investment.

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## Exporting China's Problem Creates More Problems

IN 1998 THE NOW DISSOLVED State Economic and Trade Committee released a policy document: Index of Over-Invested Products for Moving Abroad. The title of the document is self explanatory. Export would solve China's excessive capacity and domestic problems. The report targeted the first batch of industries and products to move abroad: the light industry, machineries and electronics, motorcycles, refrigerators and TVs, etc.

While export of goods has always been growing rapidly, export of capital began to experience leaps and bounds only since 2000. The next year Premier Zhu Rongji officially proclaimed the strategy of "going global." Within a short period China has become a creditor country for developing countries, especially Africa.

Arrighi argues that China remains socialist or non-capitalist and poses an alternative to global capitalism, refuting the accusation that China's role in Africa is colonialist but admitting it is capitalist:

Though China is not a colonialist, it is a successful capitalist in Africa. The path it has taken on that continent is consistent with the logic of market capitalism — liberal trade based on fair contracts . . . . Although capitalism implies exploitation to many, China's capitalists have to limit their exploitation within the framework of the WTO and abide by local laws.\*

It has also been argued that China somehow has developed her own alternative model to globalization led by U.S. capital — the so called "Beijing Consensus" which is allegedly in opposition to Washington Consensus. Even if we concede that there is something called the "Beijing Consensus," it has nothing to do with socialism. Both are in the service of capitalism,

the same mode of accumulation that is extremely hostile to labor, the welfare state, and democratic rights. The fact that China "only" privatized her small and medium SOEs, leaving the big ones in the state's hands, that the CCP opted for a gradual transformation for capitalism rather than "shock therapy," that the state still heavily intervened with the "free market," that it allows local and even rural party officials' initiatives for industrialization etc., do not constitute something substantially different from neoliberalism. If the party state retains ownership control over the commanding heights of the economy, it is not because of any supposed adherence to socialism, as Arrighi suggests; rather it is simply because the ruling elite cannot tolerate any idea of giving away the most profitable sector of the economy. If "Beijing Consensus" is competing with "Washington Consensus" it means only that the Chinese party state wants to use the devil to beat the devil.

In the final analysis, despite occasional tension, the China-U.S. economic partnership worked well for both sides until recently. If there is also a dimension of intense competition between them, it is only a struggle between great capitalist powers for hegemony, not anything near a struggle between a progressive alternative and the evil Empire.

With the global economy sinking further, leading figures of the U.S. elite now point accusing fingers at China, blaming the crisis on China's high saving rate. The Chinese government has reacted by mocking the United States as shifting the blame to others when it is American spending to be blamed. As a matter of fact, both are right, because the U.S. – China global economic partnership is really a unification of contradictions: Reacting to the same problems of lack of buying power for common people, the United States' and China's ruling elites opted for opposing and at the same time complementary economic decisions, i.e., China, although a poor country, lent cheap credit to

\**Beijing Review*, February 2007 (this is the official journal of CCP).

the United States to allow the latter to import from China. Each in its own way solved its respective problems for a while, and continues to benefit from it. China was made to pay more for the partnership, but she gets what she wants, though. On top of the smaller share of profit that Chinese companies earn, the Chinese government has earned a very powerful leverage in influencing U.S. decision-making. If the U.S. government plays too many of the cards of the double Ts (Tibet and Taiwan), the CCP can always retaliate by selling its U.S. bond reserve to disrupt U.S. money market and the U.S. government's budget. Therefore both US and China wanted to continue such kind of partnership, at the cost of creating a global imbalance in the longer term. Now both wish to look for an alternative growth model, but it is not going to be easy. The Chinese government is deeply concerned about the continuing drop in the value of China's foreign reserves, but selling her U.S. bond reserves is not an option. The partnership has so integrated both economies that China's sale of the reserves will result in catastrophes for both sides.

### **Hidden Rules in the Service of the Hidden Agenda of the Bureaucracy**

ARRIGHI APPLAUDS CHINA'S MODEL for its "accumulation without dispossession," but it is only half-true. While peasants still retain their small plot of land in the course of rapid industrialization — which we have acknowledged long ago — one must not forget that the right to till the plot of land came with a heavy cost for the peasants, namely all kinds of taxes and levies, which had been so heavy in 1990s until 2006 that it virtually bankrupted the peasants. The problem of "scissors" (the inverse relationship between prices of industrial and agricultural products) was the last straw. They were left with no savings, no cash. Millions of rural migrants began to flow into cities to find jobs, and ended up being brutally exploited by the capitalists. This is the hidden dispossession, which Arrighi

has not taken into account. Adding to the list of dispossession was the 100 million SOEs and collective workers: from "ownership by all people" these SOEs have been transformed into share holding companies.

For the moment, the peasants' plots of land are still there, but nothing is secure. After privatizing the state owned enterprises and urban land, the bureaucracy and the newly rich are now looking for a third wave of privatization: the privatization of rural land. Whereas the top leaders of CCP have not dared to risk rebellion by doing this, the neoliberals, in the service of local officials and the business elites, have been tirelessly pushing the government on this matter.

In order to shift to a growth model led more by domestic demand, China requires nothing less than a redistribution of wealth. The bureaucratic capitalists and their minor partner, the private capitalists, would not allow part of their profit to be re-allocated to working people without a fight, notwithstanding the central government's rhetoric of significantly raising social wages. While the party state carries more leverage and power in dealing with the economic crisis than in many other countries, the self-interest of the bureaucracy also serves to offset the advantages they enjoy. Hence the objective of long term rebalancing of the economy, through a substantial redistribution of wealth to enlarge domestic market is excluded, although in the short term limited success of containing the crisis through more state intervention is possible. It is even conceivable that China's economy might continue to grow despite a narrow domestic market by exporting her problem again, this time to developing countries and at the expense of working people there.

China's leadership very much resembles the Korean military junta, but is ten times its scale: an authoritarian regime which actively supports rapid accumulation and export drive at the expense of working people by denying the latter

basic civil and labor rights. For Naomi Klein, the China regime is comparable to Pinochet's Chile: free market combined with authoritarian political control, enforced by iron-fisted re-

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pression. The financial crisis boosts the self-confidence of the CCP even further in maintaining an iron hand.

Why do so many still fail to see the true picture of China? One of the reasons is that they take too literally the rhetoric of the bureaucracy and believe that the Chinese official policy of eradicating poverty, of raising the income of the peasants, of adopting labor laws to protect the workers, are really working. They are apparently unaware that all written laws and regulations are not necessarily binding. Since the 1950s, a whole set of hidden and unwritten rules governed the Chinese bureaucracy, as was true for two thousand years previously, when China was ruled by a professional bureaucracy with the Emperor at the top. The purpose of the hidden rules is obvious: it is meant to serve the hidden agenda of the bureaucracy, namely their own enrichment.

A third element at work in the politics of bureaucracy is *guanxi*, which is a central concept in understanding Chinese politics. In a broader sense it means personal network of influences, but it is better to be understood as a patron-client relationship or even mafia-like cliques. The Chinese bureaucracy is practically organized along cliques who override laws and regulations, or even the authority of central

governments. They constitute the most powerful material obstacles in all levels of government and in the enforcement of laws.

The 1949 revolution, despite its achievement, is also deeply bureaucratically deformed and it eventually rebuilt an all powerful bureaucracy. Partly thanks to this long tradition of bureaucratic politics — hidden agenda, hidden rules, and *guanxi*, — the bureaucracy is able to undo all legal constraint laid down by the revolution and the constitution and eventually transform themselves into the new exploiting class. This is not to deny the possibility of reform in the future, but any significant reform by the party state is inconceivable without a social upheaval. The workers have already summed up their experiences in their own slogan: “Big struggle big gain, small struggle small gain, no struggle no gain.”

### Further Rise of China?

IN VIEW OF THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE free market, there is no doubt that the one-party state of China has more advantages than United States/UK in imposing counter-cyclical measures. In the longer term, this may support China's rise as a bigger power if the one-party state remains unchallenged socially. This not only spells disaster for Chinese toilers, but also for the world labor, because it implies an accelerated race to the bottom among them, with Chinese barracks capitalism becoming the new global labor standard.

The further rise of Chinese barracks capitalism is not predetermined, however. The hegemony of the party state works in a contradictory way as well. It is effective in controlling the people, but increasingly it also loses control of itself. It cannot control its own greed, nor its corruption, nor even its ranks — for decades, despite repeated directives issued from central government to shrink the size of public servants, it goes on expanding. The tainted milk scandal is just one example of the depth of corruption, which results in deep distrust and hatred of

government officials and the disintegration of social fibres, driving people more and more to the brink of rebellion. The resentment against the officials is so high that the smallest skirmish in the street may quickly trigger confrontation between police and a large crowd. In a word, the repression is turning into its own antithesis. It will make the authority's plan to shift the burden of economic crisis to working people less easy. To sum up, China's future direction is going to be determined by a protracted social contest between the haves and the have-nots.

There are not many signs of optimism for the moment, though. The private bourgeoisie is merely an appendage of the bureaucracy. The intellectuals continue their drift to the right. The liberals are more like neoliberals, and many well known new leftists have completed their journey to nationalism. Some have practically become apologists for the monolithic party state, from the past to the present. The youth seems not to be much better. A jingle posted in the internet in response to the coming 90th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement — a youth movement in 1919 which aspired to individual freedom, democracy, and national renaissance — reflects the deep political apathy of young people: "The youth only care about their personal interests, and the May Fourth idea is now obsolete." College graduates have been experiencing downward mobility because the high growth rate fails to create jobs, but they have little idea of linking up with workers to stage a united struggle, as the Korean students did in the past. The blow that the CCP dealt to people's spiritual lives in the 1989 crack-down is still being felt today.

### Perspective on Labor Movement

YET, A POSITIVE SIDE OF CAPITALIST restoration in China — as opposed to what occurred in the former Soviet Bloc — is accelerated industrialization. As a result, the number of China's wage workers is constantly increasing, and they now comprise half the working popu-

lation and account for one-fourth of the world's wage workers. Being at the center of production and distribution makes them a potentially phenomenal social force, the only force capable of stopping and eventually reversing the direction in which China is now heading. For the moment they are still a class-in-itself, though. There is no labor movement in the strict sense. The ACFTU (All China Federation of Trade Unions) is very much part of the state apparatus and one of its missions is to monopolize the right to form a union. Although the ACFTU necessarily plays some role of coercion, as in the enforcement of "family planning" (producing a "pregnancy permit" for women workers as the necessary proof for "legal" pregnancy), the eras of Mao and Deng differ. Before the reform, the official unions were also responsible for allocating apartments to workers and footing their medical bills. These are not small things. Unfortunately these benefits were lost when a full restoration of capitalism set in. In the privatized SOEs, the workplace ACFTU virtually lost all functions in welfare provisions, except occasional recreational activities, while the repressive side of their functions remained largely in place.

There is a trend for official workplace unions to move away from the direct control of the National and local ACFTU, but only towards the direction of becoming tools of the new bosses. As for private enterprises the workplace unions are purely a formality, and it is common to see that the chairpersons of these unions are the personnel managers. Hence it is not accidental to see wages as a share of national income have declined to such a deplorable level, despite the presence of the chairperson of ACFTU in the Polibureau of the CCP and despite its 193 million members. ACFTU never strikes against the state or the bosses, regardless of how workers are treated.

Since 2006, the ACFTU seems to be more proactive in organizing workers by targeting Walmart, which some overseas trade union ac-

tivists may see as encouraging signs. As a matter of fact, two years after the Walmart organizing drive, the chairperson of the workplace union of Walmart in Nanchang City, Gao Haitao, was forced to resign from both the union and the company not only because the boss simply bypassed his union for collective bargaining, but also because the National ACFTU had practically supported the boss by making things difficult for Gao. Deeply frustrated, he left Nanchang altogether.

Another recent example of how ACFTU suffocated rank and file trade unionism is the Ole Wolff case. Ole Wolff is a Danish company which operates an electronic plant in Yantai City, Shangdong province. In 2006, the women workers decided to found a workplace union after a strike to protest against wage cuts and layoffs. It was met with hostility from the local ACFTU, although eventually the workers succeeded in registering the union. Within two years the boss sacked nine-tenths of the workers along with nearly all the leadership, and the local ACFTU did nothing at all. The workplace union, in a way that never happened before in China, wrote to 3F, the Danish union, for solidarity and got a responsive reply. 3F pressed Ole Wolff to compensate six dismissed workers' representatives, but was not able to make the company negotiate with the workplace union. Towards the end of 2008, the national ACFTU praised the company for complying with the laws although it was not true.

In Guangdong province there are now scattered workers' legal aid centers, some from Hong Kong and some local initiatives. They are often registered under commercial registration as sole proprietor, because in no way can they obtain the license for running a workers' asso-

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ciation. They are so vulnerable that many of them prefer to avoid operating in industrial areas because the local authority hates the idea of allowing these centers to have close encounters with workers. *Dagongzhe*, or Workers, was a workers' center which located in Shenzhen industrial area. The person in charge, Huang Qingnan, was seriously injured last year when attacked by gangsters with knives, after the center had been repeatedly harassed.

In addition to workers' centers are *heilüshi*, or "barefoot lawyers," who are often self-taught people with no legal rights to practice law. Some of them are themselves workers who have become familiar with labor laws after engaging in years-long legal actions against their bosses. In general both workers' centers and "barefoot lawyers" are met with hostility from the provincial ACFTU, which views them as potential trouble makers and contenders. At one point, in a Guangdong city, the ACFTU opened an official worker center with the same name as another worker center, founded much earlier by common citizens, so as to out-compete the latter. In 2007 it was reported that the Shenzhen ACFTU joined hands with local government to crack down on the barefoot lawyers and workers' center. After the sticks came the carrots: The Shenzhen ACFTU co-opted sixty of them who agreed not to contact foreign reporters and not to seek funding from foreign funding agencies.

There are deeper reasons for the difficult birth of a labor movement other than state repression, however. First and foremost is the deep division of the working class between two sections, the state sector and the rural migrant workers. The division is so deep that not only is there no common struggle, there is virtually

no exchange of ideas and very rare intermarriage. Although the rural migrant workers have not experienced the devastating defeat of SOEs workers, neither do they possess collective memory as a class. They are *nongmingong*, literally “peasant workers,” more peasants than workers, not because they really till the land — in fact, most of them rarely do — but because the *hukou* system acts like a kind of social apartheid, barring them from raising families in the cities and sinking their roots there. No matter how long they stay in the cities they are aware that it is bound to be temporary. Hence the sense of class identity is hard to forge.

But neither are they entirely passive. The rural migrant workers have staged numerous spontaneous strikes against their bosses and local authorities. These spontaneous strikes often win partial victories, and they are so common that the authority’s defacto ban on strikes broke down long ago, to the effect that local governments have had to learn to live with that.

Organizing is still very difficult, though, and without it workers’ resistance remains fragmented and ineffective in bringing about a substantial redistribution of wealth or a raise of confidence in collective resistance. The next stage of struggle will likely be a struggle to defy the ban on organization, though how this will occur I cannot predict. The spontaneous struggles of workers have achieved the unexpected goal of training small circles of individual activists, and from this milieu occasionally a loose or more integrated network of activists could be forged. Both the bosses and the authority have to live with that as long as the activists learn how to combine courage with prudence. The initial organizing drive is not confined to labor. In the recent tainted milk case, the victims have practically founded their own

organization in making their voices heard, and the local governments have until now only dared to harass them but not disperse them — any such move may lead to an explosion of social discontent. For the moment these are individual cases, but the present economic crisis will definitely create more space for activists to develop into a close network if not official organizations.

But another obstacle will be more difficult to overcome, namely the fact that socialism is deeply discredited. If one talks to a worker activist about socialism, very often his or her response will be: how can we build something new by using old crap from the communist party? Surely the degree of cynicism about socialism differs across industries and regions, but the general apathy to left politics is too obvious to deny. Perhaps a left victory in some countries can revive the credibility of socialism in China.

The Chinese party state is far stronger than the Suharto regime of Indonesia on the eve of 1997, but even if the scenario of instant collapse like Indonesia is not very likely, there is still hope for a gradual expansion of autonomous civil associations and labor organizing. Activists must learn to be patient in this long drawn-out contest between the haves and have nots. It must be added that, with the absence of freedom of speech, it is very difficult for both Chinese and foreign commentators to learn the real situation of China. Hence, any assessment of China’s future development is bound to be speculative rather than scientific. We must prepare for shocks and surprises in the coming months and years.

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Editor’s note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, [www.newpol.org](http://www.newpol.org)

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# Are U.S. Unions Ready for the Challenge of a New Period?

KIM MOODY

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BY NOW IT SEEMS CLEAR that the United States has entered a new period of contradictory trends that presents a profound challenge to organized labor. First there is the deepening world recession that is bringing down some of American capitalism's most high profile institutions from Wall Street to Detroit. At the same time, of course, it is wiping out millions of jobs, 4.4 million from December 2007 to February 2009. Slightly less dramatic is the changing climate of social and political opinion in the US that has been taking shape for a number of years and made the landmark victory of Barack Obama possible. This change is not simply that the dark clouds of neoconservatism have lifted. Nor is it that we have a Democratic administration and Congress, as these predictably disappoint. At root is a definite mood shift away from faith in markets and business leaders that just might help unions recruit and open the door to bolder action.

There are a number of ways to measure this shift in public opinion away from the conservative hegemony that seemed to solidify when Newt Gingrich led his far right posse to seize control of Congress in 1994-95. First is the rise of pro-union sentiment. When Gingrich took the gavel, 39 percent of non-managerial workers were favorable to unions. A decade later it was up to 53 percent, according to a Peter D.

Hart poll. If the attitudes toward unions have become more favorable, views of America's leading capitalist institutions have gone largely sour. NBC/Wall Street Journal surveys taken over the past decade show that those who had "little or no confidence in large corporations" rose from 24 percent in 1998 to 54 percent in late 2008. Similarly negative views of the "financial industry" rose from a mere 17 percent in 2000 to 55 percent in late 2008. Another indication was, of course, the incredibly negative ratings of George W. Bush from 2005 on. This general shift was one of the underlying factors that made the election of America's first African-American president possible.

What of the impact of this new administration and Congress on union hopes? President Obama is supposedly committed to passing the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) on which the hopes and dreams of America's labor leadership rest. He owes a lot to the unions, who put a quarter of a million people in the streets and on the phones and whose members voted by 67 percent for him — 69 percent in key battleground states according to the AFL-CIO. But Obama and the Democratic majority in Congress also owe much to certain sections of big business. Since the Democrats took Congress in 2006, business money has shifted from Republican to Democratic campaign coffers, as it usually does when they dominate Congress and its committees. According to Federal Election Commission figures, defense, FIRE, and health care all went from giving more to Republicans prior to 2007 to giving a majority of funds to Democrats. Even Obama, who has made much of the majority of small campaign contributions he received, got over a quar-

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ter of his money from contributions of more than \$1,000. About 2,000 contributors bundled gifts of \$25,000 or more. Among these big donors Wall Street and related investment and real estate firms were well represented. On top of this, big business has mounted a multi-million dollar campaign to defeat EFCA.

Obama has made pro-union gestures by appointing union-friendly people in second-tier positions, notably Secretary of Labor and Chair of the NLRB. Vice-President Joe Biden and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis have both appeared at AFL-CIO events. But, at the same time, Obama has surrounded himself with union-shy Clinton veterans and imperial praetorians whose interests lie more in the bailout of global capital than of the working class at home. He has the votes to pass EFCA, even in the Senate, but there is massive business resistance. While Obama does represent something new in American politics, he is still the leader of the free (market) world. At most with most previous Democratic administrations since the Second World War, union issues have tended to slide down the legislative agenda and face compromises or even defeat as capital asserts its right to rule. The EFCA was introduced in Congress on March 10, but will certainly go through a long process involving possible compromises. Obama has hinted that the bill may have to be amended. If labor hopes to win the EFCA in a timely and useful form it will have to fight for it.

### **Fit to Fight?**

**BUT ARE THE UNIONS FIT TO FIGHT?** Basically, many union leaders have had two strategies for survival and increased fitness: mergers and new organizing. Mergers have been a matter of survival for small and shrinking unions. For the larger unions that have absorbed smaller ones, mergers were meant to increase the membership size, financial resources, and presumably power of individual unions. As many unions shrank, the number of mergers increased from

24 in the 1960s to 42 in the 1990s. Mostly these were absorptions of smaller unions by larger ones. Increasingly, they had little industrial or jurisdictional logic. The bigger unions became

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conglomerate organizations. By the 1990s almost half these mergers were carried out by five conglomerates. With the merger of UNITE and HERE in 2004, six conglomerates dominated the merger process and accounted for a majority of the membership of the pre-split AFL-CIO. The multi-jurisdictional giants included SEIU, IBT, UFCW, USWA, and CWA. UNITE-HERE and the UAW followed close behind.

Did this growth through merger and absorption bring the resources and power that had been promised? Financially, all of these conglomerate unions remain precarious, in most cases more so than before. The fact is that most unions cannot finance their top-heavy structures through members' dues. Most cover about 80-90 percent of expenditures from dues and fees. The rest comes from investments, a risky practice in today's world. Even to do this, the big conglomerates have raised dues. The Teamsters, SEIU, CWA, and UFCW had some of the largest dues increases between 2000 and 2004 and still couldn't cover expenses with member-based revenue. The main reason is that the conglomerates must administer more contracts and sustain more officials and divisions. In most cases the union's bureaucracy is inflated even more. While sheer size might increase their political clout to some degree, the bargaining record of

the conglomerates in recent years often lags behind the average wage increase of all union agreements and seldom exceeds it. Whatever mergers do for this or that union, they clearly have not contributed to the growth and revival of the movement as a whole.

### Unity from Strength?

SINCE DECEMBER, top leaders of the AFL-CIO, Change-To-Win Federation (CTW), and the National Education Association (NEA) have met at least three times to discuss the possibility of some sort of unification either in the AFL-CIO or a rumored federation of federations. The Obama administration has encouraged this to simplify pacification, while the imminent departure of John Sweeney opens some doors. But the rush to re-unify is above all an admission of failure on the organizing front, particularly for CTW. Both federations saw a drop in overall membership since the split in 2005. In 2006-2008, the AFL-CIO saw a drop of 146,939 members in its affiliates, a 1.7 percent decline. The CTW, however, saw the membership of its affiliates drop a net 458,083, a disastrous 8.6 percent drop. The only CTW union to show any growth through organizing since the split was the SEIU.

Here something needs to be said about the Bureau of Labor Statistics figures for union membership in 2008. The BLS figures show a net gain of 428,000 union members for 2008. The AFL-CIO and CTW figures showing a combined drop of over 600,000 members are based on the fiscal years of their affiliates, meaning in most cases that the last three months of 2008 are not counted. So, they are not strictly comparable to the BLS figures. Yet, the combined drop of over 600,000 members means that the gap between the federation figures and those of the BLS exceeds a million union members. How do we account for this? Some part of this may simply stem from statistical problems with the current population survey on which the BLS figures are based. Then too, al-

most two-thirds of the recorded gains are in the public sector where employment grew significantly in 2008. My own theory is that the bulk of the BLS increase came from what might be called the "Obama Effect." That is, the intense canvassing of members by their unions during the 2008 elections probably made more workers aware of their union membership — hence the statistical surge. If this is the case, the 2008 increase represents a greater consciousness of union membership rather than actual growth, particularly in the private sector.

The 2008 Department of Labor LM-2 membership figures are not yet available for most individual unions, but the organizing record since 2000 is not encouraging. From 2000 through 2007, only 17 unions grew as a result of recruiting new members. Nine of these were public sector unions, including the huge NEA, which added 237,612 new members over those years, excluding the 400,000 in the New York State AFT who affiliated with NEA in 2006. Similarly, the SEIU's legendary growth, over 300,000 from 2000 through 2007, was mostly in the public sector. These were largely home health care workers recruited through political deals with governors whom the SEIU funded and helped elect, including the now disgraced Blagojevich of Illinois. Besides the SEIU, only eight mostly private sector unions grew in this period. Three were construction unions, and five were smaller, occupationally-based unions. The fastest growing union in the United States was not the SEIU, but the small International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers which grew by 42 percent, compared to the SEIU's 23 percent. The second fastest growing union was the SEIU's arch rival, the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee.

What figures we have for 2008 are not encouraging either. The SEIU, usually the growth engine of the movement, "united," as they say, only 89,000 workers in 2008 and 55,000 of

those came from the affiliation of the North Carolina State Employees Association. The Teamsters claim 43,000 new members. The CWA's 2008 LM-2 shows a slight decline, while UNITE-HERE admits a drop in members. All of this points to organized labor's inability to organize in the private sector, the heart of American capitalism.

### Card Check, Reality Check

PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS HAVE GROWN over the years, while a majority of private sector unions have lost ground — including most of the big conglomerates. The net loss of private sector members since 2000 was almost a million. As we saw, the split didn't change that. But neither did the other

panacea tried by several unions — neutrality agreements and card checks. These are voluntary methods of gaining recognition without going through the unbalanced and ineffective channels of an NLRB election. Recognition is granted on the basis of a majority show of authorization cards, and in most cases the employer agrees to not attack the union. In recent years fewer than 100,000 workers have been recruited annually through NLRB elections with a win rate of about 55 percent. So, several unions have taken the neutrality/card check route to growth. One study identifies five unions that use it fairly regularly, UNITE-HERE, CWA, UAW, SEIU, and the Steelworkers. The Teamsters and Food and Commercial Workers also use this approach.

The win rate for card check recognition is considerably higher than for NLRB elections, around 68 percent, according to one study. Furthermore, while hard figures are rare, the AFL-CIO claims its unions organize more workers through this channel than through the NLRB.

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**If organized labor can turn out a quarter of a million workers to elect a president, why can't a similar force be mobilized to kick off a huge recruitment drive?**

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In 2005, it gained 150,000 new private sector members through card check or other voluntary methods, compared to 70,000 through the NLRB. It is also the case that the targets of card check campaigns are generally much larger on average. Not surprisingly, this tactic works best with employers with whom the union already has a longstanding bargaining relationship. This is often called "bargaining to organize." The CWA's neutrality agreement with

AT&T netted it 40,000 members at its wireless subsidiary (formerly SBC Cingular) from 1997 to 2007. UNITE-HERE's agreement with Hilton and Starwood Hotels brought it 6,000 new members from 2004 through 2006, while the UAW's eleven agreements with

auto-parts suppliers won it 20,000 from 2002 through 2006. The Teamsters have such an agreement with UPS Express (formerly Overnight) and claim to have organized 12,000 workers under this agreement in 2008.

All this comes at a price. In most neutrality agreements, the union agrees not to attack management, removing the "them v. us" sensibility that helps build a union identity. The biggest problem, however, comes with employers who have no prior relationship with a union and wish to keep it that way. Most U.S. companies are not prepared to volunteer for unionization. So, the campaign to convince them often becomes a long drawn out and costly one, not unlike those through the NLRB. An example is the SEIU's successful campaign to organize 5,000 janitors in Houston. It took months of mobilization and a ten-day strike to get to card check and then recognition and another year and a strike to get a contract. Similarly, the CWA's 1997 neutrality agreement at Cingular Wireless (later AT&T) was, according to Dorothee Benz, "the result of

years of struggle and organizing.” Writing in *Working USA*, Benz pointed out that to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, “we have to look at the process it takes to get to neutrality or card check agreements as well as the results from such agreements.” This tactic was rendered more difficult in 2007 when the Bush NLRB ruled in its Dana/Metaldyne decision that the traditional “recognition bar” that gave a newly recognized union a reasonable amount of time to negotiate a contract before anyone could file for de-certification no longer held in card check cases.

Most of the unions that use this approach have failed to grow, losing members faster than they gain them. One reason is that most of these campaigns are part of highly targeted, very expensive, drawn out campaigns where employer resistance remains high. The highly praised Justice for Janitors national campaign, UNITE-HERE’s Hotel Workers Rising, and the drawn out Teamster campaign at UPS Express are examples. While this approach has its strengths, it also has at least two drawbacks. Janice Fine, writing in *New Labor Forum*, notes that it took SEIU ten years to organize 900,000 workers for a net gain of 600,000 at a cost of \$1 billion. She argues that at this pace “To reach the same goal in health care, it would take upwards of thirty years, at a cost of three billion.” In other words, the resource-based, targeted road to growth is very long, expensive, and staff-intensive. Unions that follow this approach are likely to experience financial tensions and enormous frustration at slow progress. It is, at least in part, this problem that is at the heart of the exploding fight between the top leaders of UNITE-HERE.

### EFCA to the Rescue?

THE LABOR LEADERSHIP IS UNITED in the belief that the EFCA will pass and will save the day, allowing rapid expansion. Canadian industrial relations scholar Roy Adams says, “Canadian experience indicates otherwise.” In Canadian provinces that have laws granting card check and first contract arbitration, union den-

sity has continued to fall in the private sector. Adams cited employer resistance as the main reason. The EFCA would undoubtedly make organizing easier in many cases but could not eliminate all the problems of organizing in a depressed economy with intense employer opposition.

One of those problems is the tendency for this resource-based approach to growth to make unions even more top-heavy than before. Staff proliferates, decisions on targeting and tactics are made by the central leadership, more power is concentrated at the top, and the nature of the union as a workers’ organization is perverted. As Bill Fletcher and Fernando Gapasin put it in their recent book *Solidarity Divided*, this approach has become “focused on retooling existing unions to make them more effective organizing machines.” In this view, “one chooses to ignore the character of the union or unionism...” Democracy, already a slim reed in a strong wind, is further undermined. The temptation to take short cuts to recruitment via “partnership,” that is sweetheart deals, becomes massive. The most extreme example of both of these, as Herman Benson showed in *New Politics* #46 (winter, 2009), is the SEIU.

Since 2000, more and more power has been concentrated into the hands of its president, Andy Stern, and a small group around him. Locals are forcefully merged into gigantic, sometimes multi-state administrative units with officials appointed by Stern. The staff has doubled since 2000, not only to expand organizing, but to administer these outsized units. With leaders more isolated from rank and file scrutiny, corruption has returned to SEIU. Most recently, workplace representation has been outsourced to call centers known as member resource centers. This drive to centralized power has led to the flight of the union’s largest health care local, the California-based United Healthcare Workers — West, which is now reorganizing itself outside the SEIU as the National Union of Healthcare Workers. Inside the

SEIU, Stern's heavy hand has also spawned a national rank and file opposition known as SMART (SEIU Member Activists for Reform Today). The issues in both cases are democracy and resistance to sweetheart deals.

### **Dump the Business Union, Resource-based Model**

IF AMERICA'S LABOR MOVEMENT is to meet the challenges of the new economic and political context, it will need to jettison the whole business union model. Top down, conventional organizing, even with EFCA, will not create the social momentum needed to turn the fate of millions of workers around in today's unfolding economic crisis. One practice that can and should be dropped is that of limiting union members to existing or soon-to-be-recognized, majority bargaining units. "Open source" or non-majority unionism, where any group of workers can begin engaging in concerted action, should become a norm in new organizing. This practice could have kept the nearly 475,000 workers who participated in lost NLRB elections between 2003 and the end of 2008. It could have brought into unions those in the 30 percent of lost card check campaigns. It could also keep those who face long-term layoffs, a practice that could be important in a period of recession or worse. More importantly, it could bring in at least a slice of the 50 million who say they would vote for a union. A few unions such as the UE, CWA do use this tactic and interestingly enough UE, several AFL-CIO unions, and CTW have all petitioned the NLRB to allow recognition of unions without majority status. But formal recognition need not be a requirement to getting a big foot in the door and acting like a union from the start. A little Knights of Labor style expansion is in order as a transition to a growing union movement.

To organize in the midst of recession will take bold, high profile tactics. The 250, mostly Latino UE members at Chicago's Republic Windows and Doors set a fine example when

they occupied their plant for six days in December in the face of its closure. They demanded back pay, health insurance, and vacation pay owed them, and won. They had the backing of their union and the sympathy of the working class public. Plant occupations have been illegal since the Supreme Court ruled them so in 1939 after three years of sit-down strikes. Yet, no one attempted to enforce the law. The action was widely publicized and popular, making eviction a messy task. It is a precedent that has yet to be followed, but a tactic of great relevance with layoffs and closures certain to spread. It might have made some difference for UAW members in the debacle that passes for bargaining at the "big" three auto makers.

Whatever tactics are used, labor's most important resources aren't its budgets or staff, but its membership. As AFSCME's Paul Booth put it a few years ago, "What we need is an army, and that can only come from our underutilized membership ranks." Member-based organizing and mobilizing should become the alternative to resource-based organizing. If organized labor can turn out a quarter of a million workers to elect a president, why can't a similar force be mobilized to kick off a huge recruitment drive? The two million or more non-union workers the AFL-CIO has recruited into its campaigning Working America could help. The goal would not be just a few thousand more bargaining units, but a movement aimed at changing the balance of social forces in America. This mobilized force could fight for EFCA, universal health care, and a shift in "stimulus" from capital to working people, even as it recruits new union members. The pro-labor, anti-business sentiment is there to be drawn on. Yes, this too will take resources and a lot of motivation and inspiration to get the largely passive membership on board. But the activist layer is there to lead if encouraged. If there is to be a reunification of labor, and there should be, let it not be just one more layer of bureaucracy, but a coordinating committee to launch such an ambitious campaign.

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# French Workers Face the Crisis

LÉON CRÉMIEUX

TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL SEITZ

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**G**UADELOUPE HAS MADE AN IMPRESSION ... but not yet on the French union movement.

The capitalist crisis affects France as it does all industrialized countries. The ingredients are the same:

- The financial crisis rocks the banks, even though the French banks have been generally less affected than those in the United States and in England, having lost a total of “only” 19 billion euros due to subprime mortgages, and even realizing juicy profits in 2008, about 10 billion for the sector. In addition to which AIG, thanks to its federal bailouts, has reimbursed the French banking sector to the tune of some 20 billion.
- Recession, here again, is less than the European Union average, but nonetheless 1.8 percent predicted for 2009. The most heavily affected sectors are real estate and construction, which together are likely to lose 30,000 jobs this year, while they had gained 350,000 jobs over the past ten years. As for the automobile industry, there are over a million jobs in this sector. The sales of the French auto makers (PSA and Renault) were down 8 percent in 2008. In this sector 202,000 full-time equivalent jobs had already been lost during the years 2004–2007. Since then the French auto makers have been producing the majority of their cars outside of France, reserving for the French plants the top of the line vehicles, the first to feel the effects of the crisis. In the electronics sector, equipment expenditures and interme-

diary goods have also been hit. All in all, the crisis has accelerated a process going on over the last thirty years: the contraction of industrial jobs in France from 5.5 million to 3.5 million.

Many plant closings in the electronic and automobile industries (Sony, Continental) come as a windfall for the companies, accelerating the removal of production sites to countries with cheaper manual labor.

The characteristics of the crisis in France, thus, are not at all unique on the economic level, their effects being even weaker than in other European countries. But, compared to other countries in the European Union, the social and political reactions over the past few months have been livelier. This is, of course, attributable to features present in French social relations for decades which lead to a rapid politicization of all social questions. But this also results from the particular context in France since the election of Nicolas Sarkozy to the presidency of the Republic in May 2007.

On the eve of that election, the two dominant parties, Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and the social democratic party, Parti Socialiste (PS) were largely discredited for their respective politics in the preceding governments, the politics of which had largely been at the expense of the working classes. The two principal candidates (Segolene Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy) presented themselves similarly as providential candidates, emancipated from their parties, and playing a populist tune. Sarkozy had the nerve to base his campaign on the claim that “I’ll be the President of [increased] purchasing power.”

And in fact, the first months of the Sarkozy

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presidency seemed in line with the image the right sought to project of its victory: a total drying up of the political terrain of the Front National, the extreme fascist-leaning right, by a law-and-order and anti-immigrant politics which were no better than the program of the National Front's founder and president, Le Pen, on these issues; a quasi-bonapartist stance by Sarkozy, who sought to appear as a popular tribune feigning to bring solutions to social inequalities; a marginalization of the traditional left, KO'd after its defeat in the presidential election, but above all incapable of regaining its feet in the face of Sarkozy's onslaught.

The paralysis of the PS was such that it was unable to react to the integration of several well known socialists in the government, including at the head of the list, Bernard Koucher, as minister of Foreign Affairs, and the satellitization of several others, notably Dominique Strauss Kahn, pushed to the International Monetary Fund. The PS reaction echoed the lack of substantive discord between the UMP and the PS during the electoral campaign on numerous social issues, economic issues, and issues of international politics. Sarkozy gave the impression of occupying all by himself the terrain of his political majority, leaving only marginal issues to his ministers. He neutralized political opposition on his right as on his left, while multiplying initiatives on all fronts.

FUNDAMENTALLY, HIS FIRST ACTS were in thorough allegiance with the propertied classes. In the summer of 2007 he championed fiscal measures granting 15 billion euros of gifts to the richest: a "50 percent shield," that is, a total tax limit to 50 percent of income. This measure had been in effect since 2006 but with a 60 percent ceiling. Added to this was elimination of inheritance taxes on real estate purchases, a new reduction of the tax on large fortunes. At the same time the government refused to activate the "coup de pousse" — the annual July 1 tradition of a raise in the minimum wage,

which benefits 17 percent of wage earners.

The Sarkozy campaign's slogan in regard to wage earners was "work more to gain more." Populist demagoguery addressed to the "France

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In January 2009 the union confederation called for a day of general strike, bringing out 2.5 million demonstrators in major French cities. On March 19 the number of workers on strike and in the street was even larger than before — 3 million.

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which gets up early," it was given concrete form in a law exempting overtime work from social deductions. Purely ideological, this measure obviously didn't increase wage earners' buying power. The injury was compounded with the arrival in the summer of 2007 of the subprime crisis. The beginning of the economic recession in 2008, even before the explosion of the financial crisis, led to a renewed increase in unemployment, notably as a result of the non-renewal of "contrats interimaaires," contracts for temporary workers.

Parallel to these fiscal measures, the government, in concert with the French employers association, Mouvement des Entreprises de France (MEDEF), pursued its neoliberal offensive, seeking to place France in unison with the rest of Europe in dismantling public services, public systems of social protection (health, retirement), and the protection of workers' contracts.

The French labor movement has a political stake in the current situation. It is at the same time weak and dynamic: weak in the total number of members (6 percent to 8 percent on the average, depending on the sector, with only

the public sector exceeding 10 percent); strong in the real activity of shop stewards in the work sites, a dynamic union culture, and broad confidence of French workers in the unions, despite all that has been diminished over the past twenty years.

The stake for the employers is thus to see social relations in the workplace evolve towards a system broadly implemented elsewhere: to suppress conflict by more broadly pre-empting the unions, reducing the instances of conflict to top level global negotiations held directly with central office delegates, and rendering local struggles led by shop stewards with the direct mobilization of workers more or less inconsequential. In fact, the basic play of the government and employers in recent months is in their capacity to move the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) toward these orientations. The CGT, formerly linked to the Communist Party, is the main French labor confederation. For a long time the CGT was characterized by union struggle, engaging in direct conflict with management and asserting, in opposition, the interests of wage earners. Along with many of its European equivalents, like the Workers Commissions of Spain or the Italian General Confederation of Labor, the CGT in recent years has drawn closer to that sector of the union movement oriented towards neoliberalism, represented by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), dominated by the large German, English, and Scandinavian unions.

FOR TWO YEARS NOW, the government has thus espoused a politics openly in service of the propertied classes, symbolized by the tax shield, but followed by other measures, such as the recent retraction of the professional tax, a local tax imposed on businesses according to their income. The government has just repealed this tax, thus delivering a new gift of 7 billion euros to employers. But at the same time it has sought, along with the MEDEF, to assume a

position in the social dialogue while shutting out the labor movement from its reforms, as the right and employers have succeeded in doing in other European countries. The crisis has thus hit France with society in turmoil, with a president in free fall in the polls, having lost the confidence or its electoral base for exacerbating social inequalities, and having alienated by its successive reforms a large number of social sectors — with the exception of the capitalist elite, all too content to have a President so devoted to its interests.

What's more, all the measures taken since September have been perceived as just so many provocations. While the government claimed the state coffers were empty in respect to social security and the replacing of functionaries, in just 48 hours it found 428 billion in lines of credit for the banks . . . but without any concrete means for wage earners to access credit, or measures to combat unemployment and the closings of businesses . . . and with an obstinate refusal of any measures to increase the buying power of workers.

Anticapitalist sentiments, already quite noticeable in France, have been reinforced by the occasion of this crisis and augmented by a real discrediting of Sarkozy and the government. It's widely understood that business leaders and the state don't want the crisis to be the occasion for a questioning of the wealth accorded over the past twenty years to capital, or to guarantee jobs and good wages by imposing another relocation of surplus value. This explains the very lively reactions to the closings of a business like Total which listed profits this year of 14 billion euros and to plant closings as at Continental near Compiègne, where workers at the French factory of U.S.-owned 3M held their boss captive to protest planned layoffs. These are the latest sign of growing public anger at rising unemployment in France. This also explains the growing popularity of the anticapitalist left, with Olivier Besancenot and the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste formed in January.

Despite this broad discontent, it was not until January 2009 that the union confederation called for a day of general strike, bringing out 2.5 million demonstrators in major French cities. The force of discontent was such that all the unions, even the least combative, were obliged to sign on for the strike.

January and February were obviously marked by the general strikes of Guadeloupe and Martinique. In addition to local demands, due to the colonial heritage suffered by the Caribbean populations, the wage demands echoed those of wage earners in France. The demand for a 200 euro net raise seemed legitimate to mainland workers. And to manage to assert this demand by means of a 6 week strike served as an impressive example. But of course there is hardly any comparison between the union leadership of Guadeloupe and France. It took al-

most six weeks for another day of general strike to be called . . . on March 19. Here again, despite the delay, the number of workers on strike and in the street was even larger than before — 3 million, with 70 percent of the population according its support to the movement.

But the question posed in the aftermath of this event is evident. How can this force be mobilized to effectively get the government to yield? Because the union leadership doesn't want a real test of strength, doesn't want a national struggle on the scale of Guadeloupe, for that reason the only new call given to the strikers of March 19 is . . . May 1st! Let's hope that in the cities and among the mobilized workforce, like those in the auto industry and national education, the combative workers will impose other imperatives.

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# The Class Struggle in Post-Soviet Russia

BORIS KAGARLITSKY

TRANSLATED BY MICHEL VALE

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THE RESTORATION OF CAPITALISM on the territory of the former Soviet Union was accompanied not only by unprecedented attacks on the social rights of the population. (Not only rights characteristic of the Soviet system, e.g., the right to housing, were rescinded, but also many of those that in the West are considered a normal attribute of a civilized attitude toward the wage laborer). No less impressive was the ease with which the new bourgeoisie imposed its conditions on the workers.

By the late eighties the topic of free trade unions had become extremely popular. Soviet society was still digesting its impression of the mass workers' demonstrations in Poland, where a massive democratic movement had arisen under the banner of creating free trade unions. The miners' strike in 1989 gave rise to the Independent Union of Miners, and by early 1990 the "traditional" Soviet trade unions that had managed to outlive both the USSR and the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) had learned how to strike and put forth demands. However, by the end of the decade the trade union movement was in deep decline. The last wave of workers' demonstrations swelled in spring and early summer of 1998 — the famous "war of the rails" where the workers (most of whom were the same miners) blocked the railroads, demanding payment of their wages in arrears. Before that, wages had not been paid

for several months. But in most cases these demonstrations had nothing in common with any trade unions, old or new.

After the default in 1998, the number of strikes and workers' demonstrations in Russia declined sharply, diminishing many times over. The first years of economic recovery were a model of "social peace" in Russian factories and plants. In some regions some quite bitter conflicts flared, involving even seizures of firms — at the Vyborg Paper Pulp Complex there was even shooting — but once again the trade union organizations were utterly ineffectual.

However, once economic growth resumed in the early 2000s, the topic of trade unions as organizations, and repression against them, began to gain public notice. The first event that attracted the attention of the press was the formation of a trade union at the Ford Factory in the Leningrad region. After several months of struggle, the trade union had radically increased its membership, and after organizing a series of protest actions, it succeeded in raising workers' wages considerably. This epidemic of trade union building quickly spread to the new firms created by transnational companies to operate on the Russian internal market. In the summer of 2007, the Inter-regional Trade Union of Automobile Factories of Russia (MPRA) was formed and became part of the All-Union Confederation of Labor (VKT).

By the end of the same summer of 2007, unrest hit the petroleum industry as well. Protest actions took place in companies of the Surgutvieftevgaz group. Workers in the Megionneftgaz Company also began to protest. The demands were the standard ones: wage raises, narrowing of the gap between workers'

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and managers' wages, indexing of the wages fund to keep pace with the rise in prices. The wave of protests and strikes organized by free trade unions forced many companies to take "preventive measures": they fired activists and set the police onto them.

A similar conflict flared up at Togliatti after the workers of GM-AvtoVAZ began to form a free trade union. Andrei Liapin, the chairman of the trade union committee, discovered that his computer had been blocked and he himself became the subject of thorough body searches at the gate. Then disciplinary penalties began to be imposed on members of the newly created trade union — such practices had been the norm for some time in Russian companies.

As in other countries of the world, the industrial recovery in Russia brought about a growth in the workers' movement as well. A new generation with much better ideas of how capitalism worked and of how to defend workers' rights under the new conditions had emerged. It is today no longer a rare thing to meet an activist from the new free trade unions capable of discussing dispassionately and in detail how his comrades in France or Brazil are working, an activist who splendidly understands a company's structure and its weak and strong points, and moreover is thoroughly informed about contemporary labor legislation.

**I**T ALSO SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE that the transnational firms and the petroleum industry have become the principal focal points of growth of the workers' movement. Transnational companies not only brought their technology and labor relations to Russia, they have also willy-nilly created the conditions for

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**The productivity of labor  
experienced a qualitative leap  
compared to the old factories but  
along with the growth in  
productivity, the self-awareness of  
workers grew as well.**

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the spread of the international experience of social struggle. The transnational companies astutely opted for the creation of young workforces not blighted by the Soviet workers' culture and capable of quickly assimilating the new technology. Their calculations were borne out: the productivity of labor experienced a qualitative leap compared to the old factories — suffice it to compare the Ford factory

with AvtoVAZ — but along with the growth in productivity, the self-awareness of workers grew as well. This was expressed at the economic level quite simply: new trade unions emerged demanding higher wages. A new disciplined workforce, that had become used to clear and well-defined work was capable also of organizing efficient and disciplined strike actions. But the "virus of class struggle," finding itself in a favorable environment in the new firms, gradually began to "infect" the old ones as well. Along with the first successful demonstrations, information was spread, experience was exchanged, and most importantly a sense of self-confidence emerged. The business press complained that Western capital had brought to Russia the ideas of radical trade unionism.

In August of 2008 a strike situation crystallized in the former flagship of Soviet industry, AvtoVAZ, but in the end the strike failed. The first "surprise effect" had waned and under the changed conditions management was much better prepared to confront the workers.

In a typical Soviet corporate city, in which life was organized around one gigantic factory, any labor dispute would grow into a political confrontation, and vice-versa. Urban problems, public transport issues, welfare conditions, and conditions of social life generally had an immediate and direct impact on production.

When the drivers of public minibuses struck, the workers of AvtoVAZ were unable to get to the factory. In such situations management behaved aggressively and uncompromisingly, relying on the open support of the authorities. The achievements of comrades working in transnational companies encouraged those working in the privatized sector of industry to up their demands as well, but these successes could not always be repeated.

Against this background, the new strike in the Petersburg Ford Factory, begun on November 7, 2007 [MV: old calendar], on the anniversary of the October Revolution, took on symbolic significance. The strike lasted less than a day and was curtailed by a court decision, but the trade union had been prepared for this. Not even two weeks had passed when on November 20 a new strike started, but this time it was open-ended. The events in the Ford factory were but a part of a general surge in the workers' movement which had by that time embraced Petersburg and Leningrad. Conflicts that had broken out before summer had ended in the Heineken brewery and the Coca Cola plants, which were followed by a conflict in the local section of the Russian Postal Service. In all of these cases the workers' resistance was accompanied by the creation of new free trade unions that endeavored to demonstrate their ability to improve the workers' situation. Often a trade union formed simply because a conflict in a factory had reached the bursting point or because the working conditions were perceived by the majority of the workforce as unsatisfactory. The successes of the Ford workers demonstrated that a change could be achieved through energetic, organized joint action. By the beginning of autumn 2007 it seemed that workers' demonstrations were declining, and many trade union leaders found themselves in a dilemma, not knowing precisely what to do next, while public opinion was distracted by the Duma electoral campaign which had then begun, and by debates among the po-

litical class about who would become Putin's successor.

HOWEVER THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER changed the situation again. Even as the vacuous and languid electoral campaign produced fatigue and befuddlement amongst the general public, news of new workers' protest actions began to come from Petersburg. After the Ford warning strike, the dockers' strike began on November 13. By the end of the month the dockers in some factories decided against attempts to stop work completely, and instead adopted the Italian strike, i.e., "working to rule" which under Russian conditions might well have a greater impact on the port owners. The conflict in the Petersburg Post Office once again made the news, embellished by court cases and actions of solidarity in defense of the fired trade union members. The locomotive brigades declared a strike for November 28. The conflict in the Ford factory occurred in consonance with the general swell of workers' protests, and the strike coincided in time with elections to the State Duma. Neither the pro-government party, "One Russia," nor the official opposition, earned the sympathies of the strikers, and the trade union put forth the slogan, "Don't vote, strike!"

Russian legislation in fact prohibits strikes — although technically a one-day strike is possible before a court decision can be handed down. The Ford strike was a challenge to both management and the state. It lasted three weeks and became a symbol of the workers' resistance. It ended in a compromise, which essentially brought victory to the trade union. Wages were raised, and the workers were given a guarantee of employment to offset the company's endeavors to expand outsourcing. However the victory at the Ford factory was the last significant success of the free trade unions.

The economic crisis loomed, finally made its appearance, and by the end of 2008 had resulted in a massive cutback in production. Although the bulk of dismissals were of white col-

lar workers, the situation of the industrial workers also deteriorated. The official Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) declared struggle through strikes to be its most important priority under the crisis conditions. The leaders of the workers' organization began to be attacked — in particular Aleksei Etmanov was assaulted twice, and on the second occasion the attacker, arrested at the scene of the crime by workers' activists, was released by the police. The congress of the VKT held in November 2008 declared that "actions of solidarity must become the standard of activities in the free trade unions," and called on people to respond to violence against worker activists with "a powerful protest campaign" organized by "the forces of the left." Solidarity actions remained a weak aspect of the new workers' movement, which has almost no such experience. So far each organization has protected itself, receiving only basic moral support from colleagues and comrades in other trade unions. Aleksei Etmanov, the leader of the MPRA and the Ford workers, declared that the trade union struggle was no longer adequate, and that a workers' party was needed. Nonetheless there is not full unity on this issue even in the ranks of the MPRA, not to speak of other trade unionists. The majority of left-wing organizations are sects of little significance, and the official Dumas opposition expresses the interests of management with no less decisiveness than those holding power. This applies not in the last instance to the Communist Party (KPRF) which supports management against workers every time a strike occurs. The KPRF leaders are right-wing conservatives in their ideology and for them the most interesting topic is the struggle against the Jewish conspiracy and defense of Russian Orthodox values. In January 2009 the MPRA council addressed a petition to the government of Russia in which it offered its view of "anti-crisis measures": establishment of trade union control of the financial resources allocated to companies by the state; access of the trade unions to information on the financial and

economic position of a firm; full information concerning a company's profits; welfare subsidies to dismissed workers. Workers who have lost their jobs should be exempted from paying off loans for the duration of their unemployment and the state should establish a system for monitoring compliance with labor legislation. Companies that take unjust advantage of the crisis to erode the working conditions of their workers and who misuse state subsidies systematically violate the labor code and the trade union law, should be nationalized. Anti-crisis committees should be created to include representatives of a company's management, representatives of trade unions operating in the firm, and representatives of the state-authorities. A nationwide anti-crisis plan coordinated with the Russian tripartite commission must be drafted, taking into account the solutions proffered by the factory committees.

But even these quite moderate demands were ignored by the government, which gave not so much as a hint of willingness on its part to carry on negotiations with the trade unions. For their part workers' organizations are themselves not ready for decisive actions in factories or on the street. Given such a situation, one should not expect a new upsurge of the workers' movement in Russia. But just as little can one imagine that workers will silently endure the crisis, the decline in the standard of living, dismissals and inflation. Social tension will grow ineluctably, and the protest movement will just as ineluctably move into the streets, as was already the case at the end of 2008 in the Far East. These protests will hardly be purely worker and class protests in composition, but the activists and leaders of the new free trade unions will undoubtedly be playing a not inconsiderable role in them. The time for politics has come upon us. And the fact that a "pure" class organization is today an unachievable goal for left-wing forces by no means removes the necessity of acting in accordance with their ideas and principles.

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# Notes Toward a Vision of The Workers' Movement in Mexico

JORGE ROBLES

TRANSLATED BY DAN LA BOTZ

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*To the memory of Dale Hathaway and Antonioin Villalba*

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IN ORDER TO EVALUATE AND UNDERSTAND the current situation of the workers' movement in Mexico as power has shifted from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to the National Action Party (PAN), it is important to understand the character of the Mexican regime and its historical development. Does a change in the ruling party represent the beginning of a democratic transition and a change in the system?

The Mexican system is a corporate state, and far from being democratic, not only at the parliamentary level, but also in the most important aspect of the life of each citizen, in the everyday life of the Mexican people. The Mexican state is far from being a welfare state, as is clear from the obvious lack of liberty, and social and political democracy. The system's social and economic benefits form part of the established mechanisms of the corporate state which exists for the reproduction of the labor force and for the establishment of the minimal conditions of the governability and functionality of the corporate system.<sup>1</sup>

It was President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-1928), who by way of the Mexican Embassy, copied the model of the corporate state from Fascist Italy. Officials associated with the Mexi-

can embassy there copied and implemented the Fascist model not only in the official party but also in the labor unions. To develop this project, Calles took advantage of intellectuals who traveled throughout Europe studying models of party structure and mechanisms of maintaining legitimacy which would permit him to control the most significant social groups: independent unions and peasant organizations.

The political operatives who carried out the transfer of Mussolini's model to Mexico were Manuel Y. de Negri and José Manuel Puig Casaunac, who, after serving as ambassadors to Italy, each occupied the post of Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. Another important agent was Abelardo L. Rodríguez, who traveled to Europe expressly to put the final touches on the Federal Labor Law (LFT), later served as Secretary of Labor, and finally as president (1932-1934). Rodríguez, who used the new corporate law against the independent unions, could count on the support of union officials such as Luis N. Morones, then Lombardo Toledano, and finally de Fidel Velásquez.<sup>2</sup>

Representative Ezequiel Padilla, President Plutarco Elías Calles's man in the House of Representatives in 1932, and later Ambassador to Italy, spoke favorably of fascism, a system which had suppressed the class struggle and replaced it with class collaboration. He lauded the Fascist organizations called corporations in which "the worker was no longer isolated." The corporations, he pointed out, coordinated all of the unions, organizing them into a Council of

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Corporations, then a Ministry of Corporations, and finally enveloping them in the Fascist state. His eulogy of the Fascist system was greeted with a round of applause.<sup>3</sup>

## The Corporate System

CORPORATISM AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM implied the integration of the citizens of a country into the state apparatus by way of corporations, whether those be civic associations, neighborhood

groups, merchants' organizations, labor unions, or employers' chambers of commerce, with the goal of maintaining the established order and guaranteeing the participation of the state as the means of assuring governability.

In the world of work, the corporations are none other than the workers' unions and the employers' association. Corporatism uses these organizations as transmission belts that unite the individual with the state apparatus with the intention of guaranteeing the efficient application of the appropriate legislation in each sector, attempting to maintain social control over the entire population, and, as has been made evident, trying to keep wages as an economic variable under control in times of economic crisis.

In terms of ideology, all corporatist regimes have been founded upon nationalism. The nation is seen as the supreme reality to which other groups, classes, and individuals must submit. Consequently, every movement that demands its own autonomous space is considered to be an attack on the nation. That's why the legitimate right of indigenous communities to live autonomously is crucified. Internationalism is a sin against the nation, as is seen when during union struggles genuine unions are accused of being traitors to the country when they establish alliances with unions in other countries.<sup>4</sup>

The Mexican corporatist regime attempts

to include the totality of social reality; it becomes involved in questions of private morality and in matters of everyday life. The Mexican state, self-defined as the legal incarnation of the nation, demands unity and strength in the national leader, the president of the republic, and diminishes the judicial and legislative powers.<sup>5</sup>

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President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928) copied the model of the corporate state from Fascist Italy.

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The Mexican state may or may not recognize class conflict, but it disciplines and subordinates such conflicts to the interest of the nation: No

struggle outside of the legal framework. Nothing outside of the legal system designed to control the workers. Nothing that permits the autonomous action of citizens. And, if by some oversight some free space should be discovered, the state will legislate to contain it, as it is attempting to do today with Secretary of Labor Javier Lozano's project of labor law reform.<sup>6</sup>

An important point: Corruption is part of the system. It is one of the props of the Mexican corporate regime even though it harms its image, and it is encouraged as a substitute for the ineffectiveness of the nationalist ideology as the sole pillar of the system. Corruption, constructed out of economic relations within the system, is converted into one more element propping up the system. Corruption is now part of the system without which it could hardly operate.

## Company Unions and Corporate Unions

PERHAPS THE GROUP MOST REPRESENTATIVE of *sindicalismo blanco* [white unionism], that is to say unions directly controlled by the bosses, is the Confederation of Mexican Union Groups (CONASIM), which, as they themselves recognize, has its roots in 1931 when it was established to administer provisions created and promoted by the Federal Labor Law. It was formally constituted in October, 2000 by the fu-

sion of the Federation of Free Unions, the National Federation of Progressive Unions “José María Morelos y Pavón,” and the “Cuauhtémoc y Famosa” Union of Workers. The latter was born on November 5, 1931, and became the paradigm for employer protection unionism controlled directly by the employers. Its principal area of operation is in the North of the country, with unions in commerce, bottling, packing, metal, auto, and claims 90,000 members.<sup>7</sup> If the corporatization of union and employer organization began legally in 1931 with the Federal Labor Law (LFT), the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM) has had an alliance between union leaders and [state] power since 1918, and was the product of a government initiated meeting.

The Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) began in the same way in 1936, and though it developed within the framework of popular fronts, its corporate structure was refined and this confederation was converted into the formal pillar of the regime, charged with announcing the official candidates for president, and functioning in an efficient way to control the workers. When the Federal Labor Law itself is not sufficient, the CTM does the job through gangster practices such as the takeover of union halls at the point of a machine gun and the violent commandeering of union meetings in order to impose its flunkies. This practice produces new pack leaders who retake control of many workplaces, of course, with the sale of protection contracts. This upsurge also generates internal competition between the union mafias for the control of the union registrations handed out by the government, which by this time have been converted into real sales franchises peddling protection to the employers.

Since 1952, internal groups have disputed the division of the franchises and reveal the competition for this “market in protection to the employers and the government.” They separated from the CTM, but not from its practices, forming as the Revolutionary Confedera-

tion of Workers and Peasants (CROC) and the Revolutionary Workers Confederation (COR). In order to control this proliferation of confederations and unions, in 1966 the Institutional Revolutionary Party/Government brought them together in the Congress of Labor which came to have 42 union organizations, most of the largest unions in the most important sectors of industry in the country.<sup>8</sup>

### **Employer Protection Contracts**

IN MEXICO DURING THE 1970S, the few authentic unions of that period such as the Welders League (LS), the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), the Union of Electrical Workers of the Mexican Republic (STERM), and the Independent Union Front (FSI), attempted to expand the principle of autonomy, freedom, and democracy but confronted on a daily basis a judicial labor court which impeded their growth as a legitimate current of worker organization. One of the most frequent practices of official unionism, gathered together in those years on the Congress of Labor (CT), consisted of establishing contractual relations with the bosses without the workers involved even knowing of the existence of those unions. In everyday language they were called “ghost unions,” that is, unions with a legal existence but absolutely unknown to the workers. In many cases they didn’t even rob the workers of dues because dues weren’t collected by anybody.

When, after a long process of union organization, the workers succeeded in establishing their own independent and democratic workers’ organization, they would then attempt to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement. But often they found themselves stalled at the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration because there was already a recognized labor union and a collective bargaining agreement at that workplace with a contract signed on file, even though the workers knew nothing about it. At that moment, when the organized presence of the men and women who worked in the plant became

visible to the company, the boss's offensive to destroy the organization began: threats to the family, beatings, harassment, unjustified firings, blackmail, payoffs, kidnapping carried out by the police, and even assassinations such as that of Efraín Calderón Lara of the Independent Union Front of the FAT in Yucatán.

If while they were organizing the workers had discovered the existence of the "ghost union," and of the collective bargaining agreement on file at the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, then they would demand the right to administer that contract. If — after many months of resisting the employers' attack, the bureaucracy and corruption of the labor board and the Secretary of Labor, and after having the union representation election by voting out loud in front of management and the labor authorities — if finally the workers won, they got only the right to administer the existing contract, a document that gave them few or no rights and many responsibilities and obligations. To begin with such a contract was and is to begin with nothing, confronting official policies that restrict rights and benefits such as wage and benefit ceilings. This experience came to be called "*contratismo*" or "protection contracts," that is, contracts that protect the companies against real labor unions.

With the passage of time, a new term, somewhat imprecise but with an important social message, arose to describe the concept born from the democratic workers' movement's opposition to "*contratismo*": Collective Contract to Protect the Bosses. Little by little, the concept drew the attention of labor scholars and of other unions which, as they grew, confronted this phenomenon, until there was an explicit recognition of this employer practice.

The phenomenon is not new in Mexico. It was not born in the 1980s with the neoliberal policies, nor was it born with Arsénio Farel Cubillas who, as Secretary of Labor, gave out union registrations as franchises to his friends and to big shots.<sup>9</sup> Nor was it born during the

1950s when various dissident groups within the Confederation of Mexican Workers created new unions as their private businesses. The system was born when labor legislation converted the unions into "registered trade marks" and when the general secretaries [top officers of the unions] became their sole legal representatives. This gave rise to a kind of "imperial unionism" where nothing happened without the approval of "my general secretary," the sole legal authority recognized by the state and the only one who could call or not call a strike. Union struggles and the strike in particular thus became a source of wealth, and labor peace and not striking were converted into a commodity coveted by businessmen, turning the union organization itself into a kind of merchandise and into a mechanism of control through the sale of protection contracts serving the employers' economic interests.

Protection contracts are characterized by the fact that they offer a professional service of protection against the independent organization of workers. They don't necessarily have to operate in a spectral fashion like ghosts, and over time they can even change their form to conform to new circumstances and to meet the needs of the employers. The protection union can, if the employers or the unions holding the registration think it prudent, even have some sort of labor union life, if only to justify the union dues that the officials either pocket themselves or use to pay their organizers, thugs, and contractors.<sup>10</sup> Protection contracts can be administered by unions which presumably oppose or criticize this kind of arrangement, but they can use it, if necessary for their self-interest, as has been done by the Union of the Metropolitan Collective Transportation system<sup>11</sup>, television Channel 40<sup>12</sup>, and the daily newspaper *La Prensa en Oaxaca*<sup>13</sup>. The most cynical case might be the Morelos Group of the Confederation of Mexican Workers which announces and sells its protection contracts over the Internet.

Mexico's major unions, most of them in the Congress of Labor (CT), the umbrella organi-

zation of labor, have been in a state of flux. The Federation of Unions at the Service of the State suffered an abrupt fall with the withdrawal recently of 21 unions and the formation of a union of public employees, called the Democratic Union Federation of Workers at the Service of

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One of the most frequent practices of official unionism . . . consisted of establishing contractual relations with the bosses without the workers involved even knowing of the existence of those unions.

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the State headed by Elba Esther Gordillo.<sup>14</sup> Among the national unions, the railroad workers union was dismantled by privatization, even though its leader continues to collect union dues from thousands of retired workers. The oil workers union leaders sold permission to lay off 170,000 workers. The withdrawal of the Federation of Unions of Goods and Services (FESEBS), the Social Security Workers Union, and others represents about half a million workers, such as aviation pilots, flight attendants, national pawnshop workers, technical and manual film workers, street car and telephone workers. The Mexican Electrical Workers (SME) continued to belong to the CT, even though it is a founder of the Mexican Union Front.

### **The Lozano Project of Labor Law Reform<sup>15</sup>**

Beginning in the 1980s, the Mexican economy's opening up of its markets placed it at a disadvantage in terms of global competition, both in terms of its need for a legal framework as well as its lack of a modern industrial plant. President Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) defined the conditions of economic growth in terms of the neoliberal model: economic stability, economic

modernization, and finding investment resources by way of slimming down the state, together with the economic opening and legal changes in labor relations.

Meanwhile, the vertical structure of Taylorism was being transformed: the specialized worker who received strict orders regarding his work activities was changed by the multi-tasks worker under the complete control of the work process and by the establishment of autonomous work teams responsible for the "total quality" of the product at each stage of the work process. This transformation began in the Toyota auto factory in Japan, which based its productive processes on the workers' flexibility and mobility with minimum specialization, more supervision, and with pay strictly tied to each worker's productivity. While the development of technology within the framework of globalization brought these changes to the production process, globalization led to competition for the new spaces in the world market, and led to attempts to lower production costs. The result was a production system made up of assembly plants in different regions of the world and based on lower costs of primary materials, transportation, and labor. These transformations required the active participation of workers in order to redefine working conditions in the new production model without which the firms' otherwise unilateral plans always run up against the obstacle of too little active and creative involvement which they require.

According to the official reports of the World Bank itself, only real unions which are truly representative have the capacity to negotiate within the new legal framework of labor relations. To solve this problem there are two options. One can democratize the world of work so that there is a voluntary collective participation of workers in the new processes, with real economic benefits for them such as is found at MAHLE in Aguascalientes. At MAHLE, formerly Sealed Power, an auto parts factory, the FAT's steelworker affiliate STIMAHCS car-

ried out a democratic discussion within the union and negotiations with the company, leading to worker training and higher wages to achieve higher quality, and the plant became the first to achieve ISO 9000 certification.

Or, one can take up the other option, which involves seeming to comply with the World Bank requirements but imposing the model of simulated contracts, an authoritarian imposition carried out in a unilateral way by the firm, masking this authoritarianism with what is called in Mexico, "the New Labor Culture." In order to push forward the authoritarian alternative, in February 2009 the government of President Felipe Calderón presented to the Representatives and Senators of the National Action Party (PAN), the Lozano Project for labor law reform with proposals that make aggressive assaults on labor rights.

The Federal Labor Law (LFT) provides that employers can employ workers only on the basis of an eight-hour-day and a 48-hour-week with pay for 56 hours. Overtime work is not obligatory for the worker, and if he should work overtime the first nine hours are paid double and after that triple. The Lozano Project would eliminate the maximum of 48 hour, would eliminate the double and triple pay for overtime, and would make overtime obligatory.

The right to strike would be impeded under the Lozano Project since the employer would have to authorize, previous to the [now legally required] strike notification vote, the list of workers, which would in practice be converted into a blacklist and firing even before the strike took effect.

The Lozano Project would legalize outsourcing, while under existing legislation an employer who subcontracts is obliged to comply with labor rights.

At present employers choose a union and sign protection contracts, but the independent unions have used a loophole in the law to fight for representation of a company's workers. With the Lozano Project, this possibility would be

lost because it would require that the workers involved [in a representation election] previously recognized by the employer before substitution of a new union for a company union. This, in practice, would mean the immediate firing of the dissident workers, even before the election took place.

When a worker is fired without cause, [s]he has the right to be returned to her job and to compensation equivalent to his lost wages during the period of legal proceedings. The Lozano Project would limit this right to just six months' lost wages, when in practice the legal process often takes as long as two years. This is a way of cheapening firings and of discouraging workers from fighting for their legal rights.

The Lozano Project would also keep unions secret by not making available records of their legal existence, their members, or their collective bargaining agreements, maintaining present practices that keep members in the dark so that they don't even know if they have a contract or what union represents them.

In conclusion, the Lozano Project, far from modernizing the legal norms on the basis of international standards, such as those of the C International Labor Organization (ILO), would establish new legal controls to protect employers, the official unions, and the company unions.

COUNTERPOSED TO IT is the strategic proposal for Labor Reform and Productivity of the National Union of Workers (UNT), which attacks the problem at the root by dismantling the corporate system.<sup>16</sup> The UNT proposal calls for:

- The open registration of labor unions and their jurisdictions. [That is not subject to government approval of the union or its officers.] The current legislation restricts the unions by industry or craft, activity or territory, making it impossible for them to grow or to be representative.
- Free, direct, and secret vote in union representation elections and in union officers elec-

tions based on valid voting lists and places and votes taken in safe conditions.

- A public registration of labor unions and collective bargaining agreements. At present the collective bargaining agreements are secret and they serve to protect the firms since most of them have been signed by corporate and corrupt unions which in addition to selling protection to the firms make it impossible for workers to exercise their labor rights. What is needed is transparency in the matter of registrations and in the administration of the unions themselves.
- The substitution of the Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration by Labor Judges from the federal, state and Federal District judiciaries. The powerful control of the federal or local executive over the boards and the presence of the corporate unions on them keeps these bodies from acting in a neutral fashion in resolving the issues that come before them, especially collective issues, and consequently favors the existing system of subordination of the unions.
- Elimination of the “exclusion clause” used to expel members from the union or to force them to resign their employment, a measure often used against dissident members. This clause has already been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Justice.
- Elimination of the “orders of exception” which deprive workers in various sectors of their collective rights such as freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the strike. Workers at the Development Bank and public employees do not have the right to collective bargaining or the right to strike. Workers at the Autonomous Universities [state universities throughout Mexico] cannot form industry-wide unions, and workers in special government offices such as human rights and electoral services, for example, are restricted by law from the exercise of these elementary rights. Confidential employees also have in practice insuperable obstacles.
- The express prohibition of workers’ obligatory affiliation with a union of a particular confederation or with a political party. Participating in a union should not limit the workers’ free exercise of political rights.

## The Reconstitution of the Workers’ Movement

THE SYSTEM OF CORPORATE CONTROL in Mexico is suffering a readjustment to the new circumstances imposed by globalization of the economy, the standardization of production conditions, the competition for international markets, and now the global economic crisis. The productive processes have been adapted to these circumstances, innovating the forms and standards of production, redefining the form and function of the labor force. If at the beginning of the century, the rationalization of the productive processes gave birth to assembly line production, and to specialization and absolute subordination to the mid-level supervisors, today the administrative innovations in the productive forces also derive from the auto industry and in particular from the Toyota Motors factory in Japan, which introduced new productive standards and reorganized, once again, the role of the work force.

This new model has been the promoter of the famous QS [International Standardization Organization — Quality Standards or ISO QS], job flexibility, the formation of quality circles and production teams responsible for different aspects of the productive process. The globalization of the economy, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and finally the free flow of capital in competition to find the best conditions for the exploitation of labor have opened up the borders and with that brought about the implementation of these measures, directly altering the stability of the work force and in the end demonstrating the inoperability of the existing system of corporate control.

This is not a beneficial change for workers. On the contrary, if the old style of corporate control of the unions has been efficient until now, it is because the state acted to offer itself as the guarantor of capital, both foreign and national, in order to encourage investment in our country. The social security institutions, health and pension plans primarily, and the rec-

ognition of the right to a job and stability in employment are menaced by neoliberalism and more by the recent crisis. In this context, the Mexican workers' movement must bring about a renovation of unionism, which implies recognizing the experience that as workers we can bring to the productive area, which has within itself the possibility of self-management in the future, as well as returning union organizations to the hands of the workers in order to achieve authentic, autonomous, and democratic unions.

### **The May 1st Inter-Union Coordinating Committee**

THE MAY 1ST INTER-UNION COORDINATING COMMITTEE (CIPM) — established by several union, social, and political organizations: the National Coordinating Committee of the Teachers Union (CNTE), the Independent Union of Workers of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, the Mexican Electrical Workers, the Authentic Labor Front, the Union of Workers of the National Autonomous University, among others — represented an important effort at creating an independent union alliance. It was a project of working class solidarity developed in the Valley of Mexico beginning on May 1, 1995, originally at the suggestion of Route 100 workers and the Independent Proletarian Movement. Nevertheless, as it developed, those who came to dominate the discussion were not the unions themselves but rather the opposition union currents, not only within the corporate unions, but also in the independent unions.

The CIPM lacked a structure that would have permitted it to work in an autonomous way with the various sectors, without neglecting the coordinating mechanism: the students discussed strategies and attempted to make decisions about union strategy; the political parties did the same with the students and the unions. All of the CIPM's work became drowned in discussions and speeches of the political sharpshooters until it disappeared by

dissolving itself into the National Dialogue. The National Dialogue represented a failed attempt at unity promoted by the Nacional Union of Workers (UNT) and the peasant organizations in the Mexican Union Front.

### **La Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT) y el Frente Sindical Mexicano (FSM)**

SINCE THE DEATH OF FIDEL VELÁSQUEZ, the Confederation of Mexico Workers (CTM) has

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The social security institutions, health and pension plans primarily, and the recognition of the right to a job and stability in employment are menaced by neoliberalism and more by the recent crisis.

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shown itself to be even more vicious and intolerant than it was forty years ago when in its gangster-style it threw itself into the task of retaking control of the big industrial unions — railroad workers, miners, petroleum workers — which since its founding had separated themselves from official control.

With the coming to power of the conservative National Action Party, the new government, far from dismantling the control over the unions, has rather been very effective in re-establishing corporate relations. The CTM remains its fundamental interlocutor, without totally ruling out new spaces of discussion with the company unions and with the lawyers who facilitate the sale of protection contracts by non-institutional means.

As a result of the changes taking place both in the economy and politically in 1995, the Forum Unions Face the Nation (FORO) was established with two different tendencies within

it. The first hoped to consolidate the organizational advance of the FORO, proposing the creation of a new labor federation which would engage in a frontal attack on the Congress of Labor. Some of the unions promoting this position were the university workers of STUNAM, the FAT, and some who continued to be members of the Congress of Labor, but decided to leave it and promote a new project. This was the origin of the National Union of Workers (UNT).<sup>17</sup>

The other group decided to stay in the Congress of Labor and consequently they opposed the formation of the new federation. Among them were the Teachers Union (el SNTE) led by Elba Esther Gordillo, together with the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers (COR), the union of the fishing industry, the National Council of Workers, and the Mexican Electrical Workers (SME). At the beginning they tried to keep themselves together, taking the name the Little Forum [el Forito]. The alliance between Gordillo of the teachers and the electrical workers of the SME lasted until there was a change in the leadership of the latter. With the retirement of Pedro Castillo and the arrival of Rosendo Flores, the Electrical Workers Union joined with the university workers of SITUAM and others to form the Mexican Union Front (FSM).

Thus by the beginning of the 2000s there were two independent labor formations, the UNT and the FSM. These two independent national options have maintained a relationship alternately drawing closer and moving away from each other, depending on the necessities of the situation at each moment. Alone, neither is representative of the real national labor movement. The FSM is completely dominated by the SME and its dynamic, by its being limited to the Valley of Mexico, and by the industrial necessities and the contract negotiations of the SME.

Without a doubt the UNT, which represents a much more interesting option, has not been able to consolidate itself at the national

level. Its largest union, the Social Security workers, is linked in any parts of the country to the PRI, and it has even marched together with the CTM in various parts of the country, such as Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez. Valdemar Gutiérrez, the general secretary of the union, without the knowledge of his members, signed away important rights linked to retirement and pensions. At the local level in the Valley of Mexico, the UNT drags along with it the union of the Metro of Mexico City, one of the most corrupt unions and one of the greatest violators of labor rights.

Nevertheless, some of the progressive characteristics of the UNT are important. Most notably, decisions are made by consensus, and there is collective leadership. Equity among all union members exists, as well as transparency in its plenums, even in front of the press. It has an international presence as well as a capacity for mobilizing, including the ability to form alliances with peasants and NGOs. Since its founding the Federation has not sought government recognition of its leadership through the legally required process called *toma de nota*, taking note. Its agenda has been brought into line with the national and international agenda on matters such as union rights, a change in the labor regime, protection contracts, and others.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Movement for Food and Energy Sovereignty, Workers Rights, and Democratic Liberties**

THIS MOVEMENT, AS IT'S CALLED, was formed in January, 2008 as part of the political alliance of the UNT growing out of joint actions around the defense of the state-owned petroleum industry and against rising prices and the loss of the purchasing power of wages. The movement brings together diverse social forces of the left, including unregistered political parties, non-governmental organizations, workers' unions and peasant and fishers' organizations. It aims at the restoration of constitutional legality as opposed to the actual neoliberal model and its social im-

pact — unemployment, poverty, and the lack of freedom are constants to the detriment of the marginal classes and the majorities of the field and the city. The movement brings together many of the most active labor unions, peasant organizations, NGOs, and political parties.

The Movement proposes calling together organizations of peasants, unions, social movements, citizens, and the people in general who are harmed by current government policies to participate in our plan of struggle; to construct a movement that extends to all of the states and regions of the Mexican Republic; to promote solidarity and linkages with like-minded international organizations; and to demand that the government at all levels act in accordance with their constitutional powers to deal with the proposals to solve the political and social crisis of the country.<sup>19</sup>

The Movement represents without doubt a great advance in the policy of alliance constructed over many years. But it also presents serious difficulties with regard to the real change of the situation of workers and changes in the corporate regime. Unity of action is limited by the essential programmatic differences. For example, the electrical workers in the SME take the position that they want to maintain the existing labor regime, while the National Confederation of Peasants (CNC), a peasant bulwark of the PRI, holds the same position in the countryside. The National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE), the opposition in the teachers' union, pushes for a radical change in the regime but keeping intact the existing labor legislation. The FAT and the UNT stand for the establishment of a new democratic labor regime, with International Labor Organization standards as the foundation, together with an end to corporate control over the unions exercised by the state and the employers.

### **Urgent Task of the Independent Union Movement Today**

THE INDEPENDENT UNION MOVEMENT TODAY

faces a number of challenges that present it with urgent new tasks, while at the same time fundamental tasks still remain. The movement will continue to demand adherence to the standards of the International Labor Organization's Conventions 87 (the right to join a union of one's choosing); 98 (the right to collective bargaining); and 169 (the rights of indigenous peoples). At the same time, the movement has to broaden the relations of the labor movement to include all progressive political forces in order to push forward democratic reform which includes autonomy, democracy, and union rights. The movement must also try to form a closer relationship to Andrés Manuel López Obrador [presidential candidate in 2006 who claims to have won the election and calls himself the Legitimate President of the Legitimate Government of Mexico], whose movement has so far remained absent in the struggle for labor rights.

On a regional level, the Mexican independent union movement must continue to fight for the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The movement must broaden solidarity concretely in order to strengthen organizing strategies, to respond to conflicts and strikes, and to give attention to problems of health and safety in the workplace in alliance with the networks which are active on the U.S.-Mexico border. The movement needs to push forward the formation of a union coordinating committee of North America as recently exemplified in the work of the Trinational Coordinating Committee of Energy Unions in which the Mexican organizations SME (electrical), SUTIN (nuclear), and the FAT (confederation) participated. And, it must support the campaigns of social movements and NGOs of the NAFTA countries dealing with issues of workers' rights, immigrant workers' rights, wages, employment, and poverty. The movement must contribute through the building of bridges and networks to the development of positions and alterna-

tives toward the process of continental integration in Central America and the Caribbean, and it must develop common strategies to push forward the Continental Social Agenda.

At the global level, the movement must also develop multilateral international exchanges with union organizations in other countries in order to compare experiences and to construct common strategies and build networks of solidarity at the international level. In particular, it must coordinate international strategies in the energy, metal, auto and autoparts, textile, transport, and maquila sectors. The independent union movement of Mexico needs to work with European unions to monitor and develop common strategies to confront the transnational firms which have productive investments in Mexico, with the goal of improving workers' conditions. There is much to be done.

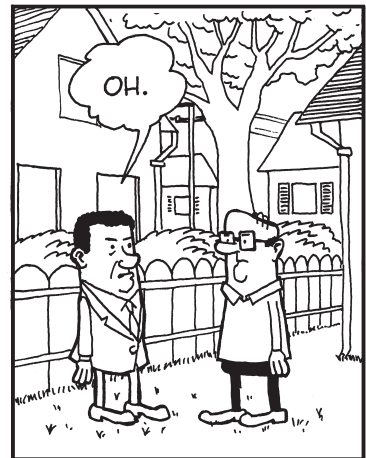
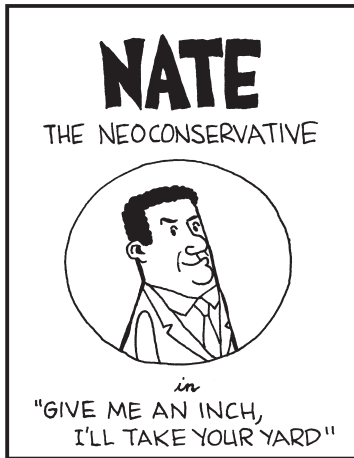
#### NOTES

1. "It is customary in our country to affirm that we are practically the inventor of social rights. . . . Our social rights are the expression of state control over the social force of the workers." Jorge Megia Prieto's interview with Néstor de Buen, *Fidel Velásquez: 47 años de historia y poder* (Mexico: Ed. Diana, 1981) p. 145.
2. To learn more about the Italian influence in the imposition of the corporate system in Mexico, see Robles, Jorge, "Los contratos de protección: un producto de la Ley Federal del Trabajo," in: Bouzas, Alfonso et al, *Contratación Colectiva de protección en México. Informe a la Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT)* (Mexico: UNAM-ORIT, 2007), pp. 49-95. [http://www.fatmexico.org/analisis/Contratos de proteccion\[1\].DOC](http://www.fatmexico.org/analisis/Contratos de proteccion[1].DOC)
3. XXXV Legislatura, *Diario de debates*. 21 de octubre de 1932. <http://cronica.diputados.gob.mx/DDebate/35/1er/Ord/19321021.html> Consultada el 30 de enero de 2009
4. This was the case with the Duro Bag company in Tamaulipas where an alliance between the National Union of Workers and the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras attempted to unionize a group of workers. The Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (JFCA) held its hearing in a hall covered with placards that accused the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) which was advising the union of having sold out the country and of being allied with U.S. labor unions. For more details about this conflict, see: Méndez H., Luis., "La respuesta obrera maquiladora en el entorno binacional," *El Cotidiano*, May/

- June, 2005, (Vol. 20, No. 11) pp. 63-71. <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/325/32513108.pdf>
5. In Mexico where labor issues are involved the courts are responsible not to the judicial branch but rather to the executive branch.
6. Lozano Proposal (Feb. 2009): Regarding cheapening firings and strengthening corporatism, see: [www.fatmexico.org/](http://www.fatmexico.org/)
7. CONASIM, "Sindicalismo con responsabilidad social," <http://segob.guanajuato.gob.mx/sil/docs/eventos/4toSem/Sindicalismo%20con%20responsabilidad%20social.pdf>.
8. Rendón, Armando, "Los reformismos en el Congreso del Trabajo," in *Confederaciones Obreras y Sindicatos nacionales en México*, ed. by Luis H. Méndez, Carlos García y Marco Antonio Leyva. Eon ediciones. México 2005
9. That's how Ramón Gámez began his union business.
10. The case of the Sindicato Progresista Justo Sierra de Ramón Gámez, at the company Zinc y sus derivados S.A. where the FAT was able to win back their collective bargaining agreement for the workers in 1997.
11. For more details see: López Laredo, Gustavo. "Democracia y corporativismo sindical. El caso de los trabajadores del metro — 1970-1987," Bachelor's Thesis, ENAH-SEP, Cuicuilco 2001, at: [www.fatmexico.org/miscelanea/index.html](http://www.fatmexico.org/miscelanea/index.html)
12. The CTM union called a strike and carried it out in collusion with TV Azteca so that that television consortium could take over the channel. See: Gómez Leyva, Ciro, "La infame historia del canal televisivo secuestrado," *Etcétera*, August 18, 2005, at [www.etcetera.com.mx/pagciro1ne58.asp](http://www.etcetera.com.mx/pagciro1ne58.asp)
13. Federación de asociaciones de periodistas mexicanos A.C., "Agresiones a la libertad de expresión en el continente americano," June 2005, at [www.fapermex.com/main/comunicados.htm](http://www.fapermex.com/main/comunicados.htm)
14. <http://dgcs.pgr.gob.mx/Sintesis/Matutina/Matutina2004/MatutinaEnero2004/Ene1004.htm>
15. [www.stps.gob.mx/ANEXOS/Comparativo\\_264.pdf](http://www.stps.gob.mx/ANEXOS/Comparativo_264.pdf) Consultada el 8 de marzo de 2009.
16. [www.fatmexico.org/analisis/ref\\_lab\\_unt\\_resumen.html](http://www.fatmexico.org/analisis/ref_lab_unt_resumen.html) The Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) holds that it is not necessary to change Mexico's labor laws, that enforcing them would be sufficient.
17. Nacional Coordinating Committee of the FAT, "Political Report," Documents of the XI National Congress November 1997, Oaxtepec, Morelos.
18. The first four are a contribution directly from the FAT based on its program and structure.
19. Canto, Manuel, "Perspectivas Políticas 2009," a presentation to the FAT on February 28, 2009.

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# Obama and Empire

THOMAS HARRISON

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AS NOAM CHOMSKY OBSERVED, “Obama’s message of ‘hope’ and ‘change’ offered a blank slate on which supporters could write their wishes” (*Znet*, Nov. 25, 2008). Millions voted for Barack Obama in order to reverse the brutal and catastrophic foreign policy of the Bush Administration, especially the war in Iraq. But as far as fundamental change is concerned, his first months in office (this is being written in mid-April) offer no real grounds for hope.

Obama has announced the closing of the prison facilities at Guantanamo Bay, but he has also indicated that the policy of rendition — essentially outsourcing torture — will remain in place. The President’s tacit recognition of the “Islamic Republic of Iran,” and some other initiatives indicate a possible shift from threats to diplomacy, but he has also renewed sanctions on Teheran. He has reiterated the Bush administration’s plan to install a missile defense system in Eastern Europe, using the same excuse — Iran. While promising to withdraw the majority of U.S. troops from Iraq by Aug. 31, 2010, he has stated that the occupation will continue with 50,000 “non-combat” soldiers until the end of 2011, the date set by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the Iraqi government for the removal of all troops. Of course, there’s a good chance that by 2011, the Administration will pressure Baghdad to allow the United States to stay. In Afghanistan, Obama wants to add 21,000 troops to the 35,000 already there.

Obama’s stated goal of defeating Al Qaeda

and the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot be accomplished by military means without further escalation and enormous civilian casualties, and probably not even then. The AfPak War, as it is now called, provides a perfect example of the toxic effect of U.S. intervention, its blind militarism and cynical political manipulation fueling the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Though only a small minority of the Pakistani people would freely choose Taliban rule, they are overwhelmingly hostile to any U.S.-sponsored war. On April 14, *The New York Times* reported on Taliban and Al Qaeda inroads in Punjab, the country’s most populous province; after interviewing villagers, the reporter declared that “the single biggest obstacle to stopping the advance of militancy was the attitudes of Pakistanis themselves, whose fury at the United States has led to blind support for everyone who goes against it.” As long as U.S. drones continue to kill Pakistani civilians, with the de facto complicity of Islamabad, further accommodations to the viciously misogynistic rule of the Taliban, like those in the Swat Valley, are inevitable.

If a negotiated solution is possible, it can only be carried out in a radically reconfigured context, one that probably must include a resolution of the Kashmir problem. In that Muslim-majority region, held against its will by India since 1947, a proxy war has been going on for decades. The Indian army maintains a brutal occupation, while Delhi refuses to discuss self-determination for the Kashmiri people (evidence indicates that they would vote to be independent from both Pakistan and India). Meanwhile, Pakistan continues a de facto war against India through its surrogates, the Islamist insurgent groups — one of which was evi-

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dently responsible for the Mumbai terror attacks.

The undeclared war between India and Pakistan has an impact on the war in Afghanistan too, where President Karzai enjoys Delhi's strong backing and Islamabad exerts influence over Taliban forces in the eastern part of the country. Peace between the two nuclear-armed regional powers might be achieved through political negotiations between Delhi and Islamabad, with the essential condition that the Kashmiris be allowed to govern themselves. But the Obama Administration is continuing the Bush strategy of "tilting" towards India, as a strategic counterweight to China, thus giving Delhi no incentive to make concessions.

The uproar over the AIG bonuses cast a harsh light on the influence wielded by Geithner, Summers, and their ilk over the President and his cabinet. A great many people are noticing that the new Administration's response to the collapse of banking and finance is all too similar to the neoliberal crony capitalism of its predecessors. What has received less attention so far in the major media is the striking continuity evident in Obama's foreign policy. The President has supported an increase in the military budget, as promised during the campaign, proposing \$21 billion more in military spending than under Bush — \$534 billion, compared to Bush's \$513 billion. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has called for cutting some obsolete and very expensive weapons systems, but he is also seeking more money for drones and troop support. In addition, Obama is asking for more war funding for Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan — an expected additional \$75.5 billion for the remainder of 2009 (as with Bush's budgets, these war funds are above and beyond the regular defense budget).

### **An Empire Like No Other**

SINCE WORLD WAR II, successive U.S. administrations, without exception, have pursued not just global military dominance, but overwhelm-

ing dominance. NATO's purpose has always been more about maintaining Washington's control over its allies than about defense against a common enemy (a Soviet invasion of West-

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ern Europe was never a serious possibility). And now that the United States is losing its economic predominance, American leaders feel they must compensate militarily. Its armed forces must possess a military advantage so immense that no state, or groups of states, will be willing or able to equal it. Thus, today this country accounts for more than half of worldwide military spending. There are around one thousand U.S. bases in 130 countries, if you include refueling stations, weapons depots, training camps, and so on. The militarization of space is well underway. The Bush Pentagon called it "full spectrum dominance," and there is no sign that Obama has any inclination to relinquish this kind of dominance.

The world has never seen an empire like this. Unlike previous imperialisms, the power of the U.S. Empire is not used to colonize or permanently occupy territory, despite its vast network of bases, charmingly dubbed "lily-pads" by the Pentagon — nor does it confront its real military rivals with war or the explicit threat of war (Serbia and Iraq were hardly serious rivals). Instead, power is "projected" episodically over other nations, but with no limits of time or space. Bush took this doctrine to an extreme. In 2003 *The New York Times* magazine quoted a high level official informing reporters: "We're an empire now, we create our own reality. And

while you're studying that reality . . . we'll act again, creating other realities." In this crazed arrogance, there was more than a whiff of a Nazi-like "triumph of the will." But even the apparently more "sober" approach of the new administration is still committed to a system of domination on a scale that no other imperial power ever considered possible.

Bush's "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) was designed to put the nation on a permanent wartime footing, with consequences for dissent and civil liberties typical of wartime. Because military action cannot possibly eradicate non-state terrorism, and in fact foments it, there can be no end in sight for such a war, and indeed the Bush Administration envisioned none. Under Obama, only the terminology has changed. The policy has been re-branded as "Overseas Contingency Operations, or OCO. Some commentators have noted, hopefully, that abandoning GWOT may signal a reluctance to use wartime rhetoric to justify further aggrandizement of extraordinary executive powers by the Administration. But whatever it means, OCO still includes policing a global empire.

Moreover, as Ellen Meiksins Wood explains in *Empire of Capital*, "Unilateral global supremacy can never be achieved once and for all. It means moving the boundaries of warfare ever further beyond the reach of would-be challengers; and this requires constant revolutionizing of the means of war — which cannot then be left untested and unused."

Despite its colossal power, the U.S. Empire is threatened. Threats include "failed states" like Pakistan, "rogue states" like Iran, and strong states that may become future competitors, such as Russia, China, and the European Union. While the first two categories are subject to direct military intervention, the third is kept in check by military force applied indirectly. Russia and China are surrounded by bases and missiles. The EU is enveloped in the embrace of NATO, making its armed forces a "foreign legion of the Pentagon" (William Pfaff, quoted

in Wood).

## The World's Second Superpower

BUT THE GREATEST THREAT OF ALL, potentially, is popular resistance — which *The New York Times* once labeled the world's "second superpower" — using the tools of democracy itself. One especially vibrant example of this still mostly latent superpower, the anti-radar movement in the Czech Republic, succeeded not only in aborting plans for a U.S. radar base, but in helping to topple the fanatically pro-American Czech government, which had arrogantly ignored public opinion, overwhelmingly opposed to the base. Democracy scored a major victory, although the battle may not yet be over.

The Empire is inimical to democracy abroad, as the Czech example shows. Democracy, majority rule, in the Arab world would be a major blow to U.S. global dominance; majoritarian populism in Latin America has already threatened Washington's power over that continent. But Empire has also always been at odds with democracy at home. Its smooth functioning depends on excluding American voters from deciding or even seriously debating questions of foreign policy. Above all, the massive military budget cannot be questioned, except marginally and in a way that does not challenge the basic assumptions behind it. Thus Rep. Barney Frank has called for cutting military spending by 25 percent, starting in 2010, insisting that doing so need not diminish "the security we need" — which begs the question of what constitutes true security. Does it require continuing to shower military aid on Israel, escalating the war in Afghanistan, stepping up intervention in Pakistan, maintaining foreign bases throughout the world? Even if all this can be accomplished with 75 percent of current military spending, its immorality, futility, and still-disastrous cost need to be exposed. Frank, as well as most other "progressive" politicians, does not question the whole panoply of imperial might — although he has performed a ser-

vice by pointing out how scandalous it is that while the annual military budget is not much less than the \$700 billion financial bailout, calling for any reduction is basically taboo. At the moment, no one in Congress (with the exception of Dennis Kucinich and perhaps one or two others) or the mainstream media will dare to suggest that the United States should not continue to guard its global preeminence at all costs, that it is madness to maintain a bloated military establishment, bristling with ever-more horrifying weapons, sucking up vital resources that could be used to support decent lives for millions both here and abroad.

It is up to the peace movement to violate this taboo. Popular opposition to the war in Afghanistan is growing and will certainly increase at a more rapid rate as the fighting drags on and expands into Pakistan. A significant anti-NATO movement has emerged in Europe on the occasion of the alliance's sixtieth anniversary, and it needs strong American support. And a revival of the movement for nuclear disarmament is long overdue. But the work of the peace movement will always be a labor of Sisyphus, forever responding to particular crises that are the inevitably recurring products of an imperial system, the goal of peace and security forever out of reach — unless, that is, it moves beyond reactive, single-issue projects and begins to challenge comprehensively the assumption that the United States ought to continue acting as a global superpower.

But if a critique of Empire is to make sense

to most Americans, it must propose an alternative. The only response to the violent jihadi networks operating, and probably proliferating, throughout the Muslim world that has any chance of effectiveness is to call off the inhumane and un-winnable “war on terror,” by whatever name, and replace it with a radically different policy. Ending all support to Arab police states and giving real support to Palestinian statehood, advocating self-determination in Kashmir, withdrawing from Afghanistan (not merely non-escalation); these and other democratic foreign policy initiatives are not only right in themselves, but are also means of countering the bitterness and hostility in Muslim countries that breeds terrorist threats.

The United States and its military police a world-system that is deeply cruel and irrational. Obama's election has not changed that. Even before the current economic crisis, billions toiled and died in the most abysmal squalor, thanks in large part to the tyranny of U.S.-backed rulers, the policies of U.S.-dominated international financial institutions, and the needs of the global capitalist order. A vast portion of the world's population is unemployed. These billions could find work building, educating, producing the things that people so desperately need. A truly democratic U.S. foreign policy is desperately needed to address this misery and inequity, but we can begin to do so only by diverting this nation's vast wealth away from militarism and maintenance of Empire.

April 16, 2009

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# As Cunning as Serpents and as Innocent as Doves: Towards a Worldly Left

ROLAND BOER

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THE THESIS OF THIS ESSAY is as follows: since the religious left has been marginalized and has had the Bible stolen from it, and since the secular left is on the rise, we need a politics of alliance between the religious left and the old secular left. I call this alliance the “worldly left,” one that is as cunning as serpents and as innocent as doves. Before I go any further, let me clarify my terms. By “religious left” I mean those who struggle within the synagogue and church for justice and who find elements within their traditions as an inspiration for their struggles. They include both the reformers and the revolutionaries. Even though my preferences lie with the revolutionaries — the sundry Christian and Jewish socialists, communists, and anarchists — for a politics of alliance the religious left also includes the reformers, those who prefer to tinker with the system in order to improve it in one way or another. This is where many of those who struggle for queer, gender, indigenous, and environmental justice may be found. By “(old) secular left” I mean the various socialists, communists and anarchists who are deeply suspicious of religion of any stripe, especially Judaism and Christianity. They still follow the old model of secularism which they understand as anti-religious, indeed as atheistic. Such a position may have been fine in 19th century politics, but it cuts off some extremely valuable allies and hobbles the programs of the left. For now I will continue to use the two terms of re-

ligious left and (old) secular left — sometimes dropping the “old” — but only as temporary placeholders until we can find a better term.

In this essay, there are three steps in exploring the politics of alliance. To begin with, I sketch the way the religious left has been marginalized, with a specific focus on synagogue and church. In their various struggles, the religious right has been able to claim that their interpretation of religious faith and sacred texts is the only correct one, while the religious left has surrendered the very definition of what it means to be Jewish and Christian into the right’s hands. I follow this argument up with the need to rescue the emancipating elements of these religions and their sacred texts in the context of the resurgence of the left in general. This resurgence is a response to all manner of globalizations, all the way from Coca-Cola to terrorism, as well as the spread of the one-party state and totalitarian characteristics in countries that supposedly have parliamentary democracy. Finally I sketch what a politics of alliance might look like, especially in terms of what I call a “worldly left.”

## The Marginalization of the Religious Left

A CURSORY LOOK AT THE RELIGIOUS landscape provides the following picture. Everywhere, reactionary and fundamentalist, or so-called “Bible-based” religion seems to triumph. In Rome, one right-wing pope is followed by another. The Roman Catholic hierarchy watches its educational wing closely in order to ensure a narrow orthodoxy among its teachers. On a range of moral issues, it rails against contraception, abortion, and stem-cell re-

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search. It systematically weeds out its radical clergy and scholars, seeking to wind back the clock to some of the most conservative elements of Roman Catholicism that had well-nigh disappeared. In the United States, Bible-brandishing fundamentalist Protestant Christianity is so deeply entrenched, especially in the Southern states, that the primary question for teenagers is not, “have you had sex yet?” but “have you accepted Jesus yet?” Climate change, peak oil, the disaster in Iraq, even

the possibility of a Democrat victory in the U.S. elections are all signs of the imminent end of the world, the Rapture, Armageddon and then the return of Jesus (one may even find a “Rapture Index” at [www.raptureready.com/rap2.html](http://www.raptureready.com/rap2.html), which is described as “prophetic speedometer of end-time activity”). In Australia, vast conglomerates, such as the Hillsong enterprise in northern Sydney, spread their mega-churches further and further a-field. Using verses such as “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin” (Proverbs 10:15) and “The blessing of the Lord makes rich” (Proverbs 10:22), they tout a “wealth gospel”: God will bless you with wealth if you believe and are faithful, but will curse you with poverty if you are not faithful and sin just a little too much. If you happen to be poor, then you have only yourself to blame. Others, such as the Planetshakers in Melbourne, attract swaths of teens and 20-somethings to their mix of Christian rock and evangelical Christianity, urging young people to devote their lives to Jesus. In parts of the Roman Catholic Church of Australia where the conservative thug, Cardinal George Pell, holds sway there is a systematic effort to return to a

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pre-Vatican II agenda, especially in theology, education, and sexual morality, and Islam has become the great enemy. Even politicians are noticing, celebrating what they perceive as the return to conservative religion and biblical values.<sup>1</sup>

In Iraq, the disastrous invasion of American, British, Australian, and other troops has opened up battles between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslim groups. In Israel, conservative and Hasidic Jews continue to set the agenda on domestic policy areas such as immigration. In each case,

the religious right seems to be on the rise. In each case, they have driven the religious left underground. In each case, right-wing religious beliefs and practices by and large are wedded to right-wing politics.

It was not always so. Evangelical Christianity, for example, has not always been the religious soul of the political right. There was a time in the 19th century when evangelicals were the scourge of the establishment, when that establishment was the aristocracy and the established church. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) is perhaps the most noted example. Although a social reformer rather than revolutionary, for Wilberforce evangelical Christianity meant basing his life on the Bible, and that meant taking on injustice wherever he saw it. An evangelical by the time he entered the British parliament in 1784, he saw a program of social reform as a natural part of his faith. Texts such as the words in Jesus’ mouth in Matthew 25:35-36 were crucial for Wilberforce: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” As was the famous

Galatians 3:28, with its claim that “in Christ” there is neither “slave nor free.” Although he is most famous for his persistence in halting the slave trade (for 14 years he brought bills before the parliament before succeeding in 1891), he also vigorously campaigned to improve the condition of the working class, bringing in measures to counter inhuman working hours and atrocious living conditions, and he was one of the founders of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA). Now while we might find problematic his efforts to have the East India Company include missionary work in its charter, or indeed his personal motto — “God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners” — a little quaint, Wilberforce and other evangelicals like him saw their work of social reform, their challenge to the aristocrats of his own Tory Party, and their tireless efforts on behalf of the working class a natural extension of the Bible and their evangelical faith. Would that it were so now!

It is a long time since such a version of Christianity was seen to be consistent with the political left, no matter how mild Wilberforce may have been. What has happened since is that the religious right has become the provider of moral and biblical justification for the political right.<sup>2</sup> If Jesus were alive today, goes the argument, then despite all its sins he would still vote for the right. He simply would not condone abortion, gay rights, indigenous land claims, efforts to deal with climate change, and the supposed atheistic stance of what passes for the “left.” In the process the religious right has stolen the very definition of what it means to be religious. A crucial move in this theft is the development of distinct language, or discourse.

Such a discourse is all too recognizable. Thus, a church of the religious right is a ‘Bible-based’ church, implying that any other branch of Christianity is not “Bible-based.” Further, being “Bible-based” means that you focus on the

central issues, namely your personal walk with Jesus. If you have accepted Jesus into your life — as the language goes — then you will want to learn more about him from God’s word to us, the Bible, as well his gift to us, the church. This Bible is of course inerrant, the inspired word of God (“All scripture is inspired by God,” says 2 Timothy 3:16), and to question any detail, even the smallest, is to question God himself (the masculine pronouns are a signal of one’s Bible-based faith). To take the Bible in this way, the only true way, is to accept that smallest detail, such as the sun standing still when Joshua asked God to do so in the battle with the Amorites:

Then spoke Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the men of Israel: and he said in the sight of Israel, “Sun, stand thou still in Gibeon, and thou Moon in the valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for a whole day’ (Joshua 10:12-14).

The small matter of a geocentric universe assumed in such a passage may be overcome by the observation that God could of course do this if he really wanted.

Further, in this language of right-wing Christianity, your individual life of faith must be nurtured by a daily “quiet time,” when you read your Bible, with the help of one of the myriad guides so that you read it correctly, and pray. Social justice issues are just that, “issues,” and not central to the gospel. Sure, they may be important at a social or political level, but too many people and churches get sidetracked by them. On some matters, the Bible is clear, such as the condemnation of gays and lesbians<sup>3</sup> and the subordination of women to men,<sup>4</sup> and on others we should not waste too much time, such as indigenous justice or environmental issues. Rather, what is really important is the spiritual

battle between Satan and his evil spirits on the one side and God and the angels on the other. This is the vital conflict, and as a Bible-believing Christian you are a foot-soldier in God's army, overcoming evil wherever you might see it.

While this language may seem dominant across vast swaths of the Christian church, especially those with a Protestant and Charismatic background (and here I include those new churches that keep springing up like mushrooms after rain), it is a relatively new phenomenon. In the 1960s and 70s, mainstream churches were largely liberal in theology and their understanding of the Bible. A human document, through which you may hear God speak to you, the Bible was thankfully flawed and certainly not inerrant. It is, after all, a collection of documents written by human beings and they, as we all know, are somewhat fallible. You could sit loosely with many of its stories, such as the virgin birth of Jesus, or the myth of creation, or even the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and you preferred Jesus the Teacher rather than an almighty savior. These liberal churches had small evangelical wings, but the evangelicals were definitely on the outer margins. However, as the mainstream churches began losing members for a variety of reasons, such as demographic change and the inroads of secularization, the evangelicals came up with a convenient narrative: these churches were losing members because they had lost their focus on the central truths of the faith. They had become side-tracked on social issues; they had lost their sense of the importance of the Bible and some of its teachings; they had become worldly and, in some cases, had lost their faith and the true way. Soon enough the equation turned up: conservative, evangelical and Bible-believing churches grow, while those who are not decline. This belief slowly took hold, so much so that it is now dominant in many churches, despite the fact that statistics simply do not support it. Indeed, as Gary Bouma from Monash university

points out,<sup>5</sup> the boom in the so-called mega-churches is not restricted to any particular standpoint, whether evangelical, charismatic, liberal, or social justice. All the data points to the fact that the only defining feature of the mega-churches is that they are big, with memberships of 2,000 or more. They are well-run, offer a huge range of programs for all ages, and they are economically efficient. In short, it matters little whether they are conservative and evangelical churches or not.

Despite these statistics, the picture painted of a rampant and all-conquering evangelical Christianity is one that holds the imagination of the churches and of the public. In the process the religious right has stolen the very definition of what it means to be religious or have a religious faith. However, the response to this development has been contradictory. Firstly, the position has become so pervasive that many declining churches began "evangelizing programs" in order to halt the decline in members. They have of course had a spectacular lack of success in turning around the steady decline. By contrast, the second development is that the religious left has responded by focusing on identity politics — championing the causes of women's ordination, of indigenous rights, and gay and lesbian clergy, of environmental good practice, and so on.

However, let me make the following point here: the outcome of these struggles over identity politics is crucial for the future of the church; yet, conversely, the religious left has made a serious mistake in diverting its energy into such identity politics. On the one hand, it is vitally important that those who espouse justice on a range of fronts, from sexuality to indigenous politics, should gain the upper hand. The possibility of just societies depends on it. On the other hand, the move into identity politics as the key ground of struggle in these religious institutions is also a great problem. Why? The religious right has been able to designate these matters as "issues" peripheral to the main

message, if not waywardness from the straight and narrow path. The religious right has been able to claim the center ground while the religious left, as it takes on the various causes of identity politics, has surrendered that ground and the definition of what it means to be a “be-

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**In Australia a whole alternative legal system has been put in place that strips anyone caught in its net of even the basic elements of a fair trial.**

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liever” into the right’s hands.

For this reason too the religious left has become a minority voice and is in desperate need of alliances with those outside church and synagogue. While I recognize the vital work done by the religious left within religious institutions, they are beleaguered and under attack from all angles by conservatives who seek to marginalize them in the name of orthodoxy. What the religious left needs, then, are alliances with progressive movements outside those religious institutions, with those individuals and movements who can assist in the long and difficult ideological and political battles, such as feminists, indigenous, lesbian and gay activists, environmentalists, and those who work tirelessly for equal distribution of resources, against hunger, poverty, and exploitation. What such an alliance would show is that the various causes pursued by the religious left are actually parts of a deeper common political agenda.

### **The Resurgence of the Left**

WHAT WE NEED TO DO, then, is revitalize the religious left. And that revitalization ought to take place in the context of a resurgence of the left in general. In this section my interest is the

old secular left, in contrast to my concern with the religious left in the preceding section. We are indeed in a strange situation: as the religious left finds itself beleaguered on all sides, the secular left is in the early stages of a revival. This situation provides a distinct moment for reclaiming the liberating and progressive possibilities of religion from the political and religious right.

Before I say a little more about that resurgence, let me get two points out of the way. First, it is crucial that the old knee-jerk rejection of religion and its sacred texts by the secular left be dumped. Fitting perhaps for the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is no longer a useful strategy. Second, lest there should be some suspicion that I am a closet advocate of religious institutions such as synagogue or church, let me be perfectly clear: I do not harbor any hope that they can become progressive institutions as a whole. You simply have to be kidding if you think they can on their own become prophetic bodies, offer possibilities of improving society, or make the world a better place. They are inherently conservative, patriarchal, stuffy, and often brutal institutions. Yet, there are elements within them, elements I have called the religious left, that continue to struggle despite the odds, and their struggle is worth all the support it can get.

As far as the resurgence of the secular left is concerned, it would of course begin to take place precisely when old warhorses such as Terry Eagleton have been reciting the eulogy at the left’s funeral, or at least the last rites on its deathbed.<sup>6</sup> Now, one may be forgiven for agreeing with him and others like him, for the rolling back of the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe, the shift in China to rampant capitalism, and the activities of rogue states such as North Korea have signalled for many the end of any viable socialism. On top of this, we have the great rush for globalization, in everything from military hardware to cultural kitsch, that has simply become a fact of life whether we like it

or not. Without the need to compete with former Communist countries, the welfare state slowly disappears beneath a vast reallocation of the state's resources. Even in bastions of the welfare state, such as in Scandinavia, the process of winding down is well under way, let alone in the United States, where one could well argue that even the glimmer of the welfare state has well and truly faded.

This is precisely the situation in which the left is able to get some grip. While some on the left may lapse into nostalgia for the good old days when there was something viable for which to hope and work, they have missed the resurgence of the left in unexpected ways. What passes under the name of "terrorism" does not, of course, offer one of those ways, no matter how effective it may be on a mass psychological level. However, the context of "terrorism" does. For what is happening in the rising hysteria over 'terrorism' is that parliamentary democracies are able to slip on the mantle of totalitarian regimes with remarkable ease.<sup>7</sup> In Australia a whole alternative legal system has been put in place that strips anyone caught in its net of even the basic elements of a fair trial. Detention without reason, severe penalties for reporting anyone so detained, and the withholding of all manner of information from any public scrutiny under the banner of "national security" are but a few aspects of this system. One by one the critics of government policy are silenced and brought to heel, the latest being the two publicly owned media outlets, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), which are under sustained attack by the government for "leftie biases." The same applies, with minor variations, in one state after another with parliamentary democracies.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, we live in what is effectively a one-party state. The major political parties (Labour, Tory, Liberal Democrat, National, Social Democrat, Republican or Democrat, or... (fill in the blanks)) increasingly become factions within the one po-

litical party. So similar are the policies of these factions within the one party — the pro-capitalist party — that elections come down to popularity contests for the factional leaders.

We should not be all that surprised that the left — a proper left and not social democracy — should resurge precisely at this time. With a consistent history of the criticism of capitalism and the exploration of various alternatives, it does provide a clear option for those who see increasingly that the system is deeply flawed. It is, however, a left that looks somewhat different. All I need do is point to the return of anarchism as a version of radical politics for people in their teens and twenties, the common front of the anti-globalization movement, with its successes from Seattle to Melbourne, the varieties of green movements which continue to have a startling effect on popular consciousness, and the politicization of articulate and well-informed teenagers in a way that has not been seen for a long time. At a scholarly level, there is a renewed interest in the possibilities offered by Marxist, anarchist and post-colonial thought, not least among scholars of religion and theology.

One outcome of this varied resurgence of the left has been a renewed interest in matters of religion. Let me give a few examples. Michael Löwy argues in a study of the liberation theology movement,<sup>9</sup> especially its deep connection with the cause of the poor in Latin America, for a reconsideration of the role of religion within left thought and politics. The fact that certain elements of Christianity should find not merely an affinity with the left, but should be able to find a common cause from within its own tradition is reason enough for such reconsideration.

Further, there is an intense interest in the Bible from a disparate group of left philosophers who are deeply indebted in their various ways to Marxism. Alain Badiou,<sup>10</sup> with his roots in Maoism, has argued that in the writings of Paul in the New Testament we find one of the

earliest and clearest expressions of the political event that breaks, entirely unexpected and undeserved, into the life of an ordinary individual. Based on the fable of Christ's resurrection, Paul founds a militant political movement that is marked by faithfulness to that cause. The experience and expression of this event is for Badiou a truth, one that he also calls materialist or laicized "grace" and is available to all. In response to Badiou, Giorgio Agamben<sup>11</sup> has argued that Paul provides us with two crucial insights for a new politics of the left: the messianic and the remnant. For Agamben, messianic time is the "time that remains," a suspended moment (*kairos*) that grasps hold of a moment of our everyday, chronological time, and then opens up a possibility for it to be fulfilled in the future. As for the remnant, it is not merely the last survivors who somehow win through, but what happens when you keep dividing a group along different lines. For instance, when Paul starts dividing between Jews and Greeks, men and women, flesh and spirit, law and grace, then you end up with an undefinable group that comes to stand in for the whole. There are others who have written recently on Paul, such as Slavoj Žižek,<sup>12</sup> who finds that the revolutionary core of Christianity, embodied in the idea of "Christian love" (*agape*) must be preserved at all costs. To Žižek's surprise, Julia Kristeva would agree,<sup>13</sup> although she also argues that Paul's model of the church (*ekklesia*) is an innovation that is able to soothe many of the social and individual pathologies that afflict us. I could go on, citing Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's<sup>14</sup> evocation of a collective, political, and very Christian love as the key to the multitude's construction of a new society, or Terry Eagleton's recovery of his days in the Catholic left, or Jacob Taubes's political reading of Paul's messianism from a Jewish perspective.

Now, one may agree or disagree with these various takes on Paul (I for one, much prefer Badiou over the others), or indeed other ele-

ments of the Christian tradition, but that is not my point here. None of these critics from the left would count as a believer at any stretch of the imagination (although Eagleton seems to have recovered his early days in the Catholic Left).<sup>15</sup> And none would count themselves as a champion of the church or of the synagogue. Yet, each finds within the Jewish and Christian traditions something for a reconstituted politics of the left.

### Towards a Politics of Alliance: The Worldly left

SO IT SEEMS THAT I DO NOT NEED TO URGE the old secular left to take an interest in the Bible, for it is already happening. Indeed, there is more in common than at first seems between the religious and secular left. If the religious left, beleaguered as it is within the religious institutions, has access to a radical tradition of thought and action that precedes that of the secular left, and if all the straws in the wind point to a resurgence of the secular left, then a renewed alliance may well be the way forward. Before I give a few examples of such an alliance, it is necessary to ask whether the old opposition of secular and religious lefts is a viable one any longer. I have called the secular left the "old" secular left at some points, but that will no longer do. Is it possible to come up with a new term?

Let me suggest instead the worldly left, a term that plays off both the religious and secular left against each other. To begin with, the idea of a worldly left touches on the base definition of secularism as a way of thinking and living that draws its terms purely from this age and from this world. But "worldly" also has a number of other connotations, such as experience, maturity, and indeed worldly wisdom. To be secular in this sense means to be worldly wise. Now, there is a verse in the Bible that draws close to this sense of secularism. In Matthew 10:16 we find the admonition to "be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves." In other

words, the admonition is to be as worldly as possible, to have the wisdom and even cunning in order to know how to live in and of the world without, however, being caught up in its corruption and exploitation. Once again, wisdom, worldly wisdom comes to the fore. What we have, then, is a worldly wise, experienced and mature left, or, for the sake of brevity, a worldly left.

Further, the very idea of a politics of alliance, one in which the various elements of the secular and religious lefts may work together, points to diversity of the left. The days of Marx's systematic condemnation in *The Communist Manifesto* of a whole range of groups, including the utopian socialists and the religious socialists of The League of the Just, are past. It is no longer necessary — if ever it was — to seek out the revisionist, deviationist, or heretic from our midst. Let me give one example: at the protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in 2000 and then again at the G20 meeting in 2006, we found anarchists, environmentalists, socialists, feminists, various elements of the loopy left, and some religious groups for whom the protests were perfectly consistent with their own convictions. Further, the Marxist geographer, David Harvey,<sup>16</sup> consistently includes some churches in his lists of those engaged in activism against the ravages of capitalist exploitation, ranging from soup kitchens for the unemployed and under-employed to protests and acts of solidarity with movements for political and economic change throughout the world. A strange alliance? Not at all, for it marks the presence of what I have called a worldly left.

Rather than a constitution for such a worldly left, I prefer to close with a number of examples, one drawn from North America and the other from South Africa. The first is Erin Runions, who is both an activist and biblical scholar. Born in Canada, Runions has been involved in various levels of activism with various anarchist groups, first in Montreal, then

New York, and now Los Angeles. Working with the assumption that all the energy and resources for war should be redirected into food, Runions has worked with groups such as Food Not Bombs that gather perfectly good food that would normally be dumped, prepare it, and give it to anyone who is hungry. Such a simple act has led to opposition by local governments and big business. She has also been involved in anti-poverty, anti-war, pro-indigenous, and pro-immigrant activities. However, for a long time Runions' activism seemed quite separate from her biblical scholarship. Or at least it was separate. With the beginning of the so-called "war on terror," among others the U.S. President, George W. Bush, began using biblical rhetoric in his speeches against Muslim-majority states. The claims that God had chosen "America" in a special covenant at this crucial moment at the end of history were repeated ad nauseam in order to justify a new era of global aggression. Before long, Runions found her skills in demand in a different way, analyzing and denouncing the way Christian themes are appropriated in neo-conservative thought and practice as well as the speeches and justifications for war.<sup>17</sup> She even found herself reading parts of these studies at anti-war rallies.

My second example is Gerald West in South Africa. Forced to flee his home due to political activities against the apartheid regime in the 1980s, West found himself in England and decided to study the Bible. Eventually completing a PhD at the University of Sheffield, he was able to return to South Africa to what was initially a short term teaching position. One result of his studies was the book, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*,<sup>18</sup> which has been very influential in South Africa and beyond. The two editions of the book (1991 and 1995) span the last years of apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994. However, what interests me here are two features of West's work: his facilitation of the

Institute for the Study of the Bible (which he has now passed over to others to run), and his comments concerning the role of the Bible in the Communist Party of South Africa. The Institute was initially modeled on a similar body in Brazil, called the Centro de Estudos Bíblicos. The agenda of the South African Institute is to “establish and interface between biblical studies and ordinary readers of the Bible in the church and community that will facilitate social transformation.”<sup>19</sup> As the German Ernst Bloch believed, the underlying awareness is that the Bible remains profoundly formative of the worldviews of ordinary South Africans. Some of the most fascinating work of the Institute is to read various biblical texts with different groups, such as the trade unions, Young Christian Workers, and African Independent Churches. The parables of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-8) and the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-33) produced some distinct interpretations. First, let me quote the parable of the Mustard Seed:

Another parable he put before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31-33).

Now for an interpretation from the Young Christian Workers, a militant group of young, mostly black workers who seek to bring together their religious commitment and struggles for justice in the workplace:

To many, our actions might appear to be very small. This is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree so that the birds can come and shelter in its branches. What we learn from this parable is that even if our choices appear very small, through our commitment our small actions

will give rise to big changes. This is the kind of commitment we have to take in the YCW.<sup>20</sup>

This interpretation relates directly to the second aim of the Institute for Study of the Bible, namely social transformation. West has told me that for many members of the Communist Party of South Africa, which was a crucial ally of the African National Congress during the anti-apartheid struggle, the Bible was also an inspiration. At this point the crossover that I have been following and arguing for takes place: an old secular organization, nothing less than a communist party, draws from Christianity to carry on its programs.

These are but two moments in what I want to call the worldly left, where the old divisions between a secular and religious left no longer apply. I leave it to readers to encounter others.

#### NOTES

1. See Alexander Downer, *Speech at the Sir Thomas Playford Annual Lecture* (August 27, 2003 [cited August 28, 2003]); available from [www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2003/030827\\_playford.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2003/030827_playford.html).
2. See Marion Maddox, *God under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005).
3. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman.” (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; see also Romans 1:26-7).
4. “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent.” (1 Timothy 2:11-12).
5. Gary Bouma, “Recipe Bringing Youth Back to Church,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 28, 2006.
6. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
7. Giorgio Agamben has offered a sustained analysis of this process, developing the concepts of “state of exception” and “bare life” in order to describe what is going on. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).
8. See Alain Badiou on the bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy under capitalism: Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2002): 31, 98-9, Alain Ba-

- diou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2003): 69-78, Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005).
9. Michael Löwy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1996).
  10. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).
  11. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
  12. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003).
  13. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 76-83, Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987): 139-50.
  14. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004): 351-2, 358.
  15. See Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*. Historical Materialism Book Series 18 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007b).
  16. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).
  17. Erin Runions, "Biblical Promise and Threat in U.S. Imperialist Rhetoric, before and after 9/11," *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 2, no. 2 (2004a), Erin Runions, "Desiring War: Apocalypse, Commodity Fetish and the End of History," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1, no. 1 (2004b).
  18. Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the Context of South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Pietermaritzburg and Maryknoll, New York: Cluster and Orbis, 1995).
  19. *Ibid.*: 219
  20. Quoted in *Ibid.*: 191.

# Support our Troops . . . Until They Come Home?

AMIR AZARVAN

**H**ARDLINE CONSERVATIVES HAVE traditionally sought to vest monopoly control over patriotism in the Republican Party. In contrast, they frequently castigate Democrats and liberals in general as traitors. As Ann Coulter puts it, liberals have a “preternatural gift for always striking a position on the side of treason.”

These hardliners have employed a number of tactics in their effort to monopolize patriotism. One of the more recent of these is the use of the popular “Support our troops” slogan, in which they have attempted to convince Americans that opposing the war is somehow equivalent to opposing our troops. Noam Chomsky attests to the propagandistic value of such catchphrases:

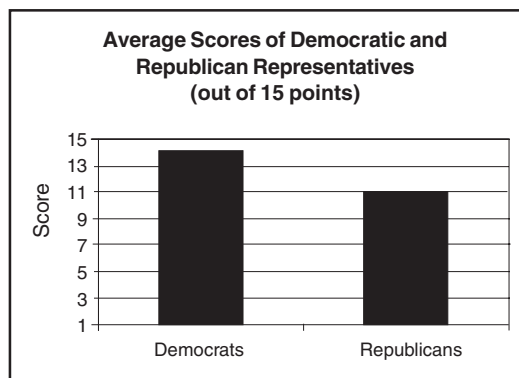
The point of public relation slogans like “Support our troops” is that they don’t mean anything. They mean as much as whether you support the people in Iowa...The issue [is], Do you support our policy? But you don’t want people to think about that issue. That’s the whole point of good propaganda. You want to create a slogan that nobody’s going to be against, and everybody’s going to be for.<sup>1</sup>

Are liberals really anti-American? Do they truly wish our troops harm? One can derive an answer to this question through a careful examination of the 2008 Congressional Report Card, published by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) Action Fund.<sup>2</sup> The Report Card assesses the extent to which members of Congress have endorsed pro-veteran

legislation relating to an “entire range of issues . . . including veterans’ health care, the new GI Bill, mental health, and support for homeless veterans.”

To be clear, IAVA is a non-partisan group. To the best of my knowledge, the 2008 Report Card does not list party affiliations of legislators next to their scores. Anticipating the accusation of partisanship, IAVA points out that “the methodology behind the report card is completely transparent — those who voted with veterans scored well, those who did not support our veterans did not.”<sup>3</sup> They note, further, that “both parties did very well” overall.

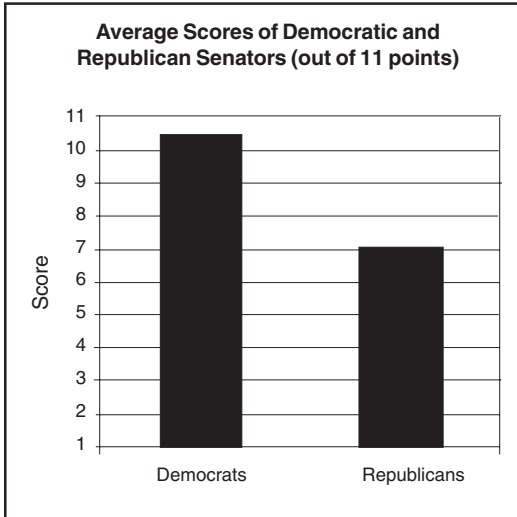
That said, there is a strong correlation of over 70 percent between party affiliation and one’s total score in both houses (the figures below display average scores for Democrats and Republicans). Specifically, Democrats are associated with higher support for pro-veteran legislation. This relationship is statistically significant at below the .01 level, which in laymen’s terms means that there is less than a 1 percent



Scores of 15 and 11 indicate “perfect support” for pro-veteran pieces of legislation, depending on the particular chamber of Congress.

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chance that this relationship is simply coincidental.

Maybe it is worthwhile to inquire on the grades last year's presidential candidates received. Perhaps to the surprise of those who

supported John McCain (himself a veteran), the senator got a D, whereas now-President Barack Obama got a B (which is also quite low, at least in comparison to the many who got perfect As).

In short, it appears that many are eager to send our men and women in uniform to war and yet turn their backs on them once they return. This invites the impression that our troops are regarded less as freedom defenders, and more as impersonal, expendable resources like money. That's hardly patriotic.

#### NOTES

1. See Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), p. 26.
2. Visit the following website: [www.veteranreportcard.org](http://www.veteranreportcard.org).
3. Visit the following website: [www.veteranreportcard.org/Report\\_Card-Frequently\\_Asked\\_Questions.pdf](http://www.veteranreportcard.org/Report_Card-Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf).

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# Franklin Rosemont (1943–2009)

## *An Obituary and a Memory*

PAUL BUHLE

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I RECALL READING, in August 1966, the catalog of the Solidarity Bookshop in my parents' house-trailer, some hundreds of miles south of Chicago. It was a marvelous catalog, like no other, full of calligraphy as ornate as the books described, prepared by the bookshop's co-owner, Franklin Rosemont. It was not entirely easy getting my odd items from this catalog and the issue was not necessarily the price. He wanted, I think, to ascertain whether the would-be buyer would be worthy of the last mimeographed copy of *Notes on Dialectics* by C.L.R. James.

The following year, when I began publishing the journal *Radical America* in Madison, Wisconsin, for the Students for a Democratic Society, he and I became avid correspondents. His mimeoed IWW magazine, *The Rebel Worker*, had folded its tents, and he had become a foremost advocate of surrealism, not merely in Chicago but in the United States at large. Founded in France during the 1920s, the surrealist movement was prolific artistically before the Second World War but was largely in decline afterward. Franklin traveled to Paris at age 22 with his wife Penelope and met Andre Breton, patron saint of the movement. Franklin pledged himself to surrealism's goal of absolute freedom and during the second half of the 1960s, he publicized and enlarged surrealism's activities and following in many ways — exhibits, publications and group meetings — at the same time merging this vision of the avant-garde with his vision of Chicago.

Therein hangs another tale. Franklin

Rosemont was the son of a renowned unionist typographer Henry Rosemont (who named his son after Benjamin Franklin) and from early in life, Franklin knew the Chicago labor movement's personalities. His mother Sally Kaye had been a "radio personality" in the early days of the medium, when local characters could do all sorts of crazy things on the air. He grew up reading Bugs Bunny and other comics, graduated to ideas of socialism that he picked up in leaflets and an occasional newspaper.

He made himself the friend and scholar of the old-time "hobohemians" who came out of the Wobblies and anarchist circles, flowing into jazz and hipsterdom. Decades later when Franklin, his wife Penny, and their friends took over Chicago's historical Charles H. Kerr Company, he edited and published a series of books about Chicago personalities and institutions, otherwise forgotten, including *From Bughouse Square to the Beat Generation* and *The Rise and Fall of the Dil Pickle: Jazz-Age Chicago's Wildest & Most Outrageously Creative Hobohemian Nightspot*. It was not the radical bohemia of Greenwich Village or San Francisco's North Beach, but something unique unto itself—and more proletarian by tradition and sensibility. It was the world of Nelson Algren and Studs Terkel.

Franklin Rosemont supported every significant Chicago radical movement of the 1960s and after, to the time of his death. True, electoral politics of the Jesse Jackson and Harold Washington type meant less to him than Blues, or protest marches, or for that matter surrealist exhibits. But with friends and collaborators, he created his own world of radical impulses and personalities, overlapping with the interests of

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PAUL BUHLE *has been a frequent contributor to New Politics.*

reformers, especially after his move to the Rogers Park neighborhood where he planned many events and shows at Heartland Café established by former leading SDSer Michael James.

His own poetry and musings offered an angle of vision outside those of anyone else, even surpassing the European surrealists in renown and notoriety. He spun visions and he sometimes illustrated them with his drawings. He was inspired by the Beat Generation but broke with it, seeking a vision adequate to newer revolutionary possibilities. The movements he embraced met many defeats, of course. But he was, in his spirit, undefeated. Like it or not, the world will not change overnight, but he believed that we must be the beginning of the change and elaborate its vision.

His network of friends and allies extended across the globe. He organized and edited a series of publications of the surrealist group (including, in later years, a series of books he edited for the University of Texas Press). A forthcoming book with Robin D.G. Kelley, *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, should appear later this year. He documented the history of surrealism in his books and in *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*; he created space for younger artists and writers to make their statements. Of particular importance for me, he synthesized impulses in American popular culture rarely taken seriously by Marxists, declaring them an essential part of any radical worldview. *Benjamin Paul Blood*, *Krazy Kat*, *The Shadow* (on the radio), science fiction in the pulps, Ernie Kovacs on 50s television, and so much more . . . these he linked to radical spirits, past, present, and future.

I published an issue of *Radical America* in 1970 devoted entirely to surrealism and surrealist materials in several other issues afterward, along with a shortlived surrealist pamphlet series. Franklin edited *Surrealism and its Popular Accomplishes*, a special issue of *Cultural Correspondence* later reprinted as a City Lights volume, and we worked with Nancy Joyce Peters and Penelope Rosemont on *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*, a would-be City Lights series that ended with that single volume. Rosemont's works contain a liveliness, a radical eclecticism, and a poetic sensibility often lacking on the Left, especially inviting to young people, and open ways to new thoughts. And so, in the comic art books of mine published in the last few years on SDS and the Beats — *The Beats: A Graphic History* and *Wobblies! A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World* — it seemed the perfect place to capture Franklin as a personality and an influence. He was a liberating influence — and more — upon me and my readers.

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# Constructing a Critical Political Theory

STEPHEN ERIC BRONNER

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CRITICAL THEORY HAS ITS POLITICAL roots in what has been termed “the heroic phase” of the Russian Revolution. This was the period from 1917–1923 in which the radical democratic vision of workers’ councils — or “soviets” — dominated both the communist movement and its radical offshoots. Based on the slogan of “All Power to the Soviets!” that was employed by Lenin to topple the Constituent Assembly, and justify the communist seizure of power, these years were marked by councilist uprisings throughout Europe as a gruesome civil war devastated the Soviet Union. Though workers’ councils never actually ruled Russia,<sup>1</sup> these ill-fated revolutionary attempts and the “offensive strategy” of the Communist International gave the new revolution a certain libertarian and utopian aura.

If philosophy is, as Hegel once remarked, “its epoch comprehended in thought” then the most radical intellectual reflection of this turbulent period, wherein the “pre-history” of humanity seemed near its end, lay in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch, and Georg Lukacs.<sup>2</sup> These three thinkers became the most sophisticated representatives of what came to be known as “Western Marxism.” Unconcerned

with the textual exegesis of what Marx “said” about this or that issue, they evidenced a new concern with transforming the “totality” of capitalist social relations and abolishing the cultural “hegemony” of the bourgeoisie. Gramsci, Korsch, and Lukacs had little use for economic determinism or the parliamentary reformism of European social democracy. They despised the ways in which orthodox Marxism shoved the actuality of revolution into the future.<sup>3</sup> These Western Marxists were instead advocates of political voluntarism, or direct action,<sup>4</sup> on the part of the working class without any particular regard for historical stages or structural constraints. All of them highlighted the role of proletarian “consciousness,” and their approach was predicated on the legacy of philosophical idealism rather than the positivism, or the putatively “scientific” character of Marxism. Lukacs liked to quote Vico that “the difference between history and nature is that man has created the one but not the other.” He and his comrades were adamant about the need to understand Marxism as a social theory and break it off from a “dialectics of nature.”<sup>5</sup> Each after his fashion, indeed, saw the dialectic as a critical method capable of dealing with changing conditions while confronting the limits of all previous theories — including Marxism itself.<sup>6</sup>

Unshackling the dialectic from the constraints of “orthodox” stage theory produced an interpretation of Marxism as a “theory of practice” and rendered it relevant to new social movements and, ultimately, the once colonized world. Privileging the totality made it possible to emphasize the structure of capitalist social relations, which reformists presuppose, while the preoccupation with bringing pre-history to

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an end — and the utopian “leap into the realm of freedom” — served an important mobilizing function. Introducing the link between Hegel and Marx, moreover, gave a historical bent to historical materialism. It made clear the dangers in mechanically carrying over any given form of thinking from one period to the next. Western Marxism rested on the belief that theory must confront new problems with new insights.

But the new period that followed the “heroic phase” was one of retrenchment. The failures of the councilist uprisings in Europe left the Soviet Union as the one “socialist” state amid an increasingly hostile capitalist world in which fascism was internationally on the rise. There consequently seemed little place in the Communist movement for the philosophical radicalism of Western Marxism. The “revolution” had been achieved; it had become concrete in an economically underdeveloped nation, contrary to the teachings of Marx, and transforming the “totality” now seemed little more than the illusion of “petty bourgeois” intellectuals. Securing the legitimacy of the Soviet Union, especially given the constantly changing “party line,” called for emphasizing the textual legacy of Marx and Lenin amid the need to develop new priorities for transforming an economically underdeveloped nation bearing the scars of war.

Economic modernization was already the priority in 1921 with the introduction of capitalist reforms under the “New Economic Policy” of Lenin. This concern became intensified with the subsequent “inward turn” of Stalin in 1928 and the start of his various “five-year” plans. Retrenchment replaced the cultural experimentalism and loosening of traditional mores associated with the heroic phase of the Russian Revolution. In the name of “materialism,” a degeneration of theory followed the burgeoning authoritarianism of practice.<sup>7</sup> Consciousness would now be directed not toward the coming international revolution, but to recognizing

the “revolutionary privilege” and the need for “socialist construction” of what became known as the homeland of the revolution. Remnants of the old revolutionary aura, however, continued to hover over the Soviet Union even after

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Neither the Enlightenment  
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the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 that unleashed World War II.

Growing disenchantment with communism and liberalism marked the second phase, or “moment,” in the political evolution of critical theory. With the appointment of Max Horkheimer as Director of the Institute for Social Research in 1930 and the ascendancy of his circle, which included Herbert Marcuse, the “Frankfurt School” was born. Not merely the specter of fascism, but the shadow of the revolution hung over these intellectuals. They saw themselves as inheritors of a tradition that reached back over Marx to Hegel and the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup> If new problems were to be examined, however, then the contributions of thinkers outside this tradition — like Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Freud — needed to be integrated into the critical enterprise. Neither the Enlightenment thinkers, nor Hegel, nor Marx could fully analyze the twentieth century set of institutional and cultural forces that inhibited the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat. The change from *laissez-faire* to “state capitalism” required further study.<sup>9</sup> That was also the case

for the “authoritarian” family, the impact of repressive social and psychological attitudes upon the German working class,<sup>10</sup> and how the organization of culture in capitalist society affected the individual. Questions concerning the empowerment of the proletariat, and of revolutionary agency, needed to be raised anew.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in this second phase of its development, critical theory sought to reinvigorate the radical enterprise of Marx with those utopian values of compassion, happiness, and freedom that were being sacrificed in the Soviet Union.

All of this required a new mode of theorizing for a new period of international counter-revolution. Perhaps the formulation that the proletariat constituted the “subject-object” of history, as Lukacs had claimed, was becoming increasingly suspect. But the subject was still seen as capable of transforming social reality. The injunction was clear. The Frankfurt School would confront any sort of “materialism” that did not highlight issues dealing with agency, subjectivity, and the domination of nature — implicitly including the mainstream versions of Marxism, along with any form of “metaphysics” that sundered speculative thinking from the constraints of capitalist society. “Traditional theory,” in short, would become juxtaposed to “critical theory.”<sup>12</sup>

From the beginning, however, the enemy was less metaphysics than positivism or the scientific kinds of materialist thinking that reflected “reification.” It is with the overwhelming embrace of this concept that the third political “moment” in the history of critical theory emerges. The stage needs to be set. The era of the councils had ended with the Spanish Civil War. The Soviet Union had effectively become the partner of Nazi Germany in 1939 and, even once they became enemies in 1941, the totalitarian traits they shared in common were impossible to ignore. Liberalism had, for its part, proven incapable of preventing the emergence of fascism in Europe and, even in the United States, it had apparently morphed into forms

of managing mass society at the expense of the individual. It now seemed not merely that the liberal political heritage of the bourgeoisie might contain the sources of reaction, but that the triumph of instrumental reason had blurred the difference between communism, fascism, and democracy.

A historical situation had thus arisen in which, as Theodor Adorno later put the matter in *Minima Moralia* (1951), “the whole is false.” Each of these systems was predicated on treating working people as costs of production; each had integrated its political opposition; each had its culture industry and — albeit in different and often complex ways — each was intent upon securing conformity on the part of its citizens. It was now necessary to question modernity tout court and its attendant notion of progress. The Enlightenment, once considered the source of liberty and tolerance, had seemingly been betrayed or, better, had betrayed itself. Its commitment to scientific rationality and what Kant termed “pure reason” — once directed against the Church and all forces of superstition and provincial prejudice — had ultimately turned against everything that sought to temper the march of technological progress.

*D*IALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT (1947), the classic work by Horkheimer and Adorno, suggested that everything associated with “practical reason” and emotional experience, conscience, and subjectivity, was being subverted by the demands of instrumental rationality. Enlightenment had engendered what was “totalitarian” and the “totally administered society” had sprung from the liberal political project. Its much-vaunted “individual” was now nothing more than a conscienceless robot seething with rage against the most pitiable and the weakest members of society. Enlightenment, modernity, and a unique form of scientific rationality had taken reification to its ultimate extreme: the subject had become a number tattooed on the arm of an anonymous inmate at Auschwitz.<sup>13</sup>

Utopia had, at least in its traditional formulations, been conquered. Political transformation had come up short. Freedom now rested on highlighting the tension between the totally administered system and the individual subject bent on preserving his or her subjectivity. In this vein, the “totality” required confrontation from a “constellation” of fragments or aphorisms constructed to enhance the repressed experience of subjectivity.<sup>14</sup> Modernity rather than any particular system or state formation became the enemy and the purpose of the dialectical reason was now to create a “non-identity” between subject and object.<sup>15</sup>

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* left no room for a politically organized transformation of society in terms of traditional liberal and socialist values. It instead insisted on a philosophical and cultural emphasis upon negativity. Happiness would ultimately go the way of all flesh.<sup>16</sup> The result was an inverted utopianism intent upon providing an ongoing critique of the given order in the name of an epiphany or a philosophical burst, akin in the aesthetic realm to the experience of fireworks — that for Theodor Adorno served as the paradigm of the encounter with art — and, in theological terms, to what Horkheimer termed the “longing for the totally other.” Philosophical negativity, aesthetic experience, and theological longing fused in a resuscitated metaphysic. Only in its opposition to reification, in its explosion of all claims to a positive and determinate critique of society, would it become possible to provide hope for the hopeless.

### Marcuse's Contribution

HERBERT MARCUSE WAS SURELY THE MOST politically “engaged” member of what became known as the “Frankfurt School.” His political history reaches back over his activities with the various movements of the 1960s to his time with the Office of Strategic Services during and immediately after World War II, where he played an important role in shaping American

policy toward Western Europe, to his participation as a young man in the Spartacus Revolt of 1918-9. But these particular instances of political practice say little about the character of his theory. Marcuse has usually been valorized as a philosopher or a social theorist. Too often ignored, however, is the way in which his thought integrates — for better or worse — the three dominant political “moments” within the history of critical theory. It thereby fosters skepticism about substituting metaphysics for politics and helps constructing a critical political theory that meets the concerns of the present.

The only member of the Frankfurt School's inner circle *consistently* to place the transformation of advanced industrial society at the center of critical theory was Herbert Marcuse. His interpretation of Marx was profoundly informed by Hegel,<sup>17</sup> and it led him to draw the radical conclusions from Lenin's famous claim that “intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism.”<sup>18</sup> Critical theory would thus differ qualitatively from the “traditional” variants of either materialism or metaphysics.<sup>19</sup> Hegel's belief that “truth lies in the negative” led Marcuse to question the ways in which capitalist society was manipulating individual experience. In contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno, however, Marcuse also took seriously Hegel's insistence that “truth is concrete.” This caused him to understand critical theory as theory of political resistance that speaks not merely to the resurrection of a repressed subjectivity but to the exploited and excluded in society.

Such a theory would constantly project a happiness that has little in common with license, that few living the life of conformism provided by the “happy consciousness” can judge, and that remains unfulfilled by reality.<sup>20</sup> There is a way in which even the elitism for which the Frankfurt School has so often been criticized has a more political character in the thinking of Marcuse. His critique of the culture industry and its use of “repressive

desublimation” were directed not merely at its prefabrication of experience and happiness, its subversion of the critical intellect, but also at its nullification of the utopian imagination. Marcuse’s critical analyses of reification and the various forms of “affirmative culture” were always undertaken *both* with reference to the ways in which they perverted subjective experience and also to their impact upon the potential for radical political action. Marcuse also tempers what became the traditional concern of the Frankfurt School with subjectivity by noting the way in which advanced industrial society throws the subject back on itself. This led him to insist upon the importance of developing new forms of solidarity.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, with respect to contesting the domination of nature, Marcuse wished to foster a “pacification” of existence that would integrate ecology and a concern for the environment into a revamped understanding of socialism.<sup>22</sup>

Alone among the inner circle of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse was influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Some of his earliest work involved attempts to blend the thinking of Marx and his former teacher. Most usually emphasize Marcuse’s philosophical desire to “ground” historical materialism within a phenomenological ontology. His more practical concern, however, was directed toward understanding the “historicity” of “history” or, more simply, the way in which society affects the experiential possibilities of individuals, especially with regard to their ability to resist it.<sup>23</sup> This is an issue that has genuine political implications and the theme would remain with Marcuse throughout his life. From Heidegger, no less than from his life-long encounter with Marx,<sup>24</sup> he also learned about the inauthentic character of public life and its deadening effect upon discourse, social relations, and the individual experience of finitude. Marcuse responded to this situation in *Eros and Civilization* (1955). It is the only articulated vision of utopia in the history of the Frankfurt School — a vision so radi-

cal that it projected the transformation of speech, a reconstructed notion of sexuality, nature, and the conquest of death.

*Eros and Civilization* called for an “anthropological break” with the “totality” of advanced industrial society.<sup>25</sup> But the frame for thinking about this “break,” and bringing it about, remained anchored in the past. The utopia envisioned by Marcuse — along with his notion of the “new sensibility” — received its content from a radical reinterpretation of Schiller, Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Breton, and Freud. Ultimately, Marcuse may have envisioned the need for a “new science” beyond positivism and its various offshoots. But, though the contradiction is glaring, he understood the “technological process” as hampering human development only insofar as it is tied to a social apparatus born of scarcity and exploitation. Marcuse also remained convinced that “objective” contradictions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie remained. He insisted only that the subjective “consciousness” of those contradictions had been suspended by the “culture industry” and the reification process of advanced industrial society. In contrast to Horkeheimer and Adorno, who also lived to witness the revolts of the 1960s, Marcuse did not indulge in a deadening pessimism.

*One-Dimensional Man* (1964), which is surely Marcuse’s signature work, insists that “catalysts” for sparking revolutionary consciousness continue to exist. “Marginal groups” like women, minorities, intellectuals, bohemians, and third-world movements — or those least integrated into the system — project what Andre Breton, the leading thinker of surrealism, originally called the “great refusal.” These groups constituted the new vanguard and, according to Marcuse, the refusal they offered was linked to a new sensibility directed against cruelty, exploitation, and the inhumane values of advanced industrial society. He anticipated somehow that these groups would take center stage, and they did indeed spark action by the

working class. They radicalized its consciousness and, in 1968, ignited the largest strike-wave in the history of post-war Europe with a new ideal of *autogestion* that harked back to the workers' council.

"The authentic utopia," Marcuse could write, "is grounded in recollection."<sup>26</sup> With the collapse of the radical movements generated by the 1960s, however, the nature of this *political* recollection became increasingly vague. That Marcuse supported the failed presidential candidacy of George McGovern in 1972 says as little about his theoretical convictions concerning representative democracy as the hysterical responses of Adorno and Horkheimer to the students of 1968 say about the conservative character of their thinking. Already in 1934, Marcuse had made the claim that totalitarianism evidenced an "inner relation" with liberalism,<sup>27</sup> and he noted the way in which new conditions had transformed the once radical meaning of toleration into "repressive tolerance." In short, then, it was not the liberal legacy that required recollection and re-appropriation. Nevertheless, following 1968, there seemed little that *autogestion* still had to offer.

Marcuse saw the end of the "movement," forewarned that capitalism was generating a new neo-imperialist enterprise, and that a "counter-revolution" was underway whose partisans were intent upon eradicating everything associated with what neo-conservatives like Norman Podhoretz would call "the adversary culture" of the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> There seemed to remain only what Rudi Dutschke, the great student leader, termed a "long march through the institutions." Marcuse deemed that insufficient. The "great refusal" seemed imperiled, and revivifying it, which required "utopian recollection," could occur only in the aesthetic realm. Marcuse's last work, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, thus evidences a "debt" to the aesthetic theory of Adorno that "does not require any specific acknowledgement." Here, Marcuse emphasizes the way in which art alone can redefine reality for an experiencing subject,

and how an inherently critical and liberating "form" always takes primacy over what the "revolutionary" content of any artwork may demonstrate. The "great refusal" continues. Following Adorno, however, Marcuse now insists upon the "uncompromising estrangement" of art from political action.<sup>29</sup>

But this does not tell the whole story. There was another thinker whose influence lingered. Friedrich Schiller had been a part of Marcuse's intellectual universe since the beginning of his scholarly career. Schiller played an important role in *Eros and Civilization*, and accompanied him through *One-Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation*. The parallels between their perspectives on aesthetics and politics have too often been ignored. Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) sought to preserve in the aesthetic realm the moment of radical freedom that had been politically extinguished by the French Revolution during its Thermidor of 1793. Schiller had postulated an unrealized aesthetic life-world predicated on the "play impulse" that was less directed towards the unique experience of the individual subject than as an image of resistance or, better, as the utopian alternative to an increasingly repressive reality. It was no different for Marcuse. *The Aesthetic Dimension* was a last desperate attempt to maintain the "great refusal" in the face of the political radicalism that had vanished first with the integration of the social democratic labor movement, then with the failure of the communist revolution, and finally with the collapse of the movements associated with 1968. The subjectivist turn made by Marcuse was, in my opinion, less theoretical than tactical. Even in his last work, written under the cloud of counter-revolution, the "great refusal" retained echoes of what it once was: a cultural endeavor – predicated on solidarity – whose intentions informed the political imagination.

### Toward a Critical Political Theory

"TRADITIONAL" POLITICAL THEORY in the

United States basically comes in two variants. The most recognizable is *normative* theory. Primarily influenced by students of Karl Jaspers like Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, it is preoccupied with the conventional canon that begins with Plato and the basic categories — such as “virtue” or the “citizen” — that re-appear in an ongoing and timeless conversation among classic thinkers. Normative theorists privilege the unique textual interpretation, the plasticity of concepts, and the experience that gives them credence. Even the most cursory glance at the mainstream academic journals demonstrates the extent to which normative theory is separate from social reality. The alternative ap-

proach is usually termed *empirical* theory. Important thinkers from this school include “pluralists” such as David Truman, Robert Dahl, and Charles Lindblom. They tend to offer middle range theories that have little use for the more general concepts associated with normative theory. Their aim is to offer “objective” descriptions of how institutions, parties, and factions operate. Neither of these traditional (and hegemonic) approaches provides an insight into the totality — what Marx termed “the ensemble of social relations” — or the contradictions that it generates. Neither is particularly concerned either with critique or resistance let alone questions of agency or the mobilizing power of ideas. In short, just like the traditional theory criticized by Max Horkheimer, each traditional form of political theory — after its fashion — neatly divides the subject from the object, the metaphysical from the material, and the speculative from the behavioral.

Critical theory had always opposed attempts to deal with ideas in trans-historical fashion, leave the totality unquestioned, and ignore its contradictions. It can offer an alter-

native to the reigning paradigms. But this would mean introducing a new commitment to privileging political action and specifying meaningful forms of institutional resistance. It would also mean coming to terms with how negative dialectics has cast a metaphysical veil over critical theory and how those with a vested interest in maintaining its academic respectability have a vested interest in keeping that veil in place. The need for such a conceptual shift is, there-

fore, not as self-evident as many would like to think. Purely philosophical and aesthetic practitioners of critical theory constantly laud the radicalism of their intellectual undertakings but rarely put “positive” proposals on

the table, identify contradictions with an eye on their resolution, or offer even speculative ways of dealing with the crises of our time.

It may be the case that politics is not reducible to the questions raised by Harold Lasswell: “Who gets what, when, where, and how?” But these concerns inform any understanding of meaningful political action. Unless a theory can generate the categories necessary for making such determinations, no willingness to condemn “the system” or “the establishment” will make it political. Marcuse took important steps in lifting the metaphysical veil, but it made little sense calling for a “new science” without bothering to provide criteria for verifying experiments and claims.<sup>30</sup> Such a stance only gets in the way of disentangling the conflation between objectification and reification — about which Marcuse himself evidenced ambivalence — along with what have become completely metaphysical arguments about the commodity form and instrumental rationality.

A critical political theory must begin by admitting that the theory of reification has itself become reified. The commodity form often

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Every movement must, by  
definition, make not merely its  
message — but also its values —  
popular.

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breaks down the walls of the organic community, and it can empower women and other victims of reactionary traditions; it just as easily generates monopolies or reduces the worker to a cost of production. Instrumental rationality is actually nothing more than a mathematical technique for dealing with scarcity by achieving maximum output with minimum input. It is employed in curing malaria or producing a nuclear bomb, organizing for social democracy or organizing for fascism, developing legislative programs for environmental reform or analyzing the possibilities for strip-mining. The issue is not the commodity form or instrumental rationality, let alone “science,” but the projects that are being undertaken through their usage. Juxtaposing them and the totality they ideologically reinforce against subjectivity has made it virtually impossible to render any determinate political judgment or deal with questions concerning what is to be done.

A new critical political theory must therefore discard the indeterminate notion that “the whole is false” and emerge from what Hegel called “the night in which all cows are black.” Entering the political discourse, rather than retreating from it in the name of “critique,” requires jettisoning the notion that the abdication of “positive” political judgment is somehow a principle of judgment. It demands the creation of categories for rendering qualitative distinctions between institutions and between movements with an eye to how any one of them might contribute to bringing about a *more* liberated society. Sartre put the matter beautifully when he wrote:

I know that certain lofty spirits make a name for themselves by illustrious refusals. They say *no*. What about it? These refusals are appearances that hide a shameful but utter submission. I hate the pretense that trammels people’s minds and sells us cheap nobility. To refuse is not to say no, but to modify by work. “Change the world,” says Marx. “Change life,” says Rimbaud. Well and good. Change them

if you can. That means you will accept many things in order to modify a few.<sup>31</sup>

A one-dimensional view on the culture industry fits the familiar pattern. There is, admittedly, a trend within cultural production that speaks to the lowest common denominator and there is too much of what Adorno termed “non-conformist conformity.” But it is mistaken to suggest that every work will necessarily become subject to a form of what Marcuse termed repressive de-sublimation whereby its critical and liberating content is diminished to the extent that it becomes a popular commodity. That is certainly not the case with a host of artists ranging from Charlie Chaplin to Ethel Waters to Bob Dylan. Different works of art, whether representing high or low culture, offer different possibilities: some can provide a better depiction of social reality while others can better spark the imagination.<sup>32</sup> Insisting that art *must* evoke a great refusal or a sense of utopia denied is really a form of provincial nostalgia for the seminar room masquerading as radicalism.

Kant recognized that the aesthetic experience has no purpose to serve other than one of purposelessness. There is nothing rarified, or even necessarily “radical” about what he had in mind. In modern terms, in fact, Kant expresses the need for “escape.” That is the appeal of genuine aesthetic experience. It is as real for Emma Bovary reading her trashy novels as it is for Adorno listening to — or, perhaps better, “reading” — the music of Schoenberg. Forgetting this, and framing the analysis of the culture industry in a one-dimensional way, leaves resistance to the “happy consciousness” identified with a completely self-referential experience that also has dogmatic overtones. Adorno and Marcuse, correctly, recognized that even their most beloved modernist works were susceptible to integration by the culture industry and that this very fact demanded unceasing innovation. But that innovation could occur only in terms of ever more esoteric and formalistic

works that must ever more fracture the narrative and undercut simple enjoyment in the name of an ever more endangered experience of genuine subjectivity.

Of course, many products of the culture industry insult the intelligence of even everyday people. But the judgments of even its best critics become arbitrary when it comes to determining what works actually perform the task of negativity as against those “popular” works that can’t — by definition. These thinkers also ignore the ways in which the culture industry has expanded the public for high as well as popular art and made the world bigger for a broader public. The famous claim made in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that “mass enlightenment is mass deception” goes nowhere. The usual critique of the culture industry is far less radical than self-indulgently conservative and counter-political. It leaves the world as it is.

Walter Benjamin was much more circumspect than most members of the Frankfurt School when he noted that that even popular works can foster political reflection and, from a progressive stance, that a positive judgment on the technique employed depends more on what it can teach other artists than whether it evokes a great refusal or an intensification of subjectivity.<sup>33</sup> To believe that the New Left, the Women’s Liberation Movement, the various movements identified with people of color, or even the anti-imperialist movements somehow opposed mass culture is misguided. Every movement must make not merely its message — but also its values — popular. The culture industry should be conceived as what Douglas Kellner termed a contested terrain in which battles are constantly taking place between conflicting ideological forces. Categories for making distinctions, once again, become necessary. To deny this — especially in the name of subjectivity — leads into yet another dead end.

None of this translates into abandoning utopia. But it does call for understanding the best society as a regulative ideal that is in flux

— that is a dream — rather than a realizable vision against which all practical projects are judged essentially worthless. To his credit, Marcuse complemented his more speculative ventures with concrete investigations into the social dynamics of fascism, a fine study of Soviet Marxism,<sup>34</sup> and advanced industrial society. He also stood virtually alone in employing his utopian ideal, his anthropological break with the established order, to inform judgments concerning the new sensibility required by a movement committed to liberation and even the changes in social relations that it might demand. But the old perspective cannot simply be mechanically carried over into new conditions. The New Left is a thing of the past and the matter of solidarity — no less than the ideological values informing it — needs critical reformulation.

**R**ADICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STILL EXIST. But they can no longer be seen as existing at the “margins” of the system. Many have crystallized into interest groups that clearly (in political if not always in ideological terms) seek inclusion into mainstream society rather than a new order. Each also competes with others for resources, loyalty, and publicity in order to privilege its particular demands. There is a general tendency for interest groups to engage in the moral economy of the separate deal, and — from the perspective of progressive forces — the whole has become less than the sum of its parts. These are real issues. But contemporary critical theorists have been notably remiss in tackling them. It is the same with problems concerning the development of links between social movements and the “working class.” That is, I think, because — especially after Marcuse — subjectivity has been privileged over solidarity by the “critical” radical enterprise.<sup>35</sup>

Solidarity is usually trumpeted by contemporary practitioners of critical theory from the perspective of compassion, guilt, and identity. Even Marcuse does not deal with how social

movements and class intersect, their shared interests, and the ideological preconditions for overcoming the disunity between them. A critical political theory must grapple concretely with the problems and preconditions for establishing solidarity among the exploited and the excluded.

Articulating programs that might express a “class ideal,” or a stance that privileges the interests of working people within the major social movements without privileging one or the other, might be a place to start.<sup>36</sup> Not the great refusal, in any event, but the most basic and unrealized political values of the enlightenment legacy informed the great progressive movements of the past — from the socialist labor movement to the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, the anti-Communist uprisings in Eastern Europe, and the most democratic and egalitarian movements in the once colonized world. The implication is clear: critical theory must reorient itself politically and acknowledge its fundamental debt to the liberal political heritage.

Harping on the way in which modern critical theory has engaged in a critique of enlightenment from the standpoint of enlightenment itself doesn’t help matters. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* was a metaphysical exercise from the beginning and there is a reason why Horkheimer and Adorno never wrote the “positive” sequel to their masterpiece: they no longer had anything positive to say. They and their followers see the Enlightenment as the source of modern barbarism: the fulfillment of a triumphant instrumental rationality, in their view, is the “totally administered society.” But historical reality never entered into their argument. Not *modern* classes like the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whose partisans embraced liberalism and socialism and identified with anti-fascist political movements, but *pre-modern* classes like the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and the lumpenproletariat have traditionally formed the mass base for racist, xenophobic, and im-

perialist movements from the Action Française to the Ku Klux Klan to the Nazis and beyond.

Rarely is it mentioned that the critique of these reactionary ideologies, even when embraced by liberal-enlightenment thinkers, can occur only with liberal-enlightenment assumptions; that the extent to which difference can be practiced depends upon the extent to which the liberal values are in effect; and— finally — that the degree to which authoritarianism is constrained is the degree to which all institutions, including capital, are rendered democratically accountable. While castigating the great representatives of the Enlightenment, critical theory has wasted little time on what the “counter-enlightenment” had to say about the pressing issues of their time and ours. And for good reason: most of their works are so prejudiced, so anachronistic, so blatantly foolish, that they are simply unreadable.

The truth is that, from the beginning, critical theory underestimated the enlightenment legacy and parliamentary democracy in a way that the orthodox Marxist representatives of social democracy never did. Repulsed by totalitarianism, in fact, critical theorists became undialectically defined by what they opposed. That is perhaps less true of Marcuse than the others, but it is true of him as well. He may have anticipated that the more liberal developments of advanced industrial society were being threatened by a counter-revolution with provincial and authoritarian intentions. But Marcuse, like his less political friends in the Frankfurt School, never appreciated the way in which Goethe was right and that, from the very beginning, two souls lived in the breast of Europe and perhaps the rest of the world, too.

Today, a new generation of critical political theorists must draw the appropriate lessons from this insight from *Faust*. The alternative is no longer reform or revolution, but liberal reform or authoritarian reaction. That is true in the Occident no less than in the Orient. Human rights, scientific experimentation, and eco-

monic justice are under siege by proponents of religious fundamentalism and political provincialism. A modern critical political theory cannot simply retreat into the philosophical-aesthetic ether. It must dispense with the metaphysical preoccupations of times past and, finally, recognize that there never was a “dialectic” of enlightenment at all: only an ongoing political and cultural conflict between real movements either committed or opposed to constraining the arbitrary exercise of institutional power and expanding the possibilities of individual experience.

## NOTES

1. The primacy of the Communist Party was achieved with its destruction of the Kronstadt Soviet in 1921. For a background, see Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 19–88, 188–195 and Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (New York: Norton, 1970).
2. For a more complete discussion, see Stephen Eric Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 11–67.
3. With orthodox Marxism, “the dialectical method was overthrown and with it the methodological supremacy of the totality over the individual aspects; the parts were prevented from finding their definition within the whole and, instead, the whole [namely, capitalism] was dismissed as unscientific or else, it degenerated into the mere ‘idea’ or ‘sum’ of the parts. With the totality out of the way, the fetishistic relations of the isolated parts appeared as a timeless law valid for every human society.” Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), p. 9.
4. According to the prevailing Marxist wisdom, which saw the revolution as ultimately taking place in the most economically advanced nation, it should not have broken out in an economically underdeveloped country like Imperial Russia. That the communist revolution occurred there was for this new generation not merely a vindication of Lenin but a “revolution against *Das Kapital*.” Antonio Gramsci, “The Revolution Against ‘Capital’” in *Selections from Political Writings 1910–1920* ed. Quintin Hoare and trans. John Matthews (New York: International Publishers, 1977), pp. 34ff.
5. Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 24.
6. The point was to develop a “conception of Marxism that was quite undogmatic and anti-dogmatic, historical and critical, and which was therefore materialist in the strictest sense of the word. This conception involved the application of the materialist conception of history to the materialist conception of history itself.” Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* tr. Fred Halliday (London: New Left Books, 1970), pp. 92ff and 43.
7. Russell Jacoby, *The Dialectics of Defeat: The Contours of Western Marxism* 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
8. In spite of his critical attitude toward the communist movement, and his withering contempt for orthodox Marxism and social democracy, Max Horkheimer thus lauded the idea of workers’ councils as late as 1940. See, Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule: Geschichte, Theoretische Entwicklung, Politische Bedeutung* (Frankfurt: DTV, 1988), p. 66.
9. Friedrich Pollock, “State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations” in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Mackay Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 95ff.
10. Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
11. Max Horkheimer, “The Authoritarian State” (1940) in *Telos* #15 (Spring, 1973), pp. 3ff.
12. Note the classic essays, “Materialism and Metaphysics” and “Traditional and Critical Theory,” by Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, tr. Matthew J. O’Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 10ff and 188ff.
13. See, for a critique of this position, Stephen Eric Bronner, “The Limits of Metatheory: Political Reflections on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*” in *Imagining the Possible: Radical Politics for Conservative Times* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 103ff.
14. “If today the subject is vanishing, aphorisms take upon themselves the duty to consider the evanescent itself as essential. They insist . . . on negativity.” Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 16. Also note the famous lecture by Theodor Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy” (1931) in *Telos* #31 (Spring, 1977), pp. 120ff.
15. “The less identity can be assured between subject and object, the more contradictory are the demands made upon the cognitive subject, upon its unfettered strength and candid self-reflection.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 31.
16. “Happiness is an accidental moment of art, less important than the happiness that attends the knowledge of art. In short, the very idea that enjoyment is of

- the essence of art deserves to be overthrown." T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretl Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann and tr. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 22.
17. Note the classic study by Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).
18. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (London: International Publishers, 1963) 38:276.
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25. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Dialectics* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. 73.
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30. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (New York: New American Library, 1971), p. 344.
31. Note the more elaborate discussion, which seeks to generate some categories for differentiating the radical possibilities of artistic works, in Stephen Eric Bronner, "Expressionism and Marxism: Towards an Aesthetic of Emancipation" in *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 411ff.
32. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pgs. 217ff; Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" in *Understanding Brecht* trans. Anna Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 85ff.
33. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Vintage, 1961).
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# Global Leveraged Buyout or the “Longest Boom in Capitalist History”?

*A Reply to Robert Fitch*

LOREN GOLDNER

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ROBERT FITCH HAS, FOR MORE THAN FOUR decades, charmed readers with his elegant writing style, his intellectual breadth, and this gift for metaphor. Nevertheless, style, breadth and metaphor are no substitute for content, and his “In Defense of Washington and Wall Street” (*New Politics*, # 46), while making some good points about the unraveling of the world financial system, is seriously flawed.

It is a little surprising that Fitch’s article is *New Politics*’ sole statement so far on the biggest capitalist crisis in 80 years. Fitch seems almost indifferent to the theoretical legacy of the Russian Revolution, the theses of the early Communist International, and the further development of the Left Opposition (Trotsky and others) after the early 1920s which were *NP*’s founding commitments. Whereas all these currents had in common the affirmation that capitalism had become by 1914 a decadent mode of production on a world scale, Fitch writes that, on the contrary, we are now seeing the end “of the greatest and longest global expansion in the history of capitalism going back to the first industrial revolution.” For him, apparently, world capitalism, at least until 2007-8, was still progressive, as it was in the period prior to 1914.

One would think this assertion would at least require some comparison with the longer and far more broad-based post-World War II

boom (1945-1973). To take only one example, capitalist productivity, (however ambiguous a form of measurement, since it makes no distinction between, e.g., productive and unproductive labor) in the developed sector in 1982-2008 only rarely reached the 3 percent annual average increase of the 1945-1973 period. Even the *Financial Times* of London routinely acknowledges this.

Fitch seems to miss the difference between a classical capitalist boom and a huge leveraging of debt built upon a far-reaching human retrogression that more than cancels out his Exhibit A for the ongoing health of capitalism: the emergence from poverty of about one-fifth of the populations of China and India (about which more in a moment).

In 1980, the total debt of the U.S. government since the American Revolution was \$1 trillion. Less than 25 years later, it had become \$4 trillion, underwriting a similar increase in the indebtedness of American corporations, state and local governments, and individuals, now unraveling.

This period (indeed starting ca.1960, during the postwar expansion) saw the disappearance of the single-paycheck working-class family in the United States and a fair part of Europe, and thus the doubling (or more) of the hours of work per week required to maintain such a family. This fact alone, reversing the drift of capitalism since the mid-19th century to a shorter work week, decisively undermines Fitch’s Pollyannish boom scenario.

The only expansion on a world scale during the 1982-2007 period that resembles clas-

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sical capitalist expansion took place in Asia. Yet Japan, the second largest economy in the world after the U.S., hit a wall in its 1990 meltdown and has struggled with stagnation ever since, with an estimated 30 percent casualization of the work force. The 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis devastated South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia. In South Korea, 5 percent annual growth did return by the early 2000s, but with 60 percent of the work force casualized and one paycheck away from the street.

What about Fitch's showcases: India and, more importantly, China? Indeed, about 300 million people in both countries acquired (or did acquire) "middle-class" levels of consumption. But the 100 million Chinese laborers drifting from city to city in search of work experienced no boom. Nor did the 750 million back on the farm, increasingly driven from the land by poverty and land-grabbing party officials building golf courses. In 2008 alone, there were a reported 70,000 "incidents" (strikes, riots, demonstrations, and other public protests) in China responding to this degradation of conditions.

In India, the accelerating poverty of the 750 million peasants blew the cover of "India shining" in the last elections. Bankrupted weavers hang themselves from their looms, and the once marginalized and now revived rural Naxalite (Maoist) insurgency in various backward states (e.g. Orissa) was recently declared India's biggest internal security threat.

But capitalist accumulation is world accumulation, and even this very uneven regional expansion is overshadowed (and then some) by net retrogression elsewhere, which was not the case during capitalism's progressive phase.

Fitch's silence on the Third World outside parts of Asia is near total. Between 1970 and 2000, the average external indebtedness of the countries of Latin America (to American and European banks) had increased by no less than 30 times. Third World debt has largely disappeared from the headlines in recent years, not

because it has disappeared in reality or still does not weigh heavily on the non-development of 80 countries, but because the old "Third World"

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is now, in bourgeois ideology, called "emerging markets" and because much of that debt has been rescheduled or written off as uncollectible. Only recently, Ecuador's threat to stop payments on its \$30 billion debt had them sweating on Wall Street and the City of London (above all as a precedent for dozens of other countries) until attention was somewhat diverted by the crisis of \$55 trillion in global derivatives and hedge funds.

**R**ETROGRESSION? TAKE MEXICO. In the wake of the Latin American debt crisis of 1982, the living standards of the Mexican population were reduced by 50 percent. Then, with the skillful marketing of Mexican President Salinas in the late 80s and early 90s, Mexican financial markets (but not living standards) recovered and the *Wall Street Journal* was touting Mexico as the "next Korea"; the 1994 "tequila crisis" of the Mexican bond market (requiring a \$50 billion bailout of U.S. investors by the Clinton administration) reduced the living standard of average Mexicans by another 50 percent. From then until the end of the 1982-2007 period, Mexico's economy lived from the forced emigration of millions of workers to the United States in search of badly-paid work, from oil, and most importantly, from the drug trade. The recent closing off of job opportunities in the United States and the collapse of world oil

prices knocked away two of those three sources, leaving only the drug trade.

The drug trade is now estimated to constitute as much as 40 percent of the Mexican economy, reaching of course deep into the United States itself. Seven thousand people died in drug-related killings in Mexico in 2008, more than died in the same year under the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The drug cartels have an estimated half to one million men under arms and are more than a match for the Mexican state, which they have also largely infiltrated and paralyzed. Mainstream Mexican political discussion is no longer about being the next Korea, but the next Afghanistan. Similar gangs from the “muscular democracies” of Central America (created by U.S. counter-insurgency in the 1980s) also reach into the United States, and continue their killing sprees in L.A. barrios and California prisons.

A similar story can be told about Brazil (also restructured in the 1982 debt crisis) and the resulting “lost decade” of the 80s; this was followed by the less-touted lost decade of the 90s under H.F. Cardoso’s neo-liberalism, and finally by Brazil’s return to the good graces of Western bankers under Lula. But in Brazil, as well, 20-30 percent of the population still lives on the extreme margins of the official economy. The drug cartels control many of the slums around Rio and Sao Paulo, and are (like their Mexican counterparts) better armed than the state, and in summer 2006 took over downtown Sao Paulo in armed riots commanded from prison by drug bosses on their cell phones. They even fund health care, schools, and summer camps for kids. Most recently, they funded their own coup in Guinea-Bissau, a stepping stone to the European market.

Argentina was the “A+ student” of the neo-liberal “Washington consensus” in the 1990s, until its collapse in 2001; Buenos Aires is surrounded by a ring of ex-industrial suburbs filled with closed factories and semi-lumpenized workers from what was (until the 70s) the best-

paid and most militant working class of the Southern Cone, ground up (like the workers of Chile and Uruguay) under the military dictatorships established in 1973-1976, where neo-liberalism was first tested.

A lot of other people were left out of the boom too. How about Africa, where the almost continent-wide war of 1994-1998 (following the 40-odd wars of the early 90s) killed more people (4 million) than any war since 1945? The 800,000 who died in Rwanda’s genocide missed the boom too. How many IMF “structural adjustment programs” led to similar retrogression? Six million children (one Holocaust) die every year (not to mention adults) of diseases that are eminently curable, if only someone could make a profit selling them the medication or providing public health infrastructure. Jeffrey Sachs, (who organized some retrogression himself in Bolivia, then in Poland and in the Baltic states) talks about that regularly.

The geopolitics of retrogression since the early 1980s would also include the non-oil states of the Islamic world (where millions of marginalized youth have been drawn to jihadi politics, from the Algerian civil war via Gaza and Lebanon to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

They would further include Eastern Europe, Russia, and the ex-Soviet Republics of Central Asia (in the latter the fall of living standards was on the order of 70 percent after 1991).

WHAT HAPPENED IN EASTERN EUROPE, like Argentina (until very recently) a showcase of neo-liberal triumphalism? After 1989-1991, its industry, previously oriented to the defunct Soviet Union, not surprisingly, proved worthless in global competition. But capital poured in from the West, above all Germany (for Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) and Sweden (for the Baltic states). For sustained, broad-based development? Hardly. After Sachs-type “shock therapy” (much shock, little therapy) killed off or marginalized the older populations whose pen-

sions became worthless, such capital poured into real estate speculation and “services” employing the better-educated youth (or those who did not emigrate to western Europe at the first opportunity), leaving the old industrial working class to stagnate in ex-industrial towns throughout the region. The 1998 Russian default (which almost brought down world capital markets) was followed by Putin and a certain stability, built again not on any real development but oil revenues, and the export of Russia’s other valuable natural resources, fueling a frenzied yuppie-type consumption in showcase cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg) while those left behind flocked to red-brown National Bolshevik groups and nostalgia for Stalin. And we shouldn’t forget those Mafia-type oligarchs who moved the Western aid money to their Swiss bank accounts.

In the “advanced” countries, finally: western Europe labored for most of the 80s and 90s with 9-10 percent unemployment, and in the U.S. 80 percent of the population saw living standards fall (working, once again, twice as many hours per week per family) by at least 20 percent.

The minimum wage in the United States in 1973 was \$3.25 per hour; today it is \$6.15, and it would have to be raised to \$18 to recover the purchasing power of the 1973 level. The United States routinely scores 20 out of 20 “advanced capitalist” countries in comparative testing of high school students. U.S. life expectancy is 42nd in the world, rivaling . . . Jordan, and many semi-developed countries have lower rates of infant mortality. In order to satisfy the demands of big pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies, health care takes 14 percent of the artificial GDP figure, much higher

than most other OECD countries with better (and universal) systems. Forty million Americans have no health insurance at all. Between 1 and 2 percent are awaiting trial, in the prison system, or on parole, an exponential increase from 35 years ago.

Current estimates of the requirements for rebuilding U.S. infrastructure are conservatively \$1.6 trillion, and we need only recall New Orleans under Hurricane Katrina to grasp, in extreme form, what this has meant generally as social retrogression.

Thus, in summary, Fitch, for all his erudition, could reacquaint himself with Marx’s concept of “expanded social reproduction” introduced at the end of vol. II of *Capital*, and think more about the difference between the paper expansion of GDP (which has after all increased more than 10 times since 1973, and Fitch himself would not say we are any richer) and the real material reproduction of the world. Given his framework, Fitch may well think that capitalism will recover from this crisis, and a further ensuing boom will be “progressive” too.

#### SOME SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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## ROBERT FITCH REPLIES

THERE'S MUCH WISDOM in the old saying that you learn more from criticism than from praise. So why am I not more grateful for the criticism I received from my old Berkeley buddy Loren Goldner?

True, Goldner failed to even mention my thesis — that the ultimate cause of the present crisis — widely seen in narrow financial terms — lay in the unprecedented length and breadth of the boom that took place in the productive sector — causing a huge buildup of surplus capital which in turn caused interest rates to fall and wild lending sprees to flourish. It's an explanation that fits the socialist remedy for capitalism, which is to change not the banking system or the mode of regulation but the mode of production.

Yet Goldner does provide things to be grateful for: it helps to be reminded that millions of Americans languish in prisons; that millions more have no health insurance; and that real wages have declined substantially. For regular readers of the media, these may seem like commonplaces, but as Goldner gently points out, I am getting on in years. And we oldsters need constant reminders of perfectly obvious facts.

Less helpful, I must concede, was Goldner's criticism of my "assertion" that capitalism is "progressive." This is, of course, the incorrect view. The correct view of capitalism which was established once and for all by the Communist International — and flagrantly ignored by the editors of *New Politics* — is that capitalism is now "decadent." But — check the text — I never asserted that capitalism is progressive. Merely saying that capitalism produced a boom doesn't at all entail that it is progressive, whatever that might mean. Because Goldner never bothers to explain the decadent/progressive distinction or why we ought to pay attention to it. It is enough that the Communist fathers have said thusly and so must we.

One possible clue to what it might mean for capitalism to be "decadent" is Goldner's allied discussion of "retrogression." Not that he defines that term either. But he does give an instance which furnishes a clue: social retrogression happens, according to Goldner, when a Third World country like Jordan has lower infant mortality figures than the United States. Only a couple of problems arise with the example. First, the U.S. infant mortality rate isn't rising: it's falling. How would it be social retrogression if Jordan's rate were falling faster than ours? At the worst it might be termed "relative social retrogression." But why wouldn't Jordan's more rapid progress be a cause for celebration and congratulation rather than outrage and disgust?

Unfortunately, Jordan's infant mortality, according to the most recent U.N. figures, is actually 19.4 per 1,000 whereas in the United States it's 6.4 per 1,000. Goldner's piece is full of "facts" like the Jordanian birth rate. Like his fanciful doubling of household work time in the "80s and the 90s." (From 1979 — 2004 hours worked rose 18.1 percent for the middle fifth.) And perhaps most crucially in his dating of the post-war boom from 1945: There was no boom in 1945. Between 1945 and 1947 Europe couldn't even feed itself. Germany didn't regain its pre-war level of production until 1948. But in the struggle to show capitalist decadence, Goldner wants to show the post-war boom is longer than the recent one. So he back dates it.

Another criticism I found indigestible was Goldner's claim that I fail to grasp the distinction between a "classical capitalist boom and a huge leverage of debt." It's true that I fail to grasp the distinction. But that's because there is none. There never has been a boom — classical or romantic — that proceeded without leverage, i.e., without an over-extension of credit so that rising debt dilutes equity and capital structures tumble when asset prices fall. In 1834

it was speculation in British railroads; in 1871 the objects of mania were Continental and American railroads and railroad-connected real estate; in 1929 the run up in the new consumer product stocks — radios, autos, telephones — bought on margin.

**T**O BE FAIR, I must admit that there is one criticism where Goldner has really found me out. “Given his framework,” (my alleged belief in capitalism’s progressivity) “Fitch may well think that capitalism will recover from this crisis.” It’s not necessary to speculate based on false premises what I think. Here’s what I think: Socialism isn’t dough that automatically rises from capitalism when the economic temperature rises sufficiently. I think that whether capitalism survives or continues depends in no small part on what socialists do. The misery and elementality of capitalism opens the door; but socialists have to make the sale to the working people. They have to be convinced that socialism is the remedy. If we have a sales corps made up of advocates who substitute fudge for facts, who rely on an authority that lacks all persuasiveness, and who are incapable of making elementary distinctions that would make their meaning clear — I’m afraid I’d have to go short on the revolution.

Finally, readers may wonder whether there is more to this acrimonious exchange than a couple of grey old geese from Berkeley pecking away at each other? Just possibly. The issue for us socialists is whether the present crisis will at

last make us politically relevant — a force within the labor movement and an influence within the political system. To make that move from the wild margins where anything can be said because no one is listening — to the mainstream where fact-checkers flourish and arguments are tested for circularity — we must be able to explain to people what’s happened to them. And that requires that we understand it ourselves.

And for a long time we haven’t achieved clarity because there have reigned two incompatible models of capitalism — one from the Communist International that asserted capitalism had reached its “highest stage”: i.e., monopoly capitalism with stagnation as the natural state of the economy and state direction of the economy, war and imperialism required to ward off the inevitable stagnation. In this model, the advanced working class lived as parasites off the exploitation of workers and peasants in the less developed nations. The other model which receded in influence after 1917 comes from Marx. It foregrounded the exploitation of workers, who suffered relative impoverishment as their wages fell, a consequence of a competitive market system that didn’t spare or shield them. In Marx’s model, boom and bust, not stagnation, is the natural state of the economy. Who can doubt which model best explains the present economic conjuncture? Or which workers are more likely to identify with? If this debate advances the cause of socialist clarity, the old saw about criticism being more valuable than praise will have been proved right again.

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# After Israel's Invasion:

*An Eyewitness Account from Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel*

MARIE KENNEDY

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## **Gaza: War on Civilians in the World's Largest Open-air Prison<sup>1</sup>**

**A**FTER THREE WEEKS IN THE WEST BANK, Israel, and Gaza,<sup>2</sup> I returned to Los Angeles in a state of stunned disbelief. I had last been in Palestine in 1995, a time when many were hopeful of a peaceful transition to two states, as outlined in the Oslo accords. Even at that time I was pessimistic about a solution to the conflict — already Palestinians were prevented from freedom of movement, subject to arbitrary detention by the Israeli military, and land seizures for new and ever expanding settlements were rampant. Now, things are immeasurably worse, not only in Gaza (although that is the most extreme), but also in the West Bank and for Palestinian citizens of Israel. I will share a few brief impressions and some facts, starting with Gaza, the world's largest open-air prison — a 140 square mile strip of land in which 1.5 million people are crowded together. Even before the recent Israeli offensive, the people of Gaza had been subjected to a punitive blockade for 18 months.

Massive destruction was evident the moment we cleared the Rafah border from Egypt to Palestine on March 9, 2009. The further north we went, the worse it got. Houses, apartment buildings were shot or bulldozed down; mosques, all police stations, all government

buildings, including parliament were destroyed; huge sections of the walls of schools were blasted away, the American International School was obliterated, the United Nations Refugee School was bombed, as was the Islamic University of Gaza; the walls of hospitals were pocked with bullets; lone houses stood in plains of rubble. What little Gaza had of economic infrastructure was re-engineered into swaths of upturned concrete and twisted metal. Olive trees were uprooted and crops bulldozed under. Thousands of people were living in tents, hastily constructed hovels, or in the ruins themselves. These were the things I saw with my own eyes. The stories I heard were even more devastating.

Even though we were there during the “ceasefire,” the war continued by non-explosive means. Nothing in — food, fuel, medicines, people with essential emergency skills; nothing out, including people in need of critical medical care not available in Gaza. Of course, it wasn't a total ceasefire — every night we heard loud explosions — we were told that the Israelis were continuing to bomb the tunnels and to fire artillery at fishing boats.

Israel carpet-bombed the 140 square miles of the Gaza strip. Supposedly the attack was to teach Hamas to stop firing rockets into Israeli villages. Of course, wars are never about only one thing and the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is so long and complex that it almost defies sorting out.

But we should note one relatively new factor in the calculus. In 2000 the British Gas Group (BG) discovered 1.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (worth nearly \$4 billion) beneath Gaza's territorial waters. While the election of

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a Hamas government in 2006 put an end to the chance for Israel to profit directly from this find, the Israeli government proceeded to blockade Gaza's waters, not only preventing Palestinians from fishing, but BG from harvesting the reserves. Now, as Palestinians continue to be prevented from fishing in Gaza territorial waters, they wonder if Israel is withdrawing gas by means of nearby "slant pumps."

It's true that Hamas' militia fired rockets at Israel, killing three Israeli civilians and one Israeli soldier and wounding 182 civilians. While it is indefensible for Hamas to fire on Israeli civilians in Israeli territory, it's important to note that their effectiveness was limited. A Gaza journalist put it this way: "The rockets had minds of their own. Some looked around and decided to sunbathe in the Negev desert, others to take a dip in the Mediterranean Sea. Some decided they'd drop on Sderot, some on Ashkelon; many decided to turn around and go back home." Hamas' Katyushas are not smart. They lack the surgical precision of Israel's unmanned drones. In fact, prior to going into Gaza, we met with Eric Yellin, a leader of Other Voices, a peace organization in Sderot. Although Eric emphasized how traumatizing it is to live in a town that has at times seen as many as 50 rockets a day, he also described the Hamas rockets as pretty ineffectual. And, driving around Ashkelon and Sderot, the two communities hardest hit by rocket fire from Gaza, we couldn't see any sign of destruction, whereas in Gaza, no matter where you were, it would be hard to avoid seeing massive destruction. Whatever the finer points, it's apparent to most objective observers that Israel's response to the Gazan rockets was disproportionate.

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Gaza Mental Health Centre, air strikes began at 11:25 in the morning on December 27, 2008, almost at the same time throughout the Gaza Strip. There are two school shifts in Gaza and this is pre-

cisely the time at the end of the morning period and the beginning of the afternoon period, when the most number of children are bound

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Air strikes began at 11:25 in the morning. There are two school shifts in Gaza and this is precisely the time at the end of the morning period and the beginning of the afternoon period, when the most number of children are bound to be in the streets.

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to be in the streets. John Ging, the Irish head of the UNRWA in Gaza, stated that the only possible reason for choosing that time would be to kill and injure as many children as possible. For 22 days, Israel dropped bombs from F16 jets and shot rockets from Apache helicopters (all of U.S. origin). Unmanned drones killed many, including a family having tea in their courtyard<sup>3</sup>. Many homes and institutional buildings, including Gaza's UN headquarters, where 700 civilians were sheltering, were shelled with white phosphorus ammunition. White phosphorus ignites on contact with oxygen; when splattered on humans it burns through flesh and bone. We were warned by UNRWA not to go off on our own as white phosphorus was still burning in some places. In several homes that I visited, rabbits that the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee had supplied to women for household and economic use were incinerated by white phosphorus. Physicians for Human Rights is still trying to figure out from the types of wounds that were inflicted and what weapons were used.

Altogether, between December 27th and January 18th, more than 1400 Palestinians were

killed. Of these, almost two-thirds were civilians, almost a third of whom were children.<sup>4</sup> More than 5300 Palestinians were injured, many seriously<sup>5</sup> and an estimated 90,000 people are homeless. Of the group of about 80 women in the north (where the damage was most extensive) with whom I met on International Women's Day, at least a third of them had lost their homes and about a quarter had lost a family member. There wasn't one of them who didn't have a dead or injured family member. And yet, they welcomed me with smiles, and when I teared up at their stories, they rushed to comfort me, hugging me and handing me tissues. Then we danced together and ate food they prepared over open fires.

EVERY MOTHER I SPOKE WITH said her children were terrified. They cling, wet and soil themselves, and can't concentrate. Some refuse to go to school, especially since so many of their schools were shelled or bombed. Those who do go are unable to study. They're unable to concentrate. They're irritable and easily upset. It doesn't help, the mothers said, that their parents are short-tempered too.

The people who try to help, such as the mental health workers at the Gaza Mental Health Centre, have to deal with their own trauma as well as offer psychological help to others. In my conversation with workers there, they estimated that 99.4 percent of Gaza's children are seriously traumatized. A psychiatrist at the Centre told a story about his 6 year old son, Ali: The family was about to take a trip from their home in the north to the middle area to see how their family there had fared. The child wrote a small letter — when asked what his letter said, the child “read” his unreadable scribbles (he didn't really know how to write much yet): “I am Ali. I live in Jabalia. Don't kill me.” In response to his father asking what he would do with the letter, he said: “If the soldiers stop the car I will give them the letter.” Another mental health worker told of overhear-

ing her niece talking to herself, “I want to hide my father in the cupboard; I want to hide my mother under the bed; I want to hide my brother behind the drapes . . . where will I put my aunt? I don't have any more places.” The children feel they must take care of themselves, take care of their family, knowing that their parents can't protect them.

The Mental Health Center is working with school counselors and doctors to help them diagnose and properly treat psychosomatic symptoms, and they are working with men, women and youth against domestic violence which has increased during the war. They talked with us about the psychological warfare that Israel waged. Shelling was 24 hours a day in all areas of Gaza. They bombed urban areas an excessive number of times — as one worker put it, “when two times would have destroyed everything, they came back six times” — in his opinion, this was just to terrorize the population. They dropped leaflets saying that people had to leave their homes and made telephone calls at 2 or 3 in the morning — some were recordings, others were personal, saying “You must leave your house in 3 minutes. We are bombing.” In many cases it wasn't true — in others it was. Some received as many as 5 phone calls. As a psychologist said, it was a way of intimidating and terrorizing people, otherwise why give just 3 minutes, why not a half hour or more?

Jabr Wishah, the Deputy Director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, described the war as a deterrent war — a war to cause deep suffering so Palestinians would recall the suffering in the future, to punish people for electing Hamas and for accepting resistance to the occupation, so that in the future, they will choose leaders according to the choice of Israel and the United States and will “count to 100 before raising your voice demanding rights.” He talked of the pattern of the attack: “War ships shelled people along the coast and heavy shelling drove people from the northern and eastern borders with Israel, forcing people into

the city centers. 1.5 million people were confined in the central area where every Hamas facility, every police station, every government building would be a target. Every person was a potential target, whether people supported Hamas or not, they were a target." Nonetheless, human rights workers tirelessly collected direct testimony throughout the war and, using small generators to send emails, they continued to issue press releases every day, particularly important since foreign journalists were prevented by both Egypt and Israel from entering Gaza during the war.

We visited the partially destroyed former headquarters of the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) with staff member Nida' Abu Al-Atta. Israeli soldiers occupied the once beautiful building and used it as a prison for 23 days. Upon leaving, the soldiers thoroughly trashed it. As Nida' showed us the trash-strewn room that had been her office and the courtyard now reduced to rubble where the workers used to take their lunch, the emotion in her voice caused tears to come to my eyes. Most of the furniture was destroyed, including 20 computers and printers. The conference room which was equipped with video-communication equipment, their main way of communicating with PARC in the West Bank, was totally destroyed. Trees and crops from their extensive model urban garden were uprooted. Interior walls were covered with vicious and threatening graffiti, similar to the graffiti found in homes and offices wherever they were occupied. But, here, we also witnessed the incredible resilience of the Palestinian people — an elderly neighbor of PARC and his sons had already re-planted the model garden. He told us that he had done it so that his sons would not lose hope.

As UNRWA's John Ging put it, Palestinians "are very civilized people living in extremely uncivilized circumstances." They are not waiting to be rescued. They're focused on pulling themselves out of the rubble Israel made of their

land. They don't want handouts. They just want a reasonable chance to live on their land. But land is constantly being confiscated. The so-called buffer zone along the border with Israel is one example.

According to Ahmed Sourani, the Project Director at PARC, the 300 meter buffer zone established by Israel at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> intifada has been widened to 1.5 KM in the east and 2KM in the north. This may not sound like much, but when you consider that Gaza is only 8-9 KM wide and 45 KM long, the buffer zone represents a substantial portion of Gaza, land that has essentially been confiscated by Israel. This is the most fertile land in Gaza and, historically, 70 percent of animal production was in this zone as well as much of the agriculture. Orchards and crops have been uprooted, and hundreds of houses, including Ahmed's, as well as industrial establishments have been bulldozed. When we visited this area in the north, we looked from the rubble of former factories across empty fields crisscrossed by tank treads to the green fields and smoking factories of Israel.

A young woman, Iman Al-Najar, told a few in our delegation about the destruction of her village, Khoza'a, east of Khan Younis, in the expanded buffer zone, 500 meters from the Israeli border. Unfortunately, the story is not untypical of what happened in a number of places. As British journalist Jack Shenker said in writing about Khoza'a, "The village's story is significant largely because it is so ordinary."<sup>6</sup>

On the night of January 12th, 2009, the Israeli military began a ground offensive that lasted 12 hours, terrorizing the villagers with indescribable cruelty and violence. After Iman and 10 of her family members woke up to the sounds of bulldozers, rifle fire, and F-16's and Apache helicopters overhead, they rushed to the roof of their home, waving white flags in an attempt to plead with the Israeli soldiers who were seen everywhere in the village. Iman's family were civilians, women, men, and children

with their grandparents. They had no weapons. They were not hiding any militants. But their house was under attack from bulldozers below. Iman and her family frantically tried to escape to neighboring houses, as snipers positioned themselves around the village firing from houses they now occupied. Soldiers were separating the men from the women, ordering them to undress and herding them into another structure. The soldiers ordered the women and children, some two hundred of them, to move to the center of the village and to use a certain roadway to reach the center. At the foot of this roadway — a few hundred meters — stood a building and the women were to move towards this building. They carried white flags, and many women held babies and young children in their arms. Others had their children by their sides. Within minutes Israeli special forces opened fire on them from the building.

Rawhiya Al-Najar, a 50-year old housewife, was at the front, begging and pleading for safe passage for the group. A sniper aimed his rifle directly at Rawhiya and shot her from the building which the women had been ordered to move towards. The women started to run back as shots rang out and more women received bullets. Rawhiya lay bleeding, and paramedics who were 60 - 70 meters away, were prevented by the soldiers from reaching Rowhiya and the women and children. The soldiers fired warning shots at the paramedics. It was twelve hours later when the paramedics were finally able to reach Rowhiya and all they could do was to take her body to the morgue.

AS THE CARNAGE CONTINUED with house after house bulldozed into a pile of rubble, the villagers had no place to escape. Some crawled into holes in the debris, while others attempted to hide under slabs of broken concrete and bricks. Villagers made desperate calls from a mobile phone to the Red Crescent pleading to be rescued. The Israeli army refused the rescue and continued their assault, declar-

ing the village a closed military zone, warning that anyone coming near it would be shot on sight.

The village was surrounded by 8 bulldozers and several tanks. When the soldiers discovered that some villagers were inside cave-like holes in the collapsed buildings they began pushing the rubble and wreckage. "They were intending to bury us alive," Iman said. The children were screaming with terror. The adults prayed for a miracle. Some people, who had been wounded by bullets from snipers, were bleeding profusely. The white flags which they had used were now applied as bandages. Some women got their elderly parents to crawl out on their hands and knees, fearing that they would suffocate or be buried alive. A blind boy was separated from his mother. A paralyzed man was dragged from his wheelchair by people in an attempt to get him out of the path of a bulldozer. Traumatized villagers huddled wherever they could, as the soldiers proceeded to kill their goats, sheep, and chickens and threaten that they would kill them in the same way. Many people narrowly escaped being crushed to death as they crawled through small openings in the wreckage. Iman described how the soldiers began to fire gas missiles, filling the basements, "caves" and holes where villagers were desperately seeking shelter from the shelling. The smoke filled these cavities and Iman's mother and sisters began to vomit. They could barely breathe.

What was once a peaceful farming community lay in ruins — hundred year old olive and citrus trees uprooted and smashed, fields of grain and newly planted vegetable crops now sculpted by bulldozer and tank treads. And a whole village of people were now homeless, without the resources to rebuild. For most of these villagers, constructing a house is a life-long undertaking. Even acquiring a farm animal poses a financial burden.

Fourteen villagers were killed during the 12-hour siege. Fifty villagers were eventually

evacuated to hospitals with several succumbing to their injuries. Dozens were treated for gas inhalation, shrapnel injuries from missiles fired from unmanned drones, sniper bullets, bulldozer and tank attacks, and chemical burns from white phosphorus.

As one villager explained, "They wanted to send a message to our village: 'Leave, leave your land behind.' But this was the land of our fathers and will be the land of our children, so we stay. We sleep in tents in the rubble rather than finding shelter elsewhere. And although there is no armed resistance here, amid this violence the act of staying becomes a resistance, and that is why they are afraid of us."

Today, as before the war, the Palestinians of Gaza are trapped in an Israeli made prison. They can't fight or flee; neither can they develop an economy which will sustain them. Today, they can't even get a piece of glass to repair broken windows. Although Israel is letting some humanitarian aid enter Gaza, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported in the middle of March that, among a long list of banned items, "no livestock, industrial/electrical appliances, vehicles/transport, packaging applications, or construction materials were allowed entry." Perhaps most peculiarly (and punitively), "Items banned by the Israeli authorities . . . included jam, biscuits, and tomato paste, resulting in 398 boxes of USAID cargo and 2,488 boxes of World Vision cargo stopped from delivery to Gaza. . . . food parcels containing these foodstuffs, as well as tea, sweets, and date bars, will be rejected in the future." Gaza, indeed, continues to be a prison, including nonsensical prohibitions of anything that might give a feeling of normalcy to the people stuck there.

The recent deaths in Gaza came from modern machines of war and the brutality of an army encouraged to see all Palestinians as terrorists, even unborn babies.<sup>7</sup> In the West Bank, I might compare the situation to "the death of a thou-

sand cuts."

### **The West Bank: The Death of a Thousand Cuts**

MANY OF THE DEVICES TO SEPARATE ISRAELI and Palestinians and to protect illegal Israeli settlers were already in place when I visited in 1995: Here are a few excerpts from what I wrote in at that time: "Movement is severely and unpredictably restricted for Palestinians. On roads, checkpoints are frequent — some are permanent and others are thrown up and taken down at the whim of the Israeli authorities. Different colored license plates on cars determine who sails through checkpoints (Israelis), who is pulled over, and who will be turned back. There are now numerous roads in the West Bank and Gaza from which Palestinians are banned altogether. . . . Searches and arrests without charges or appeals are still common. . . . The issue of land and the continued expansion of Israeli settlements remains central to the struggle for real peace and a viable Palestinian state. . . . Water, a precious resource in this arid climate, is also stolen from the Palestinians. According to a 1993 World Bank report, 80-85 percent of all the available water of the West Bank and Gaza has been diverted to Israel and the settlements."<sup>8</sup> Today, each of these problems has intensified beyond what I had imagined possible in 1995. In addition, the separation wall which cuts deeply into West Bank land, with water resources conveniently located on the Israeli side, is nearing completion. When completed, Israel will have seized more than half of the West Bank land for the wall, restricted roads, and settlements.<sup>9</sup>

Grassroots International focuses its program on Resource Rights — the right to land, water, and food sovereignty — and in the West Bank, we met mostly with farmers who shared with us the problems they have in securing their rights to land and water. Those whose land has been severed by the separation wall or, in some cases, fence, talked with us about the problems

they face in continuing to farm their land on the other side.

In some places the wall is a massive concrete barrier, in others it looks less impenetrable, being a fence which one can see through. But, looks can be deceiving — these fences are electrified and covered with razor wire. The sign on one that we saw read:

MORTAL DANGER —  
MILITARY ZONE  
ANY PERSON WHO PASSES OR  
DAMAGES THE FENCE  
ENDANGERS HIS LIFE

The farmer whose land is on the other side of this fence must be careful to not farm or graze livestock too close to the fence and he must travel a long distance to reach a gate through which to pass to his land on the other side.

Mohammed Othman, a youth organizer with the Stop the Wall Campaign, accompanied us to his town of Jaayyous so that we could talk with local members of the Campaign. The village was one of the first to protest the wall, but stopped demonstrating after the wall was completed in 2004, in order to help farmers get permits to access their land on the other side of the wall, where the 6 village wells and nearly 70 percent of the village's land are located. But, when Israel decided to re-route the wall, confiscating even more land, they started demonstrating again in November of 2008. Now demonstrations occur every Friday and interrogations and arrests are frequent. Four youths have been shot by Israeli forces responding to demonstrators and many have been arrested. Only a few days before our arrival, the army had searched every home in Jaayyous in the middle of the night and arrested 16 youths after rounding up a much larger group for interrogation at a local school.

With the construction of the wall, farmers need permits to access their land on the other side, but permits are hard to get. We spoke with Mohammed's father who has had to work his farm land and tend to his sheep single-handedly

for the last three years. Although he has been able to obtain a permit to access his farm, none of his five sons have been granted a permit. He also noted that frequently the guards aren't there when they're supposed to be to open the gate. Other times, access isn't permitted at all, supposedly for security reasons. But, it's critically important that he keep farming his land because, under various laws, land that isn't worked is considered state lands.

As it turned out, we had the opportunity to share a common plight of Jaayyous residents when a curfew was called while we were visiting at the home of Boudour Shamasni, a member of the Jaayyous Women's Committee. Suddenly, scores of Israeli jeeps were zipping around town shooting and throwing "sound bombs" (bombs that create a deafening sound but no shrapnel, designed to terrify people, drive them out of their homes and scatter demonstrators). Sharpshooters on rooftops scanned the village for any violators of the curfew and we resigned ourselves to sitting out the curfew for what turned out to be about six hours. We were told that curfews are at least weekly, usually on Fridays, the holy day for Muslims. As we chatted and ate with the amazingly hospitable women in the house, we learned about the difficulties Boudour's mother faces in order to visit two of her sons, who, as a result of earlier demonstrations, are imprisoned, one in the northern region of the West Bank and one in Israel. Sometimes she makes the 7 hour trip to the prison only to be dismissed after a visit of a few minutes. We were told that 90 percent of the young men of the West Bank have been jailed at one time or another.<sup>10</sup> And, if you have been jailed, you cannot get a permit to pass through the wall.

Lutria Halat, a spokesperson for the Women's Committee, summed up the spirit of resistance in Jaayyous: "We will continue to demonstrate until the occupation has ended. . . . They can hit us with bullets, run us over with bulldozers, but they will never kick us off this land."

Protecting farmland from seizure came up time and again as we talked with farmers throughout the West Bank, even when the land has not been closed off by the wall. One of GRI's partners, the Unions of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), has been providing education and seedlings to local farmers' committees in many parts of the West Bank and Gaza. We visited a few of UAWC's sites in the field, including Bait

Reema where, as part of land reclamation and economic development efforts, the UAWC farmers' committee has distributed lemon, orange, and almond tree seedlings to the surrounding community. The Farmers' Committee of Bait Reema was started with 20 members a year ago and has since more than doubled in size, and includes both men and women. When asked what the advantage of having such a committee is, one member explained that, besides increasing solidarity and facilitating the fair distribution of resources, "when we work together it provides a good example and helps to defend against the occupation. We are stronger together to stand up for our rights and to defend against the occupation."

The bottom-up planning that is a hallmark of the UAWC was vividly demonstrated by the Kuf Ein Farmers' Committee. The first project that they chose to undertake was not the planting of productive trees, but rather 320 shade trees in the cemetery — not at all what the central UAWC staff would have chosen. But, it turned out to be a brilliant choice and demonstrates the power of local knowledge. By providing something for the whole village, the farmers' committee won the community's trust and grew from 5 to 23 members in just six months.

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The separation wall (in the West Bank) is nearing completion. When completed, Israel will have seized more than half of the West Bank land for the wall, restricted roads, and settlements.<sup>13</sup>

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Since then, Kuf Ein farmers have gone on to plant many almond and fruit trees. One of their main focuses right now is access to water. Israel controls access to the water coming into

Bait Reema and holds authority over who can dig wells. Permission is almost never given. Water is very scarce, usually coming only once a week. While a few residents have water catchments, most have to purchase water from Mekorot, the Israeli water company.

Our last field meeting near Kuf Ein was with Afeet Said Barghouti, who had discovered Israeli settlers picnicking on his farm land at night — the first step to occupying the land. As a result, he is building a house on the land and has already moved his family from town to the half-finished house to better protect his land. With UAWC's help he has also intensively planted his land to prevent its seizure.

Altogether, between the two villages, over 2500 UAWC seedlings have been planted in the last year. In addition, UAWC has provided training to farmers in improved planting techniques, how to produce export quality olive oil, and how to advocate more effectively for their rights.

We also visited with the Palestinian Farmers Union, a secular and non-partisan organization with more than 9,800 members in Gaza and the West Bank. It was started by GRI's partner the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) to advocate for the rights of farmers. They have recently applied to join La Via Campesina, an international farmers' rights organization with members in more than 60 countries. They hope that through Via Campesina they will be able to build international support for Palestinian farmers who unite with Via Campesina's demands for equitable

access to land, water, and other resources within a universal human rights framework.<sup>11</sup> This seems to express the desires of all the farmers with whom we met in Palestine, as well as the Palestinian farmers who are citizens of Israel.

### **Second Class Citizens: Palestinian Farmers in Israel**

I WAS SHOCKED TO LEARN that Palestinian farmers who are citizens of Israel face many of the same problems that are faced by farmers in the West Bank. GRI's newest Middle East partner is the Ahali Center for Community Development. Ahali has initiated a nationwide project aimed at promoting Arab agriculture, rural development farmers' rights with a specific focus on women in the Arab farming sector in Israel. Their goal is to build a stronger, more productive community of self-reliant farmers and citizens who can actively work to attain equal rights. The project uses a grassroots approach based on the principles of community mobilization, organization, and development, and aims to establish the first national organization of Arab farmers to serve the interests of Arab farmers, raise their issues in front of the Ministry of Agriculture, and ensure their representation in Israeli farmers' organizations.

In a meeting with staff at Ahali's office in Nazareth, we were told a story all too familiar from the West Bank. After 1948, there was a gradual confiscation of Arab land, and the Arab farmers who were left found it difficult to compete with Jewish agriculture which developed on a basis of irrigation, advanced technologies, and capital intensity. Jewish farmers benefited from the allocation of low cost government owned lands, subsidized inputs, and subsidized capital. In 1948, an estimated 90 percent of the Palestinian population was employed in agriculture. Today, it is estimated that only about 7 percent of the 1.5 million Palestinians living in Israel continue in agriculture.<sup>12</sup> Arabs have about 17 percent of Israeli agricultural land, but only 2.5 percent of the water. Only 10 percent

of Arab land is irrigated, while 90 percent of Jewish land is irrigated.

From Nazareth, we went with staff member Sobhi Sghiar to visit farmers from Sakhnin and Arabe near the Batouf Valley. This is the most consolidated area of Arab ownership of farmland in Israel — a total of about 3,200 acres of fertile agricultural land, spanning a large valley. But there are many problems here. Cutting through the center of the valley is the National Water Carrier, which brings water from the Galilee in the north of Israel to the Negev desert in the south to be used for irrigation and settlement usage. Nine meters wide, the canal is surrounded by fences, creating a zone that is actually 100 meters wide. The farmers in the Batouf Valley are not permitted to use this water. Bridges crossing the canal are built in only four places, creating long and unnecessary trips for many farmers to reach their land. Further, the area suffers from a lack of drainage in the rainy season and a lack of irrigation in the dry season. For years, the government has promised to develop a drainage system that would collect water in a reservoir for use in the dry season. This is one of the projects that Ahali is pressing the government for.

We experienced directly the swampy conditions in the valley — after driving close to one of the bridges over the Carrier, I got out and walked, but gave up when the mud came up to my ankles. It's definitely impossible to have more than one short growing period without proper drainage.

Ahmed Waked has another set of problems. As we sat and had tea on his patio, Ahmed and two other farmers from the area told us an almost unbelievable story. Ahmed's land is up the hill from the Batouf Valley. Long ago, the government told him that he could no longer live in the stone house in which he had been born, he was forced to leave his house and let it fall into ruin. Ahmed raises sheep and cattle, and until last month, his family for generations has grazed their sheep on a hill up from the

houses. But a month before our visit, the government put a fence up and said that the hill was state land and that it was being given for grazing cattle to a Jewish settlement at some distance from the hill. Ahmed was forbidden to use the hill. Another hill, where his family had also historically grazed their livestock had been given some years ago by the Israeli government to a U.S. based Jewish organization which designated the land for Jewish use only, saying that no non-Jew could even step on the land. Now Ahmed has nowhere to graze his livestock, and must buy feed for his 2,000 sheep, which means he can no longer make a profit from them.

The fencing off of his grazing land is only the most recent in a long series of problems Ahmed has faced. A few years ago, he was building a barn for his animals, when the government told him he had to tear it down as he had no permit for raising livestock. He was told that the permit would also give him access to water and electricity at the lower agricultural rate. So, he and a number of other farmers applied for livestock permits. Ahmed alone received a permit and he prepared to pipe in water from the nearest source, only to be told that that source was only for Jewish use. So, at his own expense, he had to pipe water from a source that was much farther away. He still hasn't gotten electricity — when he requested it for his barn and out-buildings, he was told, "You Arabs steal the electricity at the lower rate for your residential use, so we aren't going to give you electricity for your livestock."

As we were leaving, the farmers told us that they are jealous of the West Bank farmers, because, "They have hope of having their own state, while we have no hope." Of course, the West Bank farmers told us just the opposite. I would say that both are up against some pretty heavy obstacles.

### What Can We Do?

BEFORE TURNING TO WHAT I THINK WE should

be doing as U.S. citizens, I want to address a common American viewpoint that even-handedly says "both sides attacked each other; both are to blame." I think that any objective look at what has happened reveals not just a quantitative, but a qualitative difference. One side uses high-tech weaponry to flatten whole communities and obliterate economic activity; the other side uses crude rockets that inflict little damage. One side has steadily seized more and more land and water from the other, in violation of international law. One side reserves the right to send its military into the other's territory, to detain the other's civilians without trial, to impose curfews and blockades.

One thing that is true on both sides of the Green Line that defines the border between Israel and Palestine is that there are pockets of hatred and intolerance, but also widespread yearning for peace. But here, too, things look different on the ground than they do filtered through the U.S. media. While Israel's public stance is that they want peace but the Palestinians won't accept their existence as a country, what I heard from dozens of ordinary Palestinians on this visit, as I had in 1995, was the exact mirror image: they, the Palestinians, want peace, but Israel won't accept their existence as a nation. In fact, though the Palestinians I met were uniformly angry at Israel, I encountered surprisingly little hatred and intolerance, given the suffering inflicted on them by the Israeli government. Mohammed Othman in Jaayyous matter-of-factly commented, "We accept to live with them [the Israelis], but they don't accept us."

But whether or not you agree with this viewpoint, there are more basic issues for us as Americans about how our government's actions and aid are fueling war and destruction. As U.S. citizens, we should be very concerned about our government's role in the recent tragic events in Gaza.

We U.S. taxpayers need to question the use of our tax money for military aid to Israel. In

FY 2008, Israel received \$2.4 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). This represents over 20 percent of the overall Israeli defense budget. The agreement signed by the Bush Administration in August 2007 calls for incremental annual increases in FMF to Israel, reaching \$3.1 billion a year by FY 2018.

Egypt is the second largest recipient of U.S. aid in the Middle East and has been doing both the U.S.'s and Israel's bidding, keeping the Rafah border closed. The United States is in a good position to pressure Egypt and Israel to open the borders and to let needed goods and personnel flow into Gaza.

While it's good that Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has spoken against the demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank, she has also refused to enter into dialogue with the democratically elected government of Gaza. Peace won't be found without dialogue with all parties concerned.

I traveled to Palestine bracing myself for what I knew would be very hard sights and stories from a fresh war zone. Even so, I was completely unprepared for much of what I saw. In Gaza, I was staggered by the scale of seemingly deliberate assaults on civilian populations and infrastructure of all kinds, from homes to schools and peaceful NGOs, from rabbit cages to factories and farms, including targeted attacks on women and children. I was shocked to learn that selective Israeli bombardment is continuing despite a Palestinian cease-fire. In the West Bank, I was shaken by the nightmarish web of arbitrary, constantly changing restrictions that make daily life and making a living nearly impossible. Within Israel, I was saddened to learn of Israeli authorities using a series of Catch-22s to confiscate land from Arab farmers, much like in the West Bank. But very importantly, I was also deeply moved by people's resistance to violence and despair. I was moved by the resilience of Palestinians in Gaza, replanting gardens, comforting their children,

even comforting me when I became upset by all that they had lost. I was moved by the grassroots organizations that are patiently rebuilding in Gaza, trying to support agriculture in the West Bank, and documenting Israeli human rights abuses in hopes that someday, somebody will listen. And I was moved by meeting with Other Voices, an Israeli organization housed in one of the two towns that have received most of Gaza's rockets, that is dedicating itself to working for peace and opposing the Israeli government's war-making. So I want to close on that note: there are lots of people and organizations in both Palestine and Israel who are doggedly working for peace, for human rights, for a secure livelihood for all. These are the people and organizations that we as Americans should be supporting.

You can see a few of my photos of Gaza at: [www.flickr.com/photos/mariekenedy/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mariekenedy/)

#### NOTES

1. I wish to thank Code Pink and the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency in Gaza for arranging our delegation into Gaza. I would also like to thank delegation members Hanna Hadikin and Amal Sedky Winter for contributing stories as told to them to this article.
2. I traveled as a representative of Grassroots International (GRI), a human rights and development aid organization on whose board I serve. Salena Tramel, the GRI Middle East coordinator, and I joined the delegation to Gaza organized by the women-led peace group Code Pink at the invitation of the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency. Salena and I visited GRI partners in the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza and much of the information in this essay came from these partners. For more about GRI Middle East partners, visit <http://grassrootsonline.org>.
3. See "Cut to pieces: the Palestinian family drinking tea in their courtyard," [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/23/gaza-war-crimes-drones](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/23/gaza-war-crimes-drones)
4. According to the careful records of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 1,417 Palestinians were killed. Of these, 236 were combatants and 926 civilians, including 313 children and 116 women.
5. According to the Ministry of Health, 5,303 Palestinians were injured in the assault, including 1,606 chil-

dren and 828 women.

6. See <http://jackshenker.blogspot.com/2009/01/khozaa-anatomy-of-massacre.html>.

7. See Uri Blau. "Dead Palestinian babies and bombed mosques-IDF fashion 2009." Haaretz.com. 3/20/2009; Amos Harel. "Shooting and crying." Haaretz.com. 3/20/2009 and "Testimonies on IDF misconduct in Gaza keep rolling in," Haaretz.com. 3/22/2009; Ethan Bronner. "A Religious War in Israel's Army," *The New York Times*. 3/22/2009; Richard Boudreaux, "Rabbis criticized for Gaza stance." *LA Times*, 3/25/2009.

8. Marie Kennedy, Lisa Bevilacqua, and Nuhad Jamal, "Between Occupation and Autonomy," *CrossRoads*. March 1996.

9. Marie Kennedy, "Israel's War for Water," *Progressive Planning*, fall 2006.

10. According to the *Palestine Monitor 2009 Factbook* (available from [www.palestinemonitor.org](http://www.palestinemonitor.org)) at the end of 2008, the International Committee of the Red Cross was following up on roughly 10,500 Palestinian prisoners, while the Israeli Prison Service estimates that there are "only" 9,493 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. In addition to "regular" arrests, the Israeli military can put anyone into "administrative detention" and

detain them for 6 months without charge or a trial, which can be (and often is) renewed for many years, 6 months at a time.

11. For the Via Campesina: Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority in managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy, and ecologically sustainable production. See Nikhil Aziz, "Resource Rights and Wrongs," *Progressive Planning*, fall 2006.

12. While it's true that the percentage of the overall Israeli population working in agriculture has reduced, the Jewish population was never as concentrated in agriculture as were the Palestinians. Overall, the percentage of the population of Israel working in agriculture has decreased from 18 percent in 1960 to 2 percent in 2002.

# Lost in *The Jungle*

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

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**I**N 2003, A SMALL, INDEPENDENT publisher — the kind I would ordinarily support — issued a new edition of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the classic tale of a Lithuanian immigrant whose life unravels in turn-of-the-century industrial Chicago.

*The Uncensored Original Edition* was the subtitle of this See Sharp Press edition. Its jacket condemned all other editions as “censored commercial versions” and stated that this was the one “Upton Sinclair very badly wanted to be the standard edition — not the gutted, much shorter commercial version with which we’re all familiar.” Inside, a preface by a librarian, Earl Lee, stated that “efforts of censors to subvert” *The Jungle* led Sinclair to change it “to get it published by a large commercial publisher.” An introduction by Kathleen De Grave, a literature professor, vowed that Sinclair’s alterations were “not driven by a desire for artistic economy” but “produced under coercion, directly or indirectly.”

Phenomenal stuff! There was, however, just one problem: not a sliver of evidence existed in support of it.

I knew this to be true, because I was busy preparing my own edition of *The Jungle*. My immersion in Sinclair’s manuscripts at Indiana University’s Lilly Library and wide reading in the secondary literature on the novel led me to conclude that there was no evidence whatsoever that *The Jungle* had ever been censored.

Yet who would notice the “uncensored” edition of *The Jungle*? See Sharp Press is a tiny

Arizona imprint. It mainly issues anarchist and atheist tracts in small runs. What did it matter? So I thought.

How wrong I was. Upon hearing that I was at work on *The Jungle*, friends kept mentioning the “uncensored” edition. *Library Journal* dubbed it “essential.” And as I spoke on the occasion of the novel’s 2005 centenary — on a panel at the Chicago Historical Society, for example — some audience member would invariably appear with a copy, persuaded it was the one and only pristine truth.

I finally decided to set the record straight when Scott McLemee, the cultural columnist at InsideHigherEd.com, put some questions to me about the “uncensored” edition in 2005. When I responded that its publisher’s claims were unsustainable and illogical, it gave rise to an on-line dispute in which the owner of See Sharp Press accused me of being “compelled to lie — yes, outright lie.” That, in turn, prompted me to lay out the novel’s publishing history in elaborate detail on the History News Network (HNN) website in 2006.

See Sharp stakes its claim upon the initial serial run of *The Jungle* in the *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist weekly edited by Fred D. Warren and published in Kansas by J. A. Wayland (the serial version also appeared in Wayland’s quarterly *One-Hoss Philosophy*). That 1905 serial version had a different ending and was five chapters longer than the one we all read in high school, which was published by Doubleday, Page in 1906. See Sharp interprets the redaction as proof of an expurgation forced upon Sinclair. “Sinclair must have agonized over the revisions he made,” writes DeGrave. “They went against what he believed in, and what he’d seen for himself.”

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CHRISTOPHER PHELPS teaches history at Ohio State University at Mansfield and is editor of the Bedford/St. Martin’s edition of *The Jungle*.

The notion of a suppressed edition of *The Jungle* has undeniable romantic allure. I myself succumbed to it in my twenties, as a graduate student, when reviewing a now-forgotten 1988 edition of *The Jungle*'s original serial text with a comparable interpretive framework for *Monthly Review*. But in wading through Sinclair's correspondence, interviews, and publications to prepare a new edition of the novel, I determined that the hypothesis of "suppression" was fanci-

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There was, however, just one  
problem: not a sliver of evidence  
existed in support of it.

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ful. Sinclair revised the novel entirely of his own volition.

Sinclair revised the novel not out of capitulation to censorship but because he considered the serial version to have been a long-winded, rambling rough draft. While cranking out hundreds of pages in 1904 and 1905, he recalled in 1930, "I went crazy at the end, . . . and tried to put in everything I knew about the Socialist movement. I remember that Warren came to see me at my farm near Princeton, and I read him the concluding chapters, and he went to sleep. So I guess that is why I left them out of the book!"

SINCLAIR PARED THE NOVEL to make it less didactic. He made it more concise and corrected its Lithuanian-language references. Meanwhile, Sinclair experienced problems with Macmillan, the publisher contracted to publish the novel as a book. When Macmillan demanded he eliminate the novel's "blood and guts," Sinclair refused, leading Macmillan to renege. In other words, Sinclair refused to compromise the novel's social realism and repulsed — successfully — the sole attempt at commercial censoriousness that the record sustains.

Subsequently, Sinclair submitted his novel to four more leading publishing houses. Each rejected it.

Frustrated, Sinclair resolved to self-publish. He asked readers of the *Appeal* to order advance copies. He turned over the revised text to a typesetter and was waiting for the plates to be made when a surprise turn of events transpired: Doubleday, Page suddenly offered Sinclair a contract. Fully satisfied that Doubleday would publish the novel as he wished, Sinclair alluded to "an offer from a publishing house of the highest standing, which is willing to bring out the book on my own terms." Because readers' orders had subsidized his typesetting, however, Sinclair asked Doubleday to permit him to proceed concurrently with his small, private edition. The firm agreed.

In February 1906, therefore, two book editions of *The Jungle* appeared. The pages were printed from identical plates. Doubleday published it as an overnight mass-market bestseller. Simultaneously, a limited edition appeared under the imprint "The Jungle Publishing Company," with the Socialist Party's symbol of hands clasped across the globe and a label identifying it as a "Sustainer's Edition."

What does all of this mean? This: that the standard 1906 book edition of *The Jungle*, the very version See Sharp Press denigrates as commercial and censored, is the one Sinclair preferred. It is the one whose text he polished, the one whose cover he embossed with a socialist symbol, and the one he fought to bring before the public without sacrifice of blood and guts. It was printed precisely as Sinclair wished, from plates made to his specifications. It was not censored. That is why, decades after the initial serial run was forgotten, *The Jungle* was still recognized as one of the leading social protest novels of the twentieth century.

I naively thought that there were two possibilities for what might follow after I provided all of this evidence and analysis. One was that See Sharp would withdraw its edition from the

market, as any embarrassed university or trade publisher would do. (Perhaps, I thought, the publisher would reissue the book with a more modest set of claims in its jacket text and front matter. There is, after all, value in having the initial serial text available in print.) The other possibility was that its backers might respond with counter-evidence unknown to me. I did not foresee what would actually transpire; that the “uncensored” edition would continue to sell briskly despite the publisher being unable to provide any plausible evidence to rebut my refutations.

An article by Lee appeared on the See Sharp website. It reasserted the virtues of the “uncensored” edition without supplying a single supporting quotation or citation. Lee had to concede Sinclair’s statement that he greatly preferred the 1906 version, but he alleged Sinclair was merely “hiding the fact that he had gutted his book in order to appease commercial publishers.” Despite Lee’s admission, See Sharp to this day continues to publish its edition, complete with the jacket text touting it as the version Sinclair really wanted us to read.

Booksellers still stock the “uncensored” edition. Credulous readers buy it in the belief that it is the most authentic version of *The Jungle*, the one Sinclair preferred. All the major booksellers—Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Borders, and even AK Press, the largest anarchist press and distributor in the country—purvey it. Never mind that Sinclair wrote two autobiographies in his lifetime, neither of which charges that the standard edition of *The Jungle* was the product of censorship by a perfidious corporate publisher. Never mind that Sinclair preferred the 1906 version. See Sharp now garners more profits from its edition than any other publisher of *The Jungle*, if on-line dealer rankings are reliable.

My efforts, in short, have met with precious little success. Historian Robert Cherny, writing for the Gerda Lehrman Institute’s online journal, did credit my research last year for establishing that “the book was published in nu-

merous editions during Sinclair’s lifetime, including four self-published editions, but that Sinclair never sought to restore any of the text he’d cut or altered.” Anonymous Internet posters, however, have launched ad hominem attacks suggesting I am a stealth conservative and accusing me of seeking to boost my own edition’s sales — even though I have often praised competing versions of *The Jungle*, such as the excellent ones edited by James R. Barrett and Ronald Gottesman, respectively.

So I am left to ponder. If a publisher persists in hawking an edition as “uncensored” despite overwhelming evidence that the novel was never censored, is any recourse available? Should a scholar persist, debunking the bogus edition at every available chance? Or would it be better to foresake the illusion that anyone can single-handedly clear a culture of its detritus? When does intellectual responsibility shade off into futility? When, precisely, does the noble pursuit of truth become Quixotic? And what does it say about the left—for naturally, young radicals are prominent among those buying the “uncensored” edition of *The Jungle* — if many radicals seem to prefer wishful thinking and romantic mythologizing to a novel’s actual publishing history?

I’m not sure these questions have determinable, let alone satisfactory, answers.

*The Jungle*, ironically enough, abounds with Sinclair’s frustration at deceptive marketing. His celebrated revelations about the meatpacking industry, for example, included the disclosure that what was labeled “deviled ham” frequently contained sawdust, bleach, chemical additives, and condemned meat. Toward the novel’s end, advertising is called “the very centre of the ghastly charnel-house of capitalist destructiveness,” a vehicle for “low knavery.”

What words, I wonder, would Upton Sinclair choose today if asked to describe the “uncensored” edition of his most successful novel? And would his words have any more effect than mine?

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# Edward Said: A Palestinian View

FAKHRI SALEH

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A DISPOSSESSED PALESTINIAN EXILE, who was forced to leave home and land with his family in 1947, Edward Said (1935–2003) became a spokesman of the Palestinian people in the West. His writings on Palestine tried to tell the truth of the Palestinian tragedy, the horrors afflicted by the Israelis, and the stunning immoral negligence of the West towards the humiliation of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli occupying force. Said, who resided in America from his early youth, studied and taught English and Comparative Literature for more than fifty years in American and other Western academies, used the force and spirit of Western humanism to tell the story of the Palestinian people. His works, which are not dealing directly with the question of Palestine, like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are suffused with notes and indirect alluding to Palestine and its centrality to the human consciousness — its force as a tragedy to explain the workings of imperialism and Western hegemonic world in the politics of the twentieth century.

We can say, with confidence and sheer belief, that Palestine formed the locus of Said's work. His thinking of literary domains, the hidden agenda of *Orientalism*, and the unquestioned relation between culture and imperialism, are only ramifications of his effort, all through his life, to interpret and reinterpret the

Palestinian tragedy in modern times, and to find solutions to the deadly embrace of the Palestinians and the Israelis.

In *The Question of Palestine* (1979), written right after the publication of the well acclaimed and groundbreaking *Orientalism*, Said writes a quasi-personal account of the Palestinian tragedy. He does not indulge in writing a history of the Palestinians, but tries to envisage a future and a hope of those dispossessed, brutally exterminated, and mostly exiled people. Although he magnificently explains the turmoil of Palestinian lives, the catastrophic changes in the demographic and personal atmosphere of his people, and the loss of hope in the return to Palestine in the near future, Said focuses on a humane solution of the question of Palestine. Taking into consideration that the Palestinians became a minority in their motherland after the 1948 catastrophe, and the 1967 war, being dispersed to various parts of the globe, in the surrounding Arab countries as well as in America and Europe, he insists on finding a solution for the Palestinian-Israeli continuing dilemma.

The question of independence can be interpreted as an awareness of the improbability of coexistence and mutual recognition of the two people. Said reiterates that the Palestinians: “repeatedly insisted on their right of return, their desire for the exercise of self-determination, and their stubborn opposition to Zionism as it has affected them.”<sup>1</sup> In that context, Said does not see the Palestinian insistence on their fundamental rights as an aberration, since they are “fully supported by every international legal and moral covenant known to the modern world.” (QP, p. 47) He mentions Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The International Covenant on Civil

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and Political Rights (1966), the UN General Assembly resolution 194, affirming the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property. But, as a thinking-over of the deadlock of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Said of-

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Said: “We turned ourselves from a liberation movement into an independence movement. We talked about two states, an Israeli state and a Palestinian state.”

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fers mutual recognition and coexistence as a final solution of one hundred years of unfortunate history of suffering.

Early in the 1970s Said, a real advocate of peace and coexistence, and a determined believer in the power of humanism and heterogeneity, asks the two sides to “reckon with the existential power and presence of another people with its land, its unfortunate history of suffering, its emotional and political investment in the land.” (p. 49) He, of course, contextualizes the sufferings of his people, the expropriation of the Palestinian land at the hands of the Israelis, the banishment of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to diaspora, the brutal killing of tens of thousands of the Palestinian people, and the bombing of Palestinian refugee camps in the surrounding Arab countries in the sixties and seventies, but at last comes back to the existential question of the Palestinian-Israeli deadly embrace, arguing that the two peoples are “fully implicated in each other’s lives and political destinies, perhaps not in any ultimate way — which is a subject not easily bracketed in rational discussion — but certainly now and the unforeseeable future.” (p. 49) Said does not forget to mention, in this context, that it is necessary to discriminate between an invading, dispossessing, and displacing political presence,

meaning the Israelis, and the presence it invades, displaces, and dispossesses, meaning the Palestinians.

Said admits that the Palestinian movement went through different phases during the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. And although he is not happy with the achievement of his people, he says in the voice of an involved person that: “During the history of my own direct political involvement, we went from the goal of one secular democratic state, to the immense transformation that in November 1988 took place in Algiers, in which I participated. We turned ourselves from a liberation movement into an independence movement. We talked about two states, an Israeli state and a Palestinian state. Now the principal political struggle concerns the price of having willingly committed ourselves to national independence. It’s the tragedy, the irony, the paradox of all anti-imperial or decolonizing struggles that independence is the stage through which you must try to pass: for us independence is the only alternative to the continued horrors of the Israeli occupation, whose goal is the extermination of a Palestinian national identity.”<sup>2</sup>

THE CORE OF SAID’S THINKING of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is based mainly on his belief in the necessity of avoiding the rhetoric of blame that pervades the political and cultural discourse of the Palestinians, as well as the Israelis. The Palestinian people are there; there is an Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem; there are Palestinians who are now Israeli citizens; there is a large Palestinian population in exile — these actualities have to be acknowledged and tackled by the Israeli side. To banish these facts, and maintain the strategy of war and genocide against Palestinians by the Israelis, will lead nowhere, because the Palestinians will not disappear and will continue their struggle and resistance against the Israeli occupation and denial of Palestinian rights. Said

explains that the “history of the past forty years has shown that Palestinians have grown politically, not shrunk, under the influence of every kind of repression and hardship.” (p. 51) What is called Jewish national liberation “took place on the ruins of another national existence.” (p. 52) And for that reason Israelis are asked to stop their hostilities and war against Palestinians, and sit to negotiate with those people whom the Israelis dispossessed, exiled, killing and maiming many.

On the other hand, Said calls on the Palestinians to understand the fear felt by most Jews against the backdrop of the Jewish Holocaust. In that sense, Said sees the Palestinian mission as a mission of peace. He maintains that the Palestinians are not “just a population of exiles seeking restitution and national self-determination.” (p. 233) Putting in mind the contemporary history of the Palestinians, Said adds: “We have recreated ourselves as a people out of the destruction of our national existence, and our national organization, the Palestine Liberation Organization, has symbolized both the loneliness of our vision and the wonderful power of our faith in it. Certainly when the PLO is compared with the Israeli army or air force, and when our civilians in refugee camps support the PLO while willingly exposing themselves to Israeli bombers, it is clear that the Palestinian cause means a choice of peace and human will over steel and sheer force.” (pp. 233-34)<sup>3</sup>

At last what Said is sure about is that the “Jews of Israel will remain; the Palestinians will also remain.” (p. 235) That vision is extended throughout the work of Said, who became after the publication of *The Question of Palestine*, a commentator on the Palestinian life, resistance, turmoil, and self-determination, and dreamt of independence from the Israeli brutal occupation in the West Bank and Gaza strip.

In his collected essays *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map*, published after his death in 2003, Said compares the Israeli occupation to apart-

heid in South Africa. He believes that the Israeli dispossession of the Palestinian land and people, and the occupation of the remnants of Palestine in the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, is far exceeding the apartheid in its discrimination, brutality, ethnic cleansing, military occupation, and massive social injustice. But he sees no hope, in the meantime, of an international campaign against the Israeli occupation in Gaza strip and the West Bank. Although he blames the Palestinians for not focusing, as a people, on cultural struggle against the Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing, and expropriation — and this is what the black South Africans did — Said does not hope for a change in the Western support of Israel. For that reason, what Said asks for is to “accept the idea that Israeli Jews are here to stay, that they will not go away, any more than Palestinians will go away.”<sup>4</sup> What comes out of this vision is that “separation can’t work in so tiny a land, any more than apartheid did. Israeli military and economic power insulates Israelis from having to face reality.” (FO, p. 51) At the same time he calls the Palestinians to “capture the imagination not just of our people but of our oppressors,” a lesson we have to learn from the black South Africans.

The dialectic of resistance and the call for mutual recognition and coexistence is played here as a humane tool to find solution for “a live or die conflict.” Said, who was deeply influenced by Jewish intellectuals like Giambattista Vico, Theodor Adorno, and Erich Auerbach, is aware of the sufferings of the Jewish people, the implication of the Holocaust in their personal lives and history, and the anti-Semitic atmosphere in which they grew up in the Western civilization. For that reason, he asks his Palestinian people to remember the sufferings of the Jews that force them to feel pessimistic about their future.

The vision of Said circles around the question of mutual recognition and coexistence. And if we go back to articles written by Said, at the same time or after *The Question of Palestine*, we

notice that his vision of a multi-ethnic democratic state, encompassing all its citizens, is not wavering all through his life. It is true that this is PLO's view in the 1970s, but it is true also that Said, as a prominent figure in Palestinian national politics, was one of the advocates of that vision. The obstinacy of the different Israeli governments, and the majority of the Israeli people, and their refusal of this kind of State, and their negation, at the same time, of the Palestinian rights, did not prevent people like Said to yearn for such kind of solution based on the discourse of hope.

This reliance on what I called the discourse of hope can be attributed to the humane vision of Edward Said. He clung to his idea of non-ethnic democratic state to the last minute of his life. In Said's writings about Palestine, we encounter passages that describe the loss of hope, the helplessness that the people of Palestine felt through their struggle against Zionism and the occupying Israeli force. He mentions in a magnificent essay, written in the eighties, that the Palestinian people lost everything in 1948, and, as he writes: "We were the first people whose land had been colonized who were declared *persona non grata*, were dispossessed, and traces of whose national existence were systematically erased by the immigrants who replaced us. This was no exploitation Algerian style, nor was it apartheid South-African style, nor was it mass extermination as in Tasmania. Rather we were made not to be there, invisible, and most were driven out and referred to as nonpeople; a small minority remained inside Israel and were dealt with juridically by calling them not 'Palestinians' but 'non-Jews.'"<sup>5</sup>

But that sense of self-defeat, realizing that a whole people are living at the edge of extinction, officially non-existent, does not push Said to embrace an opposite stand, meaning the denial of the Holocaust, as some of the Arab and Palestinian intellectuals did, or to think of an alternative that relies on war and the extermination of the Israeli "other." During the Pales-

tinian Intifada, Said wrote an article explaining the aim of such non-violent passive resistance. He stipulated that "the message of the Intifada is "that we will not go away, we will not submit to tyranny, we will resist, but we will do so in terms of a vision of the future — the Palestinian idea — based not on exclusivism and rejection, but upon coexistence, mutuality, sharing, and vision. I think Palestinians now universally realize, along with the Arabs, that Israel and Israelis are part of the Middle East, and they cannot be expected to leave." (*RE*. pp. 142-43)

It follows, that the First Intifada is the model of Palestinian struggle that Said was advocating at the end of the eighties. He happily boasts that "Every Palestinian feels proud that, at the end of two decades of difficult and laborious effort, so remarkable a national insurrection against injustice should have arisen in the occupied territories. The Intifada provided a blueprint for Palestinian political and social action that is lasting — relatively non-violent, inventive, brave, and confoundingly intelligent. Based on non-coercive norms of behavior that contrast stunningly with Israeli practices against Palestinians in the territories, the Intifada soon became the model for movements of democratic protest. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

This kind of civil insurrection is an antidote for the brutalities and ethnic cleansing of the Israelis. The Intifada represented a new hope for the Palestinians, and Said saw in that era of Palestinian struggle a fruit of his imagination coming true. Describing the methods and workings of the Intifada, Said says: "Where Israeli troops shot, beat, and harassed civilians, the Palestinians devised modes for getting around and crossing barriers; where the civil and military authorities forbade agricultural education, the Palestinians improvised alternative organizations to do what was necessary; where the injunctions of a still largely patriarchal society held women in thrall, the Intifada was the inspiration and the force that transformed Pal-

estinian caution and ambiguity into clarity and authentic vision: this of course was embodied in the 1988 Algiers PNC Declarations.” (*QP*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.)

AS SAID SEEKS ALTERNATIVES for the Palestinian case, as well as for the Israeli oppressors, the most acceptable one is that based on mutual recognition, sharing, and coexistence. The alternative he puts forward involves also a democratic and secular state in Palestine, non-nationalist, and non-ethnic or sectarian visions of identity, and an alternative, non-totalitarian, non-fundamentalist form of government. In an interview made by the Australian academic Imre Saluzinsky in 1986, he told his interviewer that he is no longer interested in partitioned lands. He unequivocally says: “I’m not sure, in any event, that I believe in what would have to be at the outset a partitioned Palestine. I’ve stopped thinking that the solution to political problems is to divide up smaller and smaller pieces of territory. I do not believe in partition, not only at a political and demographic level, but on all sorts of other intellectual levels, and spiritual ones. The whole idea of parceling out pieces for communities is just totally wrong. Any notion of purity — that such and such a territory is essentially the Palestinian or Israeli homeland — is just an idea that is totally inauthentic, for me. I certainly believe in self-determination, so if people want to do that they should be able to do it: but I myself don’t see any need to participate in it.”<sup>7</sup>

That is a very clear stand of Said towards the Oslo accords that was to come after seven years. He became one of the strongest critics of what was agreed upon between the Israeli government and the PLO in 1993. Said’s criticism

is mainly based on the idea that the Palestinian leadership, represented by the late Yasser Arafat and his allies in the PLO, surrendered to the Israeli colonialism. They agreed to be a self-autonomy and not a Palestinian independent state. Although Said does not believe in partitioned lands, and the division of smaller pieces of territory, as he stated clearly, his criticism of the Oslo accords relies on the fact that even the aspirations of the Palestinian people of achieving self-rule and an independent tiny state, on less than 20 percent of historical Palestine, were not fulfilled. It is really disheartening that the fears of Edward Said that the ultimate fate of the Oslo accords was sheer failure come true.

#### NOTES

1. Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 2nd ed. (London: Vintage, 1992), 47. In the following pages it will be referred to as: *QP*.
2. From an interview that took place in 1992 and made by Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinker. See Edward Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, edited by Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Vintage, 2001, 134).
3. Isn’t the case of the Palestinians in the Intifada compatible with Gandhi’s idea of nonviolence? In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi says: “Passive resistance. This force is indestructible. He who uses it perfectly understands his position. . . . The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul.”
4. Edward Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 50. In the following pages it will be referred to as: *FO*.
5. Edward Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 545. In the following pages it will be referred to as: *RE*.
6. From the preface written to the second edition of, Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, p. xxxiii.
7. Edward Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture*, p. 71.

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# Globalization and Capitalism

*An Interview with Zygmunt Bauman*

CHRONIS J. POLYCHRONIOU

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*As Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds and author of 60 books, Zygmunt Bauman offers some reflections on globalization and capitalism as a parasitic system, on liquid modernity, solidarity, and love.*

*CP: It's my impression that during the course of the last 2–3 decades your thoughts and ideas have followed an entirely different path from the one we encounter in the early stages of your intellectual pursuits, such that one might, perhaps, speak of a young and a mature Zygmunt Bauman. Would you agree with this interpretation of the evolution of your work?*

ZB: This is not how I see my own intellectual itinerary — though of course the author is the last person to be asked to explain the “emergent logic” of his work and the last person whose opinions on that matter are likely to be treated as authoritative and binding . . . How I see it? As a never ending series of visits to the same room, on each visit entering the room through a different door, and switching on the lights of a different color. As every seasoned photographer would tell you, what you see changes considerably depending on the color and direction of lights: different aspects become visible and turn salient, other aspects sink in the shade or disappear from view. I guess that my successive studies are travel-reports from those repeated,

yet not repetitious visitations.

*CP: Globalization has been going on for a long time, maybe it's as old as human history. Yet, we instinctively assume that there is something new to contemporary globalization from historically similar situations in the past. What do you regard as unique in the current phase of globalization?*

ZB: Divorce between power and politics, heretofore married to each other and residing under the same roof, inside the nation-state household. Much of the power held previously by the nation-state has evaporated into the supra-national and supra-state “space of flows” (Manual Castells’ term), while politics was left behind and remains local, enclosed within the confines of the nation-state. This process makes the state increasingly powerless: most factors that determine the living conditions, the options and the prospects of its citizens, are formed, operate, and are manipulated far beyond its reach. Because of that deficit of power, nation-state is forced to abandon a rising number of functions which it performed, or wished and strove to perform, half a century ago. Those functions tend to be now “deregulated”: that means, shifted sideways to the market forces, or dropped down to the realm of “life politics” — the politics conducted by individuals, everyone using his or her (limited) skills and his or her own (limited) resources.

Thus far, globalization has been almost exclusively negative: that means, it embraced the powers notorious for their “disruptiveness”

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*Among Professor Bauman's latest books are Consuming Life (Cambridge: Polity 2007), Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers? (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), and The Art of Life (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).*

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— piercing even the most fortified borders, ignoring local sovereignties, and all but immune to the politically constructed and promoted restrictions on their freedom of movement, indeed on their wanton license (powers like capital and finances, trade, information, criminality, terrorism, drug trafficking, weapon contraband, migrants smuggling, recently also piracy). We have not started yet in earnest, at any rate not effectively, to erect an institutional framework for the “positive globalization,” the sole remedy for the damaging impact of the ‘negative’ one: namely, global equivalents of the political and juridical institutions developed by our ancestors at the level of the territorially sovereign nation-state.

*CP: Does the current economic crisis of capitalism constitute a threat to the globalization trends of the last thirty or so years?*

ZB: As the recent “financial tsunami” has shown to millions of people believing in capitalist markets and capitalist banking as the patent methods of successful problem-resolution, capitalism is at its best in creating problems, not resolving them. Capitalism, just as systems of natural numbers of Kurt Gödel’s famous theorem, cannot be simultaneously consistent and complete; if it is consistent with its own principles, problems arise it cannot tackle; and if it tries to resolve them, it cannot do that without falling into inconsistency with its own founding assumptions. Long before Gödel wrote up his theorem, Rosa Luxemburg published her “capitalist accumulation” study, in which she suggested that capitalism cannot survive without “non-capitalist” economies; it can proceed according to its principles as long as there are

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“virgin lands” open for expansion and exploitation — yet when conquering them for purposes of exploitation, capitalism deprives them of their pre-capitalist virginity and so exhausts the

supplies of its own nourishment. Much like a snake devouring its tail: food is plentiful to start with, but soon it is more and more difficult to swallow, and shortly after there is no food left for eating and no one to eat it. . . .

Capitalism is essentially a parasitic system.

Like all parasites, it may thrive for a time once it finds the as-yet unexploited organism on which it can feed, but it can’t do that without harming the host and sooner or later destroying thereby the conditions of its prosperity or even of its own survival. Writing in the era of rampant imperialism and territorial conquest, Rosa Luxemburg did not and could not foresee that pre-modern lands of exotic continents are not the only potential “hosts” on which capitalism can feed to prolong its life-span and initiate successive time-stretches of prosperity. Capitalism revealed since its amazing ingenuity in seeking and finding new species of hosts whenever the previously exploited species got thin on the ground. Having annexed all “pre-capitalist” virgin lands, capitalism invented “secondary virginity.” Millions of men and women relying on saving books rather than living on credit were ingeniously transformed into one of such yet unexploited virgin lands.

Introduction of credit cards was the sign of things to come. Credit cards had been thrown “on the market” a few decades ago under a telling-it-all and uniquely seductive slogan: “take the waiting out of wanting.” You desire something but haven’t earned enough money to pay the selling price? Well, in old times, now fortu-

nately over and bygone, you'd have to delay your satisfactions (that delay, according to Max Weber, one of the fathers of modern sociology, was the principle that made the advent of modern capitalism possible): to tighten your belt, deny yourself other joys, spend prudently and frugally, and put the monies you managed you spare that way in a saving book, hoping that with due care and patience you will collect enough of them to make your dreams come true. Thank God and the banks' benevolence, no longer! With a credit card, you can reverse the order: enjoy now, pay later! Credit card makes you free to manage your own satisfactions: to obtain things when you want them, not when you earn them and can afford.

In order to avoid reducing the effect of the credit cards and easy borrowing just to a one-off lenders' profit, the debt incurred had to be (and indeed swiftly was!) transformed into a permanent profit-earning asset. You can't repay your debt? Don't worry: unlike the old-style, sinister money lenders, eager to have their loans to be promptly repaid in time fixed in advance — we, modern friendly lenders, do not call our money back; instead, we offer to lend you yet more credit to repay the old debt, while leaving you with some extra money (i.e., debt) to pay for new joys. We are the banks who like to say “yes.” Your friendly banks. Smiling banks — as one of the most ingenious of commercial copes declared.

What none of the commercials openly declared was that the lending banks don't really want their debtors to repay the loans. Were the debtors duly to repay their borrowings, they would be in debt no longer; but it is their debts (the monthly interest paid on them) that the modern friendly (and remarkably ingenious) money lenders have decided and managed to re-cast into the principal source of their continuous profit. Clients promptly returning the money they borrowed are the money-lenders' nightmare. People refusing to spend money which they did not earn and refraining from

borrowing instead are of no use to the money lenders — as are the people who (whether prompted by prudence or by old-fashioned honor) unduly hasten to repay their debts. For their and their shareholders' profits, banks and credit-card providers count now on continuous “servicing” of debts, rather than on their prompt repayments. As far as they are concerned, an “ideal borrower” is one that would never repay the loan in full. You pay heavy penalty if you wish to repay your mortgage loan in full before agreed time . . . Until the recent “credit crash,” banks and credit-card issuers were more than willing to offer new loans to insolvent debtors to cover the unpaid interests on earlier loans. One of the major credit card companies in Britain refused recently to reissue the cards to the clients which every month repaid the whole of their debts in full, incurring thereby no financial penalties.

To sum up: the present-day credit crunch is not an outcome of the banks' failure. On the contrary, it is a fully expectable, even if by and large not expected, fruit of their outstanding success: success in transforming a huge majority of men and women, old and young, into a race of debtors. They got what they aimed to get: the race of debtors forever, the condition of “being in debt” made self-perpetuating, whereas more debts being sought as the sole realistic saving device from the debts already incurred. Entering that condition has become recently easy as never before in human history; escaping that condition was never as difficult. Whoever could be made into a debtor, and millions of others who could not and should not be lured into borrowing, have been already enticed and seduced into going into debt. As in all previous mutations of capitalism, also this time the state assisted the establishment of new grazing grounds for capitalist exploitation: it was on president Clinton's initiative that in the U.S. the “subprime,” government-sponsored mortgages have been introduced to offer credit for buying houses to people with no means to

repay their loans — and so to transform into debtors parts of the population heretofore inaccessible for credit-mediated exploitation... But just as the disappearance of barefoot people spells trouble for the shoe industry, so the disappearance of debt-free people spells disaster for the loan industry. Rosa Luxemburg's famous prediction has come true once more: again, capitalism came dangerously close to unwitting suicide by managing to exhaust the supply of new virgin lands for exploitation . . .

The reaction to the credit crunch so far, impressive and even revolutionary as it may appear once processed in the media headlines and politicians' sound-bites, has been "more of the same" — in vain hope that the profit-and-consumption reinvigorating potential of that phase has not been yet fully exhausted: an effort to re-capitalize the money lenders and to make their debtors credit-worthy once more, so the business of lending and borrowing, of falling in debt and staying there, could return to the "usual." The welfare state for the rich (which unlike its namesake for the poor has never had its rationality questioned, let alone put out of operation) has been brought back to the showrooms from the service quarters to which its offices were temporarily relegated to avoid invidious comparisons. The state's muscles, long unused for that purpose, have been again publicly flexed — this time for the sake of continuing the game that makes flexing them resented, yet — abominably — unavoidable; a game that curiously cannot bear state flexing its muscles yet cannot survive without it.

We have not started as yet to give serious thought to the sustainability of our consumer-

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The difference between an optimist and a pessimist is that the optimist believes that this world of ours, here and now, is the best of the possible worlds — whereas the pessimist suspects that the optimist could be right.

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and-credit-propelled society. "Return to normality" portends return to bad, and always potentially dangerous, ways. Intention to do so worries: it signals that neither the people who run the financial institutions, nor our governments, have reached to the roots of trouble in their diagnoses — let alone in their deeds. Quoting Hector Sants, the head of the Finances Services Authority, who shortly ago confessed to "business models ill-equipped to survive the stress . . . a fact that we regret," Simon Jenkins, uniquely insightful analyst of *The Guardian*, observed that "it was like a pilot protesting that his

plane was flying just fine except for the engines." But Jenkins does not lose hope: he still reckons that once the culture of "greed is good" has been "tested to destruction by the recent hysteria of City incomes," the "non-economic components of what we vaguely refer to as the good life will take more prominence"; both in our life philosophy, and our governments' political strategy. Let us hope with him: we haven't yet reached the point of no return, there is still time (however short) to reflect and change the track, we may yet turn that shock and that trauma to our and our children's advantage . . .

*CP: In your books you distinguish between "liquid" modernity and "solid" modernity. Is this another way of saying, or of avoiding saying, modernity vs. postmodernity?*

*ZB: Yes and no . . . the referents of the two concept couples roughly overlap time-wise, but the concepts themselves convey different meanings — they view the historical change from different angles. To start with, the "solid-liquid," unlike the "mod-postmod" couple, is posi-*

tive: it says that “now” is different from “then,” but also says what constitutes that difference. Secondly, the “solid modernity-liquid modernity” pair, unlike the other couple, grasps simultaneously continuity and discontinuity between the two members of the opposition. This is its enormous advantage — since when juxtaposing modernity and postmodernity we willy-nilly suggested that modernity was over, replaced with something altogether new; that the rupture between two stages and two successive forms of social life was more profound and indeed closer to absolute than in fact it has been; at least we allowed such an interpretation, however strongly we argued otherwise. Thirdly, it hints on the fact that the advent of “liquidity” is to an extent a “natural” phase in the innately driven development of modernity — it follows, so to speak, its inner logic. Modernity, after all, was a born, “natural liquidizer.” Moving from solidity to liquidity was ultimately the outcome of the early modernity’s success, not its failure in acquitting itself from that mission . . . As you know, already in the early nineteenth century two hot-headed youngsters from Rheinland called Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels noted (with relish!) that “everything solid melts into the air and everything sacred is profaned . . .” What has in fact happened since (no more, but no less either) is that in the beginning modernity set to “melt the solid” not because of its distaste of solidity, but quite the contrary: due to its dream and ambition to put paid once and for all to any fluidity, contingency, randomness of the human condition (deeply and painfully felt during the agony years of the ancient régime); what was held then against the found solids was that they were not solid enough. The intention was to replace them with more solid solids, solids constructed according to the dictates of reason. Passionate change (called “modernization”) was believed to be a temporary, one-off necessity — to be replaced soon by the tranquil enjoyment of steadfast, transparent, predictable, and reliable setting,

calling for no more change thanks to its perfection . . .

What we know now, however, is that the obsessive and compulsive “modernization” is the proper (and unchanging) essence of modernity (modernity without ongoing modernization would be an oxymoron like “wind not blowing” or “river not flowing”). Forms and structures are consolidated and solidified only to be very shortly dismantled and decomposed again, and replaced with other forms destined for the same fate. With the passage from “solid” to “liquid” modernity not so much the practice has changed, as the self-awareness of its nature and destiny. We know now that there is no “finishing line” to the modernizing push, that everything already constructed and to be yet constructed is but “until further notice.”

You could of course squeeze all those observations in the opposition between “modernity” and “postmodernity” — but then to keep them there to the exclusion of others, misleadingly suggested, would be an uphill struggle — as I learned the hard way, having found myself (when still using the now abandoned conceptual couple) in the company of unexpected, uninvited, and unwelcome bedfellows. . . . \*

*CP: Your views about fear, insecurity, and uncertainty are quite well known. Would you share with me some of your views about solidarity?*

ZB: Already in the *Postmodern Ethics* (1990) I

\*Bauman’s distinction between “liquid” and “solid” modernity rests on theoretical grounds and empirical premises which allow us to reflect and investigate sociologically and historically “the shift from solid, defined, localized, territorialized, nation-bound modernity” to a liquid condition of experiences caused by “the effects of globalization, migration, nomadism, tourism, the effects of world wide webs and internets, socket free phones and texters, a world and subjectivities re-defined by interaction with the huge and fascinating potentials of new technologies and information systems.” Quotes taken from Griselda Pollock’s essay “Liquid Modernity.” See [www.leeds.ac.uk/cath/ahrc/events/2003/1011/lm.pdf](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cath/ahrc/events/2003/1011/lm.pdf)

suggested that the three-partite slogan of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” tends to be replaced nowadays with the slogan “Liberty, Difference, Tolerance.” I also argued there that “tolerance,” all too often but another face of domination, needs yet to develop into “solidarity” — something quite different from, and superior ethically to mere tolerance. In addition to desisting from punishing the different, as tolerance promises to do, solidarity involves a wholehearted recognition and acceptance of the other’s right to different identity, readiness to assist each other with the difficult task of self-assertion, and sincere joy derived from human variety that promises otherwise unobtainable gains: exciting new experiences, and the prospects of learning from each other. In other ways, solidarity means unification not despite the differences, but through and thanks to our differences . . . Since then, I returned to the issue many times — and, if anything, tried to reinforce, not to revise, the original argument.

*CP: Love and friendship also occupy leading roles as philosophical and sociological themes in your thought and work. Would you say that these human bonds and emotional attributes are even more important in a world of liquid fear, insecurity, and the banality of consumer culture?*

ZB: Yes, but it is also precisely because we are willing “to form deep friendships and companionship,” and craving it more strongly and desperately than ever, that our relations are full of sound and fury — saturated with anxiety and states of perpetual alert . . . We are willing, since friendship bonds are (in Ray Pahl’s felicitous and memorable phrase) our sole (social) “convoy through the turbulent waters” of the liquid-modern world. The “turbulent waters” we need to be convoyed to brave are the unstable and frail workplaces saturated and poisoned with mutual suspicion and all too often torn asunder by cut-throat competition; our neighborhoods under constant threat by developers;

abundant, yet similarly uncertain and poorly marked roads to decent life and signposts to success, that come up and vanish with no warning; dangers to the safety of one’s body and possessions too vague to pinpoint, let alone to fight back; constant pressures to show one’s mettle and “prove oneself” with little help in mustering the resources such a feat would require; successions of recommended life fashions that are too fast to catch up with and so to stave off the threat of falling behind or be pushed out of the track altogether. Helping hand of a reliable, loyal, faithful, “till-death-does-us-part” friend, a hand that can be relied upon to be promptly and willingly stretched whenever needed, is what islands are for potential shipwrecks or oases for the lost in a desert. We need such hands, and wish to have them — the more of them around, the better . . .

However . . . However! In our liquid-modern surroundings, life-long loyalty is a blessing alloyed with many a curse. What if the waves change direction, what if new opportunities beckon that will recycle yesterday’s reassuring assets into today’s menacing liabilities, cherished possessions into an off-putting ballast, buoyant lifebelts into lead sinkers? What if the near and dear is no longer dear but still vexingly near? Hence the anxiety: fear of losing friends or partners mixed with the fear of being unable to get rid of those among them who are no longer wanted — topped with the fear of finding oneself at the receiving end of the friend’s or the partner’s “I need more space” urge and resolution . . . The network of human relations (“network”: the never ending play of connecting and disconnecting . . . ) is nowadays a seat of the most harrowing ambivalence.

Love, we need to conclude, abstains from promising an easy road to happiness and meaning. “Pure relationship” inspired by consumerist practices promises such easy life; but by the same token it renders happiness and meaning hostages to fate.

To cut the long story short: love is not

something that can be found; not an objet trouvé or a ready made. It is something that always yet needs to be made and remade daily, hourly anew; constantly resuscitated, reaffirmed, attended to, and cared for. In line with the growing frailty of human bonds, unpopularity of long-term commitments, stripping “rights” of “duties” and avoidance of obligations except “obligations to oneself” (“I owe this to myself,” “I deserve this,” etc.), love however tends to be viewed as either perfect from the start, or failed — and better be abandoned and replaced by a new and improved specimen, hopefully genuinely perfect. Such love is not expected to survive the first minor squabble, let alone the first serious disagreement and confrontation . . .

Happiness, Kant is remembered to diagnose, is not an ideal of reason, but imagination. He also warned: out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing can ever be made. John Stuart Mill seemed to combine both wisdoms in his warning: ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so . . . The ancients probably suspected that much, but guided by the principle *dum spiro, spero* (as long as I breathe, I hope) they suggested that without hard work, life would offer nothing that may make it worth while. Two millennia later the suggestion seems to have lost nothing of its topicality.

*CP: For me at least, your latest book, The Art of Life, which addresses the above themes, underlines, more than anything else, the banality of contemporary social life but, in so doing, provides a solid perspective for challenging the way contemporary society functions which is still guided by the tradition of critical social thought. I say this because you are generally regarded as a rather pessimistic thinker. So, are you less or more pessimistic of an alternative social order than you were at the start of your academic life?*

ZB: My rendition of the difference between an

optimist and a pessimist is that the optimist believes that this world of ours, here and now, is the best of the possible worlds — whereas the pessimist suspects that the optimist could be right . . . By such reckoning, I am neither the one nor the other. I seem to belong to a third category: of Men Hoping. I believe that the world can be made better than it is, more hospitable to human decent and dignified life, and that it depends on my fellow humans whether indeed it will be.

I think I believed that from the start, and nothing has happened since to force me or prompt me to change my mind.

*CP: Any explanations for the outburst of the incredible productivity you've had since your university retirement?*

ZB: I owe it mostly to the privileged condition in which people working in humanities find themselves upon retirement. Were I an experimental scientist, retirement would be virtually tantamount to the end of my kind of professional life — a kind which would need for its continuation permanent access to laboratory, research assistance, considerable funds — all that terminated at the moment of retiring . . . But if you work in humanities, retirement has the exactly opposite effect: you can now continue what attracted you originally to the world of scholarship — the wonders and pleasures of thinking, reading, writing, lecturing, debating. The sole change is that you need no longer pay the heavy price required for the privilege of doing humanities inside the academia: like attending endless and senseless administrative meetings or filling the endless and senseless forms. That change liberates enormous amounts of previously stolen and wasted time and allows you — finally, at long last — to focus on things and acts you always wished to focus on, but were not allowed!

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Anarchism and Socialism

MARVIN MANDELL

WAYNE PRICE'S *THE ABOLITION OF THE STATE* is a well considered, well researched, and well written book. I shall try to summarize his major points in the first several chapters. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 deal with the failure of revolutions in Russia and Spain and the success of the counter-revolution in Germany, and I shall discuss them as well.

### The Abolition of the State

WAYNE PRICE

Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2007,  
196 pp., \$14.49

- Both anarchists and Marxists believe in a revolution from below by the working class.
- Both see the state as a “committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (*Communist Manifesto*).
- Marxists would replace the existing state with a new state that would wither away when the class struggle ceases. (Price questions this, given his view of Lenin and Trotsky as incorrigible centralizers.)
- Anarchists, on the contrary, “plan to go immediately into a stateless society” (p.5).
- Homo Sapiens began about 50 thousand years ago, but states did not start until about 5 thou-

sand years ago. Hence, state is not “required by human nature.”

- Reformism — whether Fabian or Scandinavian — cannot work because even if social democrats get elected and control the government, “they do not control the economy . . . [and] have to manage a capitalist economy” (p. 25).
- Cooperatives and other alternate institutions are fine, but they are no strategy for overthrowing capitalism.
- Decentralism: Small closely knit communities should be the goal. (According to Ralph Borsodi, 2/3 of the national product could be made more cheaply on homesteads; only 1/3 is more effectively made by mass production.)
- Price acknowledges Marx and Engels’ insistence on democratic worker democracy, but faults them for not rooting it locally in worker institutions and communities.
- Price believes in a federation of cooperative communities and of worker-controlled industries — a federalized pluralistic system (pp. 81,97).
- Anarchists and socialists, generally speaking,

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agree on the beginning and ending of the struggle for a classless society. Both begin with a *sine qua non* — a bottom-up workers' revolution (although some anarchists believe this must be a spontaneous movement, and some socialists believe in the leadership of a workers' party). The ending for both is a withering away of the state and the end of exploitation in a classless society.

With his customary acuity, Engels put his finger on the fundamental difference between anarchists and Marxists:

Bakunin maintains that it is the *state* which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital *only by the grace of the state*. As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself. We, on the contrary, say: Do away with capital, the concentration of all means of production in the hands of the few, and the state will fall of itself. The difference is an essential one: Without a previous social revolution the abolition of the state is nonsense; the abolition of capital *is* precisely the social revolution and involves a change in the whole mode of production. Now then, inasmuch as to Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can maintain the existence of the state, that is, of any state, whether it be a republic, a monarchy, or anything else. Hence, *complete abstention from all politics*. To commit a political act, and especially to take part in an election, would be a betrayal of principle (Letter to Theodor Cuno, 1-24-1872, italics, Engels').

THE QUESTION, THEN, IS Does the state flow out of class struggle, or does class struggle flow out of the state? As indicated, Price accepts Engels' formulation of the state as a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, he is unequivocal about the

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Socialism does not emerge  
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anarchist plan to go immediately into a stateless society. In my view, as long as class contradictions persist, so does the need for state. Socialism does not emerge *in vacuo*; it is birthed from the womb of capitalism.

However, Price is not naïve. He realizes that people will not be perfect after a libertarian revolution:

What if [a rogue community] declares itself open only to white people, or it teaches creationism in its schools, or it dumps

pollution into the river on which other communities are located? . . . What would a non-statist society do (p.78)?

He imagines a regional conference at which several proposals are brought forward:

- 1) Leave the rogue community alone, let them stew in their own juice; 2) Organize a regional militia to march on the offending community; 3) Wage a propaganda campaign, organize an economic boycott, demonstrate non-violently.

Clearly #1 is unacceptable. Of course, there is an enormous difference between the functioning of a bourgeois and a putative libertarian society, but let us take a quick glance at some use of state force in past American history, some rare exceptions to the usual use of state force to crush workers. In 1957, despite a unanimous decision by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Brown v. Board of Education*), Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, supported by mobs, could be countered only by federal paratroopers. Again, in 1963, only federal marshals could insure the admission of black students to the U. of Alabama. And, for that matter, none of the three proposals put forward by Price's imagined conference would end the Confederacy in 1861. That was then, now is different, some would say. But the Rush Limbaughs, Sean Hannitys, Ann Coulters, Glen Becks, et. al. will not go away, and their mobs are even now arming themselves

in great numbers.

Leon Trotsky sums up what he saw as the anarchist fallacy as follows:

Like every sect which founds its teaching not upon the actual development of human society, but upon the reduction to absurdity of one of its features, anarchism explodes like a soap bubble at that moment when the social contradictions arrive at the point of war or revolution.<sup>1</sup>

As for the United States, that moment came on April 12, 1861 with the opening shots of the battle of Fort Sumter.

**I**N A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION, would the state wither away if it is not abolished outright? Here is where Price makes an important factual error, despite his otherwise well researched book: he claims that Lenin said, in his most libertarian work *State and Revolution*, “the state might exist indefinitely” (p.50). Nowhere in this work does Lenin say this. Again and again Lenin stresses the withering away of the state. “The more democratic the ‘state . . . no longer a state in the proper sense of the word,’ the more rapidly does *every* state begin to wither away”(emphasis his)<sup>2</sup>.

Then why did it show no signs of withering away after the Bolshevik Revolution? Was the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into a totalitarian regime due to the Bolsheviks’ scorn of decentralization, to their lust for centralized power? First, unlike some (including both Richard Pipes on the right and Noam Chomsky on the left, who maintain that the October revolution was a Bolshevik coup d’état), Price clearly believes that the Russian Revolution was a genuine workers’ revolution from below. Whatever the Bolsheviks did, whatever mistakes they made, was in their view a defense of a bottom-up workers’ revolution. This is in sharp contradistinction to, say, the top-down Cuban Revolution. Regis Debray, a close ally of Castro in the early days, wrote in *Revolution in the Revolution*:

The next point is: No political front which is basically a deliberative body can assume leadership of a people’s war; only a technically capable executive group, centralized and united on the basis of identical class interests, can do so; in brief, only a revolutionary general staff. (tr., Bobbye Ortiz, *Monthly Review*, July–Aug., 1967), 86.

For Castro (and Debray) “the duty of the revolutionary is to make the revolution”; for Marx, the revolutionary was the spark (in Russian, *iskra*) — only the workers can make the revolution. It is folly to think that an elite group would cede its power — once won — to the people. And in Cuba, China, and Vietnam, it hasn’t.

Like Debs, Lenin followed the Marxist dictum of a bottom-up revolution, the opposite of what Debray postulates. After warning that 3 conditions are necessary for a successful revolution (the government must be collapsing; the vanguard — for Lenin, the workers and the soldiers — must be in motion; and the vast majority of people must support the revolutionary party), Lenin concludes:

We could not have retained power July 16-17 politically, for, *before the Kornilov affair*,\* the army and the provinces could and would have marched against Petrograd. Now (Oct.) the picture is entirely different. We have back of us the majority of a *class* that is the vanguard . . . We have back of us a *majority* of the people . . . (emphasis his)<sup>3</sup>.

And perhaps the most remarkable passage in *State and Revolution* is the one in which Lenin envisions a post-revolutionary world of democracy and equality:

The workers, having conquered political power, will break up the old bureaucratic foundations, until not one stone is left upon another; and they will replace it with a new one

\*Kornilov affair: People learned that Kerensky, the head of state, was conspiring with Gen. Kornilov to overthrow the state in a coup d’état when train workers prevented Kornilov from moving troops onto Petrograd.

consisting of these same workers and employees, against whose transformation into bureaucrats measures will at once be undertaken, as pointed out in detail by Marx and Engels: (1) *not only electiveness, but also instant recall*; (2) *payment no higher than that of ordinary workers*; (3) immediate transition to a state of things when *all* fulfill the functions of control and superintendence, so that *all* become “bureaucrats” for a time, and no *one*, therefore, can become a “bureaucrat.” (Last 3 words stressed are Lenin’s emphases; rest are mine.)<sup>4</sup>

How differently things turned out!

PRICE IS AWARE of Lenin and Trotsky’s insistence that “the revolution would succeed only if it spread to Western Europe” (127). He concludes:

Under the failure of the revolution to spread, foreign invasions and civil wars, and the extreme poverty of the country, such concepts overwhelmed the libertarian aspects of Lenin’s vision and produced a totalitarian nightmare (p. 58).

Given these factors, who can say with any certainty that the degeneration of the Bolshevik Revolution owed primarily — some would say solely — to the Lenin-Trotsky drive toward centralization? In my view, that would be ahistorical, denying the civil war, the backwardness of the people, the lack of industry, the post-WWI exhaustion of both the troops and the people, the famine, the foreign invasion on several fronts, and the failure of the revolution in Western Europe. To quote Lenin on centralization without mentioning that he wrote many of those passages in the midst of a civil war and a struggle against foreign invasion, as many do, seems to me disingenuous.

Price faults the Bolsheviks for four major actions: During the Civil War, (1) the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany and (2) suppression of the anarchist Makhno guerrillas; and After the Civil War (3) Bolshevik authoritarianism and (4) the suppres-

sion of the Kronstadt uprising.

In March, 1918, there was a vigorous debate within the Bolshevik Party. Three positions were argued: Lenin for peace; the anarchists for a revolutionary war (the position supported by Price); and Trotsky for “no war, no peace.” Both the latter two positions staked everything on troops of the Central Powers responding to appeals of the Russian soldiers and revolting. We must keep in mind that World War I left 7 million Russians dead, wounded, or imprisoned and that those troops still active were exhausted, typhus-ridden, and malnourished. Remember, also, that a key slogan of the Bolsheviks in their rise to power was “Peace, Land, and Bread.” Had they not sued for peace, they would have continued a hopeless war, Lenin maintained, and they would have reneged on their pledge. The two positions for waging a revolutionary war seemed risky. A majority sided with Lenin; and Trotsky — perhaps reluctantly — signed the peace accord with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk.

As for the struggle with the Makhnoites, here is what the historian W. H. Chamberlain has written:

Typical excerpts from the diary of Makhno’s wife are:

“Feb. 23, 1920 — Our men seized Bolshevik agents, who were shot.

“Feb. 25, 1920 — Moved over to Maiorovo. Caught three agents for the collection of grain there. Shot them . . .”

Further details of Makhno’s harassing guerrilla activity are to be found in the reports of the Soviet Ukrainian Front for the same year, 1920:

“June 8 — At the station Vasilekka Makhno blew up the railroad bridge . . . shot 14 captured officials of Soviet and robbed the food warehouse of the railroad workers. . . .

Aug. 16 — Having seized Mirgorod for a day-and-a-half, Makhno’s followers robbed all the warehouses of the county food committee, destroyed the buildings of Soviet and workers’ organizations, smashed 15 telegraph ma-

chines, killed 21 workers and Red soldiers.”

In these dry reports there is a decided hint of a fierce hatred of Makhno’s partisans for everything connected with the city: railroads, telegraph lines, everything connected with the city/town an advantage over the village<sup>5</sup>.

I do not quote this at length to stress the brutality: the Ukraine was a sea of blood and betrayal (e.g. Makhno’s aide Karetnik murdered the renegade Grigoriev and his envoys at a parley). What happened in the Ukraine — on *all* sides (Whites, Reds, Petlurists, Austrians, Makhnoites) — was frightful. (Price mentions only Red transgressions. This is tendentious.) I quote this at length because I think Price sometimes belittles the importance of the social forces involved: the conflict between urban workers and peasants. He calls this “a dogmatic theory of class conflict” (p.123). The workers of Petrograd were hungry, even starving, and the Red Army also desperately needed food. (Price claims that the Bolsheviks could have chosen a more reasonable policy to get grain. Possibly, but starvation is not the optimal condition for reasonableness. Tendentiousness again: the Makhnoites and their peasants also could have been reasonable.)

**B**UT AFTER THE CIVIL WAR . . . *External* political opposition — Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries — had been banned during the later part of the Civil War. Now, in the tenth Party Congress, *internal* opposition (e.g. Workers’ Opposition) within the Party was banned,<sup>6</sup> even while General Tukhachevsky’s troops were crushing the Kronstadt rising. The insurgents at Kronstadt had demanded an end to the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party and the restitution of government by Soviets, which had been promised — and demanded — by Bolsheviks during their rise to power. March, 1921 was a crucial moment in the history of Bolshevism. Lenin referred to the Kronstadt uprising as “the flash which lit up really better than anything else.”) For Trotsky, it was a “tragic

necessity.” I agree that it was tragic, but not that it was a necessity. True, power to the Soviets at that time would have removed the Bolsheviks

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The key question is not whether to  
have decentralized militias or a  
centralized council: the real issue is  
how truly democratic would those  
bodies be?

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from power, but their holding on to it at all costs proved, as we now know, disastrous. This may seem a contradiction to what I just wrote about actions regarding the Brest-Litovsk treaty and the treatment of the Makhnoites, but we should bear in mind that the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising and the tenth Congress’ ban on internal party dissension both took place not during WWI or the Civil War, but after them (although — it should be mentioned — foreign troops, including those of the United States, were still on Russian soil).

A troubling question: Should criteria for holding onto power differ from the criteria for seizing power? (See Lenin’s criteria for latter above.)

As Nietzsche wrote, “Whoever battles with monsters had better see to it that [the battle] does not turn him into a monster.”

As I have said, Lenin and Trotsky believed that their revolution could be saved only by a workers’ revolution in Europe. (Marx believed that the revolution would begin in Germany, deepen in France, and end in England.) But the Spartacist revolution in Germany in 1919 failed, and the terrible inflation and depression of the 1920s helped Hitler in his rise to power. Here Price sides with Trotsky who faults the German Communists for not forming a common front with the Social Democrats — bad as they were — to fight against the Nazis, who, of

course, were much, much worse.

**I**N THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, Buenaventura Durruti, the great Anarchist leader, whose forces in the Aragon made the only Republican advance during the war, cited the need for a centralized national defense council. This has been denounced by some anarchist historians as a move toward authoritarian socialism; but Price rightly defends Durruti. *Pace* those anarchists, the key question is not whether to have decentralized militias or a centralized council: the real issue is how truly democratic would those bodies be? In Trotsky's original plan for the Red Army, there would be no insignia or ranks, and each unit would be run by an elected committee, one of whose jobs would be to choose officers. Military discipline would be recognized only in active combat, and even their unit commanders would have had to operate without the sanction of the death penalty. (See Geoffrey Hosking's *History of the Soviet Union*.) Unfortunately, this plan was scrapped in face of the German advance, but, again, we must remember that the troops at the time were backward — they were mostly poor peasants — and I have already pointed out how exhausted and demoralized they were. I can only say that in my outfit in Italy, the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Trotsky's democratic, egalitarian plan might have worked. Surely, it would have had a better chance of working. As in a factory, those on the line know more about operations than their higher-ups. (See Bill Mauldin's cartoons about the combat sagacity of ordinary GIs compared to that of the brass.)

As Engels pointed out, anarchists abstain from political power. Yet in the Spanish Civil War, a contradiction arose. In 1936, the anarchists, through their dominance of the trade union (National Confederation of Labor, CNT) and their political association (Federation of Iberian Anarchists, FAI), controlled Barcelona and the surrounding region. Luis Companys, president of the Catalan Gener-

ality, "offered to resign in [the anarchists'] favor if they wanted but proposed instead that they work together" (141). The anarchist labor leaders joined the bourgeois government as ministers (the anarchist Garcia Oliver becoming Minister of Justice!), the same government that — strengthened by Russian arms deliveries — later repressed the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) and eventually the anarchists themselves. Price is right, in my view, to support Durruti's group in strongly criticizing the anarchist leaders for their failure to take power and for their subsequent collaborationism.

**I** AGREE WITH PRICE that "[T]here is a libertarian interpretation of Marx which is fairly close to the real views of many anarchists" (42). Despite his false attribution to Lenin in *State and Revolution* that "the state might exist indefinitely," Price has given us much to chew on. I do have a few cavils:

- He describes Paul Goodman and Noam Chomsky as reformists (174). As a friend of the late Goodman, I can almost hear him howling from Beyond. And I am sure Chomsky, too, would object to this characterization of him. Reformists believe that society can be fixed by tinkering, while Goodman and, I think, Chomsky believe in the necessity for a social revolution.
- Without offering any proof, he describes Amadeo Bordiga as an authoritarian sectarian — his policy "was a precursor of Third-Period Stalinism" (149).
- Although he is quite familiar with the works of Hal Draper and others in the Workers Party/Independent Socialist League, he concludes that "Trotskyists became variants of social democrats or Stalinists or both" (159). Not all!
- In my opening summary, I mentioned Price's reliance on Ralph Borsodi's claim that "[A] third of the national product was more effectively made centrally, by mass production, but two-thirds was cheaper to make on homesteads" (89). This claim needs develop-

ment, in my view.

- Price has a thoughtful discussion of Errico Malatesta and the question of majority/minority rights in a democracy. It would have been helpful to look at the experiences of the Students for a Democratic Society.

- In his discussion of “emotionally cold anti-social people” (Ch. 5), he could have been helped by Wilhelm Reich’s *Character Analysis* and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, where Reich tries to show the connection between economic exploitation and sexual repression.

- Chapter 11, “The Fight Against Naziism in Germany” would have been strengthened by a look at Ruth Fischer’s *Stalin and German Communism*. (Fischer was a co-leader, with Arkadi Maslow, of the ultra-left Maslow-Fischer group within the German Communist Party.)

- He situates the anarchist Karl Hess as neutral between capitalism and a cooperative,

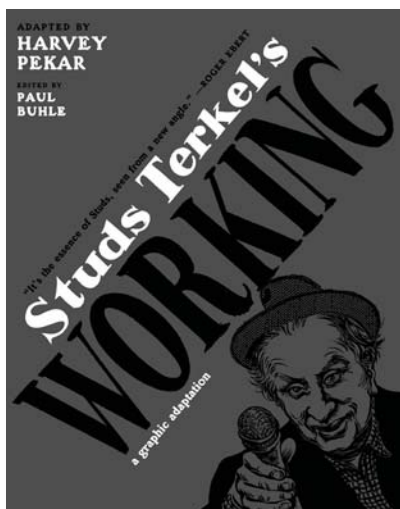
production-for-use economy. But Hess was a major speech writer for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential election.

**B**UT THESE ARE QUIBBLES. I think Marxists and Anarchists can learn from each other and, in fact, need each other.

#### NOTES

1. *History of the Russian Revolution* (Ann Arbor, U. of Michigan, 1932), II, 179-80.
2. *State and Revolution* (N.Y.: International Publishers, 1971), 84.
3. *Toward the Seizure of Power, I* (N.Y.: International Publishers, 1971), 226.
4. *op. cit.*, 91-2.
5. *The Russian Revolution* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1952), II, 237-8.
6. Irony of ironies: Trotsky voted for the ban, which in a few years would be used against him.

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# Marxism and National Liberation in India

BHASKAR SUNKARA

SATYABRATA RAI CHOWDHURI'S BOOK is an attempt to interweave a study of the mainstream nationalist movement with not only the trajectory of the Indian Communist Party, but that of the left-wing of the Indian National Congress. He succeeds by taking a traditional, scholarly approach, avoiding the very pitfalls of dogma and subjectivity that plagued many of his subjects. Though the source material may seem distant, lessons for modern socialists unsure of how they should interact with mass movements can be gleaned from the successes and failures of all strands of Indian leftism to reconcile their political ideals with the acute realities of imperialism, nationalism, and inveterate underdevelopment.

Throughout its history, many in India regarded their country's indigenous Marxists as propagators of an alien ideology, reliant on material aid from, and held hostage by, their foreign benefactors. Shattering this dependency theory, the fall of the Soviet Union and China's turn towards the market has done little to slow the growth of leftist movements on the subcontinent. While many reeled in response to the apparent triumph of neoliberalism, other Indian leftists found themselves free for the first time to reconcile their political ideals with a uniquely Indian set of circumstances.

Despite a skilled, motivated core of cadre, the first thirty years of the communist movement in India was an abject failure. Unlike revo-

lutionaries in Vietnam, China, and elsewhere across Asia, Indian communists were unable to seize a prominent role in the struggle for national liberation. Through a blind allegiance to the dicta of the Comintern and gross misinterpretations of domestic events, many radicals were able to accomplish the bewildering

feat of isolating themselves from one of the largest and most diverse mass movements in human history.

The year 1917 is a fitting one for Chowdhuri to begin his account. Yes, it did all begin long before 1917, but it all changed soon after 1917. The October Revolution, a Great War to end all wars, and the return of an expatriate lawyer from South Africa, all would contribute to a great national awakening that would turn the dream of Indian national liberation, dormant for so long, from a parlor game for elites into a mass movement. In the lead up to the Great War, the nascent self-governance campaign had rallied behind their oppressors. Men and materiel poured from colonial India under the guise of securing a future for democracy in the world. At least 1.3 million Indian soldiers and laborers served in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. The political leadership of the national bourgeois may have resoundingly supported aiding Britain, but the sentiment was not universally shared. Unrest simmered in Bengal and Punjab and led the British authorities to retaliate with draconian sedition acts and make promises of concessions to come after the war.

After the Entente Powers had triumphed, Indian elites saw the dismantling of the Austro-

## Leftism in India, 1917-1947

SATYABRATA RAI CHOWDHURI

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.  
288 pp., \$84.95

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Hungarian Empire under the auspices of “self-determination” and “democracy” and the establishment of the League of Nations as signs that at the very least the British would uphold their promises of significant constitutional reform and self-government. It soon became readily apparent, even to the most moderate in the independence movement, that the imperialists’ “universal” rights did not apply to their dark-skinned subjects. The aftermath of World War I left the subcontinent with tens of thousands of casualties, soaring inflation, increased taxation, an outbreak of influenza, and only pretenses of self-government.

The October Revolution did not, as Lenin hoped, lead to the triumph of the proletariat in advanced capitalist nations. It did, however, reshape the paradigm of national liberation movements across the undeveloped world. In India the Russian Revolution inspired the intellectuals of the lower-middle class more than the illiterate masses. It is an almost universal law that the men and women of the non-proprietary middle class are the most readily oriented towards revolutionary ethos.<sup>1</sup> Would-be subversives like M.N. Roy were galvanized by the Bolshevik example that power could be usurped from the ruling class by a determined minority. “But despite the romantic appeal of the Russian Revolution, most of those who were attracted by it in India had no clear conception of the forces that had provided momentum to the Russian revolutionary movement, the ideals and the ideologies that stimulated it[. . .] and above all, its relevance to the Indian situation.”<sup>2</sup> As would become commonplace across the colonial and semi-colonial world, Marx would come to the intelligentsia by way of Lenin, both divorced of much of context (and content). Regardless of these distortions, by the early 1920s it was undeniable that a revolution a world away in Petrograd broke the ideological monopoly of conservative liberalism in India and brought radical socio-economic content into discourse.

Perhaps the most decisive event of the Great War period was the transformation of Mohandas Gandhi from activist lawyer to spiritual leader of the Indian independence movement. With Gandhi’s emergence from obscurity, Indian politics became a hodgepodge of

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The October Revolution, a Great War to end all wars, and the return of an expatriate lawyer from South Africa, all would contribute to a great national awakening that would turn the dream of Indian national liberation from a parlor game for elites into a mass movement.

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nationalism, mysticism, and religion. Though the author is withering in his assessment of Gandhi, whom he decries as a “British spy and a saboteur of Indian aspirations,” a “worshiper of imperialism” and a “hypocrite to the core,” he admits to Gandhi’s instrumental role in shifting the political composition of the liberation movement from the elite to the newly awakened masses.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to imagine that someone as knowledgeable as Chowdhuri would completely discount Gandhi’s attempt to keep together an ethnically and ideologically diverse movement, or his efforts, however misguided, to dig Indian society out of the rubble of centuries of castism, untouchability, poverty, and foreign subjugation. Yet early on in the book Chowdhuri does just that and worst of all his sweeping indictments lack any semblance of nuance. Luckily, much of the rest of *Leftism in India, 1917-1947* is more comprehensive and scholarly in tone.

WHILE THE BOLSHEVIK EXAMPLE inspired many radical republican organizations and still more within the mainstream Congress Party, the Communist Party of India is the author's main subject. In late 1920, following the Second Congress of the Communist International, the Communist Party of India was formed. Its founding members included M.N. Roy, who would eventually become disillusioned with Stalinism (and it with him) and turn towards "radical" humanism; Abani Mukherji, who would be a victim of one Stalin's purges; and M.P.T. Acharya, who quickly renounced communism in favor of syndicalism. The life trajectories of the founding members of the CPI tells a great deal about the state of the communist movement, both in India and internationally, in the years leading up to independence.

If not for the Bolshevik Revolution, Marxism in India would have remained a marginalized fringe movement and the romantic idealism of those who saw no potential in Gandhianism would have likely continued to manifest itself in the form of anarchistic violence. It was the appeal of a foreign revolution (albeit one done in the name of the international proletariat) that gave Indian communism its credibility, but this same foreign character limited its appeal. Constrained by dogma, Indian communists were unable to see the interwar surge in Indian nationalism as anything but a "bourgeois" phenomena. The Gandhian mass movement was characterized by traditional social and cultural ethos that were antithetical to the vision of Indians who sought to import Leninism as a modernizing force, replacing the muck of mysticism and fanaticism that dominated certain wings of the independence movement. The positioning of the Indian Communist Party well outside the mainstream movement represents their adherence to rigid dogmatism. Indian communists never completely accepted that nationalism in the colonial world was progressive and anti-imperialist in character, so they positioned themselves too far to the

left of the mass movement, yet when the Comintern demanded it, like after the German invasion of Russia, the CPI swung to the right of a mass movement that refused to be beguiled like they were during the Great War. At one point during the 1940s, the CPI even supported a balkanization of India into 16 separate states, hoping that they would be able to seize power in Kerala, Bengal or Andhra Pradesh and launch a liberation and unification campaign from that starting point. The bloody aftermath of the partition of India along religious lines would have been nothing in comparison to the carnage that might have followed a division along linguistic lines. These rapid shifts from left to right and strict adherence to Stalinist pronouncements did not inspire popular confidence outside of a few states where grassroots communist organizing was exemplary.

The more successful radical leaders, like those in the Congress Socialist Party and India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, accepted nationalism as a catalysis for independence and future socio-economic transformation. This is not to say that the democratic socialist strain of Indian leftism was not influenced by Marx and Lenin. Despite the diverse class composition of the Indian National Congress, whose ranks held everyone from feudal princes to malnourished peasants, socialists who operated within the Indian National Congress claimed to adhere to Marxist thought. Socialist of all stripes were inspired by the tales they heard of Russia's stunning transformation from an undeveloped, war-ravaged nation to an industrial juggernaut and sought to emulate much of the Soviet "example," concurrent with liberal democratic values. Hugely influential to these intellectuals was Lenin's theory of imperialism, the locus classicus of the idea that the riches of the world's imperialist states was dependent on the exploitation of the Third World. Lenin argued that the export of capital to the periphery was necessary because advanced capitalist nations could not absorb their surplus

domestically, since they were incapable of mass consumption. Lenin in 1916 was witnessing the Great War, the rise of finance capital, and the hyper-exploitation of the undeveloped world, leading him to believe that unlike the bourgeoisie during the time of Marx, the bourgeoisie of the 20th century was reactionary and decadent, no different from the aristocracy of the 17th and 18th centuries. As opposed to a “two stage theory” reading of *Das Kapital*, Nehru and other self-proclaimed socialists largely agreed with Lenin’s analysis and believed that the solution to underdevelopment was state-capitalist accumulation with heavy regulation on private enterprise. In other words, an enlightened elite would coordinate production and accomplish the historic task of the bourgeoisie, ensuring that domestically generated surplus labor would be directed towards the development of infrastructure and human capital.

Of course when the vision of these democratic socialists came into fruition, despite successes in increasing access to education, medical services, and eliminating famine, growth did not come at the rate that was expected. The post-war period saw a shift away from Western capital investment in poor nations and the loss of much of the West’s imperial holdings, alongside a tremendous boom in these nation’s internal development and prosperity, discrediting much of Lenin’s analysis. India’s recent turn away from state regulation and towards free market development is causing fractious upheaval in that country, alongside an enormous growth in productive forces, proof that the bourgeoisie of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is not universally as reactionary and decadent as Lenin presumed they had become by the early 20th century.

Though many Indian progressives were as indebted to the Fabian tradition as they were to revolutionary socialism, for both the CPI and the left-wing of Congress, Marxist thought throughout the inter-war period was filtered by the Kremlin. The ideological stances of Moscow were regurgitated by the vast majority of

the CPI’s intellectuals, a group that found themselves unable to produce a charismatic leader to headline their movement. CPI founder M.N. Roy was, however, among the most inventive and charismatic of the party’s leaders. He famously debated Lenin on the class nature of national liberation movements in the Third World and garnered himself prominence in the Comintern during Lenin’s lifetime. Roy’s free-thinking and aversion to rigid dogma, precisely the qualities that Indian communists lacked during much of the pre-independence era, earned him the ire of Stalin, and he was expelled by the Third Internationale in 1929, the same year Leon Trotsky was forced into exile.

*Leftism In India, 1917–1947* is an excellent account of the political maneuvers and theoretical ruminations of Indian radicals during the last thirty years of the liberation movement. Yet the book is limited in its appeal as it is a mere survey of policy and not a comprehensive study of the grassroots movement that took on an Empire. Whatever criticisms one may have of the revolutionaries who took part in India’s struggle for independence, the reply of Nehru (quoting Lenin)<sup>4</sup> at the end of his iconic work *The Discovery of India* is fitting: “Man’s dearest possession is life, and since it is given to him to live but once, he must so live as not to be seared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past, so live as not to be tortured for years without purpose, so live that dying he can say: ‘All my life and my strength were given to the first cause in the world- the liberation of mankind.’”<sup>5</sup> Fine sentiments. I subscribe to them.

#### NOTES

1. Draper, Hal. “The Two Souls of Socialism.” *New Politics*, Winter, 1966, [57–84].
2. Chowdhuri, 25
3. Chowdhuri, 13
4. He was actually quoting the playwright Nikolay Ostrovsky, though he thought he was quoting Lenin. —BS
5. Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India*. ed., Robert I. Crane, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1959) 418.

# From “Sí se Puede” to “Yes We Can”

## *Legacy of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Worker Movement*

ALAN AJA

IN 1972, AT A STAFF MEETING of labor and political supporters of the United Farm Worker (UFW) campaign to repeal anti-union legislation in Arizona, Dolores Huerta first spoke the now famous words: “Sí se puede (Yes, it can be done!).” After nay sayers had just told the group in Spanish “No se puede” (It can’t be done), igniting Huerta’s fiery response, fellow UFW co-founder Cesar Chavez decided to make it the battle cry of the campaign: a rebuttal to the perennial skeptics who held that organizing predominantly Mexican farm workers in grower-friendly states would be impossible.

Today, while sadly few know of its grassroots origins, an English language translation of “Sí Se Puede!” is arguably the most recognized phrase in the current lexicon. First used by Barack Obama in a 2008 speech after losing the New Hampshire primary, “Yes We Can” became an integral part of the campaign’s oratorical strategy. Its propagandist catchiness, used almost incessantly during the eventual duel and victory against John McCain, became the mantra of mainstream music artists hoping to

garner the youth vote, likewise yelled by thousands at campaign rallies in a “call and response-like” cadence.<sup>1</sup> Even after Obama’s victory, companies jumped on the bandwagon, using the slogan on television and internet ads to market their products and services.<sup>2</sup>

The irony, of course, is that the phrase traces to a cause whose roots are radically different than most who proclaimed “Yes We Can” in 2008. In the recently updated version of Jacques E. Levy’s *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa*, the reader

is brought into the covenant of those who crafted the farm worker movement, with first-hand accounts from UFW founders, activists, religious and political allies, and even former critics. Dolores Huerta, for instance, balanced child rearing and labor in pesticide-infested fields, co-founding a movement whose participants endured much of the same. Her fellow co-founder, the iconic Cesar Chavez, shared her struggle, having survived a childhood of poverty, ongoing health issues, and death threats while organizing workers into a union. It is their legacy, as Randy Shaw argues in *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, that went on to inspire more recent labor organizing, environmental and immigrant rights campaigns, with tactics and strategies taken straight from the playbook of farm worker boycotts and strikes of the 1960s and 70s. While this essay seeks to

### Cesar Chavez, Autobiography of La Causa

JACQUES E. LEVY

Minneapolis, London: University of  
Minnesota Press, 2007. 556 pp., \$19.95

### Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century

RANDY SHAW

Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,  
2008. 347 pp., \$24.95

ALAN A. AJA is an Assistant Professor in the Puerto Rican & Latino Studies department at Brooklyn College (CUNY) and a previous contributor to *New Politics*. He has conducted human and environmental rights work in Latin America and worked as an organizer for the Texas State Employees Union, CWA-Local 6186 in Austin, Texas

review these two books for their individual merits and overall contributions to the labor literature, it also discusses their common theoretical underpinnings and empirical foundation. Both books belong on the shelves of scholars of labor studies, Latino history, social movements, and related disciplines. They also shed light on how today's economic and social justice campaigns are both alike and different than those of yesteryear.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1975 and re-released in 2007, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* is lengthy yet substantive, serving as a detailed reminder of the political struggles and economic hardships of those dedicated to forming and sustaining a Farm Workers' Union. Levy, a journalist and peace activist embedded within the farm worker movement in the early to mid 1970s, used one-on-one interviews, speeches, reports, notes, and various sources to tell its story. Largely centered on Cesar Chavez, Levy admits up front that unlike your typical autobiography, he arrogated the right to make editorial changes, with the purpose of presenting a full-bodied portrait of Chavez and the movement. More surprisingly is that Chavez granted Levy this special privilege after adamantly refusing previous offers for autobiographical accounts. In the 2007 edition's afterword, Levy's daughter Jacqueline, an ecologist and schoolteacher to whom the original version was dedicated, questions why her father received this special access given Levy and Chavez's bifurcated ethnic and class backgrounds. The answer may lie in a bond between the two over their shared belief in nonviolent principles, which Levy highlights in his book, citing Chavez's many references to Gandhian philosophies throughout the text.<sup>3</sup>

Levy nicely breaks down the manuscript chronologically into several "books," beginning with a historical background of its principal founder's life, moving on to the UFW's inception, its battle with greedy growers and then-

corrupt Teamsters, and then on to subsequent legislative and economic boycott campaigns in California and other states. First we are introduced to the myriad of experiences that shaped Chavez's moral fiber and passion for economic justice. As agribusinesses enjoyed the fruits of surplus, exploitable labor, the Chavez family searched for work as migrants among the vast California "dust bowl" caravans during the 1920s, only to encounter worsening conditions during the great droughts and economic depression of the 1930s and onward.<sup>4</sup> Unlike renditions in more Eurocentric versions of U.S. history, here we are provided with substantive testimonial evidence of how qualitatively worse Mexicans (alongside African-Americans, Filipinos, Chinese, and other Latinos) were treated over whites, given their indelible mark of color. Chavez's account as a young man during the Zoot Suit Riots and experiences of Jim Crow segregation in local schools complement similar narratives found in the growing canon of Latino studies literature. Victor Villaseñor's candid memoir *Burro Genius* and chapters of Rodolfo Acuña's groundbreaking *Occupied America* come to mind, each uniquely complementing and affirming what Chavez and others experienced. Even Juan Flores' *Divided Arrival: Narratives of a Puerto Rican Migration, 1920-1950*, with a focus on the Puerto Rican urban settlement experience, is a relevant and necessary intra-Latino contrast to the southwestern Chicano/Latino experience.

The bulk of the autobiography is dedicated to the actual day-to-day organization of the UFW, their eventual growth as a union, and the constant power struggles with growers and their intra-labor competition of the era, the Teamsters. As a former labor organizer myself, this is the section of the book that is perhaps most relevant to those currently on the ground and still in the fields.<sup>5</sup> The tiresome challenges of searching for potential activists, exhausting court and legislative battles, intimidation and outright violent tactics used by growers, union-

busters, and corrupt business-friendly rival unions, all de-romanticize what is portrayed in popular labor films like *Norma Rae* and *Bread*

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Chavez advocated for  
cooperative models, in which  
ownership is a collective concept  
and production is guaranteed via  
governing structures.

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and *Roses*. In one instance, Chavez's brother Manuel tells of a daylong struggle to find a new member when a farm worker unexpectedly invited him to his house to join the union. Excited for the new recruit, with \$3.50 in dues to prove it, three days later he learns of the member using the union's newly acquired family death benefit (whose wife was presumably dead in the bedroom at the moment Manuel Chavez signed the receipt), leaving the union \$500 dollars poorer at a time it was most economically vulnerable.<sup>6</sup> While an idiosyncratic organizing mishap, this incident reminds the reader of the sacrifices made to grow a union, and likewise the desperate conditions farm workers faced as they struggled to live, and die, with dignity.

In the burgeoning Latino studies and vast labor literature, Chavez is largely remembered for the use of nonviolent tactics like fasting and economic boycotts to bring public attention to farm worker issues, but less known is how his theories on social and economic inequality shaped his actions. The autobiography unveils how Chavez viewed capitalistic structures, illustrating his intellectual and experiential understanding of its severe limitations and down-right abuses. As recalled by his son Paul, Chavez saw capitalism as a harsh economic system designed to take advantage of those least able to defend themselves — the poor. However, he was also critical of socialism due to its tendency

to rely on authoritarianism when implemented.<sup>7</sup> Not having studied modern economics formally, but educating himself on the theories that construct its underpinnings, Chavez instead advocated for cooperative models, in which ownership is a collective concept and production is guaranteed via governing structures. He even implemented a rule that middle-class Chicanos would not be a part of the union's leadership, a reaction to class-based internal conflicts that arose during the union's early days. Instead, only poor farm workers would become a part of the union's governance, arguing they were more likely to look out for each other collectively.

Besides Chavez's commitment to grassroots empowerment, his position on racially inclusive organizing was sometimes met with strong resistance within the Mexican-American community. Intra-Latino racism, whose roots trace to a caste system implemented by the Spanish that gave preference to light-skinned elites, was largely exacerbated by racialized structures imposed after U.S. annexation in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.<sup>8</sup> Levy devotes a chapter to this, with Chavez recalling how he and his wife Rita were labeled "Negreroes" (nigger lovers) for organizing inclusively, such as allowing 50 NAACP members to join the union.<sup>9</sup> And in further response to language that could potentially harm organizing efforts, Chavez openly challenged those who used the term "La Raza (The Race)" ethnocentrically, a symbolic term used by Chicanos during the civil rights movement. He argued it should be used only as a way to define a shared cultural struggle for dignity, and said, "We can't be against racism on one hand and for it on the other."

Chavez also acknowledged the existence of a "cycle of poverty," an *idée fixe* among sociologists and economists suggesting that poverty feeds upon itself. However, unlike current theorists who reduce poverty's causes to behavioral patterns or individual-level characteristics, Chavez unapologetically places the blame on

what he sees as the true culprit: institutionalized inequality.<sup>10</sup> Giving his unwillingness to remove himself from those whose conditions he also endured, Chavez reveals he understood that social and economic structures were purposely mal-designed, constructed to perpetuate poverty and oppression, especially for those of color. However, his answer as how to break apart structures of oppression departs from theories based on individualism and self-reliance. His thesis was not to attempt vertically to get out of poverty and leave it altogether, but rather to change it from its present state. From the picket lines of Delano, California in the 1960s to the hunger strikes of Arizona in the 1980s, this was the theoretical basis of the radical Chavez's moral foundation, explaining his faithful marriage to La Causa until his untimely death in 1992.

In the final pages, Chavez and La Causa's legacy is briefly discussed by Levy himself, including short accounts by his daughter Jacqueline and Chavez's son Paul, but it is Randy Shaw who picks up where they left off. In *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, The UFW and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, Shaw compiles a series of case studies to forcefully argue that the foundation of today's labor, voting, and immigrant rights movements are largely rooted in grassroots organizing tactics pioneered by Chavez and the UFW. Shaw, a long-time community activist and lawyer by training, currently works as a housing clinic director and on-line newspaper editor based out of San Francisco. After watching UFW activists effectively recruit volunteers while a student at Berkeley in the mid-1970s, Shaw followed many of their careers, noticing the critical roles they played in subsequent progressive campaigns. It was this crucial link that prompted him to write the book, largely unexplored and absent from the labor literature.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw builds his argument using an interconnected path: first highlighting the innovative organizing tactics used by the UFW to win

workers' rights campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s, then focusing on the critical roles UFW alum played in progressive campaigns of the 1980s, 1990s, and more recently. The book rightfully begins with Chavez and the UFW itself, focusing on the nationwide table grape boycott and the coalitions formed with young people, clergy, women's groups, and other labor allies to win labor disputes. Here among other topics, Shaw should be credited for not only acknowledging that the UFW opened doors for women organizers amongst a sea of historically male-dominated unions, but also for discussing sexism and gender discrimination operating within its ranks. Unveiling subconscious flaws in the iconic leader, Chavez sometimes excluded Dolores Huerta and fellow activist Jessica Govea from meetings despite their high leadership positions. However, Shaw does show that gender-inclusiveness improved over time in the UFW, and that Chavez became much like what religious scholar Miguel De La Torre calls a "recovering machista": progressive men who struggle internally to deal with the long-term effects of sexist societies.<sup>12</sup>

Shaw then moves into the crux of his argument, illustrating how the UFW boycott model was used to bring attention to workers' concerns from the textile industry in the late 1970s to the workers of Salvadoran coffee farms in the late 1980s. A discussion on the clergy-labor alliance is then raised, and Shaw attributes the success of UFW tactics like hunger strikes to the fact that they were framed in spiritual or religious terms. Subsequent workers' rights campaigns such as Justice for Janitors and pesticide-campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s are analyzed, followed by a discussion on the UFW's legacy on electoral politics, the rising Latino political bloc in parts of California and the more recent marches and legislative efforts for immigrant rights in the early 21st century.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps Shaw's most contemporarily pertinent chapter deals with the latter above. Also illustrated in Levy's work, Chavez and the

UFW's biggest nemesis outside the then-corrupt Teamsters and union-busting growers was the global capitalist structure and its consequences on those most vulnerable in U.S. society. Critical of the Bracero program, the 22-year agreement between the United States and Mexico to allow sponsored temporary workers into the United States, Chavez argued for its demise as policy, given that it displaced U.S. workers and undermined organizing efforts. Carefully studying the law, Chavez learned that Braceros could not be used if local labor was available, fighting growers who ignored these statutes to employ the exploitable migrants. Shaw's purpose here is to ensure that Chavez's argument is properly understood: that the UFW's position was not anti-immigrant, only anti-union busting, and that the first UFW contract did not differentiate between undocumented and U.S.-born workers. Moreover, UFW alums like Fred Ross Jr. and Eliseo Medina went on to be integral parts of organized labor's involvement in the recent immigrant rights campaigns, even in pressuring the AFL-CIO to call for the "legalization" of undocumented immigrants, given its long history of policy positions to the contrary.<sup>14</sup>

Shaw also fills an important empirical gap in the literature by questioning the political decline of the UFW in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Shaw argues that decisions made by Chavez himself impacted the union's potential at a time it was most likely to flourish. From controversial group therapy exercises, to alienating allies and religious leaders, to conflicts over personnel salaries, all among other internal issues, Shaw illustrates how each played an interconnected role in forcing key leaders to eventually leave the UFW altogether. Moreover, while some blame the union's demise on anti-labor gubernatorial regimes (or even the flourishing control of free market capitalism run amok since the 1970s as other labor scholars have argued), Shaw points out that the "external factors" argument only undermines years of

hard work and sacrifice by key UFW leaders, not to mention implying that grassroots movements are powerless.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps Shaw's most convincing chapter is when he lists the names and future contributions of farm workers, artists, lawyers, organizers, and others once involved with the UFW. Dolores Huerta, Eliseo Medina, Marshall Ganz, Fred Ross, Sr. and Jr., Miguel Contreras, Jessica Govea, and many others, either began their careers with the UFW or were an integral part of its foundation. Herein lies the nicely compiled proof that subsequent generations of activists, inspired by their work in the UFW, went on to play key roles in future campaigns for social and economic justice. Thus the UFW experience worked as an effective training ground for organizing, indeed extending far "beyond the fields."

The only real flaw in Shaw's argument concerns an epistemological struggle between context and semantics. Shaw briefly refers to the UFW's impact on 21st century presidential campaigns, such as those of Howard Dean in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008, whose camps used grassroots tactics first modeled by Chavez and the UFW.<sup>16</sup> However, one must question the meaning of "grassroots" parallel to that of yesteryear. If "grassroots" pertains to empowering mostly middle or working class voters of today, then this is a far cry from the barrios, field houses, and colonias once and still occupied by the farm workers. Moreover, while modern-day "grassroots" efforts are largely dependent on internet organizing and fundraising, progressives often forget about the existing "digital divide" that disenfranchises potential voters, primarily immigrants, alongside many poor and isolated African-Americans and Latinos.

Put differently, Shaw is absolutely right that Chavez and the UFW's legacy were instrumental in getting candidates like Obama elected, but there is a strange irony that tactics once used to organize the poorest of the poor were ap-

plied for those who were undeniably among more privileged classes. The Obama campaign, for example, ran on “middle class” issues, barely using the word “poor,” and there is no evidence yet that amidst an economic depression, a new war on poverty has been waged. Thus it can be said that the UFW went onto to inspire a dichotomous branch of movements, with some campaigns retaining the spirit of the farm workers both in ideology and praxis, and others safely removed from its harsher roots.

In closing, perhaps what both books bring to the table is that they answer overly skeptical nay sayers who argue that nonviolent movements gain little, and that social justice campaigns are largely privy to what governments, or those in power, are willing to give and take in order to curb civil unrest or risk poor media exposure. Nevertheless, Shaw’s argument illustrates that the contours of the UFW movement, played out through boycotts, picket lines, street theater, volunteer empowerment, and religious-based hunger strikes were re-applied in subsequent campaigns for justice, and worked! Among scholars and policymakers, the debate will continue as to how progressive change is made, but both books make clear that Dolores Huerta Chavez were right — despite all odds: *Sí Se Puede!*

Dan La Botz, a member of our editorial board, will be responding to this review in our next issue.

—THE EDITORS

## NOTES

1. The slogan used by Obama in his speech inspired Will.i.am of the *Black Eyed Peas* to create a collage-style music video of the same name. The award-winning video was made independent of the Obama campaign, but nevertheless featured sports stars, actors, and other music artists designed to attract largely young, first-time voters. See [www.dipdive.com](http://www.dipdive.com) for more information.
2. A quick Internet search with key words “Yes We

Can products” will reveal much of the post-Obama electoral campaign marketing bandwagon.

3. See Levy’s Preface and the Afterword for these discussions.

4. Unfortunately Chavez’s father constantly battled and lost to local growers over possession of his land.

5. From the fall of 2000 to the summer of 2002, I worked as an organizer for CWA-Local 6186, Texas State Employees Union in Austin and El Paso, Texas. This is the same union that Eliseo Medina of the UFW helped found in the late 1970s. To this day, collective bargaining is illegal in Texas, but the union’s grassroots organizing philosophy has allowed it to win important legislative battles for improved state worker pay and benefits. See [www.cwa-tseu.org](http://www.cwa-tseu.org) for more information.

6. Manuel wanted to quit, given he had left a successful business to join the farm worker organizing efforts. Cesar’s reaction was for his brother to “drink it off,” a tactic that Manuel admits kept him in on the job. Levy, p. 177.

7. Levy, p. 545.

8. See George Martinez on “Mexican Americans and Whiteness,” in Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean, *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

9. The then-corrupt Teamsters, the UFW’s rival union during this era, organized under the premise of ensuring a predominantly white, people of color free union. The irony is that they were lead by Ted Gonsalves, who carried a name of Latin descent.

10. During early UFW recruitment efforts, Chavez’s brother Richard questions whether “laziness” was instrumental in the farm workers’ position of poverty. Chavez quickly retorted to their defense: “You’re wrong! You’re lucky, not everybody can make it . . .” Levy, p. 199.

11. Shaw, pp. 4-5.

12. Shaw, pp. 28-36. Also, for a nuanced discussion on *machismo* in the Latino community, see De La Torre, Miguel, “Beyond Machismo: A Cuban Case Study,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, May 6.4 (1999), pp. 57-74.

13. Shaw, Chapters 2-9.

14. Shaw, Chapter 8.

15. Shaw, Chapter 10.

16. Marshall Ganz, once Director of Organizing for the UFW, went on to help design Obama’s organizing strategy, serving as a trainer and advisor for its highly effective field program. Shaw, p. 272.

# Returning Political Theory to Politics

*The odd disconnect between theorists of 'difference' and struggles for social solidarity*

MICHAEL HIRSCH

**I**T'S TRAINED ELEPHANTS linked tail to snout contending with accursed builders of The Tower of Babel. That's pretty much how defenders of discourse on class and identity caricature their opposite theoretical numbers. Not so Joseph Schwartz, who shows why such binary thinking is dangerous. Schwartz instead places economic inequality and politics back into discussions of identity and difference. It's about time.

Schwartz, a Temple University political theorist and long associated with the Democratic Socialists of America, writes a book with beaucoup strengths. Two in particular stand out, and explain why it's a book that — in a period in which economic decline is an in-your face reality — nicely bridges the theoretical divide.

In its first instance, it is a healthy contribution to political theory, written within that discipline about the weaknesses and parochialism of contending thought in the field. As such, it's a great summary of warring theoretical stances. It's even a good one-stop source to read for a Ph.D., much as Paul Sweezy's *Theory of Capitalist Development* helped this writer notch a tricky qualifying exam question in my day as a student ideologue cum scholar.

Like Sweezy, Schwartz's work is also more than that. It's theory in the best sense, as a guide

to praxis. Not a how-to-book on unifying the exploited, the oppressed, and the marginalized, if such an analysis could be made before the fact. Rather, it's a mostly successful attempt to weave a series of seemingly conflicting and frequently counterpoised ideas about power and powerlessness into a genuinely subversive strategy.

What it does is nothing less than chart the underpinnings of a majoritarian politics of the left and the way to end radical isolation by linking common class needs with minority struggles.

His academic project is pretty straightforward: Equal citizenship should imply equal access to resources. It's not, as Anatole France observed sarcastically, where "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets, or steal bread."

While he holds a healthy respect for group differences, Schwartz focuses on "the structural barriers that low-income and working class people of all races face in regard to educational and labor market opportunities.

"How," Schwartz asks about a question that vexed not just Marx but Rousseau and Mill, "do inequalities in wealth, income, power, and life opportunities contradict the formal commitment of liberal democracy to the equal moral worth of persons?"

Why, in a period in which economic and social inequality exploded in the United States

## The Future of Democratic Equality: Rebuilding Social Solidarity in a Fragmented America

JOSEPH SCHWARTZ

N.Y.:Routledge, 2008, 225 pp., hardcover, \$125, paper, \$32.95

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—roughly the last 35 years — being both cause and effect of the decline in political power by labor and other progressive movements, did so many radical thinkers move away from “speak(ing) forthrightly in favor of social solidarity and democratic equality?”

“Why is it,” he asks, that “political theory has taken a peculiarly ‘anti-political’ turn,” . . . spending more energy debating the metaphysical and ontological nature of the ‘self’ . . . than on discussing how selves in the real world are affected by political and economic developments — and what people might do to reverse these inequalitarian trends?”

Sure, that’s not the whole picture, as when an American Political Science Association task force report put it in 2002, “The scourge of overt discrimination against African-Americans and women has been replaced by a more subtle but potent threat — the growing concentration of the country’s wealth and income in the hands of the few.”

We can quibble about whether indeed overt discrimination of African-Americans and women has been replaced so much as that class differences have become exacerbated, but at least the APSA was looking at the problem. The list of the unseeing and the uninterested — at least until the investment bank collapse of 2008 — is staggering.

What took the place of studying inequality in the hearts and minds of many radical academics was instead a focus on “epistemological and ontological questions about the nature of ‘the self’ and “difference.” Studying transgressive behavior in cultural studies was in; strike behavior, work alienation, and economic survival was out.

Even today, for Schwartz, “few political theorists consider how social and economic structures shape identity and even constrain — but also enable — individual and group agency.”

What emerged from that post-structuralist perspective, and what he cautions against, is “a new radical orthodoxy of uncritically embrac-

ing the value of ‘difference.’”

“In short,” Schwartz writes, “‘difference’ is not empowering for marginalized communities that possess inadequate resources and life opportunities for their members. Thus, the moral and political challenge confronting democratic

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## Studying transgressive behavior in cultural studies was in; strike behavior, work alienation, and economic survival was out.

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theory and practice is not that of choosing between the false antinomies of unity and diversity (or ‘universality’ verses ‘particularity’), but of constructing unity through diversity, and vice versa.”

Note how Schwartz won’t dichotomize the two approaches, (if anything he sees them as causally linked), only that “inegalitarian distribution of power, voice, and life opportunity cannot be politically overturned absent a politics of solidarity that promotes alliances across groups in favor of democratic equality.”

Schwartz does more, I think, than any other theorist in years to connect issues of “otherness” and “group identity” to their development under a specific mode of production, capitalism, and the need to battle politically in alliances.

Early in the book he writes, *pace* Terry Eagleton, that post-structural analysis emerged in a period of working class and social movement defeats in contending for power. True enough.

And while post-structuralists drew attention away from what they called the imperial claims of a enlightenment-based “grand narrative,” a far worse grand narrative — substituting what historian Tony Judt writes off as “the Higher Drivel” of what it terms “decentered selves,” battling in an amoral death-locked com-

petition for power — got enshrined by the right: the neoliberal idea that free market rapacity was in the common good.

The demise of democratic theory and, as I would argue, theories of class did indeed coincide with the decline not just of the left but of post-New Deal liberalism. Social class as agency atrophied in political theory following political defeats. When Auto Workers president Doug Fraser quit a federally sponsored labor-management board claiming business was “waging a one-sided class war,” those studying what Michel Foucault called “subjugated knowledges” were quick to leave the battlefield in a blur of semiotics.

So while the academic left was busy difference-mongering (my words, not Schwartz’s) the U.S. Right shifted what was an economic struggle into a social and cultural struggle.

Saying that, I do think Schwartz is right (or at least he’s magnanimous) to say that “if the post-structuralist and ‘difference’ turn had occurred in a vibrant, hopeful period for left politics, they would more likely have joined an earlier generation of radical theorists in taking on America’s dominant faith in the liberal Democratic capitalist order.”

Yet some issues are not as easily reconciled as Schwartz believes. Where he writes that “inequality over the past 30 years in the United States has distinct political, and not structural economic causes,” he exaggerates. It has both, working in tandem.

Certainly the devastation that globalism and the collapse of Fordism did to U.S. industry never reached those depths in Scandinavia (at least not yet), but that speaks to Scandinavia’s unique export capacity, its niche precision-manufacturing sector, the combined strengths of its labor movements historically and the weaknesses of its ruling classes, and not just to the institutional blocks built up to defend European social welfare programs and avoid a race to the bottom.

These blocks aren’t epiphenomenal, of

course. Europe’s own history of class struggle and the left’s embedded social democratic and radical institutions in Britain, France, and Italy are indeed political causes, or the legacy of past politics, as Schwartz says.

But these institutional buffers, thanks to capitalist globalization and not just sclerotic social democratic leaderships, are now under assault in exactly the same ways as they were in the United States under Carter, Reagan, Clinton, and the greater and lesser Bushes. Structural explanations have their place, too.

I also think he’s too hard on pioneering sociologists William Julius Wilson and Theda Skocpol for invoking what he calls a “race-blind politics” of universal rights and responsibilities. They’re not the first to suggest that viable programs that help the poor, such as universal health care, a massive federal investment in affordable, high-quality housing, improved and expanded social security benefits, federal jobs programs, and unemployment insurance without a sunset, are programs that help everyone and should be marketed as such.

On the radical democratic left, much of the work of Caribbean Marxist C.L.R. James’ — a scholar and a left militant — argues the same point.

And Schwartz unfairly, I think, dismisses Thomas Frank as someone who disparages working class suspicions of government programs as “irrational.”

That’s not how I read Frank, who argues in *What’s the Matter with Kansas* that religiously based workers voting for the Right do so precisely because they make a rational choice after seeing no difference between the two main U.S. parties on issues that matter to them. So why not vote their conscience or their fears over their interest when neither party seems to represent their interests anyway?

That’s no description of irrationality, though when workers begrudge entitlement programs and oppose all tax increases, including tax increases on the rich, it is problematic.

Electing Republicans or center-right Democrats may not be irrational, but it is ironic and self-destructive. It only compounds working people's problems.

And one last caveat, perhaps an unfair one, as this particular Schwartz sin appears more like a lead prairie dog whistling a warning to the pack and less a protagonist in Schwartz's bestiary.

It's the bogey of "class essentialism," said to be the province of the "white male Left." After a proper demolishing of his main targets, he shifts gears to aver, no essentialist he, that his study "is not another paean by white male academics to a glorious past of class-based, universal struggle." Would that he were as felicitous and balanced in his treatment of white Y chromosomed Marxists as he is in his critique of the limits of difference and a purely identity politics.

Schwartz prefers a more nuanced one — and who wouldn't? — that holds that "culture and ideology have always played a major role in the shaping of individual and group identity, and that the Left has always consisted of a coalition of progressive middle-strata and secular members of the industrial working class."

I think Schwartz states it so bluntly for only one reason: there aren't many defenders of "class essentialism" in academia. Maybe the 17-something newspaper hawker at a recent "U.S. Troops Out of Everywhere" mobilization, but not among academics, or even among the democratic socialist/radical left. It's a red herring.

In fact, was there ever such a blockheaded Marxism? Was there ever really a prevailing orthodoxy, of uncritically embracing the value of class, itself a historically fluid category defined as much by what it is arrayed against as what it comprises? Not in the universities, where Marx wasn't even taught in graduate survey of social theory at the University of Chicago in my day, and I'd argue, not really much on the radical Left either, then or now.

From Marx to Dubois to C.Wright Mills, and from Raymond Williams and Norman Birnbaum to Hal Draper, Sheila Rowthbotham and Mike Davis, no one put forward such a one-dimensional definition of class.

Whatever readers of *New Politics* think of the late Philip Foner's international stances, his exhaustive studies of working class institutions are infused with the tension between white and black workers over scarce jobs and employers practiced in playing one off of the other. From the time the Wobblies organized integrated locals and Gene Debs' refused to speak to Jim Crow audiences and the Black Panthers distinguished themselves from other nationalists with their clear-eyed approach to alliances, the Left that prizes class struggle has also embraced race and gender, if not sexual orientation or the specific language of opposing white supremacy? What union doesn't have racial, ethnic, and women's caucuses? Isn't this all part of class formation and not simply a higher form of class consciousness?

It's been a long time since the making of the film *Salt of the Earth*, where a trade union leader had to be persuaded that sanitation in company-owned miners' homes is not simply an issue for "the wives" but a trade union issue, too, or that nuclear power is a danger to working people, as the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers understood as early as the mid 1970s.

Who on the socialist Left would disagree with Schwartz that "culture and ideology have always played a major role in the shaping of individual and group identity, and that the Left has always consisted of a coalition of progressive middle-strata and secular members of the industrial working class."

Or that "In a world where interests are radically unequal, under-represented, disempowered groups inevitably are likely to mobilize outside the formal deliberative sphere—often resorting to disruptive, non-deliberative protest tactics — in order to force the state to grant greater voice and power to the disenfranchised."

What Schwartz is describing here is class struggle, retro-style, and it's at least an understated if an understandable bow to the necessity for framing to call it a battle for equality instead. What else were the sit-downs of the 1930s in the United States and France, or the plant occupations going on now (as *New Politics* goes to press in May) in France, Ireland, and the U.K. now. Or the Dalit land seizures in India, the wave of factory occupations in Argentina in 2001, where the cry was "occupy, resist, produce," or the United Electrical Workers factory occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago late last year, where employees chanted, "You got bailed out, we got sold out!"

Now criticizing Schwartz for the book he didn't write may be unfair, given that his target is not so much a hide-bound left as the academic rock stars who think a bohemian living on a trust fund engages in transgressive behavior while a worker raising a family is tied to normative expectations.

Like the abolitionists before them, who were said by contemporary radicals to "stretch their ears to hear the sound of the lash on the back of the oppressed black, at the same time that they were deaf to the cries of the oppressed wage workers in the North," Schwartz has managed not so much to trash today's theorists of difference as to provide a template for uniting freedom struggles into a movement for equality and solidarity. The effort is appreciated.

**DON'T MOURN, MAKE 'EM LAUGH!**

## ECONOMIC MELTDOWN FUNNIES

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GOLDMAN SAX

THE 4 TUCKS OF THE APOCALYPSE

# Living With Hope?

OPHELIA BENSON

WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED TO secularism in the United States over the past few decades? Ronald Aronson points out in the first few pages of *Living Without God* that a couple of generations ago secularists were confident and on the offensive, and that times have changed. "Today, the public display of belief in God has become the default assumption of American society." What happened?

One thing that happened, Aronson notes, is that the whole picture has been badly exaggerated. The polls tell us that "virtually everyone in America" is religious, but then what of the one in four who declare themselves "spiritual but not religious" or the one in four who are atheist, agnostic, or unwilling to say? Aronson finds that many U.S. surveys overcount believers and undercount everyone else, via the wording of questions and the limited choices offered, and that, in addition, many believers are also secularists who are getting tired of in-your-face religion.

It would be possible to blame religion for all this, but Aronson considers that a bad habit which "avoids looking inward and confronting the secular loss of vision." What is called for now, Aronson argues, is to free secularism from "false hopes"; to live comfortably without God requires "rethinking the secular worldview after the eclipse of modern optimism." This ne-

cessitates asking unflinching questions.

Why, despite movement after movement on behalf of justice, is life still so unfair? Is there reason to hope that any of this can be improved? What is the meaning and direction of human life, without God and after Progress?

## Living Without God

RONALD ARONSON

Berkeley, CA:Counterpoint, 2008  
245 pp., \$25

In the rest of the book, however, it becomes apparent that although Aronson is asking questions about life after Progress, he is very far from abandoning belief in progress. In other words he sees the question as being about the end of delusional optimism about the inevitability and especially the uninterruptedness of progress, but not at all about the end of belief in reform, amelioration, improvement. On the contrary, the book is saturated in ideas about amelioration, and a good thing too. Aronson is not quite as disenchanted with the idea of progress as that last question might suggest.

John Stuart Mill asked himself similar questions one day in the autumn of 1826, when he was in a depressed mood, as he reported in *The Autobiography*.

I had what might truly be called an object in life; to be a reformer of the world...[I]t occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: "Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down.

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Mill recovered. Poetry helped, especially that of Coleridge and Wordsworth; so did feeling and “enthusiasm” (an emotion that was anathema to his father); and Mill went on being a reformer of the world, thus showing that

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A God who allowed the suffering  
of billions of sentient humans and  
animals going on every second of  
every day would be a hideous  
tyrant, and living without that  
tyrant is a pearl of great price.

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the conclusion loses force once the mood is past. Our hopes for a better world will never all be attained; there will always be work to do, because there is always room for improvement.

Aronson’s chapters on social justice, responsibility, and choosing to know help to back this up: they are moral and aspirational throughout, thus showing that the only answer to the horrors of the 20th century is not to abandon the idea of reform and progress, but to do a better job of it.

We get to those chapters by way of a moving consideration of gratitude. What do we do with generalized gratitude — for nature, life, the world — when we do not believe there is anyone to thank? Aronson starts from a Wordsworthian moment in a clearing on a spring day, which evoked “a vague feeling more like gratitude than anything else but not toward any being or person I could recognize.” The absence of giving thanks in secular culture, he observes, “deprives those who live without God of much of life’s coherence and meaning.”

He notes the meaning to be found in the interdependence of nature, including the chastened sort of meaning in Darwin’s discovery of the role of competition, failure, and death in

making us what we are. The thing we are, of course, is pre-eminently social, and part of secular gratitude rests on awareness of the vast array of social networks we depend on, including the ones that created the Pinckney Recreation Area where Aronson was walking that spring day, those that prompted and enabled his grandparents to emigrate from Ukraine and Galicia, “our food from Peru and Mexico and Australia and a dozen regions of the United States; our clothing from Albania, Macau, and Mauritius, Honduras, Poland, and Sri Lanka; our household objects from China, Vietnam, South Africa, and Kenya.”

This thought leads to that of inequality, and whether the resultant guilt and resentment may overwhelm gratitude. Aronson argues that in fact this sense of our connectedness, “without seeing ourselves as God’s children,” can lead us to find “new, adult ways of sensing our unity not only with each other, but also with the cosmos, nature, history, and the social and economic worlds of other people.” He expands this theme in two chapters on responsibility.

THE CHAPTER “The World on our Shoulders” looks at social justice and racism, equality and responsibility, Nazism and the war in Iraq, ending with an acknowledgement of the burden of collective responsibility and the temptation to hand the burden over to a God. It is a burden, says Aronson, but there is another aspect to it: “Seeing the extent to which we do indeed affect our world frees us to consider ways, however small, we may change it.” Quite so — it frees us to be reformers of the world, in however small a way.

The chapter “Choosing to Know” strikes a somewhat more pessimistic note, at least at the beginning. It resonates with a long line of books about American credulity, disdain for intellectualism, and ignorance — Richard Hofstadter’s *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*, Carl Sagan’s *The Demon-haunted World*, Michael Shermer’s *Why People Believe Weird Things*, and

Susan Jacoby's *The Age of American Unreason* to name a few. Aronson's tone, however, is more sympathetic than irritated, more an attempt at rescue than a jeremiad. It saddens him to see one of his adult students, a single mother eager for knowledge, impeded by lack of time and torn between "a growing understanding of science and how to ascertain truth" and religion, central to "her sense of community and identity, and an anchor in her life." In this way the chapter has more in common with Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* than with polemics against dumbing down.

Despite the sympathy, however, Aronson is unequivocal about the fact that ignorance and credulity are a choice. He makes this plain in the opening paragraph:

Almost half of all Americans reject evolution, and they do so not after close study and careful consideration, but because of their religious faith. These believers, unlike liberal Christians, most Jews, and the Catholic Church, still insist on claiming that the book of Genesis is a literal account of the origin of the universe, the earth, plants, animals, and humans. They refuse to study evolution, or do so in order to refute it. In so doing, they reject a decisive aspect of the world they live in and a key part of its knowledge. Amazingly, in the country that has long been among the world's most highly-educated and science-minded, where the importance of education is dinned into everyone's heads morning, noon, and night, where more than one in four adults has graduated from college, these citizens choose to be ignorant.

Reject; insist; refuse; choose. This is willful behavior, and actively, determinedly, even perversely willful at that. People have access to reliable evidence-based knowledge, and they insist on rejecting it and substituting evidence-free stories instead. This is defiance — rebellion — revolution — but not of the right kind. As Sartre put it, "to be ignorant is to choose to ignore; it is to look away from what there is to know." It is bad faith.

The final chapter is about hope, but the note Aronson strikes in it is somber, at times bordering on despair. He manages some qualified optimism at first, in a moving evocation of a walk on Detroit's new Riverwalk, with glimpses of a memorial to the underground railroad and the Michigan Labor Legacy Monument, "a graceful and soaring sculpture commemorating the vital role of Detroit's once-mighty labor movement in the city's, state's, and nation's history." But that "once-mighty" of course signposts some of the reasons for the melancholy, elegiac tone — Detroit's labor movement is no longer mighty (and its prospects are a great deal worse now than they were when Aronson wrote), nor is the labor movement in general. Some kinds of social and political hope are very difficult to sustain at present, as Aronson points out.

[E]vents and trends in the twentieth century, and so far in the twenty-first, have remarkably changed the ways humans live with their hopes.

First, it no longer makes any sense to expectantly anticipate the advent of the peaceable kingdom, a better world on its way — or even that our children's or grandchildren's lives are likely to be better than our own . . . No historical logic is making the world better . . .

In the face of such events, keeping on sometimes has become plugging on, without much enthusiasm.

This is an understandable feeling — but Aronson perhaps doesn't make enough of the liberating potential of living without God.

God is always double, of course: both the kindly sympathetic protector and ally, and also the angry punitive judge. People who are superlatively skilled at shaping their beliefs according to their wishes may be able to believe their God is always the loving ally and never the punitive judge — but most people aren't that skilled. The price of believing in an all-powerful all-knowing deity who permits earthquakes and hurricanes and epidemics to kill and

maim people by the millions — is fear: not just fear that bad things will happen, which is incapable, but fear of an angry God.

God is always double in this way, and so escape from this God is always double too, and the liberation is no small thing. One gets a sense of this from conversations with believers. Aronson discusses such conversations at one point:

To appreciate our problem, atheists, agnostics, and skeptics need only recall the hesitations and stammering of their most recent personal conversations with anyone who is religious...Our own point of view, once so robust and filled with energy, is diffident and measured, able to respond to religious enthusiasm only with our denial of God followed by our own uncertainties. In contrast to our principled tentativeness, our religious friends affirm their belief in the coherence of the universe and the world, their deep sense of belonging to it and to a human community, their refusal to be stymied by the limits of their knowledge...and perhaps above all their sense of hope about the future. Even if we would reject these beliefs as unfounded and irrational, we have to be struck by their force.

I HAVE TO SAY, that has not been my experience. I don't envy their force, because I don't find force allied to wrong-headedness enviable, and I certainly don't envy their coherence, because coherence is just what is lacking. On the contrary, what I see is lamentably contorted reasoning that protects the putative benevolent God at the cost of accepting horrors. To put it succinctly, believers have no good explanation for the fact that a benevolent God allows immense suffering in humans and animals, and their failed attempts at explanation strike non-believers as simply collusion with evil. This is why the value of the liberation is no small thing. A God who allowed the suffering of billions of sentient humans and animals going on every second of every day would be a hideous tyrant, and living without that tyrant is a pearl of great price.

We have many reasons for worry and sorrow and even despair, but believing in a supernatural bully who causes or allows massive suffering is not one of them. This is nothing to sneeze at.

# Mexican Peasants

## *Resignation, Resistance and Revolt, or Migration*

DAN LA BOTZ

MEXICAN WORKING PEOPLE, especially farmers or peasants, have faced three broad choices during the hundred years since the great rebellion of 1910 to 1940 that created the modern Mexican state: they could resign themselves to the vicissitudes of what was ostensibly modernization and development under the country's authoritarian one-party state, or they could enter the popular movements and resist the expropriation of their land, the exploitation of their labor, and the abuse of their rights — in which case they might even join some local revolt — or they could follow the path of millions of their countrymen and take the risk of migrating to the United States only to find another struggle facing them there. These three quite different and equally engaging books invite us to better understand the experience of Mexican working people and these options presented to them over the past three-quarters of a century.

### **Jaramillo and the Movements of the 1930s-1960s**

TANALÍS PADILLA, an assistant professor of history at Dartmouth College, has undertaken

in this excellent historical study to understand Rubén Jaramillo and the Jaramillista movement

in Mexico in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, and in so doing she forces historians to revise their understanding of the period sometimes called the age of the “Mexican Miracle” or the “Pax Priísta” (that is, the Peace of the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI.) Born in 1900, at 15 Jaramillo joined Emiliano Zapata's forces in Morelos and fought in the Mexican Revolution. As a farmer in the 1930s, influenced by Zapata and by the anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón, he organized farmers to preserve the gains of the revolution,

and sometimes took up arms against the new state to defend them. Working within the left nationalist framework created by former President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), during the early 1940s Jaramillo emerged as a leader of farmers involved in the Zacatepec sugar cooperative, the most important industry in the state. At first finding himself in conflict with labor unions, through friendship with a Communist labor organizer he gradually saw the need and possibility to ally with workers. Jaramillo led fights against the draft during World War II and against the slaughter of cattle believed to be infected with hoof-and-mouth disease after

### **Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants**

DAVID BACON

Boston: Beacon Press, 2008. 261 pp., hard cover, \$25.95

### **Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt**

JOHN GIBLER

San Francisco: City Lights, 2009. 355 pp., paperback, \$16.95

### **Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962**

TANALÍS PADILLA

Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 285 pp., paperback, \$22.95

DAN LA BOTZ is the author of several books on labor and politics in the United States, Mexico, and Indonesia. He is a member of the editorial board of *New Politics*.

the war. Twice he ran for governor, once in the mid-1940s and again in the mid-1950s, and then under the influence of what he took to be

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Gibler's guiding idea is the notion  
that the conquest of Mexico is  
ongoing and that there are "people  
and places that remain  
unconquered."

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the ideas of the Cuban Revolution and Maoism, he attempted to establish on land seized by workers and peasants a kind of liberated socialist territory in Morelos. Amidst all that other activity, three times he led armed uprisings (twice amnestied), spending 13 years in clandestine struggle, and then toward the end of his life he joined the Mexican Communist Party — with doubts and reservations — in an attempt to find broader support for his movement's struggle. He was finally assassinated, together with his wife, in 1962.

Padilla does a fine job of situating Jaramillo within the state of Morelos, just south of Mexico City, where the central struggle for Mexican peasants was to attempt both to resist and to put forward an alternative to the Mexican state's program of modernization. The government's priorities were to exploit peasants for the benefit of growing urban centers and to transform whatever collective and cooperative projects had been created by the revolution into state property or private property that would benefit the bureaucrats of the ruling party or the wealthy and their corporations. While Jaramillo began his experience thinking as a Zapatista who defends the land arms in hand, he evolved into a Cardenista who believed that with sufficient organization peasants could push the government to adhere to the revolution's original objectives. Later his relations with la-

bor union activists and Communists, and then his awareness of the Cuban Revolution in its first few years, led him to see the need for a socialist reorganization not only of Mexico but of the world economy.

Every step in this development of Jaramillo and his movement was the result of organizing: among peasants, among workers, among the population as a candidate, among men and women willing to arm to fight for their vision of a society which is both democratic and collective. Padilla pauses for a chapter to tell us how Jaramillo and his movement argued for equality for women, and she shows us how the gradual involvement of women led them to challenge gender norms, even though patriarchal attitudes and practices continued to dominate in rural society. Even as they organized, Jaramillo and his movement's leaders and activists read the literature of Zapata and Magón, of Marx and Lenin, of Castro and Mao. Their understanding of that reading was guided by the principle that working people and the poor should run the society democratically. In the course of his rebellions, Jaramillo and his group produce two versions of a manifesto, the *Plan de Cerro Prieto*, the first in a more Cardenista spirit, the second a call for a revolution and a new constitution to bring about a democratic socialism.

Jaramillo's movement, confined to the state of Morelos or sometimes spilling over into Puebla, did enter into alliances with other social and political movements, for example an alliance with a split from the government party led by presidential candidate Henríquez Guzman and even a "flirtation" with the guerrilla army of the right-wing Catholic *Cristeros*. None of the other movements, however, shared Jaramillo's commitment to workers' power. The Communist Party of Mexico, then in a period dominated by the Soviet Union's calls for "peaceful coexistence," sought to organize workers and peasants for social reform, but rejected a revolutionary path and shied away from armed uprisings such as those led by Jaramillo. Confronting development

projects for agriculture, industry, and tourism, under the gun of the Mexican state, and under the watchful eye of the U.S. State Department, without broader support and without a revolutionary alternative, Jaramillo lost his life for his ideals while his peasant and worker base fell under the control of the state-party, its corporations, its labor unions, and its police. Mexico's development and modernization, its "Miracle," brought wealth to the state bureaucrats and capitalists in the city, but greater poverty to the peasants in the countryside. The social movements led by Jaramillo and by others were suppressed through firings, arrests, beatings, torture, and many, many murders. There was peace under the PRI in places, but it was the peace of the cemetery.

### **Social Struggle in Contemporary Mexico**

YET, THE STRUGGLE CONTINUED. John Gibler, a journalist who writes for a variety of leftist publications, such as *Z Magazine*, *In These Times*, and *New Politics*, and reports for Radio Pacifica and the show "Democracy Now!" brings forward an interesting collection of essays on contemporary Mexican society and social struggles under the title *Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt*. Gibler's book is informed by the spirit and the politics of the contemporary *Zapatista* movement in Mexico, that is, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) which under the leadership of Subcomandante Marcos led an uprising in the state of Chiapas in January 1994 and fifteen years later continues as a movement and a voice to challenge the Mexican state. Gibler's guiding idea is the notion that the conquest of Mexico is ongoing and that there are "people and places that remain unconquered." Armed with the notion of "internal colonialism," he takes us from Chiapas, to Oaxaca, to Veracruz and Guerrero to meet farmers, laborers, intellectuals, and revolutionaries who in Mexico today are both suffering the ongoing conquest and

resisting it. He offers his book, he writes, as "an invitation to reflection and a call to act."

An opening chapter provides a brief, useful historical overview of Mexico from ancient times to today. Gibler then turns in succeeding chapters — vignettes, essays, and polemics — to take up one or another of Mexico's social problems. Through vivid descriptions and interviews, he takes up in one chapter the institutionalization of corruption and practices such as torture; in another he examines the concept of poverty as an expression of development, globalization, and neo-liberalism; and in yet another section he looks at how such development and neglect have led to the theft of land, loss of jobs, and mass migration.

In the second half of his book, Gibler turns to the contemporary movements, resistance campaigns and local uprisings. He describes the Oaxaca Uprising of 2006, first the strike by Local 22 of the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE) and then the broad civic rebellion against the PRI governor Ulises Ruiz — what Gibler calls a "civil disobedience offensive" — led by the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). He relates the struggles of indigenous people through the EZLN and to MULTI, the Independent Movement for Triqui Unification and Struggle. The latter's popular radio station led to a struggle that ended with the assassination of two women who worked at the station, taking us back to the issue of repression and violence.

For me the most fascinating chapter of the book is "The Guerrilla," in which the woman born Isabel Salgado Vicario, who later changed her name to Gloria Arenas Agis, also known as Coronel Aurora of the Insurgent Peoples' Revolutionary Army (ERPI), tells her story to Gibler. Born in 1959, the daughter of a laborer and a housewife, she grew up in poverty, succeeded in finishing elementary and high school, and then entered college to study agronomy. Through one of her teachers who had been involved in the student protests of 1968, she be-

came radicalized and politicized, joining a local movement to stop the closing of a government food store and then becoming part of an indigenous movement in the 1980s. Given the choice of joining the PRI or possibly being killed, she went underground in Veracruz and then crossed the country to the city of Acapulco where she succeeded in joining the clandestine Party of the Poor-Union of the People (PROCUP-PDLP), becoming a leader of guerrillas in the state of Guerrero.

Col. Aurora tells Gibler, "We spent a long time in silence, working at the grassroots, organizing, building the organization. People aren't stupid; it is not the way the State says, that guerrillas deceive and manipulate people to join them. People have their reasons and they are the ones pushing the organization forward." She attributes the growth of the guerrillas to the widespread poverty and desire for change, to the repression of social movements, and to the failure of electoral politics to bring about reform. Her story leads us to an account of the massacre of Aguas Blancas on June 26, 1995, when hundreds of state police officers ambushed and killed seventeen peasants and wounded 23 others, and to the murder of their attorney, Digna Ochoa.

The book ends with the chapter "Empire and Revolt," which places Mexico in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement and more generally of the American empire. Gibler concludes the book placing himself on the side of *los de abajo* (the underdogs) rebels of contemporary Mexico, calling for a movement from below to resist the continuing conquest.

Gibler only half fulfills the promise of his title, presenting us chronicles of revolt, but offering less understanding of the power that they are up against. While I share many of his views and opinions, I found that Gibler's engaging book never quite hangs together and never succeeds in deepening our understanding of the issues. The historical and analytical approach he takes doesn't provide the intellectual tools

needed to make deeper sense of what we already know to be true about corruption, violence, and poverty in Mexico.

To his credit, Gibler has spent most of his time listening to the underdogs, but to his detriment he has not given us a clear sense of the nature of the top dogs. His allusion to power is not fulfilled. We don't learn how U.S. imperialism or Mexican capitalism work. We see no banks, meet no bankers; we listen to no executives and observe no corporations. We do not learn anything about the conservative PRI and the PAN (National Action Party), nor does he give us a sense of the country's principal left political opposition, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and its erstwhile leader André Manuel López Obrado, "Legitimate President" of the "Legitimate Government of Mexico." So in the end, we don't come away with a clear sense of how power works and how revolt might challenge it; the book offers no insight into strategy or program.

My suspicion is that Gibler's identification with the Zapatistas is the source of both his strength as a journalist, rubbing elbows with the plebeians, especially the rural poor, and of his weakness, failing to get cheek-to-jowl with the elites so as to understand how they work and what they think. Even in the chronicles of revolt I feel somewhat shortchanged. While he describes some of Mexico's contemporary movements, Gibler only touches on the unions through the Teachers Union Local 22, never mentioning the enormous struggle being waged at the same time as the teachers' movement by the Mexican Miners Union for autonomy — a struggle that Marcos and the EZLN also tend to downplay or avoid altogether.

### The Other Movement

DAVID BACON, ARGUABLY AMERICA'S foremost labor journalist and an accomplished photographer, describes in *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*, the third alternative left to those who

in the face of distorted development and government repression refused to knuckle under, but on the other hand could not continue to resist and rebel at home and so became part of Mexico's largest social movement: emigration. A former union organizer and longtime political activist deeply involved in immigration issues both as a journalist and an activist, Bacon risked titling his book *Illegal People* — when the movement to whom his book is addressed insists on calling such immigrants “undocumented.” He did so in order to emphasize the way in which immigrants in the United States are being criminalized, jailed, and deported, often to discourage unionization. He uses his journalistic skills in this book to describe the evolution of U.S. immigration policy and to lay out a strategy to build a coalition and to create a program and a policy that can resolve the immigration issue in a way that benefits virtually all immigrants, legal and undocumented, in the United States today.

Bacon begins his book by describing the effect of the government's immigration control and enforcement policies such as “no match letters” that identify workers with possibly dubious social security identification, leading to their dismissal and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids that may lead to their arrest, incarceration, and deportation. Both, he shows, are used to dampen union organizing efforts, to defeat strikes, and to demobilize politically active workers. When a labor rights group in the Bay Area built a movement that involved immigrant workers and succeeded in passing an “immigrant protection ordinance” that included a living-wage provision, local hotels fired the women who had been involved in campaigning for the measure, ostensibly for failure to present valid social security numbers. Bacon the journalist takes us to the homes of these workers in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland, the East Bay's largest Latino immigrant community, and then he leads us to their former homes in Oaxaca. The visit to Oaxaca becomes an opportunity to

survey the situation in Mexico that leads people to emigrate. What's happening in Mexico? Frustrated with the theft of their land, the exploita-

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Guest worker proposals — most of them without a path to permanent legal residency — create a pool of workers with citizenship and labor rights inevitably leading not only to their exploitation but to the degradation of the conditions of other workers.

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tion of their labor, and the denial of their rights, Mexico's underdogs rebel. Bacon describes two of the contemporary rebellions, the Oaxaca Teachers Union protests and the Mexican Mine Workers Union strikes. Bacon situates these in the history of the country in the last thirty years, finding the roots of the contemporary social crises in the PRI's turn toward free trade and open markets, the creation of the export processing zone and its maquiladoras, and above all in its negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Why do Mexicans leave their country? Because as Padilla described in her book, Gibler in his, and Bacon in *Illegal People*, the Mexican government's development plans serve domestic and foreign capital, not its own population.

So from Mexico, Bacon turns back to the United States again, to the history of immigration reform, from Simpson-Mazzoli with its employer sanctions to the failed Bill HR 4437 put forward by James Sensenbrenner in December 2005, a bill which would have made criminals of all undocumented immigrants and many of their allies. Bacon describes how the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC),

made up of many of the country's largest corporations and chambers, and allied with conservative think tanks, succeeded in dominating the immigration debate with a proposal that included some regularization of undocumented immigrants but also an enormous guest worker program. EWIC helped to create the environment in which the Kennedy-McCain "comprehensive immigration reform" bill was put forward, really a very conservative proposal that would also have penalized undocumented immigrants now in the United States with fines and fees, limited regularization, and still have created a vast guest worker system. Bacon is at pains to explain that guest worker proposals — most of them without a path to permanent legal residency — create a pool of workers without citizenship and labor rights inevitably leading not only to their exploitation but to the degradation of the conditions of other workers. The AFL-CIO, which had succeeded in the mid-1990s in breaking with its anti-immigrant past, continued to oppose guest worker programs, but Change to Win unions such as the SEIU, UNITE-HERE, and the UFW ended up supporting the "comprehensive" plan.

Bacon also puts forward both a strategy for political power and a program for action in the last chapters of the book. The strategy is summed up in the title of his sixth chapter, "Blacks Plus Immigrants Plus Unions Equals Power." The way to create that alliance, he argues, as summed up in a subhead of that same chapter is "The Common Ground of Jobs and Rights." The labor and social movements, he suggests, have to join together in the United States to fight for jobs and rights for all, for African Americans, immigrants, and white workers, and in doing so they will create the basis for a coalition with the power to change not only immigration policy but also American society.

Bacon's book is intended to provide social context and political arguments for those on society's left and particularly for those in labor and social movements who wish to bring about

an immigration reform that will provide regularization for undocumented immigrants now here and will stop guest worker programs. Missing from his book, however, are discussions of immigration policy in the broadest sense, that is, who should be allowed in and how many, how such goals should be enforced, what should become of border controls and internal enforcement? His book certainly will not convince those who oppose what they call "illegal immigration"; in fact it will probably not even engage them since it never takes up their political differences, much less the deeper cultural and psychological issues with which immigration is tied up in the minds of many conservatives and even liberals. While Bacon's arguments have merit and point the right way for labor and the left, they represent only one part of the debate, however important that part is. (As I have argued, the solution to these problems is a combination of an open border, resources to aid the developing world, and union organization at home. (See Dan La Botz, "If Not Now When?" in *New Labor Forum*, [www.newlaborforum.org/newlaborforum/html/2008/spring/abstracts.html](http://www.newlaborforum.org/newlaborforum/html/2008/spring/abstracts.html))

All three of these books — Padilla's history of Jaramillo and his movement, Gibler's account of contemporary rebels, and Bacon's discussion of migration — contribute to our understanding of Mexico, its movements, and its migrants. They lead us to believe that we, Mexicans and Americans, can continue to organize, strategize, envision, and take inspiration from each other and the movements of the world's underdogs. What we should not forget, these books suggest, is that the struggle continues, transformed and expanded, until the next Jaramillo or the next Gloria begins to organize, until the next rebellion of teachers or miners, or of pork packers at Smithfield in North Carolina or workers at Republic Window in Chicago. Those struggles make possible the generation of new ideas, new plans and programs, and lay the basis for resolving the problems of poverty, violence, and migration.

# Everything New Is Old Again

## *Founding Narratives & Other Nightmares*

ALYSON M. COLE

THE 2009-INAUGURATION COVER of *Ms. Magazine* depicts our new president as a superhero removing his Everyman disguise to reveal, not a caped leotard, but his inner feminist. Beneath a traditional jacket and tie he displays NOW's legendary "This Is What a FEMINIST Looks Like" tee-shirt. The image recalls the magazine's own 1971 inaugural cover, "Wonder Woman for President." Four decades later, how did the face that adorns inestimable paraphernalia come to be the new face of feminism, and the man, our "first female president"? Has the "post-racial" leader who embodies the hope for national racial redemption also become the repository for what Judith Butler lauds as the "undoing" of gender?<sup>1</sup> Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream* never grapples with Obama's gendered rendering, since the book was written when the events of September 11, 2001 were still the decisive touchstone for social commentators. Nonetheless, reading her account of Bush-era gender politics during the euphoric early months of Obama's administration suggests we should approach this image of feminism with apprehension. Rather than the harbinger of "change we can believe in," such a representation may instead be rooted in the post-9/11 erasure of women, redomestication of femininity, and resurrection of masculinity. Even as the chapter on George Bush's disastrous

presidency finally concludes, Faludi's book on American mythology and misogyny remains highly relevant in the "Age of Obama."

### The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America

SUSAN FALUDI

N.Y.: Henry Holt & Co., 2008,  
464 pp., \$16.00

The text is divided into two parts. "Ontogeny," the first seven chapters, details public responses to 9/11, especially their gendered affects. "Phylogeny" covers the remaining chapters,

which trace how Colonial/Puritan wars with Native Americans, frontier expansionism, and other cowboy escapades forged a narrative of female vulnerability and masculine protection supporting a rigid gender hierarchy. This organizing principle borrows from German zoologist Ernst Haeckel's observation that as an embryo develops it moves through the entire evolutionary cycle. Dismissed by modern biology, Faludi still finds it a powerful metaphor to portray American cultural history: traumas, such as the attack on 9/11, trigger a neurotic revisiting, if not reenactment, of scenes far removed from current events.

### Ontogeny

WHY DID THE PRESS PERSISTENTLY USE female pronouns to refer to 9/11 victims when most of the casualties were men? According to Faludi, this linguistic slip is a symptom of psychological repression — a collective emotional retreat into a "somnambulistic state" where cultural fantasies dislodge reality. Rather than probe the meaning of the present and grapple with the "unthinkable," we recoil into long-held gendered fictions. Consider, for example, the analogies bandied to help frame the events of September 2001. Numerous comparisons were

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made to Pearl Harbor. Like the assault in Hawaii, this too was a surprise attack on the homeland demanding a degree of heroism comparable to that displayed by the reified Greatest

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## The White House repackaged the war in Afghanistan as a momentous struggle for the emancipation of women.

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Generation. Expanding from World War II to the Cold War, many went beyond rallying the troops to seeking a prophylactic for the family. Securing the homeland was understood to necessitate first protecting the womb of domesticity and heteronormativity. “The myth of American invincibility required the mirage of womanly dependence, the illusion of a helpless family circle in need of protection from a menacing world” (186).

Concurrently, references to the Old West proliferated. From Peggy Noonan welcoming the return of John Wayne-types back to the fray on the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, to then-cowboy-in-chief’s recourse to idioms about “smoking out bad guys” and his reductive “dead or alive” foreign policy. How might these two fields cohere? Both are symptoms of “cocooning ourselves in the celluloid chrysalis of the baby boom’s childhood” (5). Replaying 1950s Westerns enabled us to suppress our fears by projecting our vulnerability onto women and imagining men were powerful and courageous. This is the metanarrative of our political imaginary, our “cultural dream life.” Freud maintained that dreams influence the present by envisaging wishes as fulfilled; Faludi’s account of the post-9/11 American dream life inverts his *The Interpretation of Dreams* — through dreams we turn the present into the past.

One movement the public rushed to bury

in the past was feminism. Already eulogized numerous times over the last few decades, crisis seems to demand a renewed rejection of feminism. Scolded to take up their aprons and return to their homes, this time feminists were charged as collaborators in the crime. Jerry Falwell’s infamous remark blaming feminists, homosexuals, and abortionists for inviting God’s wrath, is only the most extreme example of a whole genre of denunciations. Minus the vitriol and evangelical flourish, mainstream media likewise touted the idea that feminism had weakened America, rendering her susceptible to attack.

Precisely as feminists were dispatched to the kitchen, the Bush administration took up the banner of women’s oppression to wage war abroad. The White House repackaged the war in Afghanistan as a momentous struggle for the emancipation of women. Suddenly, conservatives of all stripes were versed in the entire feminist vocabulary, reproving “misogyny” and “gender apartheid.” In another historic first, the First Lady substituted for her husband during his Saturday radio address to christen the new crusade on behalf of third world women. The President soon signed the “Afghan Women and Children Relief Act,” a gesture that helped redefine America’s mission as less to protect itself than to wage battle for its values and mores. Such outpouring of official empathy for the oppressed women of the world gave credence to Washington’s peddling of its latest Middle East mission as a “war for freedom.” America could displace her victimization and assume instead the role of masculine liberator.

The administration’s account of Middle Eastern women-as-victims abides by the rationale of what I have called “the cult of true victimhood,” whereby only those sufferers who restore patriarchy and enhance the retributive state receive recognition as deserving victims. Cynthia Enloe offers the neologism “womenandchildren” to denote the condensed singularity of this view of victimhood as entirely

powerless and desperately needing rescue. This archetype supports a triangulated gendered logic in which two masculine types — the dominator and the savior — act upon the female victim. While a more benign form of power, masculine protectionism is simply the flipside of male domination, as Iris Young theorizes; both sustain women's subordination.<sup>2</sup>

FEMINISTS HAVE LONG CRITICIZED how such representations of women's suffering supplant arguments for all women's empowerment with campaigns for particular women's rescue, and in doing so uphold inequality (whether patriarchal, colonial, or both). Shortly after bombing began in Kabul, protecting women was no longer a topic of public discussion. After all, U.S. missiles rather than burkahs now threatened these women. Administration officials transformed once again, from ardent feminists to cultural relativists. When asked what role women's rights might have in the agenda of the new government, they demurred, "We have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them" (51).

The new muscular masculinity resurrected male models of super-heroic stature. *Marvel Comics* contributed to the effort by rushing into print an issue entitled "Extraordinary Heroes of 9/11," depicting the "real" heroes — Bush, Rudolph Giuliani, even Don Rumsfeld — as those with supernatural powers, while stock characters such as Spiderman and Superman proved impotent. Whereas Captain America could defeat the Nazis on the pages of comic books in the 1940s, September 11, 2001 rendered men powerless. Regardless of venue, hero worship entailed anointing discrete men as exceptional and thus replaced properly honoring the multitudes who rushed to the scene to help on that fateful day. More modest acts of compassion were evidently inadequate to the task; only a fantastical hyper-masculinism could begin to mask our cavernous fears.

Renditions of United Flight 93 are a good

illustration of how tragedy becomes heroism through the erasure of women. Faludi reports that one of the female flight attendants had phoned home to warn of the attack, but Todd Beamer garnered all the posthumous accolades. Elevating firefighters' gallantry was somewhat simpler. Since women never had a great presence in this profession (3 percent at most), adhering to a strict gender plot did not necessitate purging females. It did require another form of revision, for the loss of life would have been significantly less, especially among firefighters, had they never entered the buildings. When heroism is understood in stark opposition to victimhood, an individual cannot be both courageous and, as one firefighter put it, "just a victim too" (85).

Women's disappearance in public was reiterated in language (Faludi notes a regression back to the male pronoun as universal and the reappearance of terms such as "policemen" and "workmen"), as well as in decreasing institutional commitments to gender equity. After 9/11, New York City suspended monitoring equal employment practices and the Justice Department summarily dismissed two gender discrimination lawsuits. By 2005, the number of gender discrimination cases decreased 40 percent (108-9). Government may not have been interested in defending mistreated working women, but there was one context in which female suffering seemed useful, those "perfect virgins of grief." Not all 9/11-widows were worthy of our sympathies, however. Those who wanted answers not pity, compensation not adoration, and, perhaps their greatest sin, those who seemed independent, were vilified. For women not in mourning, the media prescribed alternative modes of national support. Pregnant bodies serve as a source of comfort in melancholic times, *New York Magazine* advised, and accordingly instructed females to "add baby making to your list of patriotic duties" (162). Even former Bush spokeswoman Karen Hughes's resignation to "spend more time with her fam-

ily” was described as a “case of Sept.11 too” (181).

As much as we required a troupe of superheroes to feel safe, Faludi suggests the commander-in-chief needed to emulate a frontiersman, more Daniel Boone than Iron Man. Aiding the nation’s withdrawal into its romanticized frontier past was one mission Bush could accomplish, since a rifle rather than a flight suit was the only accoutrement required. Indeed, weapons were a major theme in 2004 presidential election; the right to bear arms was unprecedentedly included on the Democratic Party platform. Needless to say, while the candidates busied themselves brandishing guns, our soldiers overseas were grossly ill equipped.

In this theater of masculine valor, the capture and rescue of army supply clerk Jessica Lynch merits attention. At first, the media simply inserted Lynch into the pantheon of male warriors, depicting her as a Rambo-like figure “fighting to her death.” Even after modifying the story to accord with actual events, American television continually replayed the scene of can-do men rescuing the blonde damsel from her captors and their escape in the Black Hawk helicopter. If not as a hero, she could still serve in the role of demure woman with an impotent gun. Faludi views Lynch’s subsequent denigration as punishment for intruding upon the sacred brotherhood, but her real transgression was probably her unwillingness to serve as poster girl for the continuing war, since it was only after she refused another tour of duty with the release of her book that her erasure from our screens became paramount.

### Phylogeny

THE SECOND HALF OF THE BOOK shifts from describing recent events to excavating the structure of our national dream life, the fantasy we retreat to when reality hurts. We redeem ourselves, restore our faith in the American project and national strength by reverting to tales of female victims and male rescuers. This is the

stuff of captivity narratives, and Faludi retells several. While many declared 9/11 “unimaginable,” she establishes that the attack replayed a key moment from our traumatic national past — “it was the characteristic and formative American ordeal, the primal injury of which we could not speak . . .” (271).

In 1836, Cynthia Ann Parker, daughter of Texan pioneer settlers, was captured when Native Americans killed her family. Although she lived contentedly among her captors and rebuked an initial deal for her release, Texan rangers ultimately reclaimed her. A revamped version of Parker’s story served to justify years of Indian removal policies. This — in a nutshell — is the pattern of American empire: conquer first, and then use fictive accounts about our women’s weakness and violation to justify preemptive violence. Building upon Richard Slotkin’s thesis about the imperious need to control nature for our females, Faludi suggests that the opposite might likewise be true: the “maiden’s rescue, fantasized or real, became our regaining redemption tale” (277).<sup>3</sup> Domination is less pathological drive than compensatory cover for abiding fear. Adhering to rigid gender roles is a neurotic reaction: we project feelings of helplessness onto women. Formed during our first “wars on terror,” this remains our defining psychic reflex today.

While Puritan captivity narratives reinforced a Calvinist view according to which the travails settlers faced in the New Jerusalem proved their need to humble themselves further before God, by the mid-18th century the genre became increasingly secular and belligerent. “The captive woman’s role was now propagandistic; she was to demonstrate the enemy’s brutality with increasingly lurid accounts of her victimization” (316). Female susceptibility, especially to sexual violation, ennobled our men by allegedly distinguishing their roles as warriors and conquerors from the Native Americans they demonized as savages. By the closing of the frontier, the myth of a secure America

consisting of virginal maidens whom rogue, brave men protected was established and “ready to be reactivated whenever a homeland threat might call for its protective services” (362).

Fears of atomic attack in the 1950s revived the myth. Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s angst-ridden essay “The Crisis of American Masculinity” exemplifies this moment, both his bemoaning the “castration” of his compatriots at the hands of overbearing mothers, as well as his longing for the “frontiersmen of James Fenimore Cooper” (368). Then as now, men combat national threats and recapture their masculinity by insisting women wither into a feminine posture. Hollywood facilitated this return to the frontier by bringing cowboys and Indians to cinema and television. Rather than grappling with the inherent danger of life in the atomic age, Americans took refuge in celluloid sheriffs exemplified by John Wayne.

The book closes with an alternative dream: what if we tried to learn from the past rather than hide behind some fictive version of it? What if we resisted our impulse to dichotomize the world into innocent female victims and gallant male saviors, and recognized the humanity in our common vulnerability? Gendered fantasies may provide temporary relief. “But rather than make us any safer, it misled us unto danger, damaging the very security the myth was supposed to bolster” (380). Faludi suggests that 9/11 affords an opportunity to return to the original trauma of the past and heal our psychic wounds.

**T**HE *TERROR DREAM* IS AN ENGAGING, intelligent, and thoroughly researched book. Given the prodigious outpouring of prose on gender politics in the aftermath of 9/11, how-

ever, Faludi is revisiting a terrain already well-traversed by feminist scholars and other public intellectuals. Her contributions are three-fold: bringing greater detail to many now familiar episodes; reminding us how the idea of vulner-

able frontiers and the threat of foreign invasion have long served as justification for American expansionism; and showing that gender is always already deployed in these retrograde politics. These are insights well worth repeating, even now.

Faludi’s delineation of a vast historical arc to account for the irrational reactions to 9/11 is compelling. She confirms that Bush’s iterations of the gender/empire nexus hark back to constitutive moments in American history. At the same time, her discussion of the distant past occludes crucial political and cultural transformations in the recent past, the immediate historical context of the 9/11 moment. This seems a peculiar oversight for an author who helped expose the regressive gender politics of the Reagan-Bush eras. How, for instance, does the current domestic revival compare with that she documented in her pioneering book *Backlash*? Similarly, in *Stiffed*, Faludi specified the devastating impact of the new economy on working class men. How is what William Connolly aptly terms “cowboy capitalism” implicated in the current remasculinization of the nation and resurrection of manly men?<sup>4</sup>

In my own work, *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror*, I demonstrate that post-9/11 gender politics is rooted in how pivotal political struggles of the 1980s and 1990s profoundly altered Americans’ view of vulnerability and suffering. The campaigns against the welfare state, identity politics and the culture wars,

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forged a new discourse about victims and victimization. Through, for instance, alarmist condemnations of “victim politics,” “victim” became a term of derision associated either with passivity, dependency, and effeminacy, or, conversely, manipulation, aggression, and even criminality. In the anti-victimist formulation, those who deem themselves victims typically victimize others and society at large. Anti-victimism elaborates an exalted view of suffering, a “cult of true victimhood,” whereby genuine victims are individuals who refuse to be victims and correspondingly abstain from making any demands.

It is not, therefore, simply that women are cast as victims once again; but that victimhood itself has been demonized in ways that are gendered and yet transgress gender boundaries. Anti-victimism contributed to the radical individuation of American society, the spread of neo-liberalism, and the stifling of petitions for collective responsibility and justice. Understanding the Janus-faced dynamics of anti-victimism uncovers another layer of post-9/11 gendering: the perpetrators have been cast as unmanly and treacherous, obsessed with their own victimization. Though brutal and terrifying, our enemies, we were told, are not real men, but cowards. Such splitting of the feminine — as helpless victims whose violation justifies vengeance but also as menacing monsters who must be destroyed — is crucial to the epistemic violence of American misogyny.

Anti-victim discourse has achieved hegemony over the American political imaginary, both left and right, foregrounding domestic and

international policy. Whether Obama’s incarnation of Martin Luther King’s famous dream will supplant “the terror dream” remains to be seen. His administration has sought to distance itself from its predecessor politically and rhetorically by, for example, replacing tropes such as the “war on terror” with “man-caused disasters.” This new designation, William Safire wryly observes, seems to redeem the male referent after years of exile from a gender-neutral lexicon. In an effort to expunge one masculinist construct have we unwittingly adopted another? Yet Safire’s remark is another manifestation of how the self-serving (here tongue-in-cheek) appropriation of the feminist mantle has become a fixture of conservative rhetoric and the gender politics of our time.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London and N.Y.: Routledge, 2004).
2. Alyson M. Cole, *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford, 2007); Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000); Iris Young, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State” *Signs* 29 (August 2003).
3. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2000).
4. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (N.Y.: Crown, 1991); Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (N. Y.: Harper Perennial, 2000); William Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2008).
5. William Safire, “On Language,” *New York Times Magazine* (April 12, 2009).

# When the Whole Is the Untrue

CAREY HARRISON

**A**MID THE GATHERING STORM OF responses to Jonathan Littell's monumental and phantasmagoric World War II novel, *The Kindly Ones*, readers as yet unfamiliar with the book may well be conscious of near-unanimity on one point: the book is disturbingly obscene, and since this obscenity derives from the narrator's private life and fantasies, separately from the sickening massacres he observes and takes part in, the juxtaposition of the Holocaust and a pornographic imagination acquires a special, perhaps unique, status in the catalogue of obscenity. Reviewers have found this juxtaposition intolerable; intolerable because gratuitous. Haven't we, they argue, put up with enough already in this book, alongside the graphic descriptions of Babi Yar and Auschwitz? Must we have our faces pressed into no less disgusting scenes from private life, whose depravity is in no way necessary to an account of Nazi atrocities during World War Two?

One riposte might be that the novel is not, after all, intended as a history. We have histories already, and although there will never be too many of these, a novel is a different kind of

enterprise. As exquisitely researched and reconstructed as Littell's set-piece historical scenes are, the prey Littell is hunting is the Nazi psyche, a creature manifest in its works but whose scope and origins are not bounded by them. Indeed, the Nazi psyche remains as inexhaustible — and as urgent — a topic as the history of the period. By what strategy is a novelist

to capture this savage yet nebulous beast? Many have tried, often in a first person narrative, which is also Littell's choice. The task is daunting, less because it would be hard to conjure a plausible Nazi, even a plausible murderous SS officer like Littell's Max Aue, than because such a creation remains something we merely observe, in much the same way as we observe a historical description. The novelist, hoping to conjure the most horrific of deeds, and the most horrific state of soul, faces a challenge which the summoning of data will not accomplish. The author must carry the reader right into the horror, using narrative strategy to disarm the reader's ability to hold it at arm's length.

Littell's strategy is remarkable, and shocking. He lures the reader into Aue's lair at the beginning of the book, when Aue tells us, You are just like me, I am just like you. Hypocrite lecteur — mon semblable — mon frère. This is of course what we want to hear. The reader is a guilty person, or else he is no reader at all; it will always be the reader's capacity for hypothetical shame and shamelessness, for deeds that only prudence and sanity prevent us from performing, that a novel offers: the roller-coaster ride of what-if. And now, Max Aue

## The Kindly Ones

JONATHAN LITTELL

translated from the French

by Charlotte Mandell

N.Y., NY: Harper-Collins, 2009  
984pp., \$29.99

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CAREY HARRISON, *professor of English at Brooklyn College, is a British novelist and playwright. His best known novel, Richard's Feet, won the Encore Award from the UK Society of Authors, and was published in the United States by Holt and Ivy Books. His television output includes 17 hours of Masterpiece Theatre. Hitler in Therapy, Harrison's 100th play to be recorded in a UK studio, was broadcast last year on the BBC World Service and won the Worldplay Award for the best drama by an English-language broadcaster, worldwide.*

promises us, like a barker at the most terrifying freak show in a human history, you will become a freak, like me. Yet this come-on turns out to be just that, a scam. We know — we know by definition, since the book is a first-person nar-

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The reader may feel  
abused, even raped.

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ration — that the narrator will survive the ride. So will we, we are subconsciously assured. And we embark.

At first Aue seems a highly intelligent, even intellectual fellow. This is no surprise. Many of the architects of Auschwitz had, it has come to light, not only one but two Ph.Ds. That we meet a younger Max, when the story's huge retrospect unfolds, as an SS officer, is no less than we require, given the inferno to which he must be our guide. His deviancy — since we learn early from his furtive homosexual encounters that he has secrets to hide that would make him an outcast in Hitler's puritanical Reich — is acceptable. As the reader, we are already outcasts. Bring it on!

We find ourselves, with Max, at Babi Yar, where all the officers were required to spend an hour sullyng their hands and consciences (conscienses?) with murder, and the description is incomparably vivid, if not surpassing D.M.Thomas's *The White Hotel* then certainly a match for it. And it's comforting, even in this hell of depravity where moral comfort, like shades of black, can barely be distinguished, to know that Max, our guide, is not a glad mass murderer. At no point in *The Kindly Ones*, in fact, does the narrator glory in genocide; later on, at Auschwitz, he risks disgrace by arguing persistently against the elimination of the Jews — on practical grounds, since Max's argument is that they would be more use being worked to death in labor camps than gassed on genocidal

principle. This is chilling — the word is gruesomely inadequate — but it is true to Max, who is bestial only, as we come to discover, in his private affairs.

We travel on with Max to the Eastern front, where once more Littell's memorable predecessors include authors like Curzio Malaparte, whose *Kaputt!* can never be topped, or indeed lost to mind by anyone who reads that largely forgotten masterpiece. Of its ilk, Littell's *Stalingrad* is nonetheless as fine a re-imagined historical canvas as anyone has attempted.

ALL THIS IS WELL AND GOOD, and would undoubtedly have drawn English and American reviewers into paeans of praise for *The Kindly Ones* — praise granted nonetheless to the set-piece reconstructions, sometimes grudgingly but often wholeheartedly, even by reviewers unsatisfied with the book as a whole — were it not for the separate horror that begins to leak into the book from Max Aue's buried past.

This past is both incestuous and murderous; sickening, shocking, and terrifying not only in itself but because it tears out of our own reading heart the identification with the narrator in which we had reposed — without fully knowing it — so much trust. The reader may feel abused, even raped. I have written elsewhere about this ferocious narrative strategy; subsequently Littell himself was kind enough to send me a page of juvenilia — his own term for it — in which he once hypothesized a book whose lines rose up from the page, as if the words were the teeth of a great mowing or harvesting machine, to devour the reader. This very vision was the one I perceived as the guiding metaphor, whether consciously or not (and on this Littell was in agreement, musing wonderingly at the prophetic nature of this juvenile fantasy), where the narrative strategy of *The Kindly Ones* is concerned.

It may not be fun to be devoured by the book you are reading; some may entertain the experience as a novelty, or even as the tithe due to any great book, by which we are consumed

as much as we ourselves consume. But it has proved offensive in the case of *The Kindly Ones*. Even a profoundly empathetic and admiring reviewer like Daniel Mendelsohn, in *The New York Review Of Books*, felt that the revelations of Max Aue's repulsive secret deeds — in no direct sense Nazi in origin — cleaves the book down the middle, dividing it between historical canvas and psycho-sexual confessional. The result, Mendelsohn maintains, is an unstaunchable wound.

And so it is — but the wound is in the reader (where all literary wounds must be) no less than it is in the book. And such wounds are by no means always a failure in the book's construction. The wound here, the wound which cannot be sewn up, is the abyss between reading and experiencing; this wound is the answer to the question, How shall a novelist render the indescribable? A blank page would do it; a black page would do it; but these surrealist recourses have been taken before (indeed already in the very founding of the novel, by Laurence Sterne). A more wrenching strategy is the one Littell adopts. He inserts an incommensurate horror, which stands in for the unacceptable by being unacceptable. To pile Pelion upon Ossa, for the sake of a hitherto unachieved degree of veracity, a description of Auschwitz more horrible than ever before — even if this were feasible, what would be the point? It would be better to issue the would-be reader, along with the book (or in place of it), a flight ticket to Cracow plus the bus ticket from Cracow to Auschwitz or, since the purchaser may want to leave earlier — or later — than the appointed bus, a voucher for a car rental with (if possible) a ticket for the car park: when you reach the Konzentrationslager museum you will experience the shock of being assaulted by solicitors for competing car parks, at the very moment when your soul is girding itself for piety. I have been there three times and still haven't accustomed myself to this dispiriting welcome.

But wouldn't this — a visit to Auschwitz

— be better than any novel, if a novel were simply an introduction to its horrors? Could words ever approach the impact of Auschwitz's reality? I can assure you that they could not. But this is not a novel's purpose, nor its function, which is to woo you into a purely literary world, the world of intimacy with imaginary characters, or in this case a single all-encompassing narrator in whose claustrophobic embrace you will spend 1000 pages, like a thousand Arabian nights with the same enchantress.

Whether the ghastly events that Aue relates from his family drama (Freud himself would blanch at Littell's recasting of the primal scene) are to be understood as truly having taken place, is not perfectly clear. We could suppose — we may prefer to suppose — that they belong to unfulfilled desires. But in a novel, as in divine justice, unfulfilled desires count; in a novel we enter them as fully as we enter desires fulfilled; nor can, Ah! It was just a dream! ever release the reader, or the viewer in the cinema, from the nightmare they have vicariously lived.

IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, rather than taking offense, as many have, at the profanity of Littell's strategy — daring to "profane" the sacred gruesomeness of Nazi cruelty by matching it with "irrelevant" private gruesomeness — you can accept that you have been blindsided by the author's psychic Blitzkrieg in the name of recognition, the same anagnorisis brought by the Zen master when without warning he smacks his pupil upside the head, you may nod your own head, and allow yourself to be devoured, hoping for wisdom on the other side of fear. Nor will it avail us to "understand" the book by supposing that Max Aue's perversions are intended to show the consequence of Nazidom; they clearly aren't. Nor will it avail us to see them as Littell's idea of the cause — perversion deeply inscribed in the German nation? — of Nazidom. Max Aue's gallery of terror and the Nazis' gallery, incommensurate in scale but comparable in transgression, are quite deliber-

ately separate; I am arguing that it is their very separation that creates an abyss in the reading process, an abîme, a gap, a hole into which you must fall all the way, confessing the impossibility of literary truth, in order to become whole. For the book itself can be no whole: *das Ganze*, as Adorno said of the whole, *ist das Unwahre*: is the untrue. The book is always a hole. To make this palpable is Littell's aesthetic strategy.

Meanwhile, if you have bowed your head before *The Kindly Ones* and its sacred harvesting machine, there are extraordinary beauties to enjoy, as the metal teeth crunch your bones. Not the least of these, although unanticipated by its inventor (who may have hoped for this but could not be certain of it), is a wondrous translation by Charlotte Mandell, so at ease with that book and its language that Francophone reviewers have rightly praised its English as being more fluent than the book's French — as fine as this is. Sifted by her supremely elegant translation, the finest passages in the book address matters quite other than horror (indeed the Holocaust is by no means the focus of the book, nor does it occupy more than a section of it). Littell's mastery of the bureaucratic intricacies of life in the SS and its parallel organizations in military and civil Nazi life reveals more fully than any previous account how well the complex infighting and pecking-order obsessions supplied the human instruments of Nazi terror with quotidian concerns to distract them. No wonder officers quite casually drew their pistol and executed a line of Jews or other human vermin; their casualness isn't explained by their being accustomed to it, or rather not that only, nor by their capacity to see Jews as less than fully human, but also by the fact that at the very moment of shooting they were worrying

about the enormously complex matter of their advancement within their own ranks, which would have required a chess master to disentangle

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It was just a dream! ever release  
the reader.

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and foresee. This Littell conjures wonderfully, when Aue's fellow officers strike up a conversation, in long Alice-in-Wonderland conversations regarding status. Even if such complexities were not deliberately devised to distract the genocidal mind, what a wonderful, inge-

nious device they formed!

Max Aue himself keeps his distance from such games, and his enduring outsider status binds us to him (unless his secret atrocities have, for the individual reader, undone those ties); this aspect of Aue's soul is finally given its head in a section entitled "Air," which finds Aue alone, in a rural setting, amid the dissolution of the Reich, alone and undisturbed and meditative. The lyricism of this section, which is the secret heart of the book as it is the heart of Aue himself, when liberated from all social compulsions and temptations, transcends the rest of the book as a flight of language, placing Littell on a fresh level purely as a stylist.

And if you have let Aue take you thus far through his chamber of horrors then you must emerge with him, out of the rabbit hole and into Hitler's Führerbunker for the most wonderfully grand-guignol climax, a stroke of macabre comic genius which forms a true reward for the reader of this titan of a book. I shall not spoil anyone's pleasure by saying more; I hope that the reader of this review, to whom I submit my case for *The Kindly Ones*, will not be distracted — or too much excited — by the tumult surrounding its publication. The book will long outlive the tumult. And it is, as a book, a strange cruel rapture that no readers in search of heady literary experience should deny themselves.

# Yiddish Culture and Early Cartooning

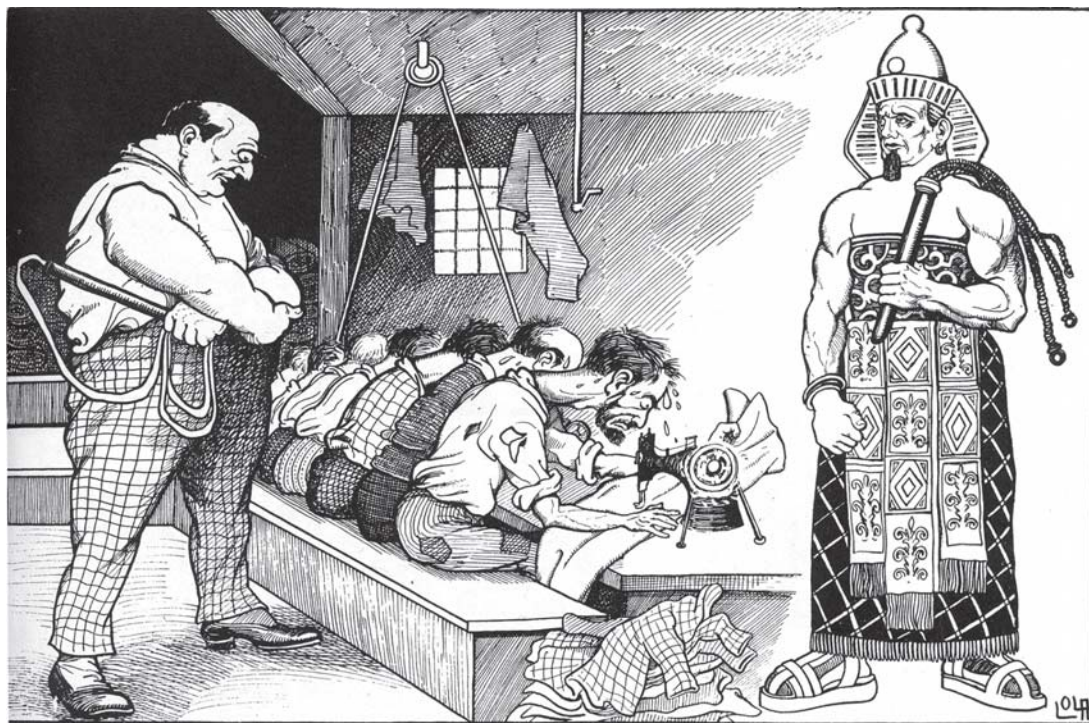
PAUL BUHLE

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*PAUL BUHLE's Jews and American Comics: An Illustrated History of an American Art Form\* surveys the decisive contribution that Jews have made to the development of the comics medium over the past century and a half. We are pleased to feature an excerpt from the introduction to his book,*

*which explores the connection between an irreverent, "deeply vernacular" Yiddish culture and early comics, along with a few sample images. We are grateful to the author and the New Press for their permission in using this material.*

KENT WORCESTER

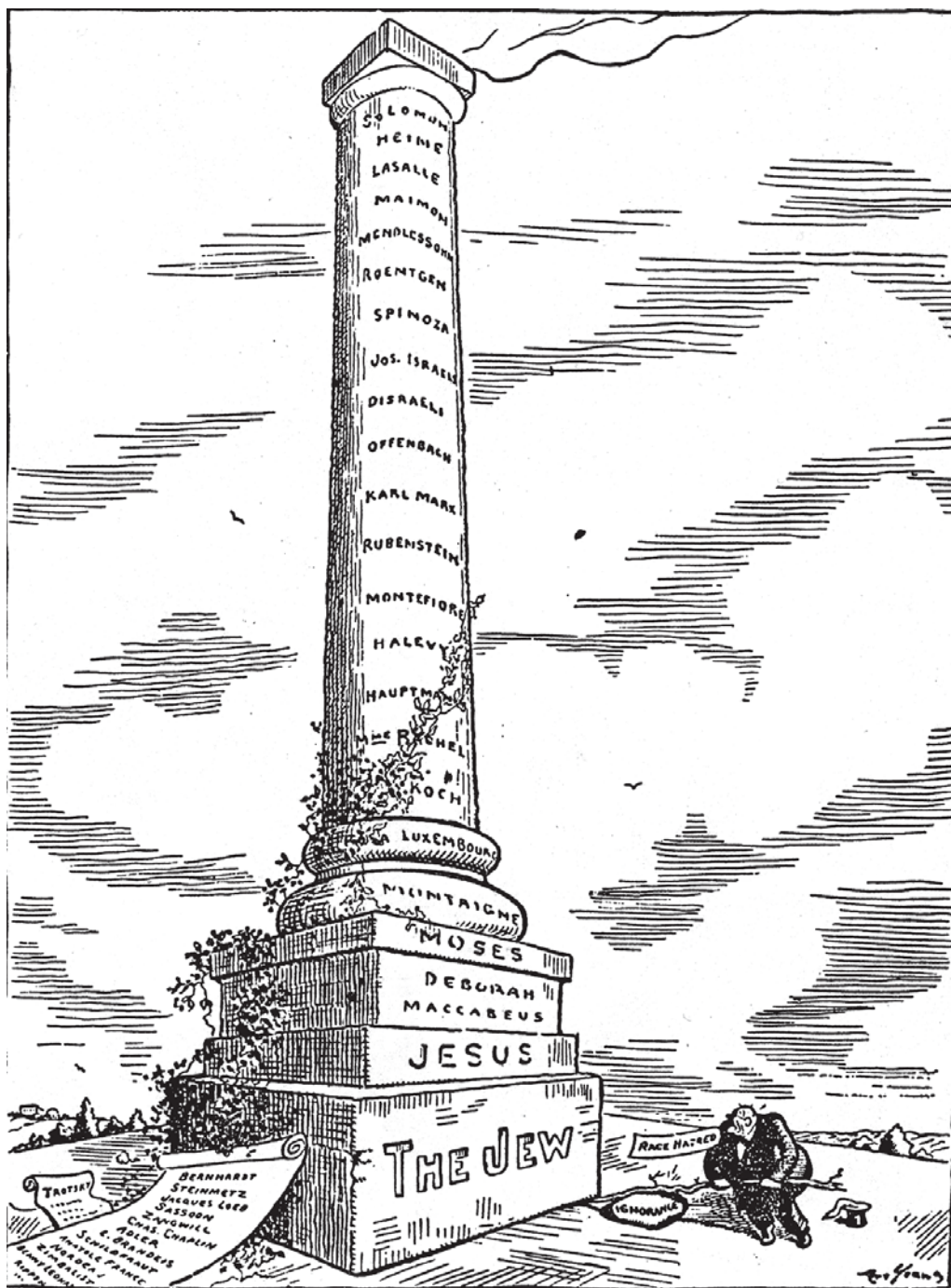


PAUL BUHLE, a boyhood comics reader whose view of the world was organized by reading *Mad Comics*, published *Radical America*, a journal for the 1960s movement SDS, from 1967-73, including *Radical America Komiks* (1969), the third number of the *Underground Comix* genre, inexplicably ceased publishing comic art for 36 years, returned to comics since *Wobblies!* (2005), adaptations of Howard Zinn (2008) and Studs Terkel (2009), plus graphic biographies of Isadora Duncan, Emma Goldman and Che, is now retiring from the Ivy League and going full time in comics production. His *Art of Harvey Kurtzman* captures one of his childhood idols.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ROOTS of the comic strip, explored by very few scholars decades ago, have begun to emerge, shedding light on both precursors and the rich outpouring to follow. Very much like Yiddish literary culture, the story goes back to European origins, then develops new contours along with a new readership in the "new country," the United

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\*N. Y., NY: New Press, 2008, 208 pp., \$29.95



States. As Yiddish began to fall away, American comics began to have a huge impact on European (and other) comics, a phenomenon renewed and reinforced by the wildness of the

1960s and 1970s undergrounds, whose spawn definitely included Art Spiegelman, Ben Katchor, and, by extension, many a young Jewish comic artist today — even, one might add,

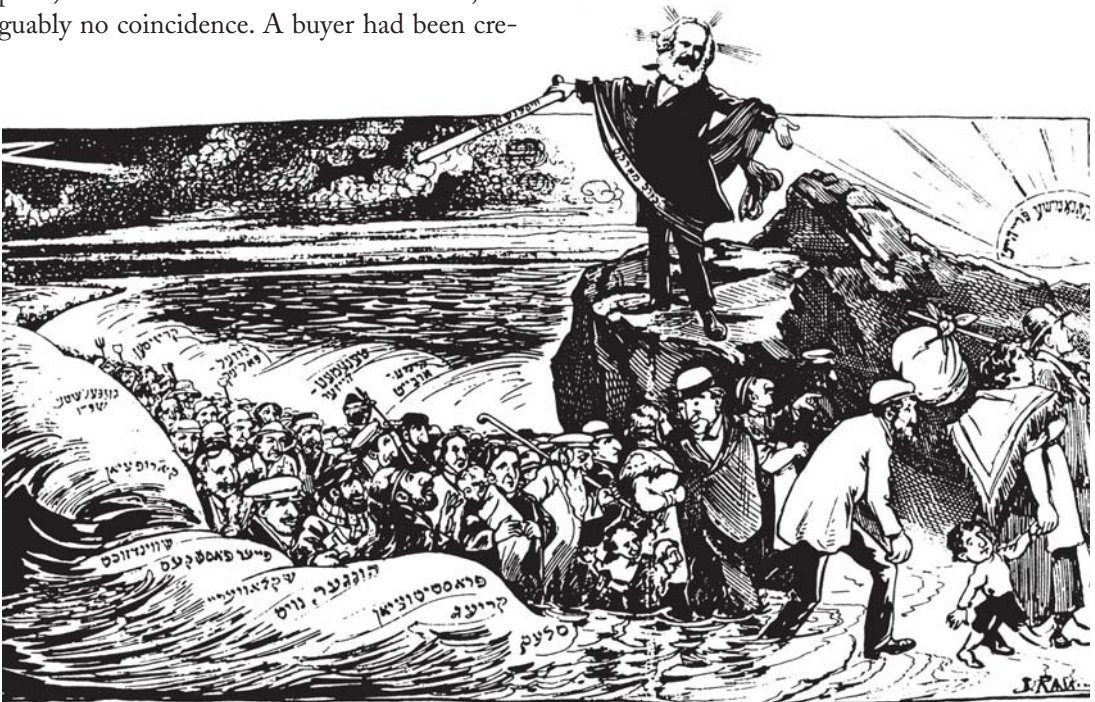
those who claim to have broken the link between narrative and drawing decisively, creating, as Chris Ware has memorably proposed, a comic art for its own sake.

No two scholars are likely to have the same precise definition of a comic strip, but the sequential narrative running across several or many panels remains the obvious beginning spot. Illuminated religious texts several centuries ago already had such panels and even an inclination toward the humorous and grotesque. But the emergence of a mass (and predominantly lower-class) audience craving entertainment offered the possibility for the modern comic strip to take form and for a certain kind of artist to make a living. Technological advances naturally played a key role, with the first glimmer of the modern strip appearing during the early decades of the nineteenth century, when drawings could be transferred to lithographic stone and set in print.

Both the early comic strip and Yiddish literature were deeply vernacular, appearing (in Yiddish theater, books, and the daily or weekly press) around the same historical moment, arguably no coincidence. A buyer had been cre-

ated for the seller. One might suggest a further similarity between the two. The advance of photography, to quote a scholar of the comic strip, plunged “the viewer into hyper-vision, into an unknown world, the world of speed...concentrated energy into a flash of time,” inspiring the vernacular artist to do so likewise for his readers. The early comic strip artist was in vital ways a cousin of the early filmmaker, and occasionally (through animation) a filmmaker himself. Comic strips about movies naturally sprang from artists’ tools during the 1910s, as movies were to spring from comic strip characters not long after, and animated films emerged as a new art form.

The other decisive connection between Yiddish and the comic strip goes straight to humor, whether as social commentary or unadulterated “fun.” The legendary qualities of Jewish humor cannot be well documented before the nineteenth century, and early popular Yiddish writers like Mendeley Moykher Sforim and Sholem Aleichem seem to have stylized





*Note: The panels in this cartoon, like Yiddish, are read from right to left.*

their folksiness to suit their potential readership. But behind the poses, beneath the unresolved mystery of origins, there was always a sense that the punishment inflicted upon the Jews, threats to their livelihood or lives, and the

simultaneous traditions of literacy and pipul, the question-and-answer dialogue of Hebrew schooling, produced tragic comedians and also the lighter sort. Humor was a way of making life bearable and also understandable.



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## IN THIS ISSUE

The optimist believes that this world of ours, here and now, is the best of the possible worlds — whereas the pessimist suspects that the optimist could be right.

*Zygmund Bauman*  
GLOBALIZATION AND CAPITALISM  
an interview

The separation wall (in the West Bank) is nearing completion. When completed Israel will have seized more than half of the West Bank land for the wall, restricted roads, and settlements.

*Marie Kennedy*  
AFTER ISRAEL'S INVASION: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT  
FROM GAZA, THE WEST BANK, AND ISRAEL

The resentment against the officials is so high that the smallest skirmish in the street may quickly trigger confrontation between police and a large crowd.

*Au Loong Yu*  
CHINA: END OF A MODEL . . .  
OR THE BIRTH OF A NEW ONE?

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