

***new* POLITICS**

a journal of socialist thought

Founding Editors

Julius Jacobson (1922-2003) Phyllis Jacobson (1922-2010)

Editorial Board

Sam Bottone
Gertrude Ezorsky
Barry Finger, business mgr.
Thomas Harrison
Michael Hirsch
Dan La Botz
Micah Landau
Joanne Landy
Amy Littlefield
Betty Reid Mandell, co-editor

Marvin Mandell, co-editor
Scott McLemee
Jason Schulman
Stephen R. Shalom
Lois Weiner
Reginald Wilson
Julia Wrigley

Proofreader
Chris Mandell

Sponsors

Stanley Aronowitz
Derrick Bell
Elaine Bernard
Jon Bloom
Stephen Eric Bronner
Mari Jo Buhle
Paul Buhle
Lynn Chancer
Noam Chomsky
Lorraine Cohen
Bogdan Denitch
Michael Eric Dyson
Barbara Ehrenreich
Barbara Epstein
Samuel Farber
David Finkel
Barbara Garson
Allen Graubard
Richard Greeman

Justin Grossman
William Kornblum
Jesse Lemisch
Nelson Lichtenstein
Ravi Malhotra
David McReynolds
Deborah Meier
Gwendolyn Mink
Kim Moody
Kai Nielsen
Martin Oppenheimer
Frances Fox Piven
Nancy Romer
Ronnie Steinberg
Stephen Steinberg
Amos Vogel
Peter Waterman
Stuart Weir
Cornel West

NEW POLITICS is published by New Politics Associates, 155 West 72 Street,
Room 402, New York, NY 10023 USA
e-mail: newpoliticsjournal@gmail.com

newpol.org

NEW POLITICS is indexed in The Left Index and in Alternative Press Index, as well as Political Science Abstracts, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, and International Political Science Abstracts. New Politics is distributed in bookstores and newsstands by Ingram Periodicals and by Ubiquity Distributors. Cover design by Lisa Lyons.

Subscriptions: \$24 for four issues. Institution rate: \$50. Foreign subscriptions (including Canada): \$40. Foreign institution rate: \$66. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency drawn on U.S. banks. Single copy: \$9 (includes postage and handling). Bulk rate postage paid at Peoria, IL.

©2011 New Politics Associates

ISSN (0028-6494)

VOLUME XIII • NUMBER 2 • Winter 2011

 TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY WE PUBLISH.....	5
LETTERS	6
<i>Seth Farber, George Fish, Steven Saxonberg, Betty Reid Mandell</i>	
CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY, STATEMENT ON IRAN.....	10
THE ELECTIONS	
FROM "HOPE" TO HOPELESS: THE DEMOCRATS' DEBACLE	12
<i>Lance Selfa</i>	
RIP IT UP AND START AGAIN	18
<i>Chris Maisano</i>	
A SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN IN OHIO	22
<i>Dan La Botz</i>	
AFTER 50 YEARS: HAS LANDRUM-GRIFFIN BEEN GOOD OR BAD FOR UNIONS?.....	29
<i>Herman Benson</i>	
WHAT IS UNION DEMOCRACY?	37
<i>Robert Fitch</i>	
"WE WANT TO BE HEARD"	44
<i>Robert Joe Stout</i>	
PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS AND THE CRISIS.....	49
<i>Barry Finger</i>	
THE JOBS CRISIS: HOW TO SOLVE IT AND BEGIN TO FIX OUR BROKEN ECONOMY.....	60
<i>Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Marguerite Rosenthal</i>	
FIELDS OF BATTLE, FIELDS OF PLAY	68
<i>Bill Littlefield</i>	
CO-OPTED	72
<i>Bhaskar Sunkara</i>	
1937/38 IN THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY	75
<i>Mike Wood</i>	
THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER . . . ANARCHISM?	85
<i>Kristian Williams</i>	
THE POPULAR FRONT, A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRAGEDY: THE CASE OF FRANCE.....	91
<i>Dan La Botz</i>	
SAVIOR IN THE DESERT, INTERVIEW WITH LOIS MARTIN	105
<i>Barbara Schram</i>	

(contents continued)

BOOK REVIEWS

<i>Michael Hirsch, REMEMBRANCE OF POLITICS PAST, rev. of Christopher Hitchens, Hitch 22, a Memoir</i>	108
<i>G. M. Goshgarian, GENOCIDE DENIAL LIGHT, rev. of Ece Temelkuran, Deep Mountain</i>	112
<i>Paul Buhle, THE HEALTH WORKERS' STRUGGLE, rev. of Cal Winslow, Labor's Civil War in California and Paul Krehbiel, Shades of Justice, a Memoir</i>	122
<i>Michael Wreszin, AN INTELLECTUAL PUBLISHER OR A SUCCESSFUL HUCKSTER?, rev. of Alan Brinkley, The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century</i>	128
<i>Steven Colatrella, IS IT A DREAM OR A LIE IF IT DOESN'T COME TRUE (OR IS IT SOMETHING WORSE)? rev. of Jefferson Cowie, Stayin' Alive</i>	134
<i>Michael Löwy, MARX AND THE NON-WESTERN WORLD, rev. of Kevin B. Anderson, Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies</i>	139
<i>Betty Reid Mandell, THE CRIME OF POVERTY, rev. of Loic Wacquant, Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity</i>	141
<i>Reginald Wilson, FATE OF A CHAMPION, rev. of Will Haygood, Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson</i>	156

WORDS AND PICTURES

<i>Kent Worcester, PORTRAIT OF A MISFIT, as seen in the art of Daniel Clowes</i>	160
--	-----

SILENT AUCTION FOR THE BENEFIT OF *NEW POLITICS*

NOTICE: The highest bidder will receive a week's vacation at a house on Cuttyhunk Island, MA some time in the Spring or Fall of 2011. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, April 1, 2011. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500.

MARVIN AND BETTY

Why We Publish

NEW POLITICS IS AN INDEPENDENT socialist forum for dialogue and debate on the left. We support unions and workers' struggles throughout the world. We are committed to the advancement of the peace and anti-intervention movements. We stand in opposition to all forms of imperialism and oppression, and we are uncompromising in our defense of the rights of women, people of color, lesbians, gays and the transgendered. In our pages there is broad coverage of labor, social movements, and the international scene, as well as emphasis on cultural and intellectual history. Above all, *New Politics* insists on the centrality of democracy to socialism and on the need to rely on mass movements from below for progressive social transformation.

These are critical times. Not since before the New Deal have working people in this country been so vulnerable, and perhaps never before have big business and the right been so aggressive and dominant. Abroad, U.S. military and corporate power embraces the world in a stranglehold.

There are hopeful signs: resistance to austerity policies in Greece and France, strikes in China and South Africa, a violently-repressed but still living movement for democracy in Iran, new progressive social movements and socialist political parties in Latin America, heightened global outrage at the repression and intransigence of the Israeli state.

And here in the U.S., there have been some encouraging developments: a vibrant immigrant rights movement, growing opposition to the war in Afghanistan, grassroots demands for jobs and a real stimulus program, the beginnings of a backlash against Tea Party fanaticism. Yet the left remains too organizationally and intellectually weak to seriously challenge the Establishment.

New Politics seeks to revitalize the left as a step towards the creation of an international movement to replace capitalism, as well as non-capitalist exploitative systems, with socialism. *NP* is not attached or subordinated to any po-

litical party or institution. We stand for popular empowerment and democratic control at every level, opposition to all forms of authoritarianism, no matter how "leftist" their rhetoric — in short, a politics of socialism from below.

During the Cold War, *NP* was a beacon of principled socialist clarity. It tirelessly exposed the lie that identified the socialist legacy with Communist states. *NP* championed the struggles of the 60s and 70s movements against the Vietnam War and U.S. intervention in Central America, for women's and black liberation, for union democracy and affirmative action. We enthusiastically supported struggles for democracy in the Soviet bloc. We have firmly defended the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to self-determination and security.

Since the Cold War, we have spoken out against the ravages inflicted by neoliberalism in this country and throughout the world, and we have exposed U.S. imperial aggression in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Haiti and elsewhere.

NP has been inspired throughout by the vision of a "third camp." During the Cold War it meant "Neither Washington nor Moscow"; today it means opposing Washington's imperial aggression while making no apologies for its antagonists when they are anti-democratic, be they Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, Ahmadinejad, or authoritarian religious fundamentalists.

Today, surveying the bleak political landscape, especially in the U.S., some argue that the left should trim its sails and be modest in its ambitions. We dare not do this. Not caution, but bold and imaginative radicalism is needed.

The aim of *NP* is to provide a voice to help transform popular struggles for equality, peace, social justice and freedom of cultural expression into a conscious, intelligent movement for a democratic, just and peaceful world.

THOMAS HARRISON
for the *New Politics* editorial board

Chomsky on Anarchism

GEORGE FISH'S REVIEW OF *Chomsky on Anarchism* does not serve Chomsky well at all. While Mr. Fish gives a picturesque description of many of the essays in the book there is no indication that he seriously wrestled with Chomsky's ideas on anarchism, socialism, the Russian revolution, the roots of totalitarianism, the vanguard party — the big ideas that Chomsky addresses.

Mr. Fish makes clear from the beginning of the review that he is a Marxist-Leninist and a traditional socialist who does not agree with Chomsky's "basic anarchist premises." Although Fish acknowledges that Chomsky is often "insightful" and "perceptive" and "erudite" and "scholarly" (Fish has a tendency to string synonyms together), he also tells us repeatedly that Chomsky's analysis is a "simplification" or an "over-simplification." (Presumably the latter is even worse than the former.)

But Fish's review is completely evasive. Although he repeatedly asserts the superiority of his Marxist views he never tells us what they are, or makes any effort to show that his Marxist paradigm explains the unexpected trajectory of modern history any better than the anarchist paradigm.

On the other hand, Fish never explains Chomsky's paradigm either. Fish tells us that Chomsky has an "unorthodox notion of anarchism." But he never even hints at what this consists. Fish implies that because Chomsky's anarchism is unorthodox there is much in it that Marxists (like Fish) would "agree with, defend and applaud." But again Fish does not tell us what this is. Fish cites some arguments of Chomsky that he finds convincing, but these do not seem to be integral to Chomsky's unorthodox anarchism — they are at a greater level of generality.

Certainly every leftist activist knows that the most passionate area of disagreement between anarchists and Marxist-Leninists is over the character of the Russian revolution. I looked forward to see how a Marxist sympathetic to

anarchism (like Fish is) would refute Chomsky's critique of Marxism and Leninism, Chomsky's argument that Marxist theory is itself responsible for the failure of the workers' revolution. Fish tells us "Chomsky gets simplistic" when he claims Lenin and Trotsky laid "the foundations" for Stalinism. Why is this simplistic? Fish does not say. Nor does he attempt to adumbrate a more complex account. Fish does admit that Chomsky's position on Leninism "while oversimplified... is not without elements of merit [sic]... for revolutionary socialists to consider." But what these elements are, he does not give the reader a clue.

Neither Chomsky nor *New Politics* readers are served well by this review by Fish. Chomsky has formulated a distinctive and "unorthodox" theory of anarchism. If Fish thinks it is simplistic compared to his Marxist perspective then it is his responsibility to demonstrate this to the reader. If Fish is unable to do this, then perhaps Chomsky is not as simplistic as Fish asserts. Perhaps Chomsky has identified some of the flaws in the Leninist and Marxist perspective that Fish is unable to answer.

Repeatedly asserting that Chomsky is simplistic is no way for a "revolutionary socialist" to carry forward the task of political education that Fish asserts is so important. Fish's superficial reading of Chomsky contributes nothing to elucidating and enriching the centuries old debate between anarchists and Marxists. I expected a more enlightening review in *New Politics*.

SETH FARBER
New York, NY

SETH FARBER'S RESPONSE to my "Chomsky, Anarchism, and Socialism" (Summer 2010 *New Politics*) places a very heavy burden on what is a book review, not a major study of Chomsky's political thought. As such, I believe it does exactly what a book review should: give a basic outline of the book being reviewed, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and indicate to the reader why the reviewer recommends or does not recommend reading the book. In this I believe I have

indeed done justice to Chomsky's anarchist thought as it relates to the book under review, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, and why there is merit to this book; most specifically as it relates to the interests of the generally socialist, not anarchist, readers of *New Politics*. I note that *Chomsky on Anarchism* not only contributes to the ongoing discussion in left circles of socialist-anarchist alliances (which I discuss in n.1), but is also highly useful to forging such alliances, and establishing common political ground between socialists and anarchists. If Farber thinks somehow that the manner in which I raise the above is incomplete, then he is criticizing me for what I did not write — a full-scale investigation of Chomsky's anarchism, not simply a book review of *Chomsky on Anarchism*.

As for Farber's assertion that I did not clarify what is "unorthodox" in Chomsky's anarchism, that's clearly untrue from a reading of the review itself. But before pointing out what I indicated precisely is "unorthodox" about Chomsky's anarchism, let me say that a writer is under no obligation to re-invent the wheel every time fingers are put to the computer keyboard. Certainly I can properly assume that the average reader of *New Politics* is already conversant in the general premises of socialism and anarchism, so that I do not need to re-explain what is already known.

Specifically, what I relate as "unorthodox" in Chomsky's anarchism are his notion that while all authority needs to be questioned, not all authority is illegitimate; democracy is not simply a "tyranny of the majority"; under certain circumstances, especially where Third World countries are under the onslaught of neoliberalism, it is necessary to strengthen state power in order to protect the people's rights; and Chomsky's own assertion that he himself votes, and supports left electoral parties such as the Greens.

Farber will certainly find no place in my review where I refer to myself as a "Marxist-Leninist." A Marxist, yes, as I indicated, but a Marxist who rejects several basic tenets of Leninism, and is quite critical of the legacy not just of Stalin, but of Lenin and Trotsky themselves. Had Farber bothered to read the long n. 3 of my review, he would've realized this. But where I find that Chomsky oversimplifies is his basic premise, shared with all other anarchists, that Leninism itself is responsible *in toto* for all that went wrong with the Bolshevik Revolution,

both from the beginning and in its Stalinist aftermath. That simply is to tar Bolshevism with far too broad a brush, and again, I said as much in n. 3. But what I did say on Chomsky's fundamental critique of Leninism is that it "is not without elements of merit and political insight for revolutionary socialists to seriously consider."

GEORGE FISH
Indianapolis, IN

Family Policies in Post-Communist Nations

I THINK THAT BETTY REID MANDELL made some interesting points in her discussion (in Summer 2008, Vol XII-1, Whole # 45, <http://new-politics.mayfirst.org/fromthearchives?nid=120>), but she has some misconceptions.

First she writes "None of the writers of these articles questions the term 'Communist' in referring to Communist nations. This leaves the impression that those nations were being governed by Marxist ideology." I think that the majority of authors writing about gender and post-communism/communism understand that the communist-ruled regimes deviated in their policies from what Marx wrote. For this reason, it is quite common to call the regimes "state-socialism" — to emphasize that it is an authoritarian type of "socialism." I would agree that these regimes were not really "socialist" at all, so in my book on the collapse of communism (*The Fall*, published by Routledge) I refer to the regimes as "Soviet-type" to emphasize that they followed a model that came from the Soviet Union. However, in journal articles you have so few words and so little space that you do not have space to discuss such issues (unless it is an article concentrating on the issue of how to label these regimes) so I often use the term "communist regimes" or "communist-led" to emphasize that communist PARTIES were in power. That does not mean that I think that the parties were implementing the types of policies that Marx would have preferred or that these regimes were following the path that Marx had predicted. (Which is not to say that I share Mandell's sympathies for Trotsky because even he in practice acted very authoritarian during his period of influence in the first years after the Bolshevik Revolution. For example, rather than

implement workplace democracy, he wanted the factories to be run with military discipline. In addition, I think he was wrong to categorize these regimes as transitional regimes, that were at a “higher” stage of development than the capitalist Western regimes. They comprised their own type of regime, with their own types of dynamics and they were for the most part at a lower level of development than the West European capitalist regimes).

Then she writes about my particular co-authored article “While women were forced to work in those countries, they also had to care for the children and do housework. That is hardly liberation.” We never claimed that the communist-led regimes liberated women and we make a big point of the fact that they still expected women to have full responsibility of the household. She took our comment out of context. When the communists first came to power, their policies did MORE than most West European countries to promote gender equality. We wrote this in RELATIVE terms. I think this paragraph that I will now cite makes it clear that Mandell misrepresents us:

Although the state-socialist policies shared some similarities with Sweden’s defamilialized, dual-earner, individual-earner-career model, important differences existed. While state socialism expected families to have dual-earners, it only expected mothers to be both earners and carers. Fathers were not expected to care for child-raising or household tasks. In fact, fathers were not even allowed to go on parental leave except in unusual cases. State-socialist regimes also followed traditional conservative parental leave policies. In order to encourage higher birth rates, the regimes eventually created extended maternity leaves. These were low paying, flat rate benefits that induced mothers to leave the labor market for long periods. Thus, the state-socialist model combined defamilializing labor market and childcare policies with conservative, familializing maternity leave policies.

I also take issue with Mandell’s conclusions about Sweden. She writes: “Yet even there relatively few fathers take advantage of this. The solution to the problem involves more than money; there are deep-seated cultural attitudes that need to be resolved.” I do not know how she

defines “relatively few” and if she defines “relatively few” as anything less than 100 percent, then I will agree with her statement. However, usually “relatively few” means something close to 0 percent. In Sweden well over 90 percent of father go on father leave. I do not remember the exact statistics, but I think it is around 96 or 97 percent, but if you are really interested in is, I can look it up for you. About 23 percent of the total parental leave time is done by fathers, which is still short of 50 percent which would mean sharing equally, but it still is high enough to show that policies can bring about changes. Mandell does not mention Iceland, where one-third of the leave time is reserved for fathers and over 30 percent of the total leave time is done by men.

Finally, Mandell concludes by stating that she never trusted a journal that does not publish letters to the editor. I guess that means she does not trust any academic journals, because I am not aware of any academic journals that publish letters to the editor. If there were no limits on space, I think it might be a good idea to include letters to the editor, but unfortunately, the trend is the opposite: the number of words social scientists like myself are allowed to use for articles is declining, so our articles must be shorter and shorter. When I first started writing journal articles the limit was often 12,000 words. Now the limit is often 6,000 words. I once even had a limit of 5,500 words. Given this situation, I would prefer being able to write longer articles than cutting the size of our articles even more to allow letters.

STEVEN SAXONBERG
Sagmyra, Sweden

Mandell Responds

THERE IS SUCH WIDESPREAD IGNORANCE about communism and socialism that I think it is important to call those countries Stalinist rather than Communist or state socialist.

Thank you for calling attention to my error about Sweden in the article on caregiving. You are right that most Swedish fathers use some of their allotted family leave. I would have been more accurate if I had said, “Relatively few Swedish fathers use *all* of their allotted family leave.” I took my information from a 2008 Swedish article entitled, “Swedish dads steer clear of maternity leave.”* That article

said, "Fathers take on average only 20 percent of the 16 months of paid parental leave offered in Sweden to either mums or dads, according to *Statistics Sweden*. . . . In most cases it is mothers who invoke their legal right and stay home with the kids."

A 2010 *New York Times* article** said, "Eight in 10 fathers now take a third of the total 13 months of leave—and 9 percent of fathers take 40 percent of the total or more—up from 4 percent a decade ago." The article said, "Swedish mothers still take more time off with children—almost four times as much."

Sweden is in the vanguard of countries that allot some family leave time for fathers, but even that vanguard has a long way to go before it reaches full equality.

Regarding my statement that I don't fully

trust *any* journal that doesn't publish letters to the editor, you say that I must not trust any academic journals. You are not aware of any academic journals that publish letters to the editor. I stick by my statement that I don't fully trust *any* journal that doesn't publish letters to the editor. Academics like to hear the sound of their own voices, and are just as happy if they don't face dissent. *New Politics* welcomes dissent, and encourages articles that present differing opinions on the same topic.

*www.thelocal.se/10420/20080312/

**Katrin Gennhold, "In Sweden, men can have it all." *New York Times*, June 9, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/europe/10iht-sweden.html?scp=2&sq=sweden&st=cse>

Subscribe Now

A four-issue subscription to *New Politics* costs \$24 (\$40 international), while the institutional rate is \$50 (\$60 international). Each issue features nearly two hundred pages of informed debate and analysis from an independent, leftist perspective.

Please write your check out to *New Politics* (in U.S. currency only, drawn on a U.S. bank), or use a Postal Money Order. For payment by credit card (VISA, Master Card, American Express) provide the number and expiration date in the spaces below.

Name.....

Address

City.....State..... Zip Code.....

E-mail address

Card number

☐

VISA

☐

MasterCard

☐

AmEx

Expiration Date

NEW POLITICS 155 W. 72 St., Rm. 402 New York, NY 10023 USA

End the War Threats and Sanctions Program Against Iran

Support the Struggle for Democracy Inside Iran

We, the undersigned, oppose the U.S.-led campaign to impose harsher sanctions on Iran, and the ongoing threat of war against that country. Despite Washington's claims, its policy is clearly not animated by a genuine concern for protecting the world from the threat of nuclear war; otherwise how could Washington support such nuclear-armed states as India, Israel, and Pakistan, or maintain its own huge nuclear arsenal? Nor is U.S. policy driven by the goal of defending democracy. If it were, how could the United States support brutally authoritarian regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

Months after it began its recent program to sanction Iran for its nuclear activities, the United States, in a move described by *The New York Times* as "more symbolic than substantive," froze the foreign assets and denied visas to eight Iranian officials, citing their role in the post-elections crackdown. This symbolic gesture cannot obscure the fact that Washington's fundamental motivation for imposing the comprehensive sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program is to neutralize or eliminate a major threat to its power in the region.

In June 2009 people around the world were inspired by the courageous protests in Iran, when hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, took to the streets to demand their democratic rights. Since then the Iranian government has tried to repress the movement: hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars, often tortured, deprived of medical care, and forced to live under dangerously unhealthy conditions. We support those who struggle for democracy and social justice

inside Iran.

Far from helping the Iranian people, sanctions and war threats strengthen Ahmadinejad's regime, helping it to shift the blame for worsening economic conditions from itself entirely onto the external enemy. In the past the Iranian elite has proven able to circumvent sanctions, but if Washington actually succeeds in preventing Tehran from importing refined petroleum, exporting oil and other items, and conducting normal trade and banking activities, over time millions of ordinary Iranians will suffer.

We don't want Iran, or any other country, including our own, to have nuclear weapons. But even the U.S. government admits that Iran does not now possess nuclear weapons and has no imminent prospect of acquiring them. Moreover, Iran has no less right than any other nation to develop civilian nuclear power. Many of us oppose the use of nuclear energy by any country, both for environmental reasons and because of its link to nuclear weapons — but that is not the issue in the present U.S.-Iran confrontation. The United States, a major producer of nuclear energy and by far the leading nuclear weapons nation, which continually upgrades its own conventional and nuclear arsenal and tolerates the possession of nuclear weapons by other reckless and aggressive powers, has no moral legitimacy when it tries to punish Iran for its nuclear activities.

U.S. belligerence — its continual warnings that "all options remain on the table," possibly including acceptance of an Israeli attack — only creates strong inducements for Tehran to seek nuclear weapons for its

defense, or to become, like Japan, “nuclear-weapons capable,” i.e. possessing all the elements necessary to make a bomb without actually manufacturing one. And it’s not just Iran: U.S. militarism has helped to create a Hobbesian world in which more and more countries come to believe that their survival depends on nuclear “deterrence.”

The United States can best reduce the danger of nuclear war by taking major steps to divest *itself* of nuclear weapons as part of a new, democratic and socially just foreign policy. This would include initiating both nuclear and conventional disarmament, encompassing missile “defense” as well as more obviously offensive weaponry; ending its predatory wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan; supporting a Nuclear-Free Weapons Zone in the Middle East; giving real support to Palestinian rights rather than continuing one-sided support to Israel; and dismantling its more than 1,000 military bases around the world. Such steps would help undermine the rationale for Iran and other countries developing their own nuclear weapons. These actions would also be the most effective way to strengthen women’s, labor, and other democratic movements in the Middle East, and to promote the interests of ordinary Americans and real peace in the world.

October 2010

SELECTED LIST OF INITIAL SIGNERS

(for the full list as it evolves, go to www.cpdweb.org)

Bashir Abu-Manneh, Michael Albert, Greg Albo, Elahe Amani, Kevin B. Anderson, Stanley Aronowitz, Parvin Ashrafi, Ed Asner, Rosalyn Baxandall, William O. Beeman, Judith Bello, Medea Benjamin, Blase Bonpane, Eileen Boris, Sam Bottone, Joan G. Botwinick, Laura Boylan, MD, Frank Brodhead, Steve Burns, Leslie Cagan, Antonia Cedrone, Adam Chmielewski, Noam Chomsky, Margaret W. Crane, Hamid Dabashi, Charles D’Adamo, Gail Daneker, Bogdan Denitch, Manuela Dobos, Tina Dobseavage, MD, Martin Duberman, Lisa Duggan, Stephen R. Early, Carolyn Eisenberg, Michael Eisenscher, Mark Engler, Gertrude Ezorsky, Samuel Farber, Thomas M. Fasy, MD, Dianne Feeley, John Feffer, Barry Finger, David Finkel, Bill Fletcher, Jr., Jean Fox, Dr. Harriet Fraad, David Friedman, Robert Gabrielsky, Bruce Gagnon, Barbara Garson, Irene Gendzier, Jack Gerson, Joseph Gerson, Sam Gindin, John Gorman, Greg Grandin, Jules Greenstein, Arun Gupta, E. Haberkern, Cole

Harrison, Thomas Harrison, Nader Hashemi, Howie Hawkins, Bill Henning, Michael Hirsch, Madelyn Hoffman, Iranian Centre for Peace, Freedom and Social Justice-Vancouver, Doug Ireland, Marianne Jackson, PhD, Melissa Jameson, Malalai Joya, Jan Kavan, Kathy Kelly, Tooba Keshtkar, Assaf Kfoury, Mina Khanlarzadeh, Jack Kurzweil, Dan La Botz, Micah Landau, Joanne Landy, Marc H. Lavietes, MD, Roger E. Leisner, Jesse Lemisch, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Traven Leyshon, Nelson Lichtenstein, Amy Littlefield, Martha Livingston, Robin Lloyd, Jan Majicek, Betty Mandell, Marvin Mandell, Nasir A. Mansoor, Dave Marsh, Don McCanne, MD, Scott McLemee, David McReynolds, Debbie Meier, Martin Melkonian, Marilyn Morehead, Erika Munk, Ulla Neuburger, Mary E. O’Brien, MD, Derrick O’Keefe, David Oakford, Rosemarie Pace, Leo Panitch, Mike Pattberg, Peace Action New York State, Maggie Phair, Christopher Phelps, Charlotte Phillips, MD, Frances Fox Piven, Danny Postel, Judy Rebeck, Katie Robbins, Leonard Rodberg, Richard Roman, Bruce A. Rosen, Elizabeth Rosenthal, MD, Matthew Rothschild, Coleen Rowley, Saffaar Saeed, John Sanbonmatsu, Ajamu Sankofa, Saskia Sassen, Jennifer Scarlott, Jay Schaffner, Jason Schulman, Peter O. Schwartz, Lance Selfa, Stephen R. Shalom, Cindy Sheehan, Gar Smith, Stephen Soldz, Cheryl Stevenson, Patricia Storace, Bhaskar Sunkara, David Swanson, William K. Tabb, Hoshang Tareh Gol, Jonathan Tasini, Meredith Tax, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Sheila Thorne, Chris Toensing, Bernard Tuchman, Adaner Usmani, Steven VanBever, Wilbert van der Zeijden, David S. Vine, Barbara Webster, Lois Weiner, Suzi Weissman, Naomi Weisstein, Laurie Wen, Cornel West, Billy Wharton, Julia Willebrand, Reginald Wilson, Sherry Wolf, Julia Wrigley, and Leila Zand



If you would like to sign the Iran statement, please send us your name and, if you wish, your organizational/institutional affiliation or city, for identification only, along with your name, email, phone and street

address. Only name and affiliation will be published.

Donations are tax-deductible. To make a contribution online to publicize the statement, go to www.cpdweb.org. To donate by check or credit card, please mail to the address below. Checks should be made payable to Campaign for Peace and Democracy. For credit cards, send your card #, exp. date and amount.

Mail to:

Joanne Landy and Thomas Harrison,
Co-Directors
Campaign for Peace and Democracy
2790 Broadway, #12, NY, NY 10025

From “Hope” to Hopeless

The Democrats’ Debacle

LANCE SELFA

FOR MORE THAN A YEAR, it had been obvious that the Democrats would face a debacle at the polls on November 2. And they did. In the largest congressional midterm landslide since 1938, the Republicans captured more than 60 seats, ending the four-year Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.

As expected, the GOP failed to gain the U.S. Senate. But that was the only consolation for the Democrats. The Republican sweep was so broad that the GOP now holds 19 state legislatures outright, 29 governorships, and the largest percentage of state legislative seats since 1928.¹ Ironically, as a result of the worst recession since the Great Depression, the Republicans now hold more power at the state level since before the Black Tuesday crash of 1929!

Because the GOP landslide/earthquake/tsunami (pick your meteorological metaphor) was wholly expected, the explanation for it was not hard to discover either. The explanation, of course, starts with the dire state of the U.S. economy. No incumbent party presiding over nearly 10 percent unemployment could hope to win accolades from millions of the unemployed and underemployed.

Although the GOP touted its gains as proof that Americans have rejected President Obama’s “socialist” agenda, rejection of the Democrats had a less ideological explanation. Only two years after the economic crisis punctured all the neoliberal and conservative myths about

the free market, and gave a Democratic administration the opportunity to change course, it seemed that not much had changed. Obama and the Democrats assumed the role as saviors of the corporate system facing the abyss in late 2008 and early 2009. Even though the Obama administration was not the originator of the massive bailouts of the Wall Street banks and the likes of insurance giant AIG, it became the chief defender of those programs.

It’s very likely that the massive government backing of the financial system saved it from meltdown, but that is cold comfort for the majority of Americans who continue to suffer high unemployment, loss of retirement wealth, and a massive foreclosure crisis. Obama and the Democrats legitimized massive government spending without changing any of their neoliberal assumptions. Instead, the administration has pursued a kind of “neoliberal Keynesianism”—putting trillions of taxpayers’ dollars at the disposal of private business, and trying to “incentivize” it to carry out social policy. It hasn’t worked. The banks and big corporations have been happy to take the money, but they haven’t committed to lending it, saving homes or hiring workers.

As critics like liberal economists Paul Krugman and James K. Galbraith pointed out, the stimulus plan passed in early 2009 was too small and ill designed to lift the economy out of its deep hole.² Unemployment continued to rise under Obama, feeding the public perception that “government” and “government spending,” was ineffectual. If the crisis of 2008 had discredited neoliberal nostrums, the continued crisis of 2009 and 2010 appeared to discredit liberal, “big government” solutions. Sixty-five

LANCE SELFA is the author of *The Democrats: A Critical History* (Haymarket Books, 2008). He is on the editorial board of *International Socialist Review* and is a regular columnist for *Socialist Worker.org*.

percent of midterm voters told exit pollsters that the 2009 stimulus package either hurt or had no impact on the economy.³

Meanwhile, opinion polls have registered some concern about the federal deficit. While the GOP claims this as support for its austerity program, public opinion experts note that concern about “debt” and “the deficit” is a proxy for concern about U.S. economic decline, and the sense that no one in charge—either in Washington or in Corporate America—cares much about how ordinary people are suffering.⁴ Once upon a time, official liberalism appeared to stand on the side of “the people.” Today it seems incapable of mustering much passion for ordinary people. It’s nothing short of scandalous that the Republicans could filibuster an extension of unemployment benefits for two months last summer, causing misery for millions, without the Democrats being able to make them pay for it politically.

If Obama and his neoliberal economic team of Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and soon-to-be-departed economic adviser Lawrence Summers botched the public’s chief priority — namely jobs — the administration also seemed to go out of its way to alienate its most ardent supporters.

Obama stiffed environmentalists when he endorsed the GOP’s “drill, baby, drill” solution to offshore oil drilling—only a few weeks before one of those offshore oil rigs caused the largest environmental catastrophe in U.S. history. For supporters of immigrant rights, the Obama administration has mouthed rhetoric in favor of “comprehensive immigration reform” while indefinitely postponing legislation, and deporting more immigrants than George W. Bush’s administration did. Obama has dragged his feet on ending the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy against gays in the military, despite overwhelming support in the public and even among the military brass to get rid of it. On top of this, the Obama administration has escalated war in one country (Afghanistan), and is still committed, despite

claims of withdrawal, to a sizable military presence in another (Iraq).

Even in what was supposed to be its signature achievement, the passage of health care

Gallup found 36 percent of
Americans voicing positive views
of socialism. Compare that to
the 18 percent of Americans
who identified themselves as Tea
Party supporters.

reform, the administration managed to rile up conservatives who agitated against a “government takeover of health care” while alienating advocates of genuine health reform. The bill that emerged from the Congressional sausage factory was so hedged with concessions to the pharmaceutical, hospital, and insurance industries that its costs may outweigh its benefits. No wonder a recent Associated Press poll found that four in 10 adults said they didn’t think Obama’s health reform went far enough.⁵

All of this produced what pollsters and pundits referred to as “the enthusiasm gap,” between conservative voters who couldn’t wait to throw the Democratic bums out and the traditional Democratic “base” groups (such as youth, African-Americans and trade unionists) who showed much less interest in the election than they did in 2008. Patricia Elizondo, president of a Milwaukee International Assn. of Machinists local, told the *New York Times* that the union had trouble motivating its members to get out the vote for the Democrats. “People have been unemployed for two years, and they’re unhappy that the health care bill was not as good as they expected,” she said. “Two years ago, I had many members going door-to-door to campaign. Now they’re saying, ‘Why should I? We supported that candidate, but he didn’t follow through.’”⁶

ABC's polling expert Gary Langer calculated that 29 million Obama voters in 2008 stayed home during the midterms, compared to 19.5 million McCain voters in 2008.⁷ Consequently, the electorate that turned up on November 2 was much more white, wealthy, old, and conservative than either the 2008 electorate or the U.S. population as a whole.

Crawling from the Wreckage

AS A RESULT, the Washington political establishment that emerged from the November 2 elections will be considerably more conservative than the current one. The right wing—in the form of the Republican Party and perhaps various organizations of the supposedly grassroots Tea Party movement—will have a bigger say in shaping the national agenda. Republican big wigs like House-Speaker-to-be John Boehner of Ohio and Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana made noises about refusing to compromise with the White House. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell told the *National Journal* that his main mission in the coming two years was to assure that President Obama would be a “one-term president.”

It remains to be seen whether this trash talk will be turned into action. Tea Partiers and Republicans have gotten far by railing against “Obamacare” and “out-of-control spending” without having to take positions that would be unpopular if they really spelled them out. Now, the Republicans face the prospect of translating their opposition to government spending and support for deficit cutting into concrete proposals.

When they get concrete, they're likely to disappoint their most fervent Tea Party backers. The *New York Times*' Frank Rich pointed this out: “What the Tea Party ostensibly wants most—less government spending and smaller federal deficits—is not remotely happening on the country club GOP's watch. The elites have no serious plans to cut anything except taxes and regulation of their favored industries.”⁸

The majority of Republicans who will be elevated to the Congress aren't inexperienced, fire-breathing ideologues, but veteran Republican politicians—even if they did latch onto the Tea Party.⁹ They're certainly a conservative lot, but they come fully marinated in the corrupt corporate-funded culture that surrounds both major parties.

Rich's point about the differences between the Tea Party base and the establishment Republicans who claim to speak for it is worth keeping in mind. But it's false to claim that the Republican establishment doesn't have any “serious plans” for austerity. It does. If it can get away with it, it wants to throw millions of the long-term unemployed off extended benefits, and it wants to slash spending on health care for the poor. Likewise, the Tea Party fringe may not get all that it wants from the GOP—but it has already shaped, at least in part, the national political debate. It has provided the Republicans with a “populist” gloss for their demands to further gut the social safety net.

Tea Party agitation has also helped legitimize a number of far-right ideas—from denying citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants to the idea that American Muslims want to impose sharia law on the U.S. judicial system. These wacky ideas won't become law, but the right's bigoted rhetoric can further poison the public debate on these issues—and give license to far-right hate groups who thrive on attacking immigrants and Muslims.

So make no mistake—the Republicans can do plenty of damage. But as long as the Democrats hold the presidency, the damage can be limited—if the Democrats want to “guard the change,” as they promised during the election campaign. That's the more crucial question.

In the lead-up to the election, the Obama administration, from the president on down, sent out two contradictory messages. On the one hand, Obama and White House spokesman Robert Gibbs attacked the Democrats' core supporters for, essentially, expecting too

much from 2008's Mr. Hope and Change. At the same time, Obama was making nice with the Republicans, urging them yet again to reach across the aisle to find bipartisan solutions.

Obama, the “centrist,” was setting the stage for his own planned shift to the right after the election. He was positioning himself—as Bill Clinton did in 1995 and 1996—as the sensible actor, working in a bipartisan fashion to enact policy over the objections of the Tea Party crazies and the “far left,” as the media describe the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Obama did nothing to dispel this expectation with his post-election press conference, where he proclaimed himself “humbled” and willing to listen to Republican proposals on a range of topics.

Triangulation and Austerity

AFTER THE HOOPLA of the election dies down, the first major development to look for is the report of the president's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. The commission, appointed jointly by Obama and the leaders of both parties in Congress, is supposed to make its recommendations on December 1. It's stacked with deficit hawks who are likely to propose sharp and unprecedented cutbacks in social entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security.¹⁰

The commission's proposals are likely to shape the debate on federal spending that will ensue after the new Congress assembles in January. Obama has already said that “everything must be on the table,” indicating that no program, including Social Security, will be considered safe from cutbacks. Obama and the Democrats have already ceded so much ground that any sort of Clintonite triangulation will amount to meeting the Republicans halfway on *how much* to cut programs like Social Security, not whether to cut in the first place.

During the election campaign, most Republicans didn't have the confidence to detail the kind of cuts in entitlements they would like to force. But an assist from the bipartisan com-

mission and from Obama could make cutting Medicare or raising the Social Security retirement age seem like the “centrist” way to go. And if liberals and Democratic “base” groups protest, Obama will attack them with the same rhetoric he used during the campaign.

Even on policies where the GOP and Democrats have more initial agreement—say on spending for infrastructure development or education reform—these will likely come with huge concessions to neoliberal ideology, such as expanded privatization and assaults on labor organization. And this is because the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are committed to neoliberalism.

Facing the coming onslaught, the leaders of many unions and advocacy groups for civil rights, women, LGBT people and the poor, will be tempted to cling even more closely to the Democrats and Obama. But if the last two years have shown anything, it's the perils of that strategy.

What Do We Do Now?

FOR MUCH OF OBAMA'S TERM, the leading liberal organizations—like the AFL-CIO, the NAACP, and the Human Rights Campaign—have played “good soldiers” in trying to carry out the White House's agenda. As a result, there has been no sustained national effort to give voice to millions facing economic devastation today. Instead, the only “movement” seemingly validating popular anger is the right-wing Tea Party. It's bad enough that the Right has seemed to capture the “populist” tenor of the times, but popular organizations that should have been mobilizing to press the administration were instead pressed into service as the last line of defense for a corporate party than disdains them.¹¹

The Democrats decried the millions in secret corporate money that flooded into the elections industry following the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision. At the same time, *Citizens United* freed union treasuries to spend unlimited sums on the Democrats. Thus,

the *Wall Street Journal* was delighted to report that a last minute contribution to the Democrats from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees actually made AFSCME—not the Chamber of Commerce—the largest contributor in the 2010 election cycle.

“We’re the big dog,” AFSCME’s Larry Scanlon told the *Journal*. “But we don’t like to brag.” But this big dog ended up with its tail between its legs. After threatening for months to punish Democrats who opposed labor priorities like the Employee Free Choice Act and the “public option” for health care reform, AFSCME backed conservative Democratic incumbents like Ohio’s Zack Space.

“We know he has been bad on the issues, but the point is, if you don’t elect the Zack Spaces of the world, then you end up with Speaker Boehner,” said Scanlon.¹² Unfortunately for working people, the sums of money that unions threw away on corporate America’s second favorite party took away from other more important tasks, like organizing or mobilizing for jobs. [For the record, Space lost by 14 percentage points, and we’re still going to end up with Speaker Boehner.]

Despite their grave disappointment in Obama and his administration, liberals and Democratic Party-oriented members of the left urged a vote for the Democrats in November. Long-time labor and civil rights activist Bill Fletcher, Jr., a board member of Progressive Democrats of America, made this appeal in the week before the election:

Well, we are now facing a moment of truth. This is not the boy who cried wolf. In addition to the Democratic Congress as a whole being under assault from the Republicans, there are some liberal and progressive Democratic elected officials who are under siege, and about whom we should be concerned. There is an energized, right wing army waiting to turn back the clock. So progressives should be enthused right now — enthused to defend our friends, but also to defeat our enemies.¹³

Fletcher’s “left” rhetoric simply covered for the

standard appeal to vote Democrat as the “lesser of two evils.” And as the socialist Hal Draper taught us years ago, when the left casts its lot with the Democrats, it’s merely admitting its own marginalization and poverty of vision. “... [T]he Democrats have learned quite well that they have the lib-lab vote in their back pocket. . . . With the lib-lab votes in a pocket, politics in this country had to move steadily right-right-right This is essentially why—even when there is a Lesser Evil—making the Lesser Evil choice undercuts any possibility of really fighting the Right.”¹⁴

Admittedly, left-wing political alternatives to the Democrats are weak today. The nominal third party, the Working Families Party, endorsed the New York Democratic slate, including the union-bashing Governor-elect Andrew Cuomo. In genuinely independent efforts, Illinois Greens ran a full slate of statewide candidates, winning about 3 percent of the vote. Veteran socialist Dan La Botz and Green activist Howie Hawkins ran spirited statewide campaigns for office in Ohio and New York, respectively. With tremendous odds against them, these campaigns were able to put forth a political alternative to the two parties of big business.

Despite the weakness of organized left politics, it’s worth remembering that two recent national opinion polls — including one by the conservative Rasmussen Reports — have shown that more than one-third of Americans have a positive view of “socialism.” Gallup found 36 percent of Americans voicing positive views of socialism. Compare that to the 18 percent of Americans who identified themselves as Tea Party supporters in a *New York Times*/CBS survey of the movement.¹⁵ Who would have thought that in center-right America, potential supporters of socialism outnumber Tea Party supporters by two to one?

These statistics tell us that there are millions of people who could potentially be mobilized against the coming onslaught from the Right.

We face the challenge of building organizations to fight effectively for working people's demands. But we also face the challenge of building a mass-based left wing political alternative to the Democrats. Without that, we will continue to find ourselves facing the same Hobson's choice between "terrible" (the GOP) and "not as bad" (the Democrats).

NOTES

1. Keith Johnson, "State-Level Wins Augur More GOP Safe Seats," *Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 2010.
2. See James K. Galbraith, "It Was the Banks," November 5, 2010 at www.commondreams.org/view/2010/11/05-13.
3. For an analysis of exit poll data, see Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin, "Election Results Fueled by Jobs Crisis and Voter Apathy Among Progressives," Center for American Progress Action Fund memo, November 4, 2010.
4. For an interesting discussion about the real meaning of ordinary peoples' concerns about the deficit, see Ryan Grim, "Mayberry Machiavellis: Obama Political Team Handcuffing Recovery," *Huffington Post*, July 6, 2010, www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/06/mayberry-machiavellis-oba_n_636770.html. Even the conservative 2010 electorate was split, with roughly similar numbers of those surveyed calling for the government to prioritize deficit reduction and calling for increased government spending to create jobs.
5. See "The Associated Press 2010 Health Care Reform Survey by Stanford University with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, conducted by Knowledge Networks, August 31-September 7, 2010, at <http://surveys.ap.org/data/KnowledgeNetworks/Health%20Reform%20Topline%20for%20Posting.pdf>.
6. Elizondo quoted in Steven Greenhouse, "Unions Find Members Slow to Rally Behind Democrats," *New York Times*, September 17, 2010.
7. Gary Langer, "Obama's No Shows: 29 million," ABC News, at <http://blogs.abcnews.com/thenumbers/2010/11/obamas-no-shows-29-million.html>.
8. Frank Rich, "The Grand Old Plot Against the Tea Party," *New York Times*, October 30, 2010 at www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/opinion/31rich.html?ref=frankrich.
9. See the analysis of political scientist Brendan Nyhan, "How Much Are Tea Party Candidates Hurting the GOP?" October 22, 2010, at www.brendan-nyhan.com/blog/2010/10/did-the-tea-party-weaken-gop-candidate-quality.html.
10. A preview of the commission's report—which takes aim at Social Security, Medicaid, and the federal workforce—came with the November 10, 2010 release of the wish list of commission co-chairs Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson. See Megan Carpentier, "Fiscal Commission Co-Chairs Simpson and Bowles Release Eye-Popping Recommendations," Talking Points Memo, November 10, 2010 at <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/11/deficit-commission-co-chairs-simpson-and-bowles-release-eye-popping-recommendations.php>.
11. The October 2 "One Nation" rally organized by a coalition of groups, including the AFL-CIO and the NAACP, brought out hundreds of thousands of working people. But instead of making the rally a focal point in a fight for jobs, the organizers kept its focus on getting out the vote for the Democrats.
12. Brody Mullins and John D. McKinney, "Campaign's Big Spender," *Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2010.
13. Bill Fletcher, Jr., "Enthusiasm?: I Am Not Interested in Things Getting Worse!" October 27, 2010 at [www.pdamerica.org/articles/campaigns/2010-10-27-10-51-34-campaigns.php](http://pdamerica.org/articles/campaigns/2010-10-27-10-51-34-campaigns.php).
14. Hal Draper, "Who's Going To Be the Lesser Evil in '68?" reprinted in Lance Selfa, *The Democrats: A Critical History* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 199-205.
15. See Gallup, "Socialism Viewed Positively by 36 Percent of Americans, February 4, 2010, at Gallup.com; Kate Zernike and Megan Thee-Brenan, "Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated," *New York Times*, April 14, 2010.

Rip It Up and Start Again

CHRIS MAISANO

THE CURIOUS THING about the 2010 midterm elections is that their results were totally unsurprising and highly illuminating at the same time. They were unsurprising because they confirmed what we all expected would happen. The voters who propelled Democrats to power in the two previous elections in 2006 and 2008 stayed home. Voters dissatisfied with the status quo turned out in droves to support the party out of power as the economy plunged into its worst crisis since the Great Depression. While two short years ago it seemed as if the GOP was ready to be consigned to history's dustbin, it turned out that they were incredibly lucky to be expelled from power at the exact moment economic misery began to descend upon millions of Americans. It allowed them to place the blame on the other guy, and the American electorate, with no viable electoral alternative to support, ratified this argument with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While much has been made of the ascendance of the Tea Party as a supposedly transformative force in American politics, a majority of voters have nearly identical (largely negative) attitudes toward both the Democratic and Republican parties. This wasn't a "wave election" or a mandate for the Republicans to pursue their agenda full bore. The ruling party almost always loses seats in a midterm election and when economic anxiety prevails. Considering the confluence of forces, it is hardly surprising that the Democrats did so badly and the Republicans did so well. Anyone

with a modest grasp of the broad contours of American politics could have seen it coming from a mile away.

While it's easy to greet the midterm results solely with a knowing shrug of the shoulders, they also illustrate starkly the confusion and disorientation that defines the current conjuncture. One would think that an economic crisis that is so clearly the product of a rapacious, predatory capitalism would boost the political fortunes of the left, broadly defined. It has not, both in the United States and in Europe. It has quickened the consolidation of center-left and center-right parties around a program that accepts the ongoing legitimacy and inevitability of capitalism (embodied here in the United States by the Obama administration's inheritance and extension of the Bush administration's bank bailouts), while the main current of opposition to the status quo springs not from the radical or socialist left but from the extreme right.

Considering the circumstances we find ourselves in, this development is nothing short of disastrous. While the rise of political formations like the Tea Party should not be overblown because they remain fragmentary and inchoate, it's undeniable that they have exercised an alarming degree of influence over the discourse concerning what the appropriate political responses to the current crisis should be. The default language of discontent in the U.S. still is and always has been a pre-modern, petite-bourgeois pseudo-radicalism that is woefully incapable of addressing the problems that define life under 21st century capitalism. If implemented in any significant fashion, the program advanced by the emboldened right would do nothing but deepen the crisis and increase the misery afflicting the unemployed and the foreclosed. And as

CHRIS MAISANO is a public librarian, a student in political science at the CUNY Graduate Center, and a member of the New York local of Democratic Socialists of America. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.

the last two years have so amply demonstrated, Democratic control of the White House and Congress does little to ensure that adequate action to address the problems we face will be taken, especially when the labor movement and the radical left are too weak to push the party in a more progressive direction.

Under these distressing circumstances, one is reminded of Antonio Gramsci's assessment of the state of affairs between the two world wars: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." In light of the situation we find ourselves in today, can there be any doubt that he was speaking about us as well?

The stark truth is that there currently is no real left to speak of in American politics. While there is much progressive activity around a wide variety of issues and campaigns, including electoral efforts within and independent of the Democratic Party, there is no organizational vehicle capable of uniting these various strands around a common programmatic agenda. Perhaps more importantly, there is no significant anti-capitalist ideological orientation within what today passes for the broad left. The vast majority of the labor movement as well as the organizational remnants of older iterations of the American left have given up on the possibility of socialist transformation, redefining their goals within the coordinates of a basically capitalist system, albeit with the roughest edges sanded off.

Yes, we are all likely better off in the immediate term with Democrats rather than Republicans in power. But the continued commitment of what might be called the "actually existing left" to Democratic electoral success has long since succumbed to the law of diminishing returns. As Adolph Reed, Jr. argues in a recent issue of *New Labor Forum*, as time passes this constrained ideological and political orientation "will be able to do little more than negotiate the best possible terms of defeat in a revan-

chist regime of upward distribution that is the practical logic of neoliberalism." Considering the exceedingly grim future that awaits us if a radical challenge to capitalism is not reconstructed, none of us should be satisfied with widespread accommodation to this defeatist

Gramsci: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

logic. New radical political formations, as well as the ideological resuscitation of anti-capitalism within the labor movement and the broad left, are urgently needed.

Faint glimmers of hope for reconstruction can be found in the modest electoral successes enjoyed by left candidates and parties in certain races around the country. Socialist Party candidate and longtime activist Dan La Botz garnered over 25,000 votes in his campaign for one of Ohio's seats for the U.S. Senate, despite being shut out of debates and having little electoral machinery to speak of. In my own state of New York, Green Party gubernatorial candidate Howie Hawkins received well over 50,000 votes while running on an unabashedly left platform, restoring the party's ballot status that it had lost in 2002. And while the labor-backed Working Families Party (WFP) seriously disappointed many leftists by endorsing pro-austerity, anti-union Democrat Andrew Cuomo in his victorious campaign for governor, the party received well over 100,000 votes on its line. This ensures that it will keep its ballot status and move up to a higher line on the ballot in future elections as well.

While these electoral efforts are somewhat

encouraging, they are not nearly enough. They also put the cart before the horse. Independent electoral campaigns tend to be ephemeral affairs and do not significantly contribute to the long-term organizational and political reconstruction necessary to ensure sustainable electoral success. Significant barriers also confront the development of fusion voting based efforts like the WFP. Fusion voting is legal in only a handful of states and regularly practiced only in New York. A state-by-state effort to legalize fusion would likely be a waste of precious time and resources. Also, as the WFP's endorsement of Cuomo in New York has shown, a fusion party backed by organized labor is crippled by a fundamental contradiction. It seeks to be a third party and a labor caucus within the Democratic Party simultaneously, and since its constituent unions are still dependent on their relationship with the Democrats it can't credibly threaten to end that relationship (or at least put it on a temporary hiatus) when the chips are down. The WFP has been instrumental in winning modest but important victories such as a hike in the state's minimum wage, but it may have run up against the limits of its fusion strategy. Similar projects in other places would likely confront the same problems.

Instead of a narrow and premature focus on electoral mobilization, leftists would be wise to attempt a different approach that has the potential to reconstruct a radical challenge to capitalism from the ground up. In their 2009 book *Solidarity Divided*, labor intellectuals Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Fernando Gapasin propose the creation of what they call "working people's assemblies" to serve as the primary vehicle for a long-term process of left political renewal. As they describe it, such an organization would pursue organizing and ideological work within a specific geographical area (a city or a metropolitan region) to bring together struggles in communities and workplaces and begin the process of building a common political agenda for the left and eventually spread outward. It

would be composed of local labor unions, worker centers, tenants' organizations, non-sectarian left organizations and parties, and any other social forces interested in building an alternative to the status quo. An assembly would begin by focusing on the problems that most concern people living in the area and crafting strategies to deal with them, as well as advancing an ideological analysis of why those problems exist. As the assembly grows in strength, it might then decide to engage in electoral politics in a manner it sees fit. On this point, we should be tactically flexible on a case-by-case basis. If the relationship of forces is such that supporting a Democratic candidacy or running a candidate in a Democratic primary for local or state office would advance the goals of the organization, then that is what should be done. If supporting or mounting an independent candidacy at the local or state level is a viable option that can really contribute to building an organization in the longer term (not just an ephemeral protest candidacy), then we should not hesitate to follow that course either. While the electoral arena should likely not be the primary focus of the organization's activity, if engaged with properly it can contribute much to the rebuilding of left movements on a local level.

Over the last year, activists in Toronto associated with the Socialist Project group have helped to lead the process of building such an assembly in their city. The early outlook for the Greater Toronto Workers Assembly seems promising. They have managed to bring together a wide array of labor, left, and community organizations that might not ordinarily work together and have begun building local campaigns for free mass transit and against cuts in public services. It is an exciting project that could potentially serve as something of a model for leftists elsewhere to emulate.

The political reverberations of the economic crisis should have demonstrated once and for all that it's well past time to, in the words of the great early 1980s Scottish post-punk band

Orange Juice, “rip it up and start again.” The Keynesian social accord between labor and capital is long gone, but the organizational and ideological shibboleths of what remains of the postwar left live on like zombies that refuse to die. The Shachtman-Harrington project of realigning the Democrats into a labor/social democratic party is an impossibility under current circumstances, and independent electoral efforts in the absence of a mass-based radical

left are similarly futile. What remains is the long-term, painstaking reconstruction of a radical left capable of posing a serious challenge to a capitalist system that might very well be approaching its economic and ecological limits. In these desperate times, we would do well to heed Lenin’s injunction to “be as radical as reality itself” and be willing to experiment organizationally and ideologically. We can’t afford not to try.

A Socialist Campaign in Ohio

DAN LA BOTZ

THE DAN LA BOTZ Socialist for Senate Campaign in Ohio in 2010 was one of the most successful socialist electoral campaigns in more than 60 years. The 25,000 votes cast for La Botz compare favorably with earlier Socialist Party candidacies in Ohio, with other socialist parties, and with reformist parties to the left of the Democrats. The La Botz campaign, in fact, compares favorably with all Socialist, Communist and Socialist Workers Party and other leftist party campaigns since the heyday of socialism. Only Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas, received more socialist votes in Ohio than Dan La Botz. These 25,000 votes for La Botz in 2010 represent one of the most significant votes for social justice in the United States since the 1940s.

No socialist candidate has received so many votes in Ohio since the 1940s. In the 2008 presidential election, the Socialist Party candidate Brian Moore won 6,528 votes nationwide, of which 2,731 were from Ohio. In general in statewide elections, Socialist Party candidates get around 5,000 votes, though in some small states that can be larger percentage of the vote. For example, in 2010 Jane Newton, candidate for the House of Representatives in Vermont got 3,222 votes, coming in fourth out of four candidates with 1.35 percent of the vote. While those represent impressive showing in small states and local contest, the 25,000 votes for the SP in the larger, more moderate state of Ohio,

though less than one percent (.68 percent) of the vote represents something qualitatively different in this more conservative region of the country.

When we compare the La Botz vote with candidates who described themselves as socialist in recent national elections we can see its significance in a different light. In the 1970s, the Socialist Worker Party candidates received about 100,000 votes nationally, while in the 1970s and 1980s the Communist Party candidates received between 25,000 and 60,000 votes. Since then socialist presidential candidates have received between 3,000 and 5,000 votes.

The La Botz vote in Ohio also compares favorably with the Green Party statewide candidates. While they are to the left of the Democratic Party and take good positions on many issues and should be supported, Green Party candidates do not run as anti-capitalist candidates, much less as socialist candidates. Ohio Green Party candidate for Governor in Ohio Dennis Spisak got 56,734 votes or 1.51 percent, while Howie Hawkins of New York also got over 58,123 or 1 percent. In Illinois, Rich Whitney got 99,625 votes or 3 percent. Though the Green Party candidates got higher votes, they are not of a different order of magnitude than our showing in Ohio.

Where the Support Came From

THE GREAT MAJORITY OF VOTES for La Botz came from Ohio's largest metropolitan areas. These urban areas contributed over 20,000 votes to La Botz, while rural areas contributed less than 5,000. Almost half of all of La Botz votes, some 12,459, came from the three largest urban areas—Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati—while almost one third, 6727 votes, came from the second tier cities—Dayton, Akron, Toledo,

DAN LA BOTZ is a Cincinnati-based teacher, writer, and activist. He edits Mexican Labor News and Analysis and sits on the editorial board of New Politics. He is a member of the National Committee of Solidarity, a socialist organization in the United States. For more information: DanLaBotz.wikidot.com

TABLE I
Votes for Dan La Botz in Ohio 2010

URBAN AREA	VOTES	PERCENT OF LABOTZ'S URBAN VOTES
Cleveland	4,713	23
Columbus	4,257	21
Cincinnati	3,489	17
Dayton	1,706	8
Akron	1,527	7
Toledo	1,488	7
Youngstown	1,063	5
Canton	943	5
Mansfield	280	1
Total Urban Votes for La Botz	20,571	
Total Rural Votes	4,797	
Total LaBotz Votes	25,368	

The table above thanks to Taki Manolakos

Youngstown and Canton.

Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Akron, Toledo, Youngstown, and Canton are historically major manufacturing centers, today fallen on hard times, while Columbus, the state capital, is a major administrative, health, and education center. The residents of these cities are overwhelmingly working class people, wage earners, and the level of labor union organization is higher in Ohio at (about 14 percent) than that of the U.S. as a whole (about 12 percent). We can reasonably conclude that workers and union members contributed to this vote, though students and other groups must also have voted for La Botz.

The Election and the Vote

GEORGE VOINOVICH, Republican Senator from Ohio, decided not to run for office again in 2010. The Republican candidate to replace him was Rob Portman, a former 7-term Republican Congressman and member of the George W. Bush cabinet as U.S. Trade Representative and Director of the Office of Management and the Budget. The Democratic Party candidate was Lee Fisher, a former state representative, state

senator, Attorney General, and unsuccessful candidate for governor. Also seeking the seat were two Tea Party conservatives, one on the Constitution Party ticket and one running as an independent.

The Socialist Party had not run candidates in Ohio for a long, long time. I was the first Socialist running for the Senate in Ohio since 1936 and the most recent socialist candidate in the state since Norman Thomas's write-in campaign for the presidency in 1940. Other socialist party candidates had appeared on the ballot in the state in the 1970s and 1980s, though they had won no significant percentage of the vote.

Since the 1940s, Ohio had had laws which restricted and in effect made it impossible for parties other than the Republicans and Democrats to get on the ballot. A series of lawsuits brought in the early 2000s and court decisions had eliminated those restrictions and the Ohio Secretary of State created rules which made it quite easy to get on the ballot. We only needed to collect 500 signatures and we collected 1,200 and were certified.

The May 4 Primary Elections

THE MAY 4 SOCIALIST PARTY PRIMARY elections represented the first response to our campaign. Greens, Democrats and independents could not vote in the Socialist primary, unless they wanted to become registered as Socialists. To vote for me as the Socialist candidate, one had to go into the polling place and in front of friends and neighbors, poll workers, and strangers request a Socialist Party ballot from the poll workers. Many were unaware of this option and some of those who were aware found it difficult to publicly declare that they were socialists. Still, in the primary I received almost 400 socialist votes.

The most important result of the primary election was the victory of Lee Fisher over Jennifer Brunner in the Democratic Party. Fisher, a rather typical, not very militant liberal Democrat from Cleveland, had defeated Brunner, a

candidate who was considered more progressive on social issues. He was able to win because the national and state Democratic Party organizations came out strongly on his side and pushed Brunner out of the way. Many Brunner supporters deeply resented what they saw as the party organization having stolen her factory. The large

Throughout this campaign we had hardly a hostile remark or even a critical comment. People received us with politeness, toleration, and generally with respect even when they differed with us.

numbers of disgruntled Brunner Democrats were potential voters for me.

The Election Nationally and in Ohio

THE NOVEMBER 2010 ELECTIONS saw many Americans vote against the administration of President Barack Obama and the Democrats. Polling organizations reported that the Democrats had lost the support of Catholics, women, gays and lesbians, and voters over 60. For the first time since exit polls began asking, more women voted Republican than Democrat.

CANDIDATE	PERCENT	VOTES
Rob Portman – R	57	2,125,810
Lee Fisher – D	39	1,448,092
Eric Deaton – C	1.7	64,017
Michael Pryce – I	1.3	48,653
Daniel La Botz – S	0.7	25,368
Arthur Sullivan – WI	0.04	1,512

SOURCE: Ohio Secretary of State at <http://vote.sos.state.oh.us/pls/enrpublic/f?p=130:6:0>

African-Americans, Latinos, and working class voters were less motivated than before to vote for the Democrats.

The election represented a victory for the Republican Party and a resounding defeat for the Democrats who lost the House of Representatives and some Senate seats. In Ohio, the Republican John Kasich defeated Governor Ted Strickland, despite campaigning in Ohio by Obama and Biden. Republicans defeated Democrats for all statewide offices. Ohio has 18 Congressional Representatives, and out of ten Democrats, five lost their seats.

The Tea Party movement has been particularly strong in Ohio where various groups backed right-wing Republicans, Constitution, and Libertarian candidates, and rightwing independents. Libertarian candidates, rightwing but generally anti-war, got about 3 percent of the vote in several congressional districts.

The Campaign Organization

THE VOTE FOR LA BOTZ in the three major cities reflected the campaign's priorities and its efforts over the nine-month campaign. The Dan La Botz, Socialist for Senate campaign had several objectives: 1) to educate people in Ohio about socialism; 2) to meet, engage, link and strengthen activist networks in the state; 3) to build unity on the left; 4) to win votes for my campaign on Election Day as a measure of the success of our educational work. To carry out these objectives we had to build an organization.

At the beginning of this campaign, I and my key collaborators decided that, since there was virtually no existing Socialist Party organization in the state, the most important thing was to build a campaign organization. We naturally focused on building the organization first in Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland, the state's three greatest population centers. We identified local left leaders and naturally they had their own organizations or networks made up of local activists. We worked to incorporate those leaders and their fellow activists into our campaign.

We created local organizations in those cities and a little later in Toledo. Our local campaign organizations were usually led by a handful of three to five local activists in each city who held small meetings usually of not more than five or 10 people. Those attending those meetings varied from week to week. Our campaign organizer kept a data base of local activists, created a listserv through which they could communicate with him and each other, helped to convene local meetings, and sometimes attended those meetings.

Who Made up the Campaign?

THE LA BOTZ SOCIALIST FOR SENATE campaign was made up of socialist, labor, peace, and housing activists. Many of those led the campaign locally were involved of the years in many of these movements and others such as LGBT, environment, and immigrant rights.

In Cincinnati where I live and work, my key supporters came from Cincinnati Progressive Action (CPA), a small activist group that grew out of a fight over police racism and brutality about 10 years ago. Since then the group has worked on other matter of criminal justice but has also engaged in anti-war activity and in support for the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) based in Ohio. Members of CPA were also active in several labor unions, some of them local officers of those unions and some delegates to the Cincinnati AFL-CIO Labor Council. One is a longtime housing activist.

In Cleveland our key supporters came from two distinct groups: first, a group of older peace activists associated with Women Speak Out for Peace and Justice (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) and, second, a few young left and labor organizers involved in the Industrial Workers of the World who had created something called the Cleveland Economic Democracy Network. Also supporting us in Cleveland was a leading member of the Ohio State Labor Party, a local branch of the Labor Party founded by labor unionist Tony

Mazzocchi in 1996.

The Columbus group was more diverse than the groups in Cincinnati and Cleveland. In Columbus, Mary Loritz, SP Ohio State Chair, played a leading role. We were also supported by my campaign treasurer, a member of the DSA, and by another couple of DSA members and a couple of Solidarity members who are also local Teamster activists. We were slow in getting an organization in Toledo/Bowling Green. A former FLOC organizer, now teaching college, took on the role of our local organizer. He brought together about ten people who functioned as an excellent local committee.

By the end of the campaign we had 380 supporters active throughout the state. There were 119 in Cincinnati; 45 in Columbus; 48 in Cleveland, and 20 in Toledo/Bowling Green. We also succeeded in building groups of supporters on local campuses: Ohio University at Athens, 25; Kent State, 5; Miami University, 13; Oberlin, 21; Ohio Wesleyan, 21; and Wooster College, 27. In the best case, at Oberlin, we got 20 percent of the student vote.

Information and Communications

WE RAISED MONEY from a small base of generous supporters, less than 200 contributors who gave on the average \$25, though many gave \$100, a couple \$500, and our largest contribution from one individual was \$1,000. We received donations of as little as \$5 or even \$1. We had by the end of the campaign raised a little over \$10,000. I contributed none of my own money to the campaign. We estimate that we traveled around 15,000 miles throughout the state as well as on trips out of state related to the campaign. We believe that we printed and distributed between 50,000 and 100,000 pieces of literature.

We created good electronic communications from early on in the campaign. The Dan-LaBotz.com website was established on Feb. 26, 2010 and by Nov. 2, 2010 we had had 16,839 unique visitors to the site. On Nov. 1 and Nov. 2

we had about 1,500 visits each day. There were a total of 23,875 visits, 94,324 page visits. I also wrote a book for this campaign, *Vision from the Heartland: Socialism for the 21st Century*, which by Nov. 2 had had 900 downloads.

In addition to DanLaBotz.com, we also had two Facebook pages, Dan La Botz and Dan La Botz, Socialist for Senate. Each of those sites had over 1,000 “friends” from throughout Ohio, around the United States and around the world, many of whom commented on the campaign as it developed. We also had a YouTube channel where we put up about 30 videos. The basic “Dan La Botz, Socialist for Senate” video received 2,728 views and a few others received about 500 views. We created listservs for our local organizations and for all supporters.

In addition to our own communications, we filled out many media questionnaires and were interviewed by TV stations about our views. The newspapers carried our opinions to tens of thousands of voters and the TV stations aired our interviews which may have been seen by hundreds of thousands.

Our Strategy

WE HAD TO MAKE STRATEGIC DECISIONS about where to spend our time, where to deploy our supporters, and how to use our economic resources. Our strategy was always to build on our strengths and to avoid undertaking tasks beyond our capabilities. We concentrated on those groups most likely to support us and did not attempt to reach either those who opposed us or those who might have been in the middle. I decided that I would spend my time speaking where I could build our local organizations or where I could speak in urban areas with large numbers of working class, African-Americans and students.

Similarly, we directed our supporters to work in those areas where we were likely to receive a good reception: universities and student communities, liberal communities, urban (as opposed to suburban) working class neighbor-

hood, African-American neighborhoods. We simply did not have enough supporters to be able to take our message to less sympathetic areas, such as the big city suburbs. While we recognize that two-thirds of Americans live in suburbs, they are a much greater challenge both logistically and politically, so we concentrated on the cities and on our most likely supporters.

A political campaign’s central activity is the candidate’s speech making and the candidate’s and supporters’ talks with the public. Early on in the campaign I developed a speech concentrating on three issues: 1) the economy and jobs; 2) the environment; 3) the U.S. wars abroad. I spoke about the country’s problems and our proposed socialist solutions in down-to-earth language without jargon, without academic terminology, without radical rhetoric, and without sarcasm or nastiness.

Altogether I gave my basic speech, in versions from 5 minutes to one hour in length (usually about 40 minutes) about 50 times either at candidate forums to which I had been invited or at meetings that we had organized. I probably spoke to between 1,000 and 2,000 people in that way. In addition, we handed out literature and engaged in conversations with many thousands of others at public events or in public places.

Conversations with the Public and Supporters

WE HAD SOME BRIEF CONVERSATIONS with voters while gathering petition signatures, while leafleting mass events, and while speaking at public candidates forums. We found that African-Americans were much more open to discussions with us, as were young people. Middle aged white people were the least willing to engage in conversations with us.

Everyone recognized, and conversations with voters confirmed, that the economy and particularly unemployment were the issues foremost on the voters’ minds. Ohio lost 400,000 jobs since 2006 and the state’s average unemployment rate was 9.5 percent officially, 17

percent unofficially and 30 percent in African-American and Latino communities. Many young people were finding it impossible to get that first job out of high school or college. Voters expressed to us their concerns about the economy and jobs.

Most of my conversations, however, were with people who were being drawn to our campaign because they were on the left. They were happy to see someone speak out on the war, on the environment, and on LGBT rights. And they were pleased to hear someone offering socialist ideas to deal with the economic crisis. Many of these people on the left appreciated my call not simply for nationalization, but for socialization of industry, for a democratically planned economy, and for workers' and consumers' involvement in the productive process.

Many on the left, of course, were concerned that supporting a socialist candidate would take votes away from the Democratic Party and help the Republicans. This argument got easier after the "progressive" Democrat Jennifer Brunner was defeated by the machine Democrat Lee Fisher. And it got easier still after Fisher fell 10 to 20 points behind Republican Rob Portman and then threw in the towel by giving his money to the party for other races.

We were fortunate from the beginning to have the pro bono services of an attorney and professor at Capital University in Columbus. He offered advice and help in the filing of our petitions, in dealing with some irregularities in the May 4 primary, and later in filing a complaint with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) because I had been excluded from the Ohio U.S. Senate candidate debates sponsored by a consortium of local newspaper and broadcasters. While the election is over, we are still pursuing this case.

Left Unity

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING we built this campaign based on cooperation between several left organizations, both as a matter of necessity

and as a matter of principle. Since the Socialist Party had only a handful of member in Ohio and no organizational infrastructure it could not function as the basis of the campaign. We had support early on not only from the Socialist Party but also from the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and from members of the Democratic Socialist of America (DSA). Later we met members of the Young Democratic Socialist (YDS) at local colleges. Socialist Alternative, while not active in Ohio, endorsed my campaign. A leading member of the Ohio State Labor Party (OSLP) called my campaign to the attention of its members, and many of them supported the campaign.

Inspired in part by my campaign, all of these left groups and others joined in a Socialist Contingent at the October 2 demonstration in Washington. Also in late November my campaign organized the Ohio Young Progressives Conference at Ohio State University in Columbus attended by 27 young activists, many from the ISO and YDS, and Solidarity and SP staff were also present. (<http://scrupulo.com/ohprog/index.html>) Finally, on October 31, 14 supporters from Toledo and Detroit—members of the SP, Solidarity and the ISO and others—canvassed 500 houses in Toledo. All of this represented a remarkable example of left unity and helped to make the campaign a success.

Weaknesses of the Campaign

WHILE WE SUCCEEDED IN BUILDING an organization in several of the state's major cities and among a variety of social activists, the campaign did have some serious weaknesses.

Though we had local union leaders and members in our campaign, we did not find a way to speak in union halls and to union members. The labor bureaucracy's alliance with the Democratic Party made it virtually impossible for us to get a hearing.

While we had a few African-American activists involved in the campaign and while I spoke at state and local NAACP meetings,

we never made any serious inroads in the black community.

Similarly with the Latino community which is important in Columbus and Cleveland. While I did attend a large Latino community meeting before the primary in Cleveland and was received with applause and cheers when I spoke, still we never had any Latino base.

While we created organizations in the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Toledo, we never succeeded in creating an organization in Dayton, Akron, Canton and Youngstown. While we had some supporters in those cities, we never got a group together there.

While we did have organizations on several Ohio campuses, we also failed to establish organizations on many campuses, most notably Cleveland State. We did not establish bases on any community colleges.

We failed to organize and mobilize our supporters to conduct door-to-door canvassing in neighborhoods in our key cities.

Conclusions

I OFFER SOME CONCLUSIONS here based on our experience in Ohio in 2010 for explicitly socialist campaigns run by socialist organizations.

The Socialist Party and other groups on the democratic and revolutionary left should continue to mount election campaigns as part of their repertoire of activities alongside labor and movement organizing, recruitment, and training of cadres. Elections provide one of the few situations where socialists, because they are candidates or their supporters are seen to have a legitimate right to speak to meeting, disseminate literature at public events, knock on doors, make phone calls, and attempt to recruit to the movement. We must take advantage of such opportunities.

We can as Socialists be successful in getting a hearing from the American people. Through-

out this campaign we had hardly a hostile remark or even a critical comment. People received us with politeness, toleration, and generally with respect even when they differed with us.

While socialist electoral campaigns are largely about the mass dissemination of socialist ideas to the working class, the labor and progressive movements, and to society in general, they should not be approached as educational or public relations matters. Socialist electoral campaigns must be approached as organizing campaigns aimed at building campaign committees, developing local leaders, and winning committed supporters.

The U.S. democratic and revolutionary left is small, limited to a handful of groups none of which has more than 1,000 members in the entire country. When the Socialist Party or other socialist groups undertake socialist electoral campaigns, they should attempt to conduct them on the basis of cooperation with other democratic, revolutionary, and left socialists. Unity on the left redounds to the benefit of all of the groups involved and to the movement as a whole.

We have to develop a way to reach working class voters in their unions, in their workplaces and in their communities. The Socialist Party and other socialist organizations will be able to do this only if they are oriented both to doing work in the workplace, the union and the community, and to conducting socialist education and recruitment as part of that work in the working class.

The Socialist Party and the revolutionary and democratic left made a small but significant advance with this campaign, but its real value will be seen in the ability of the left to prove more successful in reaching the American working class with its values, principles, and program.

Landrum-Griffin Act at 50

Has It Been Good or Bad for Unions?

HERMAN BENSON

AS SOON AS I ACQUIRED the hefty 2005 edition of *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, I lugged it onto the coffee table and opened to its comments on two fascinating cases: Marbury v. Madison and the Dred Scott decision. Then turning to Labor, the subject that preoccupies me, I discovered to my amazement that in all its densely packed, double-column 1,200 pages, dealing with the Court from day one, there was nothing about the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959 [LMRDA] or any of the landmark Supreme Court case that elaborated it, not a reference, not a word, not a single index listing.

The adoption of the LMRDA was one of those watershed moments in labor legislation. In 1959, by providing a measure of protection in federal law for union democracy, the act encouraged dissidents, reformers, radicals, and mainstream unionists who resisted repression, stolen elections, or corruption in their unions. By its impact on major unions, it has transformed the atmosphere in the labor movement. In all the ebbs and flows in the years that followed, despite periods of feeble enforcement, the law helped make internal union democracy, while still embattled, a morally respectable, defensible, and righteous cause in unions.

How explain so conspicuous an omission by the 362 *Oxford* contributors? Inexplicable, except perhaps that these are academics far removed from the nitty-gritty of union life.

And so to test my own disappointed reaction, I turned to four authors whose labor writings I respect as independent-minded, provocative, informative: two writers are *Labor Notes* radicals, a third is mildly to *Dissent's* left, and the fourth, perhaps microscopically to its right. (I hope I characterize them justly if not with scientific accuracy.) On the LMRDA, like the *Oxford*, they, too, turned out to be unexpectedly disappointing.

In his *Embedded with Organized Labor*, Steve Early writes about almost everything that interested him in a lifetime of union-related activity. No mention of LMRDA. In the 600 pages of two interesting volumes, Kim Moody ranges widely though recent labor history only to devote a few words to say that the LMRDA and Taft-Hartley were two pieces of legislation opposed by the labor movement, noting that “the object” of the LMRDA was “to weaken the power of unions in relations to employers.”

In his book: *American Workers, American Unions, 1920-1985* — another of my favorite labor works — Robert Zieger skirts by the LMRDA, commenting that it “left untouched the main features of Taft-Hartley and imposed stiff requirements of disclosure and standards of conduct that tightened the web of legalistic complexity already choking the labor movement.” Which is the sum total of all he writes about the law, even though it is so important a factor in the period he covers.

In 2002, with over 40 years of LMRDA experience behind him, in his *State of the Union: a Century of American Labor*, Nelson Lichtenstein refers to the LMRDA as “...a 1959 law bearing the names of Robert Griffin, a Republican from Michigan and Philip Landrum, a Democrat

HERMAN BENSON is editor of Union Democracy Review and author of *Rebel, Reformers, and Racketeers*. He is a founder of the Association for Union Democracy and now its secretary-treasurer.

from Georgia, Its very name [popularly, the Landrum-Griffin Act] therefore embodied the anti-unionism of the coalition of Northern Republicans and Southern Democrats who had enacted Taft-Hartley and campaigned against monopoly unionism in the 1950s. Landrum Griffin tightened restrictions against secondary boycotts and gave the Labor Department greater

How explain so conspicuous
an omission by the 362 *Oxford*
contributors? Inexplicable, except
perhaps that these are academics
far removed from the nitty-gritty
of union life.

power to regulate union financial affairs. But the most ideologically significant sections of the law was a union member 'bill of rights' whose meaning encapsulated an essentially right-wing understanding of union dynamics."

It is difficult for me to understand how after the experience of all those years, Lichtenstein, whose works I especially admire, could write such a paragraph. Without thought, he must have been saving time by recopying old notes.

LMRDA Title I, aptly entitled the "Bill of Rights," protects civil liberties of members in their unions — free speech, right to form caucuses, to distribute literature. (One weakness: it is enforceable mainly by private suit, which is ordinarily too expensive for victimized rank and filers.) With good intentions, Title III aimed to protect subordinate union bodies from repressive trusteeships imposed arbitrarily by internationals. (But it is so poorly formulated that it has proven to be a failure.) Title IV, which requires "adequate safeguards to insure a fair election," protects the right of candidates to campaign freely. It has been ef-

fective in providing recourse against the most arrantly stolen elections. (Its weakness is that it generally requires enforcement action of the U.S. Department of Labor and does not provide routinely for private suit. Consequently, decisions of the DOL are subject to political pressure.) Titles II and V and other sections require unions to provide members with financial and other information about their operations. "Miscellaneous" Section 610 makes it a criminal offense to deprive a member of LMRDA rights by violence or threats of violence. It is simply not enforced. In the labyrinthine course of hearings and debates on LMRDA legislation, union antagonists did succeed in introducing a number of amendments to the Taft-Hartley law that made it more oppressive to unions. But these were unrelated barnacles fastened on to the main body of legislation that have had no relation to LMRDA enforcement.

Top union leaders, almost unanimously, with the honorable exception of the UAW, ended up publicly hostile to the LMRDA precisely because its bill of rights did offer some federal protection for the democratic rights of members in their unions. In the fifty years that followed, the politically correct official labor establishment policy has been unwaveringly consistent. In every LMRDA case that has come before the federal courts, where the democratic rights of union members were at stake, the official labor line has been hostile to the expansion or protection of those rights and on the side of limitation or repression. If I have overlooked even a single exception, I would feel indebted to any scholar who could reveal it. LMRDA enforcement has weakened the authoritarian control of leaders over members; it has enhanced the rights of members over their leaders. It has required unions to reveal on multiple forms how they spend most of the members' money, including a listing of officers' salaries; they naturally find this requirement repellent and burdensome. It may dilute the power of their reputation among their constituents; but it leaves intact their power to

represent members against employers.

Representative Landrum and Senator Griffin did end up as the LMRDA's official sponsors, but that sponsorship hardly made the law a product of the Republican-Southern Democratic coalition. For one thing, in the give-and-take negotiations over the formulations of its provisions the law went through many versions and had shifting sponsors, including John F. Kennedy.

(In 1977, the president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers ruled that members of IBEW Local 1547 in Alaska had no right to vote on ratifying their union contract. They sued in Federal court against their president — and lost. However, two congressmen submitted affidavits on their behalf, supporting their right to vote. One was Robert P. Griffin, senator from Michigan, who wrote that the LMRDA “was designed to broaden and extend — not to deny — the principles of democracy to membership in labor organizations.” The other was Phillip Landrum, retired representative from Georgia, who wrote that he interpreted the LMRDA to mean “that each union member has a legal right to vote on matters that affect him, including collective bargaining agreements.” Would we expect something different from flaming liberals? Even conservatives can be counted on, at times, to speak out for civil liberties. That's one of the features of democracy in the United States.)

In the context of 1959, those who voted for the LMRDA were a disparate left-to-right bunch motivated by a mixed bag of objectives, principles, prejudices and whatnot. The bill of rights in its essentials, so intolerable to labor leaders, was first proposed by the American Civil Liberties Union and inspired by Clyde W. Summers, later a leading director of the Association for Union Democracy. Both the U.S. Constitution with its bill of rights and the LMRDA with its bill of rights might have a hard time assembling a majority if they were put to a vote in Congress today. In any event, by

now the conflicting motives of those who voted in 1959 are now irrelevant. What is relevant is how it worked out. None of the horrors of the bill of rights, hysterically predicted by labor officials, have come to pass — unless you consider that the requirement that unions give extensive financial information to their members is a weakening assault on the labor movement. There are weaknesses: The law has loopholes and it is not enforced vigorously enough.

The Effect on Life in the Labor Movement

BEFORE LMRDA, members who criticized their officers could be — many were — disciplined on charges of slander for criticizing their leaders. Union elections were stolen without recourse for the victimized membership. Supporters of opposition caucuses could be expelled on grounds of dual unionism or disruption. Members who went to court or government agencies in quest of recourse against injustice could be disciplined if they failed to go through months or years of futile internal union procedures. Local dues could be raised and assessments imposed without membership input. Union leaders could hold office for decades without elections; locals could be put under trusteeship forever and their treasuries plundered. In some unions you could be disciplined for circulating an internal union petition. And more of the same. The LMRDA made all this illegal. This law, like all others, is often violated in spirit and in fact. But the practices are illegal and avenues of enforcement are available.

Robert F. Kennedy, a Democrat who served as counsel during the McClellan hearings of 1957- 1959 and not part of any right wing reactionary congressional coalition, wrote that the committee had received an estimated 112,000 letters from unionists, mostly rank and filers, complaining of abuses in their unions. Even after allowing for the normal quota anywhere of career malcontents, that's a lot of people. The adoption of the LMRDA in late 1959 gave vent

to legitimate pent up dissatisfaction in some unions and triggered an explosion of organized opposition to corruption and of demands for democracy.

In the Painters union in New York City, organized crime control over District Council 9 was shaken by Frank Schonfeld's reform victory as secretary treasurer after a long campaign that began in 1962, a victory made possible by the LMRDA. In the union's San Francisco Bay Area, Dow Wilson led a successful insurgent campaign in Painters District Council 8. The LMRDA stopped the union from expelling him. He had taken the first step toward organizing a national insurgency when he was murdered in 1966.

In 1960, in the new spirit of the times, an insurgent Better Union Committee won 7 of the 15 spots on the international executive committee of the United Papermakers and Paperworkers Union. They accused the leadership of sweetheart dealings with employers; they called for the adoption of a Public Review Board modeled on the UAW; they proposed that the AFL-CIO Ethical Practices Codes and a bill of rights for union members be written into the constitution, and for a Bill of Rights for union members. Frank Grasso, a vice president who later helped lead the insurgents, wrote in 1957, "Sincere trade unionists must rally to the cause of union democracy which is today in a period of great crisis."

In the early 1960s, in the Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers, an insurgent caucus, the Rank and File Movement for Democratic Action rallied support among locals and members. It warned the union (prophetically) about the incipient dangers of corruption in the union and called for a more democratic system of electing international officers, for an ethical practices code, and, like its counterpart in the Paperworkers, for a UAW-type Public Review Board. By 1964, the Canadian locals split off to form their own union and the locals on the West Coast broke away,

formed their own independent union, and won collective bargaining rights for 22,000 workers in the area.

Fifteen locals of the International Association of Machinists in California, in 1961, joined to organize the IAM Membership Committee for Sponsoring Grand Lodge Officers, explaining that members "should have more than one candidate ... to choose from." Roy Brown, West Coast vice president, drummed out of the administration official family, ran as insurgent candidate for general secretary treasurer and got about 27 percent of the votes. Following his defeat for the international post, the IAM's California Conference of Machinists elected him to its full time job of secretary treasurer.

These and other evidences of the renewed stirrings of union democracy were characteristic of the period immediately following the adoption of the LMRDA in late 1959. A fuller record is available in *Union Democracy Review* published in those years, 1959 to 1972. The law proved effective enough to spur reformers and rebels into action, but not enough to sustain them. The momentum was lost; flowers bloomed, most of them to fade. For a time, these movements had succeeded in shaking up the bureaucratic establishment in a few major unions. However, apart from Frank Porter, an exceptional labor writer for the *Washington Post*, the progressive media, the liberal and radical intellectuals, the labor historians remained indifferent or uninformed about reformers in unions those days. But things changed dramatically around 1972 with the revolt in the United Mine Workers.

In May 1969, Joseph ("Jock") Yablonski announced that he would run against Tony Boyle for president of the United Mine Workers. John L. Lewis had retired in 1960; Boyle took over in 1963. Yablonski, part of the UMW leadership under Lewis, was still a member of its international executive board when he decided to oppose Boyle. "Union democracy is the single most important issue in the campaign for election

of a new UMW president," he wrote, "I challenge you [Boyle] to grant full democracy to the UMW by removing your autocratic grip on the districts." In an election riddled with fraud, Yablonski was credited with 37 percent of the vote; but, with his election challenge pending before the DOL he remained a potent threat to the Boyle regime. As 1969 ended, Yablonski, along with his wife and daughter were murdered. (Later Boyle was convicted for orchestrating the murder and died in prison.)

Yablonski's murder did not end the UMW reform movement. His followers rallied in caucus to form the Miners for Democracy (a right protected by the LMRDA.) Joe Rauh, the eminent civil rights and labor attorney who had initially represented Yablonski, assembled a group of liberal attorneys into the Washington Project. (One was a young attorney named Richard Trumka.) With foundation backing, they provided pro bono legal support to the Miners for Democracy that enabled the insurgent miners to enforce their full their rights under the LMRDA (A.K.A. Landrum-Griffin.) In Federal court under the LMRDA, they restored autonomy to districts that had been under trusteeship for decades, Under the terms of the LMRDA, they processed a successful election appeal to the Labor Department; in Federal court, the judge ordered a new election under conditions that made it one of the most democratic union elections on record. With their rights spelled out — and enforced — under the LMRDA, the insurgent Miners for Democracy swept the election in 1972 and ousted the murderous Boyle. These events provided spectacular evidence of the power that can be mobilized

Has anyone ever claimed that government action in Brown v. Board of Education or the Voting Rights Act undermined or disoriented the struggle for civil rights? Why should the cause of union democracy be any different?

on behalf of union democracy by a three-part combination of elements: insurgent unionists, liberal/civil libertarian allies, and the authority of Federal law, in this case the LMRDA.

The victory of the insurgent miners inspired reformers in other unions. The interest of writers, intellectuals, and liberal foundations had been stimulated by the miners, and soon they had more to think about. In 1972, deploying all the skills, experience, and connections that had served the

miners so well, Joe Rauh, by then an enthusiast of what he saw as the union democracy movement, represented Ed Sadlowski in a successful challenge to a stolen election in the Steelworkers union. In a rerun election supervised in 1975 by the Labor Department under the terms of the LMRDA and with his rights to a fair election protected by the Federal law, Sadlowski the insurgent was easily elected as regional director of the 125,000-member Steelworkers Chicago-Gary Region 31, the largest in the union, a powerful base for possible future advance.

The reform victory in the Miners union and Ed Sadlowski's big win in the Illinois Steelworkers kindled illusions: If you could change the Miners and perhaps the Steelworkers, then the labor movement and, who knows? maybe even the nation. Illusions yes, but the LMRDA inspired illusions that had consequences.

In 1977, when Sadlowski ran for president of the Steelworkers at the head of an insurgent slate, a group of eight liberal foundations came up with over \$100,000 to finance a Fair Election Project to enforce Sadlowski's LMRDA rights to campaign and to try to assure an honest count. He lost. Nevertheless, the Association for Union Democracy, which had administered

the Steelworkers project, was able to expand operations in 1980 when most of those foundations contributed \$100,000 to a three-year organizational campaign. In the spirit of the times, Arthur Fox formed the Professional Drivers Council, which later merged with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union. *Labor Notes* was founded as a network of union activists for more militant policies and was soon attracting hundreds of union activists to its national conferences. The National Lawyers Guild set up a new National Labor Law Center to defend the rights of dissidents in the labor movement. You could count on a whole group of young labor lawyers around the country for pro bono legal representation in union democracy cases. From Chicago, the Midwest Center for Labor Research began publication of its *Labor Research Review*, which provided a forum, free from official labor control, for discussion by union activists, local leaders, and labor educators. The Nader-inspired Public Citizens Litigation Group initiated its own union democracy litigation program staffed by two young attorneys, Arthur Fox and Paul Levy. They represented reformers around the country pro bono and both joined the AUD Board of Directors. The Association for Union Democracy, which had been languishing since its founding in 1969, got a major infusion of moral support — and money — that enabled it to spring to life.

BUT AS THE YEARS LEAFED BY, it became clear that the labor movement would not be transformed by idealistic reformers and that what lay ahead was the familiar, hard, long term, slogging quest for social justice. In 1984, recalling how he helped the miners win their battle, Joe Rauh summed up his own experience, “After helping to clean up a union, you get an overblown reputation. Everybody thinks you can do that kind of thing over and over again, but it’s not easy to repeat.”

Most of the foundations drifted away and turned back toward mainstream liberal and

charitable causes. Public Citizen cut back and finally abandoned its union democracy project. *Labor Research Review* was shelved. The National Lawyers Guild — a weather vane for the thinking of that loosely defined “progressive” community, had second thoughts. After three years, the NLG went through a minor crisis and dissolved its union democracy-oriented National Labor Law Center (which bequeathed its printed literature to the Association for Union Democracy.) Dan Siegel, a Guild attorney who opposed the dissolution explained, “It’s not easy to make a living representing rank-and-file caucuses; and few unions, even progressive ones, are willing to hire lawyers with a reputation for suing unions.” And so many of those idealistic young attorneys drifted away. They grew older, with families. Their idealism took a slightly different tack as they continued to do fine work for the labor movement, now at a secure living wage for established unions. But there seemed no urgent justification for squandering talents on an insurgency that promised no near-term sweeping results.

However, although the pro-labor “community” outside and around the labor movement — the liberals, radicals, civil libertarians, progressive foundations — was losing interest in union reform, insurgents inside the labor movement — and some local leaders — their rights bolstered by the LMRDA, remained alive and active. In the IBEW, a young electrician named Dan Boswell, who had been removed from the executive board of New Jersey Local 164, fined, and suspended because he criticized union policy, went into federal court under the LMRDA with the help of AUD and forced the union to remove provisions in its international constitution — illegal under the LMRDA — that had authorized repressive penalties against thousands of IBEW members in the previous ten years. In the years that followed, dissidents mounted two formidable challenges to the IBEW international leadership.

In 1989, when marine engineers faced a

corrupt officialdom, their insurgent caucus leaders came across 1972 news clipping about the miners and AUD, where they learned about their election rights under the LMRDA. Two years later they won their battle, and the crooked officers were convicted in Federal court. Tim Brown, backed by a Federal court decision under LMRDA, campaigned successfully for president of the Masters, Mates and Pilots; Jerry Tucker was elected UAW Regional Director in a rerun election supervised by the DOL under the LMRDA. When the election was stolen in the big healthcare Local 1199 in New York, the DOL ran a new election that permitted the opposition to take back their union. Examples can be multiplied, illustrating that even in those days when there was a disconnect between union dissidents and potential allies outside the labor movement, the LMRDA continued to bolster union members' rights. On the other hand, there are still no credible reports of even a single incident where LMRDA enforcement has undermined the labor movement.

In all this time, the outside liberal community had lost interest, But the scene changed in 1989. As part of a national campaign against organized crime in America, the Department of Justice had sued the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The consent decree that settled the case subjected the union to a monitorship under the jurisdiction of a Federal judge and asserted that union democracy was an essential element in keeping the union free of mob domination. And so, while an Independent Review Board concentrated on getting rid of crooks, the union was compelled to change its constitution to provide for the direct election of international officers by membership referendum. A Federal judge took control of international elections away from the union hierarchy and shifted it to court-appointed election monitors. Candidates got the right to campaign freely and were guaranteed an honest count.

Utilizing rights newly guaranteed under the consent decree, Teamster for a Democratic

Union, which had been battling for years essentially as a marginal gadfly, blossomed out into a full-fledged opposition movement with growing influence. By 1991, TDU was able to provide the indispensable rank-and-file support that was decisive in defeating the old guard and electing Ron Carey as IBT president at the head of an insurgent slate.

The election of Ron Carey shifted the balance of power in the AFL-CIO. With the support of the giant IBT in 1995, John Sweeney could lead the successful opposition to the Lane Kirkland regime in the AFL-CIO. By 1995, Andy Stern was girding up his SEIU for his own minor civil war against Sweeney. In the course of these events, insurgency has become almost an acceptable commonplace in the American labor movement, and everyone seems to consider it normal to exercise all the rights inscribed in law by the LMRDA.

At the root of the big disputes in the unions these days, is the search for some way to reverse the declining strength of the labor movement and revive its power as a force for social justice in America. Out of those debates one notion stands out clearly, not only as an idea but as a practice. To meet the power of organized and centralized big capital, it is argued, the labor movement must itself become centralized and its leadership internally unified and coordinated, speaking with one monolithic voice to the membership inside and to the public outside. In this view, the locals, once viewed as the living heart of union life, are reduced to administrative shells or reconstructed into sprawling bureaucratic monstrosities. Leaders give lip service to the ideals of union democracy; they make no frontal assault on the LMRDA and seem reconciled to its provisions; But, they find openings to make an end run around its requirements and evade its democratizing spirit.

Locals are merged into district councils where their autonomy disappears and members lose their right to vote on dues; they are denied the right to elect council officers who wield

powers once reserved to locals. Recalcitrant locals are trusted in violation of the spirit, if not the technical language, of the LMRDA. The law calls for the "equal right" of members to run for office and participate in union business. That right is adulterated by meeting attendance and continuous good standing rules which "equally" limit rights to a selected few. Due process becomes a mockery when trial committees are composed of political appointees. Members are denied the right to vote on ratifying union contacts. Stewards and business agents are appointed, not elected.

These practices flow from a philosophy that has been familiar in centuries of debates over the principles of government. It is the idea that all power must be arrogated to an all-wise leadership which bestows the benefits of civilization upon a grateful, but passive, constituency. In national life, we have mostly moved away from such conceptions. Even those who still cherish such ideas are reluctant to profess them overtly. In the labor movement, however, such notions remain respectable and, in some sections, dominant.

An alternative view, what now even seems like an old-fashioned traditional view, sees the power of the labor movement arising from bottom up out of the activity, initiative and loyalty of the grassroots membership: union democracy helps unleash that power.

The hostility of mainstream labor leaders to the LMRDA, especially to its bill of rights is easy to understand. Union democracy makes them uncomfortable and so they are especially distrustful of union democracy enforced by the power of federal law. But the distrust of the LMRDA by independent-minded liberal, left wing, radical progressive supporters of the labor movement, inside unions and out, is a matter

of another kind. Mostly, they are constitutionally suspicious of conservative, bureaucratic, or capitalistic government and fear that reliance upon the government weakens the power of rank-and-file action from below. That's what they think. But in practice, progressive leaders of union insurgencies make use of the LMRDA, but they remain reluctant to mention it. It's like a Victorian attitude toward sex: everyone does it but no one talks about it.

Has anyone ever claimed that government action in *Brown v. Board of Education* or the Voting Rights Act undermined or disoriented the struggle for civil rights? Why should the cause of union democracy be any different? The LMRDA has given an impulse to insurgency and continues to bolster it.

In the labor movement today the need for effective leadership and the requirements of a robust democracy are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Why, for example, does strong leadership require that the right to run for office be limited to a favored few? Why can't labor unions, in confrontation with big capital, tolerate the creation of a supreme court, totally independent of the union power structure, to provide recourse to members against abuse in their unions? Why must a leadership, because it is burdened with great social responsibilities, be endowed with the autocratic right to discipline and dispose of its critics?

In any event, as the labor movement wrestles with the great issues of the day, the rights of members in their unions does receive protection under the LMRDA, and a growing number of unionists are learning how to use those rights for a voice in determining the future of their labor movement. The need is, not to disparage the law, but to strengthen it and to better enforce those rights.

What Is Union Democracy?

ROBERT FITCH

I'D LIKE TO BEGIN by asking a question that has probably occurred to you already: How come despite the biggest economic downturn since the 1930s, and not withstanding the Obama victory which was supposed to have created a center-left realignment, American public opinion has veered to the Right; not the Left? Why have middle class and some working class people been attracted to the Tea Party; not towards progressive organizations; or towards organized labor? According to Gallup and Pew, support for organized labor has actually fallen sharply. In their polling history, it's never been lower. Gallup's been polling since 1936.

I don't think the answer is that the American people reject Left solutions to societal problems — like single payer health care. Or wider Left perspectives, like anti-capitalism. On the contrary, the sole piece of encouragement from recent polls, is the lack of support for capitalism. Only a 53 percent of Americans clearly prefer capitalism to socialism. Among people under 30, Rasmussen reports, it's essentially even.

One reason for the shift against unions that followed the downturn may be the De Tocqueville syndrome. Explaining the hostility of the French towards the aristocracy prior to the Revolution, the French historian observed that the aristocrats' loss of power was not accompanied by a decline in their fortunes. As organized labor shrinks in numbers, it seems more and more like a powerless labor aristocracy. The comparatively high pay and benefits won by workers over the years offer targets for resent-

ment, which the Right, if it knows anything, certainly knows how to motivate.

Another possible reason for the Right's ascendancy is that the Left — particularly organized labor — doesn't offer broad channels for popular opposition and the Right does. In the Tea Party we see what labor hasn't been for generations: a social movement. The ratio of paid to unpaid participants is low; formal organizations are bypassed by mass action from below; individual fear is channeled into collective indignation; and a common purpose is achieved. Today, about a quarter of the U.S. electorate identifies with a very militant, albeit malignant movement.

Consider by way of contrast, organized labor's response after the Upper Big Branch Mining disaster. The AFL-CIO's Rich Trumka issued what his press people called "a blistering statement." It made some obvious points. Under the "the profit system" — Trumka observed, "Many mining companies, have given too little attention to safety over the years and too much to the bottom line." This is true. But isn't that why we have a Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)? The problem, as prize winning reporter Ken Ward of the *Charleston West Virginia Gazette*, observes, is that the MSHA is a weak agency with a shameful tradition of enforcement lapses. It's been a coddler of coal companies, not an enforcer of law and regulation. Not just under Bush, but for nearly two decades going back to the Clinton Administration. And as the *New York Times* recently documented, the pattern of laxity continues under Obama. The President, after all, like former president Bush, is a big supporter of "clean coal"; according to environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. he's "an indentured servant" of the

ROBERT FITCH *has served as a business agent for a craft union and a consultant to a public sector union. His most recent book is* Solidarity for Sale *(Public Affairs, 2006).*

coal companies; under his administration, the MSHA continues to favor coal production over mine safety.

You'd think this would be an opportune

Labor's subordination of itself
to the national Democrats goes
back to pre-WWI days, to Samuel
Gompers' decision not to form a
labor or socialist party.

time for organized labor to demand that the MSHA enforce its rules. Or better, call for even tougher rules and stiffer penalties. And to back up that call with action. Yet Trumka, a former miner himself, never called the Administration to account; no threat to strike or march on Washington; no call for demonstrations. Not even a noontime pause to recall those who sacrificed their lives for profit.

But then you might ask, what's Trumka to do? The United Mine Workers is just a shadow of its former self. Officials claim over 100,000 members in public; but they report only 78,000 on their federal LM-2 report; and of these, some sources report only about 14,000 active members. So it's not as if organized labor had the leverage to stiffen the spine of the bureaucrats at the MSHA.

BUT WAIT A SECOND, it does. The federal official responsible for mine safety is a fellow by the name of Joe Main. He's the former head of mine safety for the United Mine Workers. He was arguably the weaker of the two candidates for the job. Once appointed he had the chance to establish a consistent standard for floating coal dust.

Yet Main chose not to. Instead of creating a new effective standard, he and his boss,

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, held out as the standard of mine safety an existing mine with a union contract: the Patriot Mine Co.'s Federal No.2. Hilda Solis said she was "in awe" of its performance. It was, she proclaimed, a genuine model of union-management cooperation. But the Patriot Mine No.2, it was revealed in February, not only had an injury and violations rate twice the national average — it is under Justice Department investigation for felony falsification of records. "Explosive levels of methane were found in sealed parts of the mine," the *West Virginia Gazette* reported," after at least one foreman admitted he falsified a required safety examination of the sealed area." In reply to *Gazette* inquiries, MSHA hung up the phone.

You can see how Trumka is boxed in. What's he to do? Lead a march on Washington against the guy he just got appointed? His dilemma follows as a predictable consequence of organized labor's traditional inside the beltway strategy. Labor's subordination of itself to the national Democrats goes back to pre-WWI days, to Samuel Gompers' decision not to form a labor or socialist party — like European trade unionists — but to operate as a pressure group inside the national Democratic Party. Gompers' decision, in turn, was foreordained by the locals' strategy, going back to the 19th century to line up behind big city Democratic machines like Tammany Hall. Trumka's box is a cage that has been forged by decades of vassalage.

Yet back in 1995, when John Sweeney and Rich Trumka came to power on the New Voice ticket, many labor Leftists saw a break with the past. Sweeney and Trumka were said to be products of a "revolt" — albeit a palace revolt; they said they'd rather block bridges than build them. There was talk of a revival of the 1960s social movements.

Instead what we got was a revival of the offensive strategy of the Ohio State football teams of the 1960s: Coach Woody Hayes' famous "three yards and a cloud of dust." The basic principle was similar. Simple, repetitive,

low risk campaigns; where even with poor execution you couldn't lose all that much. In the increasingly common card check campaigns, which relied on employer neutrality, unions increased their chance of winning recognition, but diluted the meaning of recognition. And unlike Woody Hayes, whose teams regularly moved the ball down the field and won a lot of games, organized labor has continually lost ground. Since the advent of the New Voice, there are a million less union members; 2 million less in the private sector. The share of private sector workers' wages in national income is at an all time low. Still the labor chiefs send out their cheerleaders as if labor was running up the score against corporate America. They perform cartwheels; they shake their pom-poms. "Rah Rah, Sis boom bah..EFCA! EFCA! EFCA!"

There's no reason to suppose that organized labor's playbook will change soon. So where is change going to come from? One hope held out by some labor Leftists is that it will happen spontaneously. Labor leftists can continue to do what they've always done. But workers will spontaneously revolt, occupy the factories, and demand justice. It happened in Chicago, at the Republic Windows and Doors' warehouse, didn't it? Sometimes Rosa Luxemburg's name is attached to this kind of wishful thinking. But Rosa Luxemburg didn't think workers could fight effectively without developing new movements to replace old, depleted forms of labor organization. Or without political parties to take the initiative in building labor movements.

The only purely spontaneous actions in which human beings engage are reflex actions like blinking and gagging. All other actions are the product of culture. The 200 militant warehouse workers in Chicago were overwhelmingly immigrants who came from Latin countries with a very different labor culture from ours. They brought that culture here with them. But most immigrants assimilate to our less solidaristic union norms. When conservative garment boss David Dubinsky first arrived here from

Czarist Russia he was a revolutionary socialist. So was the SEIU's Dennis Rivera when he came here from Puerto Rico. We can't import an alternative labor culture, the transformation has to begin here.

Is it possible for the labor Left, as presently constituted, to be the change agent? Please pardon me if I express my doubts. Labor leftists are those who see organized labor not simply as a kind of forklift to raise wages and deliver them to specific groups of workers, but in terms of its potential for uniting the working class and transforming society. Ideally, they view their own involvement not as a source of livelihood, but as a vocation.

Like mainstream labor, however, the labor Left's playbook has a Woody Hayes-like consistency. And not much has changed in the way of basic analysis of labor's plight and what it needs to do since the days of Max Shachtman, the founder of the Trotskyist Workers' Party — and ideological mentor to many of America's most prominent labor Leftists.

One reason for the lack of novelty, I would submit, is that much of the labor Left is under the spell of a dominant ideology. An ideology is a body of ideas that re-arranges reality in order to justify a pattern of actions and political choices. A dominant ideology incorporates a smaller group in a larger group with different values and aims. It's not that the subordinate group is "brainwashed" by the dominant group. On the contrary, the subordinate group freely develops ideology. The point is to enjoy the benefits of subordination — often described as "resources" — while without feeling the loss of autonomy. Or the betrayal of the original values and aims. The strategy of a dominant ideology is to strain at gnats while swallowing camels.

THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY of the labor Left is probably "union democracy." Certainly not all labor Leftists believe in the primacy of union democracy. (The "Call for Labor Renewal" in 2005 by prominent labor Leftists includ-

ing Bill Fletcher Jr., hardly mentioned it.) But union democrats offer the clearest sense of what organized labor must do to realize its potential. Rather than simply deplore symptoms of decline — the inability to strike, organize, create a movement, or move a political program — they offer a *structural* analysis of labor's decline. Since labor leaders depend on the structure — the set of legal and political institutions on which their authority rests — such analysis risks antagonizing the leaders and reducing the possibility of gaining access to union “resources.” By contrast, union democrats have the courage to dissent in a clientistic union culture whose highest value is loyalty. And where sanctions can result in a lifetime loss of livelihood. Such clarity and courage deserve the respect of criticism.

Union democracy owes its origin to Max Shachtman the brilliant, charismatic dissenting Trotskyist who co-founded the Workers' Party in 1940. He defined the field of left politics — whether in the Soviet Union or in American trade unions — as a struggle between “democracy” and “bureaucracy” (see “Left Wing of the Labor Movement?” 1949). His use of this binary — conformed to the fundamental requirement for ideological production — that its defining terms be “empty signifiers”: empty in the sense that either they don't exist at all, or the term's meaning is so ambiguous as to justify almost any political course.

Admittedly, Shachtman himself seems like an improbable progenitor of Left labor's ideology since Trotsky's one-time “foreign affairs commissar” wound up as the ally of the most inveterate business unionists including those promoting the Vietnam War. By the mid-50s, he was defining the struggle for democracy as the battle for the allegiance of labor leaders rather than union members. But his political direction can be understood as a logical consequence of his premises: all labor leaders are bureaucrats. But some bureaucrats — the totalitarian Communists — are worse than others. And with the exception of the Soviet Union itself, no Com-

munists were more bureaucratically top-heavy and therefore more evil than the CPUSA. Ergo “union democracy” consists in the struggle to ally with the less evil bureaucrats against the most evil — the American Communists.

As Shachtman began to drift more and more to the Right, he was opposed by two of his main disciples. The first was Hal Draper — who would later write the influential, but one-dimensional, *Two Souls of Socialism*; and who also co-founded the Berkeley-based Independent Socialist Club — from which Teamsters for a Democratic Union descended; the other was Herman Benson, the Brooklyn-based founder of the Association for Union Democracy. They gave “union democracy” a less paradoxical slant, one more attuned to the values of the labor Left.

In Draper's model, two and only two vectors exist in the political universe: up and down. There's the democratic vector. It's made up of those on the bottom exercising pressure from below. And there's the bureaucratic: where the topmost issue orders from above. True labor leftists help the former and oppose the latter.

Leftists however must operate with great care. First, they must make sure their opposition is loyal. “That means,” Draper said, “loyal to the interests of trade-unionism.” Second, the true interests of trade unionism demand that there be only one union — not in the Wobbly sense of One Big Union; but in the AFL CIO sense of maintaining the system of traditional jurisdictional monopolies. So a split in a business union leading to two unions competing for the same jurisdiction is not dual unionism. Any effort to create a union on alternative foundations however is dualism and therefore deplorable. “Time and again,” he explained, “experience has showed that any kind of breaking of real, new territory can most successfully be done outside the framework of an existing organization which has become fossilized. But not outside the trade union movement.” Why AFL-CIO fossils should be an exception Draper doesn't explain.

According to Draper any union that's created on the basis of "some ideological aim about the nature of the union movement" is bad. Whereas a union trying to seize another's jurisdiction is okay. Draper accepts the seeming paradox that Rosa Luxemburg and the IWW deviated from labor principles; whereas the mob-run Laundry Workers Union did not.

Given Draper's definition of trade union interests, it's no surprise that he would later oppose the strategy of "industrialization" that emerged within his organization — permeating the AFL-CIO with rank-and file "struggle groups" — the openly socialist precursors of what would become the non-socialist Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Draper's best example of true fidelity to trade union principles was his wife's career as a middle level official with a west coast garment union.

Herman Benson, the former labor editor of the Shachtmanite *Labor Action* did support TDU. It was only one of many labor reform groups he supported and advised since he founded the Association for Union Democracy in the mid-60s. Since then he's become labor's outstanding civil libertarian; it's hard to think of anyone who's done more to defend workers' Landrum-Griffin rights. Any regular reader of AUD's *Union Democracy Review*, or Benson's blog will find no sharper or more knowledgeable criticism of union autocracy. That the academic leftists who organized the 1995 Columbia University "Teach-In with Labor" could exclude him said more about their stature than his. Unfortunately, though, Benson sees politics and trade unionism in almost exactly the same binary terms as Draper and Shachtman.

For him American politics exemplify the "eternal conflict" between bureaucracy and

democracy. According to Benson, the labor movement is a great pillar of American democracy. "But this great pillar of democracy,"

he observes, "is itself nibbled away by the mice of bureaucracy... to paraphrase Emerson, 'Bureaucracy is in the saddle and is riding mankind.'" Bureaucrats stifle the energies of the workers; they make them apathetic. It's the job of Leftists to help the workers chase the

away the bureaucratic mice away by making their unions more democratic.

But what is "democracy"? Benson gets testy when forced to confront this question. It seems academic to him. What could it possibly mean other than plain old American democracy? The Bill of Rights as conceived by the founders. Or as he puts it "democracy-democracy." More critical reflection might unravel a paradox that ought to concern Benson. Unions — like the Teamsters — have become a lot more democratic in the sense he offers without becoming more democratic in a more substantive sense. Prior to Landrum-Griffin (1959), elections weren't federally mandated. Many unions didn't have them. Or had them only rarely. Now at least there is what political scientists call "minimal" democracy — there are elections; there is competition between politicians for votes. But no sense that workers are sovereign or that union regimes are democratic in the sense Lincoln made famous: of, by, and for the people.

The Teamsters have gone from mob-domination to what may be America's most democratic union — at least in Landrum-Griffin terms. But since inception of direct elections for national officers in 1991 and federal election oversight (which brought down reformer Ron Carey) fewer Teamsters participate in them. In the last election, only about a quarter of the

Union micro politics rarely offers workers the opportunity to consider much less exercise leverage on wider, supervening issues.

members bothered to vote even when provided with mail in ballots. It seems as if the struggle for democracy produced a lot more political vitality than “democracy” itself.

Apathy can’t be explained, as Benson would have it, by the bureaucratic trampling of union civil liberties. Because bureaucrats don’t normally run unions. As anyone who’s ever worked as a union bureaucrat will attest, they do what they’re told by elected officials. Andy Stern’s rule over the SEIU has been seen by Benson and others as the triumph of centralism and bureaucracy. Stern created his own barons from his entourage, whom he sent out to rule the provinces. But last month, labors would-be King John met his Runnymede. The barons said, “No mas!” Stern’s resignation and their refusal to ratify his chosen successor as president, illustrates just how powerful the centrifugal forces working to empower the local baronies remain in the U.S. model of unionism. The King can make barons; but the barons get local fiefdoms that give them the potential to unmake the King.

In our system, which features 25,000 semi-autonomous locals, the elected officers win office not because they have the support of the staff. It’s actually the other way around. They have the support of the staff because they win elections. And they win elections because they’ve built a political machine made up of patronage followers who exchange loyalty to the union boss for positions and perquisites. The machine can usually count on staying in power as long as it delivers a union premium and — in craft unions — keeps the out-of-work list short.

BENSON NOTWITHSTANDING, political apathy is a natural product of this one-party machine culture — and of the narrow restrictions on the political agenda created by local autonomy. These confine the worker to a low political horizon shaped by his local’s contract and his own individual grievances. Just like district politics in the south Bronx or ward poli-

tics on the southside of Chicago, union micro politics rarely offers workers the opportunity to consider much less exercise leverage on wider, supervening issues.

That the local union acts as a kind of political Lunesta is bad. Worse though than the centrifugal forces isolating workers, are those antagonistic forces created by the goal of the local union premium. The whole legal infrastructure of exclusion, coercion, and exclusive bargaining is designed to enable local members to earn a wage higher than those doing the same work outside the local. Unsurprisingly, the local union member tends to see other workers in competitive terms: both the non-unionists undercutting his contractual wage — as well as other unionists seeking to take “his” work. Whereas the most basic aim of unionism is to unite workers by taking wages out of competition.

My first sense that there was something deeply wrong — not just with this or that labor leader or even with their collective propensities — but with foundations of American unionism came on a picket line. It was being manned by a Local 608 carpenter whom I later got to know and work with on *Hard Hat News*, a rank-and-file paper. He was an Irish-American very active in the carpenter reform movement who at the time was picketing the use of non-union labor in a Wall Street office- to -residential conversion that was so common during the downturn of the early 90s. The workers on the job were Asian carpenters. Patrick expressed no racial animosity. He simply insisted that Asians were welcome to join the union. Only though, if they could persuade their contractor to become a union contractor. So the non-union workers faced a real catch-22. They were regarded as scabs because they were working non-union; but effectively, they weren’t allowed to join the union either. This exclusionary feature of craft unionism goes back to the 19th century. J.S. Mill criticized it; so did Engels. Union democrats don’t.

The real democracy deficit in American labor unions is not that the locals are bureaucratic. It's that there are American style locals at all. What's missing from the one-dimensional ideology of union democracy, imprisoned in the metaphor of bottoms and tops, is any sense of the scope of political conflict.

The aim of the Right is always to restrict the scope of class conflict — to bring it down to as low a level as possible. The smaller and more local the political unit, the easier it is to run it oligarchically. Frank Capra's picture in *A Wonderful Life* of Bedford Falls under the domination of Mr. Potter illustrates the way small town politics usually works. The aim of conservative urban politics is to create small towns in the big city: the local patronage machines run by the Floyd Flakes and the Pedro Espadas.

The genuine Left, of course, seeks exactly the opposite. Not to democratize the machines from within but to defeat them by extending scope of conflict: breaking down local boundaries; nationalizing and even internationalizing class action and union representation. As politi-

cal scientist E.E. Schattschneider wrote a generation ago: "The scope of labor conflict is close to the essence of the controversy." What were the battles about industrial and craft unionism; industry wide bargaining sympathy strikes, he asked, but efforts to determine "Who can get into the fight and who is excluded?"

The first step in the transformation of American unionism in the 21st century is to get beyond exclusion, accomplishing a task that unions in other countries accomplished as early as the 19th. A labor Left that breaks with the old playbook will bypass the autonomous local union, it will fight to end monopoly unionism, creating a system of representation that offers workers a choice of political ends, transforming finally a culture that breed sectionalism into one that promotes solidarity. Because what the left Labor needs is not union democracy but working class democracy.

Based on a talk given at the Left Labor Club, April 14, 2010



“We Want To Be Heard!”

ROBERT JOE STOUT

UNIFORMED AGENTS of Mexico's Federal Investigative Agency (AFI for its initials in Spanish) yanked three inmates out of their cells in the minimum-security state prison at Ixcotel, Oaxaca in November, 2008 and transported them to San Bartola Coyotepec, another Oaxaca state prison, for “interrogation.” One of the three inmates, Victor Hugo Martínez, told activist friends that the federal investigators beat him and threatened to “make your family pay” if he didn't confess in full to crimes of which he'd been accused two years before and for which he'd been sentenced to prison.

Although they demanded a confession, the federal agents made it clear that Martínez' in-prison activities prompted the beatings and threats, not the crime for which he already had been convicted. Martínez and his two companions, Pedro Castillo and Miguel Ángel García, had formed a political organization, which prison authorities considered a threat to their control of the inmates. Although both the AFI and prison authorities denied that Martínez was held incognito, beaten and tortured, his family's prompt notification of human rights lawyers pressured those involved to return Martínez to Ixcotel, where family members confirmed that body was covered with bruises from the punishment he'd received.

Throughout Mexico the federal government utilizes the investigators and militarized police to subdue dissent. Both agencies par-

ticipated brutally in breaking up a protest in Atenco, in the Estado de Mexico, in 2006 after local police attempted to arrest a group of street vendors. Atenco was the focal point of resistance against the federal government seizing land to construct a huge international airport on the area's farmlands several years earlier. The government shelved those plans but has retaliated against the residents, whose successful resistance showed the country that united community action could break through the autocratic control the federal government has tried to maintain.

Several months after the Atenco raid over 4,000 armed and armored army units, PFP and local and state police tear-gassed protest marchers and passersby in the city of Oaxaca's central historical district, which the so-called Popular Assembly had occupied for nearly five months. I asked a university professor, a specialist in criminal law, how the government had sustained charges against the more than 140 they'd arrested and sent to federal prisons since most of them were innocent and had nothing to do with the Popular Assembly. He smiled as he tapped my shoulder with his forefinger. “All the better that the victims are innocent. It makes the rest of the populace more afraid,” he repeated a phrase frequently used by counterinsurgency repressors.

Fear is the reigning force in contemporary Mexico. Fear of escalating criminality, especially in urban areas where assaults, *levantones* (temporarily sequestering a victim and forcing him or her to extract cash from an ATM), robberies, and payment of protection money have become commonplace. Fear of losing employment and falling more deeply in debt as layoffs and business closings increase. Fear of epidemics and natural disasters, many of which

ROBERT JOE STOUT's books about Mexico include *Why Immigrants Come to America* and *The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives*. He also has published a novel and written numerous articles, most recently for *The American Scholar*, “*Conscience and America*.” He lives in Oaxaca, Mexico.

have been caused by ecological devastation. Fear for their children, who never seem to be safe or secure, even in *guarderías* (childcare facilities) or schools. Fear of banks, whose mismanagement and corruption has eaten away retirement funds, fear of inflation and the peso's continuing decline, which has reduced by over 50 percent what a consumer could purchase fifteen years ago. Fear of the police whose corruption and criminality equals that of confirmed gangsters. And fear of the unresponsive federal government that is militarizing the country and refuses to respect—or even acknowledge—human rights.

According to priest Manuel Arias, spokesman for the state of Oaxaca's Catholic presbytery, the government views all popular movements and social protests—even those within minimum security prisons—as threats that have to be countered by force. Armed soldiers surround the Zapatista autonomous villages in Chiapas and logistically support paramilitary groups who burn crops, tear down dwellings, and kidnap people from their homes.

Throughout northern and western Mexico, Army units terrorize towns and villages, robbing money and possessions during their searches for drugs. Armed AFI and PFP units broke up student and teacher demonstrations in Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero, and in Morelia, Michoacán, and arrested the leaders and spokespersons involved in the protests. (Mexican law makes no provision for jury trials; a judge determines whether or not the accusations are valid and levies sentences accordingly. Unfortunately for many innocent dissidents, the state governors appoint the judges, and they conform to the governors' dictates.)

Mexican President Felipe Calderón gradually strengthened his hold on the nation after widespread allegations of fraud besmirched his 2006 election. Both Calderón and liberal opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador pulled approximately 37 percent of the popular vote, with the Revolutionary Institution Party (PRI) candidate trailing with approximately

24 percent. The Federal Election Institute, in charge of the balloting, ruled in Calderón's favor and refused to authorize a recount despite discrepancies reported in several hundred polling places. López Obrador's adherents rejected the validity of the election and instituted a mas-

Throughout Mexico, miners,
teachers, taxi drivers, airline
stewardesses, and even
prostitutes blockade highways,
invade government buildings,
and march in protest of
government policies

sive months-long sit-in in Mexico City, where López Obrador was a popular pro-active mayor from 2000 until 2005.

His popularity and his ability to sustain popular movements and social protest prompted Calderón and his National Action Party (PAN) advisors to seek alliances with the PRI, granting favors — many of them involving huge amounts of money — and government positions in exchange for forming a voting bloc that gave them a majority in the Congress. With similar favors they co-opted a segment of the leadership of López Obrador's Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), splitting it between López Obrador loyalists and those headed by José Ortega and Amalia García, the PRD governor of the state of Zacatecas. As a result of this split, hundreds of thousands of López Obrador's followers deserted for one or another of three or four smaller parties, a maneuver that assured Calderón's PAN-PRI alliance of a majority in both house of the Congress.

Despite extensive propaganda extolling the democratization of the Mexican political system after PAN's Vicente Fox broke seventy-

five years of PRI domination in 2000, the few changes that have been made in the autocratic structure of Mexico's government have been more cosmetic than substantial. In contrast with the rest of Latin America (except for Colombia) Calderón reinforced an ultra-conservative governmental system and fully endorsed neoliberal economic policies, borrowed heavily from the International Monetary Fund and committed the country to what Fox had described as "a government by entrepreneurs and for entrepreneurs."

Privatization of many former functions, including the public retirement system (which lost billions of dollars of invested funds during the economic collapse in 2008), the public health system and the oil industry has exacerbated a plunge into poverty of millions of former job holders and small business owners devastated by layoffs and lost incomes associated with the financial crash. Throughout Mexico, miners, teachers, taxi drivers, airline stewardesses, and even prostitutes blockade highways, invade government buildings, and march in protest of government policies, but the most organized, outspoken and — according to the federal government, the most threatening — of these movements emerged in the states of Oaxaca and Morelos. The backbones of both of these reform movements were those states' teachers' unions.

Calderón's government refused to comply with recommendations from a variety of international human rights organizations that documented abuses in Oaxaca, at Atenco, and in the northern states where the military unsuccessfully has tried to confront the major drug-exporting corporations. Amnesty International and the International Red Cross took protests personally to Calderón. He smiled for publicity photos taken during meetings with their representatives, but neither he nor any of his high-ranking cabinet officials acted on the denouncements. Similarly no U.S. agencies and few if any U.S. government leaders have voiced concern over the abuses; instead, the U.S. Con-

gress approved multi-million dollar financing of Mexico's military and militarized police under the so-called "Plan Mérida," despite evidence that those organizations were being used to repress popular protests as well as combat drug smuggling.

For years, under the PRI, the drug trade — including importations from Columbia and domestic production — was funneled through high-ranking government officials who pocketed a share of the drug importers profits. In turn the importers agreed not to distribute the drugs in Mexico but to use the country as a pass-through for the cocaine, heroin, and marijuana being smuggled into the United States.

Interpol and Swiss investigators discovered millions of dollars deposited in Swiss bank accounts that they attributed to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's brother, Raúl. (Carlos Salinas was Mexico's president from 1988-1994.) Mexican federal authorities charged Raúl with illegal enrichment and he was sentenced to prison in 1999 but President Vicente Fox ordered his release in June 2006. Sources throughout Mexico insist that the bank accounts were part of the drug lords' contribution to president Salinas for enabling them to do business.

Coordination between Salinas' party, the PRI, and the drug corporations shredded after PAN's Vicente Fox took office in November 2000. No longer assured of government cooperation, or forced to realign their priorities to accommodate new "protectors," the drug capos began to compete more violently for routes and territories.

Various top drug lord lieutenants broke away from their organizations to negotiate separately with Columbian entrepreneurs. Others shoved their way into immigrant smuggling, prostitution, car theft, and shaking down businesses for protection money. Commando gangs, many led by former drug cartel members (whose memberships often included state and federal police) kidnapped business magnates and/or their children and demanded

huge ransoms. Mexican authorities, acting on tips from disgruntled gang members or former gang members, managed to break up a number of these operatives but were unable to save the lives of many of the kidnap victims.

Columnist Sabina Berman of the national weekly magazine *Proceso* compared Mexico's current crime wave with the Al Capone era during Prohibition in the United States:

"Thanks to it being illegal (during Prohibition in the United States) the price of alcohol zoomed to stratospheric heights and its distribution and sale financed bands of gangsters to commit increasingly more destructive crimes...their economic power permitted them to corrupt local and federal police until those agencies were totally incapacitated...the real problem was not the alcohol but robbery, extortion and assassinations."

With encouragement from the United States, Calderón enlisted the Mexican military in the so-called "war on drugs" and boasted about its accomplishments in breaking up the drug organizations. Although the Bush and Obama Administrations in the United States supported the move, a majority of Mexican citizens did not. They filed hundreds of complaints against individual soldiers and commanders for robbery, extortion, murder, destruction of private property, and rape. Military officials refused to allow the incriminated soldiers to be tried in civilian courts and the majority of them have gone unpunished.

Despite the military involvement, and the diversion of millions of dollars from social programs to fund its activities, the number of assassinations, beheadings, and commando raids has increased — an average of fifteen slayings a day that no longer make front-page news but are summarized as afterthoughts in media reports.

"Hundreds of new addicts are created daily and kidnapping and assaults have proliferated," syndicated newspaper columnist Francisco Rodríguez wrote in 2009. Despite these statistics, and hundreds of accusations filed against the police and the military, Calderón and his

government continued to propagandize the successes his administration was recording in the "war against crime." His failure to respond to citizens' complaints and criticisms was a major factor in the resounding defeat PAN experienced during the 2009 mid-term federal elections for the Senate and House of Deputies. Political analysts described the turnover as a ringing repudiation of Calderón's policies and the administration's failure to deal honestly with corruption, crime, and the country's economic collapse.

"When we are fed up with the abuses and errors of the party in power, we vote for the other party so they can abuse us," Mexican cartoonist Pacote depicted a voter explaining the country's reinstalling the PRI's legislative majority. In some states, like Oaxaca, whose PRI governor Ulisés Ruiz has consistently thumbed his nose at human rights indictments and whose prosecutors have left uninvestigated the assassinations of over twenty Popular Assembly protesters, *indígena* rights advocates and candidates opposed to his administration, the situation may even have worsened.

But for a vast majority of Mexicans it is of little consequence who abuses them, the reigning fact is that they are being abused economically, morally and often physically. Not only that, they face abusive and discriminatory treatment when they migrate to the United States. Increasingly hostile U.S. enforcement policies against unauthorized immigration have driven thousands of young jobseekers into the hands of drug exporting organizations who offer them much better wages and benefits than they would receive in either the United States or their home communities in Mexico.

"In Oaxaca it's a crime to write! It's a crime to protest! It's a crime to think!" newspaper correspondent Pedro Matias told members of a Rights Action human rights delegation in December, 2006. His frustration, and the fears that it engenders, reverberates throughout Mexico. "We want to be heard!" Leaders of the

Trique subculture in Oaxaca organize marches and close highways complaining, “The government won’t listen to us!” The wives of miners buried by a cave-in at Pasta de Conchos in northern Mexico block access to the site of the tragedy shouting, “The government wants to forget what happened! Pretend we don’t exist!” The parents of nearly a hundred victims of a privatized government infant care facility in Chihuahua pound on bureaucracy doors demanding, “Why are you trying to ignore us?”

The victims of military aggressions, including destruction of property, theft, and rape, flail desperately at whoever will listen because the federal administration denies that the offenses occurred. Courts refuse to examine testimony from community members protesting the arrests and assassinations of those who tried to stop illegal clear cutting of their forests. “We want to be heard!” — human rights advocates whose

documented reports of violations are shelved, journalists who coworkers have been beaten or killed, *indigena* communities whose homes are raided and burned by government-equipped paramilitaries, churchmen who see drug dealers openly recruit adherents in their communities, writers who report the private enrichment of high-ranking government officials and have defamations charges filed against them and against thousands of others throughout Mexico who shout, write, and demonstrate to no avail.

Meanwhile the government of the United States sends millions of dollars worth of military hardware to Mexico, drives migrants who want to work into the hands of the drug exporting organizations it is trying to contain, and ignores the dangers that the country with which it shares a 2,000-mile border faces as it becomes explosively desperate in its desires for change.

Public Sector Workers and the Crisis

BARRY FINGER

WORKERS ARE IN NO WAY RESPONSIBLE for the economic crisis of capitalism. This would be or at least should seem to be obvious to socialists. Noncontroversial as it may now be, this has not always been the case. There have been socialists — quite outspoken in their time — who had attributed past turndowns to a profit-squeeze triggered by cumulative decades of militant wage demands. They differed from mainstream economists only in the political slant such socialists advanced: to press such demands to the tipping point, presumably, of socialist transformation. Even the most thick-headed left-winger, on the other hand, would be hard pressed to resurrect that explanation for the current deep recession, which, if it is notable for anything, has been distinguished by the decades long resiliency of wage stagnation.

What is not so obvious to the left, however, is the truth of the symmetrical proposition, namely that capitalists too are in no way responsible for the crisis. It is not excessive greed, or reckless short sightedness; not an excess of risk taking or errant business practices on the part of the ruling class that caused this crisis. These predatory spirits are simply the “givens,” the “constants” of the system. They no more cause business expansion than they do economic collapse and stagnation or — for that matter — war and imperialism. Liberals, in their ideologically constrained attempts to rescue the system from itself, believe in their heart of hearts, as they must, that taming the business cycle is ultimately an exercise in behavior modification realized through regulatory reform and enforced through

judicious oversight; that the elimination of war similarly requires the search for appropriate international frameworks and networks of reciprocal commitments. The practical, reform proposals that liberals offer — even if they were technically workable to some degree — are generally negated and neutralized in the long run by market innovations that induce legal workarounds and system gaming. The pace at which reforms are undermined generally correlates inversely with the presence of a politically vigilant and engaged working class movement and the degree to which national capital is immune from international competition.

The antisocial conduct of capitalists is in reality an outgrowth of the relentless drive to invest, to outcompete and dominate the market or be driven into bankruptcy. It is the behavioral logic induced by a class system in which the appropriation of surplus labor is the sole means to the accumulation of capital.* Outcompeting

*This analysis derives from the approach of Marx, according to whom “all economy is finally reducible to the economy of time.” All class relations, in the end, constitute varying means of expropriating the material surplus of the productive classes by those who possess a monopoly over the means or conditions of work. That is, all class societies are based on the division of the working day between that needed to replenish the capacity to work (necessary labor time), and that over and above which can be appropriated by the socially dominant class (surplus labor time). Where that line is drawn under capitalism is determined not physiologically but sociologically through the interaction of productivity change with class struggle. Under capitalism, the atomized structure of independent productive units is unified into a system of social organization by means of marketplace structures. Class relations take the form of specific market relations — wages and profits — concretized in terms of exchange values or prices. The monetary units in which these prices are

BARRY FINGER is an editorial board member of *New Politics*.

requires raising the level of labor productivity. At the most basic level this process is fraught with difficulties insofar as increasing labor productivity requires producing more commodities with less labor per unit of capital invested, of substituting in other words — capital for labor. The mass of profits emanating from the relative decline of paid labor can therefore only increase if capital accumulates at a sufficient

pace to offset that reduction. As productivity increases there are relatively fewer workers exploited and a larger cost of invested capital over which to calculate the rate of profit. Because an increase in productivity permits the customary living standards of workers to be reproduced in

expressed have an implicit labor time content insofar as the price of the net annual product is, at the same time, the outcome of a specific quantity of collective labor time productively worked. The ratio between the two is the labor time expression of the monetary unit. It is how an hour of simple, average labor — labor of average skill and intensity — is concretely represented. This reduction allows for the quantitative relationship between qualitatively different use values to be expressed in homogeneous *invariable* units of embodied labor time. The theory of value however is not a theory of relative prices, but rather an instrument for the analysis of capital accumulation that centers social conflict in terms of exploitation. Changes in productivity — in output per unit of labor time — make possible in turn changes in time relations between the labor required to sustain and reproduce workers and the surplus labor time that falls to capital in the form of additional exchange value realized in profits. But changes in productivity require investment decisions that necessitate plowing back capitalized surplus value (profits) into the system as labor-saving innovations. This is not to deny that there are other ways to derive a theory of capitalist exploitation. But without the “labor theory of value” such insights have ethical connotations alone and cannot be extended to investigate the material connections that regulate the accumulation process.

The antisocial conduct of capitalists is in reality an outgrowth of the relentless drive to invest, to outcompete and dominate the market or be driven into bankruptcy.

less time, the conditions are generated for an increased appropriation of surplus-labor without a necessary decline in living standards. So long,

in fact, as real wages rise less rapidly than productivity, a rising rate of exploitation is compatible with improved living conditions.

The end of business expansion results only when social conditions exclude a sufficient increase of surplus value for a further expansion

of capital or — when the expansion of capital has reached a point beyond which any further accumulation would lead to the same or less surplus value than before. Problems in capital formation are therefore fundamentally rooted in the system itself — an overproduction of capital relative to the existing level of exploitation. Crises are necessitated, in other words, by the need to augment the rate of exploitation beyond the point realizable through the existing trend-line in labor productivity.

This leads to the convulsive process through which the temporary barriers to renewed accumulation can be removed. Portions of capital are demobilized, leading on the one hand to writing down capital values as a precursor to a more efficient, leaner structural reorganization. Massive political pressure is exerted against public spending in order to reclaim profits otherwise earmarked for taxation and thereby sacrificed to the accumulation process. Conversely, there is virtually no pressure exerted by capital against military spending, because these costs are accepted as a needed sacrifice to maintain an international order favorable to private investment. While unemployment forcibly drives down living standards below the value of labor power, it also ramps up the intensity of work as a diminished activated working class is forced to generate output previously produced by a

larger complement of labor. This has the dual impact of increasing the unpaid portion of the working day while increasing the amount of exchange value generated in that unpaid portion, insofar as the increase in the intensity of work is uncompensated by a proportionate rise in real wages.

The upshot of this is that any real program for the defense of working class living standards in times of severe economic crises can only operate against reestablishing the conditions

of economic recovery.* To attain the massive cuts in state spending and working class living standards necessary to restore profit rates, the ruling class needs to face a divided working class and to break those remaining pockets of working class resistance that offer a fighting alternative. This is always an issue in economic recovery, ramified however by the very depth of this, the worst recession in 75 years.

This in part contributes to the renewal of the nativist assault on undocumented workers. But this is an initiative mostly and most unfortunately originating from below. Agricultural, meatpacking, landscaping and hotel/restaurant businesses vitally depend on illegal immigration to underwrite their profitability.

*Liberal economists deny this. They point out that deficit spending — the borrowing of unused liquidity to prime the pump of economic activity — has a multiplier effect on income, which can turn around an economic downturn and change the shape of capitalist crises. Paul Krugman and others attribute the anemic showing of the Obama program not to a fault in the theory, but to the insufficiency of the undertaking. *But unless profit expansion resulting from the economic stimulus can be shown to exceed the input of funds withdrawn from the private sector, the entire undertaking makes no sense from the point of view of capital accumulation, whatever the scale of the operation.* Incomes and employment can expand, but only within the context of a state that has grown at the expense of the private sector. This is precisely what the business community fears and what liberals — despite their sincere commitment to the free-market system — side step. The experience of the second world war has, nevertheless, given rise to a great misunderstanding widely shared by socialists, that Keynesian intervention ultimately “saved” capitalism in the form of a war economy. But a war economy is a nonaccumulating economy. Idle resources are put into play, output however is used not for capital formation, but for armaments. It is not the private sector, but the state that is enlarged. What was changed was the shape of the crisis, not its underlying causes. Capitalism was ultimately “saved” by the massive increase in the rate of exploitation carried through by means of forced savings during the war years, that was later available for capitalization when the need for a fully fledged war footing receded. In the 1930s, the growth of the bureaucratic state bought the system a modicum of social peace, pacifying a militant trade union movement that, otherwise unchecked, threatened to develop in a socialist direction. This is not a current political imperative. The evisceration of working class institutions in the past 40 years has diluted the urgency of such aggressive counter cyclical activities, which explains to no small extent why liberals have capitulated so seamlessly to the business call

IN THE CURRENT CRISIS, it has become increasingly obvious where the larger fault lines are beginning to break. The *New York Times* (August 7, 2010) breathlessly intones of nothing less than a “class war over public pensions” fomented by the private sector to enlist their employees against public workers, those who have retired and those down the line who will be dependent on state retirement funds. Unlike past battles against government workers, this is taking a bipartisan tone. Andrew Cuomo, for all his liberal pretensions, promises to engage against public workers much like his New Jersey neighbor, Chris Christie. The resistance against teachers’ unions, which is the cutting edge of the battle, ranges across the political board, uniting Barack Obama to Newt Gingrich, to Mike Bloomberg to Al Sharpton. As Minnesota Governor and GOP Presidential hopeful, Tim Pawlenty told POLITICO, “If you inform the public and workers in the private sector about

for deficit reduction. This capitulation is, in effect, a call to deepen the crisis by ramping up the offensive against the working class until the necessary rate of exploitation can be restored. Liberals cannot acknowledge this. They do not have the ideological or theoretical framework to do so; socialists must.

the inflated compensation packages of public employees, and then you remind the taxpayers that they're footing the bill---they get on the reform train pretty quickly."

Behind this assault is the very real recognition that public sector now has the highest concentration of unionized workers in the American economy. Public sector unions are the de facto face of the labor movement today and the last bastions of union power. Public sector unions are effectively the frontline against dismantling state services, including the return flow of services that constitutes the safety net. The payment of unemployment insurance, food stamps, disability pensions, housing subsidies and social security/medicare* — that is, "entitlements" — for those who capital has thrown out of work, sickened, marginalized or has no further use — are themselves the victorious fruits of past labor struggles. These victories have always been subject to slander by rightwing demagogues maliciously playing off the employed against the forcibly idled. Welfare has already been transformed — under the previous Democratic Administration — from an entitlement to a time-limited, forced-work program.

Health and education, on the other hand, maintain the value of labor power, which, with the opening of new sources of labor in China, the third world and the former Stalinist economies, has, despite all the ritual bleating about American competitiveness, simply lost its urgency. What is needed can be purchased on the cheap; what can't can largely be offshored. A deficit of skilled workers — engineers and scientists — can always be countered by importing. It is precisely the prospect of a forcible reduction in the average value of labor power, delinked

from productivity gains that otherwise allows labor power to be reproduced in less time with a constant or even expanding real wage, that, from capital's vantage point, now promises to make American capitalism more competitive. To finally break the back of the American trade union movement now requires a decisive defeat of public sector unions.

But what of the arguments themselves? Are public workers** in any meaningful sense privileged? On the face of it, yes. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, total employer compensation costs for private industry workers averaged about \$28 dollars per hour, while total compensation costs for state and local government workers averaged almost \$40 per hour. Moreover, the benefit packages of state and local workers average about 5 percent more than that of privately employed workers. Even more significant is that while about 61 percent of private industry employees had access to paid retirement benefits, 89 percent of state and local workers have such access. Medical care benefits are available to 71 percent of private

*President Reagan slashed SSI, and Congress still whittles away at it. They would like to turn Social Security into a means-tested program. That would get a lot of public support because there is a certain logic in not giving it to the rich, but that would be the beginning of the end for the program because as soon as a program loses its universal status, it is doomed to get cut.

**The term "state workers" is used here in the generic sense of government workers. Most studies however are confined to state and local workers and exclude federal government workers. State and local employees comprise approximately 17 out of 20 million civilian government employees. Moreover, the state and local budget crises are largely attributed to excesses in worker pay and benefits. On the federal level, the public debt "crisis" is a crisis not of employee pay and benefits, but of "entitlements." That is, on the federal level, the cost of maintaining a working class as it ages out of employment and sheds its commodity character — that is, has lost its usefulness to capital — is considered the source of the projected "crisis". There is always some element of additional confusion because a great deal of federal benefits are administered by state workers, whose pay is first deducted from the federal coffers and then transferred to the states as general revenues. But the difference in the character of the so-called crises between the two sectors of government — state and federal — is one between operating costs and program costs. The combination of the two is what is meant by "runaway government spending."

industry workers, compared with 87 percent of government workers. For family coverage, the employer share of premiums was similar for private industry and government.

In and of itself, this should be a strong endorsement of unionization. But a closer look demonstrates the illusory nature of these benefit differentials. Keith Bender and John Heywood, in a paper entitled “Out of Balance? Comparing Public and Private Sector Compensation over 20 Years” point out that these comparisons overlook significant issues. Employees in the public sector are twice as likely as their private sector counterparts to have a college or advanced degree. When the comparison is adjusted to take education into account, state and local government workers actually earn between 11–12 percent less than their private sector counterparts. Moreover, in the past 20 years the earnings for government employees have generally declined relative to the private sector. And although benefits (e.g. pensions) comprise a greater share of the total benefit package for public workers, total compensation still lags around 7 percent in the government sector.

Even this tends to understate the issues. What it does unfortunately indicate — contrary to the popular perception — is precisely how vulnerable public workers are even when organized. On closer inspection, public sector workers, due to waves of hiring freezes, tend to be on average 4 years older than private sector workers, and have more time on the job. Moreover, the comparison of large government sectors — the equivalent of huge corporations, with the “private” sector, whose average undertaking is dwarfed by the scale of government, makes little sense. The large share of small businesses in the private sector, which typically offers lower pay and benefits, so distorts the issue as to render comparisons based on the raw data nearly useless. To properly make the case, therefore, that public sector workers’ wages and benefits are excessive would require a match with workers in a similar cohort within the comparable sections

of the private sector. This is never done. Needless to say, the right’s case against government workers is not scientific, but propagandistic: to play both sides against the middle.

BUT THE REAL FAULT LINES extend beyond pensions to matters of wages and benefits, and of employment security. There are larger fundamental differences between private and public sector workers that the right seeks to exploit. Public sector workers do not, for the most part, produce marketable products and therefore do not create exchange value for the system.* State workers are indeed exploited, because they — like all other workers — are paid not for their entire expenditure of labor time, but for their socially determined reproduction costs alone. But as a cost item, the outlay on their wages and benefits represent a portion

*Ever smaller portions of wage workers under modern capitalism are employed in production including the production of services, compared to retail and wholesale trade, commerce, and finance. To the extent that the production process is not continued in the packaging and display of items, such work that purely involves the exchange of titles of ownership — bookkeepers, accountants, cashiers, etc., create no new value for capitalism. In this limited sense, these nonproductive workers — not productive, that is, of surplus value — belong to the same broad category as government workers. They are exploited, in the same sense that public sector workers are exploited, because they are paid not for the entirety of the working day, but only for that time socially determined for the reconstitution of their ability to work. The difference is this. The wages of nonproductive private sector workers are carried over into the price of the final product analogously to the cost of fuel and raw materials, that is, as circulating constant capital. For unlike government workers, their efforts facilitating the purchase and sale of commodity values are part of the total process of capital accumulation. Their purpose is to reduce the turnover time of productive capital and thereby minimize the total amount of time that would be otherwise lost to production in the process of marketing and selling commodities. The wages of these private sector nonproductive workers are nevertheless an additional cost of production made good out of sales, rather than a deduction from surplus value as are the wages of civil servants.

of the unpaid labor time of the private sector's total exchange value that needs to be sacrificed for the reproduction of the system as a whole. To the extent that working people in the private sector pay taxes to the state, that portion of the working day represented by state revenues that do not flow back to the working class in the form of services—as part, in other words, of the

If the pension system supposedly makes workers all “stakeholders” in capitalism, it does so to the same degree that a pickpocket who leaves the victim enough change to buy a lottery ticket accords the mark a stake in pickpocketing.

social wage — are converted from paid to unpaid labor time. To that extent, the capitalist state is a source of additional exploitation. Its expansion and growth is predicated on the unpaid labor that can be squeezed from private sector workers either in the form of taxes on profits or wages.

Those liberals who still defend public consumption for all the good works that are performed in that realm can hardly compete on the ideological plane in times of crises with conservatives who insist that “individuals” know best how to dispose of their incomes. From a capitalist standpoint, surplus value that is directly converted into state revenues cannot be accumulated. In good economic times, this sacrifice can be tolerated for social peace, just as long, that is, as there are sufficient profits to expand both the public and the private spheres. In bad times, there is an opportunity for capital to make common cause with its own working class — a working class, hard pressed by the threat of unemployment, declining wages, home

foreclosures and debt peonage — to shrink the scope of the state, whose tax burden is an additional source of working class distress.

Liberals can argue until they are blue that the challenge is to change the incidence of the tax code and shift the burden of state revenues upwards, or to shift the priorities of the state away from militarism to fortify and expand the social safety net. These are worthy agendas. Still, workers are understandably wary of such blandishments, given the history of tax avoidance on the part of business and the wealthy and the historic inability of society's rank and file to meaningfully participate in shaping government priorities. And they are similarly restless with the wonkishness of liberal proposals that equally exclude working people from the debate. The conservative appeal to workers is, in stark contrast, a call to political action, with the promise of immediate relief.

That is where socialists have a role to play in bridging the divide between public and private sector workers that cannot be performed in a socially “acceptable” or convincing fashion by left liberals. Liberals, including left liberals, are not merely socialists with a different set of policy preferences. The liberal left is ideologically hindered by their loyalty to a system that they wish to see strengthened and which socialists seek to replace. Liberals cannot insist and have not insisted that all the rightwing palaver about “individuals, not government, best knowing how to dispose of one's income” and about “the burden to our grandchildren of government debt” are just smokescreens for opening a second front against the working class. Their proud “political realism” is grounded in a theoretical netherworld where the purpose of public policy is to reconcile class interests. The traditional Keynesian argument that crises are caused by lack of effective demand, and not, as both the business community and socialists argue, by a lack of profits, reinforces liberalism in this peculiar ideological bind. The precepts of functional finance were the traditional answer to the conservative cry

of “out of control” public spending. Its ready prescription of deficit induced state production to compensate for sagging private production is, in theory, self-financing, and therefore unproblematic, over the course of the business cycle. This pump priming is, in other words, supposed to put into play sufficient idle capacity as to generate adequate additional revenues for retiring the deficits initially incurred to set the entire process in motion. That these deficits were instead largely squandered in the bailout of the banking system and Wall Street, with little to show in terms of induced production, has left liberalism in a quandary. Having recapitalized the financial system with funds that could have otherwise effectively shored up local and state government budgets, created green jobs, and expanded infrastructure, the administration has exhausted its political capital. An intact banking system in isolation cannot jump start capital accumulation. It will not lend money for investment or to finance trade unless convinced of the prospects for a resumption of profitability. Consequently, the administration has been unable to produce an adequate demonstration that additional deficit spending to lift the economy out of its doldrums actually works. Liberalism in power — that is, the Democratic Party — has no fall back position, therefore, other than to capitulate to the immediate demands of the business community for relief from the overhead costs of government.

It is after all “entitlement” spending rather than those traditional aspects of the state necessary to preserve and expand a social order favorable to capital accumulation, either domestically or abroad, that is under attack. And it is the state workers who administer and allocate those entitlements, not the military bureaucrats or the recipients of military contracts, not the intelligence agencies, not domestic police enforcement, and not the penal and parole systems that private sector workers are being mobilized to undermine. It is the prospect of huge swaths of entitlement revenue and government operat-

ing costs- — The entire associated structure and substructure of public spending — being recon-verted back into a fund for capital formation that the ruling class seeks to attain. The private sector job creation that can be expected to accompany this accumulation will invariably be purchased at the cost of the social safety net, of public education, community hospitals, libraries, and mass transit. There is no way to maintain the social component of wages or entitlements such as old age insurance, disability insurance, or modestly reasonable unemployment benefits, etc., without at the same time preserving and expanding government employment.

Moreover, the types of jobs that the private sector is poised to create now increasingly conform to a platform prototype with an increasingly fractionalized production structure. For those companies that still have significant manufacturing assets, they are devoted to in-house, complex, capital rich processes or products that generate few jobs. Low-value added, end of the line physical production is most likely being subject to outsourcing, which, domestically, means by part-time, free-lance, and contract workers with no union protection, job security, or benefits. As work becomes more provisional, workers who manage to hold on to the remaining full-time jobs will begin to seem like a privileged elite, much as government workers now appear. The dismantling of state services and elimination of government jobs will simply channel the unemployed towards this work, hastening the process of working class stratification and immiseration.

Just as the threat of corporate bankruptcy has been the fulcrum to whipsaw private employees into acquiescing to the loss of private pensions and health care plans, so too is the threat of government insolvency being effectively touted as the pretext to dump outlays earmarked for public consumption. This ruling class narrative is so effective that “runaway government spending” is now a close rival that threatens to surpass the seemingly intractable

problem of unemployment as the principal public concern in opinion polls. The particular effectiveness of this appeal to workers in the private sphere is that it speaks to their immediate need for lower taxes and more disposable income in times of economic contraction. The sacrifice of long-term interests is, in effect, a play on working class desperation at its most vulnerable point. Once again, the Democratic Party can be expected to volunteer itself as the most appropriate vehicle to reassure the working class that they and they alone can be trusted to organize an orderly and sensible retreat; that they and they alone are needed to “maintain” a realistic level of entitlements, e.g., further delaying eligibility ages, reducing cost of living adjustments, etc. in the Social Security program. The Obama administration has already signaled its willingness to put all these concerns on the table, promising only to hold the line against Social Security privatization. Even this assurance is rather thin gruel, given the administration’s track record of wholesale capitulation to the insurance industry during the recent health care debate.

MIDDLE CLASS LIBERALISM — the liberalism of the professional classes — is fast becoming a political and social blind-alley for realistic working class politics. Their concentration in knowledge based activities will undoubtedly allow these elements to better weather the existing crisis. Their livelihoods may be palpably threatened by the scope of the crisis; working class incomes have come under active siege. The crisis cannot and will not be resolved on the backs of the middle class. Middle class liberalism can no longer be seen even as fair weather working class allies. Their conditions of existence provide no steady source of social discontent and therefore no continuous source of struggle from which a larger political program of resistance can emerge. If middle class independents, who combine fiscal conservatism with social liberalism, have not made the full leap

into the Republican party it is largely because they are reluctant to merge their interests with fully fledged Tea Party reaction. But Keynesian bromides, and there is little left of middle class liberalism beyond this, retain little allure for them. They may still be capturable for the Democratic Party adrift to the right, but they will not play a crystallizing role in the struggle to prevent the retrogression of capitalist society. This is not a sufficient cause, to be sure, for socialists to write the middle classes off altogether, but it is sufficient grounds to look elsewhere for leadership against the rising tide of business reaction. A dynamic program of resistance can still turn much of the confused and anxious sections of the middle class to the left.

Their plight is indicative of a wider trend in American politics. According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* poll, America is entering an age of “unprecedented unstable political attitudes” (8/13/10). In the midst of the worst post-war economic downturn the popularity of both parties is sinking simultaneously. As confidence in the two party system to address the crises erodes, an opening for independent politics naturally presents itself. But only if the left is willing to take the initiative to define and clarify the true dimensions of the crisis. It can do this only by means of a clear class struggle program that places these dimensions in proper context. In this there are lessons to be learned from the scapegoating of public sector workers. First, the working class needs immediate and significant relief from taxation.

When the right raises this demand, it is being both demagogic and self-serving. The wealthy pay a disproportionate share of taxes only because they appropriate a disproportionate share of the social product. Their real purpose in raising this demand is not tax relief for workers. It is to shrink the state, to cast off the burden of public sector wages and reduce social entitlements. In so doing, the wealthy hope to increase their accumulation fund without sacrificing the extravagant personal consumption that has be-

come their unchallenged class entitlement. It is only by capitalizing on the desperation of hard pressed working people, a desperation borne in the first instance by capitalism itself, that the demand for tax relief becomes an exercise in misdirection.

The left needs to make the demand that working class taxes be eliminated. From an economic standpoint this is not impossible. The top 10 percent of income earners paid about 73 percent of the federal income taxes and they accomplished this at effective rates of taxation that are under 18 percent for the wealthiest 400 households. A modest increase here should do the trick. But if that fails to keep pace with the “growing burden” of working class “entitlements” (paid separately by Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid taxes), consider this. The top 1 percent of financial wealth owners as of 2007 controlled almost 43 percent of the entire American pie; the bottom 80 percent — roughly the working class — held exactly 7 percent. In recognition of this, income taxes on the wealthy should be supplemented with a demand for a wealth tax. And socialists might further raise the demand that every percentage increase in productivity that capital extracts from the working class be matched by an appropriate increase in wealth taxes needed to ensure a proper and orderly expansion of working class benefits. It might further be proposed that a phasing out of working class contributions to these funds be financed not only through a wealth tax, but through levying a tax on stock market and currency transactions, the type of taxes least able to be passed back indirectly to the working class.

There is no such thing as a “fair” and “equitable” tax system under capitalism, nor is there the possibility of attaining social justice through a revamped tax code. Socialists should not participate in this façade. Capitalist income is unearned income; the fruit of exploitation based on the ownership of property. The taxes that the wealthy pay, were first extracted from

working people in the course of production. The demand that the wealthy bear all the financial burdens of the capitalist state, a state that above all ensures the orderly functioning of a system of exploitation, is simply the demand that the division of the collective working day be rather modestly redrawn independent of market operations.

Socialists should moreover urge the working class not to accept without contest the nonsense that pension savings give working people a stake in the system, because such programs are tied into the stock market. The pension system is merely a system of reinforced exploitation. Workers advance capital a portion of current earnings, either directly or by foregoing raises, which is then applied to extract surplus labor elsewhere, a tiny portion of which may — no ironclad guarantee here — eventually return to workers in the form of a modest retirement annuity. If this supposedly makes workers all “stakeholders” in capitalism, it does so to the same degree that a pickpocket who leaves the victim enough change to buy a lottery ticket accords the mark a stake in pickpocketing.

Finally, socialists might turn the attack on public sector workers inside out. The left should resurrect the demand that the government act as the employer of last resort, that any worker should be eligible to participate in the advantages — such as they are — of public employment. Why restrict these jobs, as liberals are so fond of doing, to shovel-ready jobs, or even green job? This is simply too restrictive. Such qualifications preclude from public employment those who cannot perform heavy labor. But more important, this restriction overlooks the vast inventory of unmet social needs that extends beyond the physical infrastructure, neglected by a system long characterized as one of public squalor. Such needs are readily identifiable: community and housing services; childcare; drug and alcohol rehabilitation, legal advocacy, violence prevention, adult literacy and other educational services. These enhancements to the

social infrastructure have an immediate impact on the quality of working class community life. This necessarily requires deficit spending and massive revenue sharing with the states where most government jobs are. And it drives this need, not in terms of “saving capitalism,” but in terms of concrete programs of working class communal amelioration.

Its political significance is that it subordinates the necessity of deficit spending to working class struggle and cohesion without assuming direct responsibility for the capitalist crisis. To take responsibility is to cap the movement at its knees. It invariably translates into a labor movement ideologically susceptible to the need for additional sacrifice, as long as it retains consultative rights on the conditions and dimensions of its surrender. The point is to demand that people be put to work in socially meaningful capacities, regardless of its effect on accumulation and profitability. It is a demand that raises the issues of social responsibility above that of private property. The radical left should raise this demand in full knowledge that a growing public sector without democratic control from below, even if practically realizable, would further contribute to the bureaucratization of capitalism. This would nevertheless still be a qualified victory insofar as it entails a compromise forced upon capitalism by a working class gaining in social vision under circumstances most conducive to further unionization. It carries within it the momentum to drive the logic of labor’s own existence beyond the confines imposed on it by the profit system.

But these are not socialist demands. The working class as it is presently constituted is not receptive to socialist demands. The point is to change the conversation and in so doing raise a perspective that cannot and will not be raised by the existing political parties. It is the perspective of real working class solidarity.

Socialists should not expect the union bureaucracy to raise these issues. The trade union leadership has spent decades desperately

demonstrating how indispensable they are to the fortunes of the Democratic Party, more so ironically as the electorate is actively bailing as never before. It will become, if it is not already, manifestly clear that it will be the allegiance of swing voters that the Democrats need and will most passionately seek. Yet rather than this being evidence of the need to distance the labor movement from the Democrats, if for no other reason than to be more attractive to them, the union officialdom will undoubtedly draw the opposite conclusion. If past behavior is any guide to the future, it will merely stiffen their resolve to remain the most loyal of Democratic constituents. Labor can be expected to give them virtually free reign to conciliate any rearguard elements that might be usefully employed to give Democrats an electoral advantage. Their enabling behavior will inadvertently continue to be a contributing factor in an electoral movement to the right.

Neither is this a question of calling for a new political party of the left. A party of the left can only be built from a gathering movement of struggle. It cannot be conjured forth on the basis of programmatic merit. But where there is evidence of fight back, of social resistance — among rank and filers, the 99ers (those collecting unemployment insurance that had to be extended beyond the norm to 99 weeks due to the recession), where businesses or shops face closure, among beleaguered government workers — the thrust of the struggle is fundamentally progressive and workers can be receptive to radical ideas. Building a movement with a boisterous radical agenda, even when well short of becoming an electoral presence, can still contribute mightily to shifting politics to the left.

THIS CRISIS HAS SIGNALLED a global employers’ offensive against these last remnants of the welfare state safety net and the public sector workers, largely unionized, who administer these programs. For public workers this is an immediate issue of job security, but the ruling

class cannot dismantle the remaining vestiges of the welfare state without decimating the unions that stand in the way of its larger political and social ambitions. So for better or worse, public workers are the incidental last bulwarks of labor resistance. This explains why they have been subject to an unprecedented level of propagandistic venom from the business press, ginning up a near lynch mob reaction against these "privileged" workers, who "live off the taxes of ordinary struggling Americans."

The trend line of the rate of profit has been falling since the early 1970s, despite more than three decades of wage stagnation and relative and near absolute working class immiseration.

That only sufficed to keep the system barely humming. The business class is now sitting on an ocean of cash, having largely liquidated their inventories during this recession. They will not resume investment until they are convinced of the prospects for enhanced returns. Wages have fallen, now it is time — according to capitalist reckoning — to liquidate government overhead.

If capital cannot convince itself of its need to part with liquidity and restore momentum to the economy without additional working class sacrifice, the working class must look to its own program and make capital part with that liquidity and jump start the economy on an entirely different set of terms.



The Jobs Crisis: How to Solve It and Begin to Fix Our Broken Economy

GERTRUDE SCHAFFNER GOLDBERG & MARGUERITE G. ROSENTHAL

THE UNITED STATES HAS an ongoing jobs crisis that has been crippling our people and our economy for nearly two years. In September 2010, 14.8 million people were officially unemployed, 15.7 million were either forced to work part-time or were jobless and no longer looking for work and another 16.3 million were the working poor. Thus, almost 47 million people were afflicted by unemployment or underemployment (see table 1). Moreover, the numbers multiply when the families of the unemployed are included. Early in the recession, long-term unemployment—27 weeks or more—had reached the highest level since 1948, when the Bureau of Labor Statistics began keeping this record; and it continues high as jobs are shed, new hires are meager and population growth accounts for new job entrants who are unable to find work.

Although the current emergency's proximate cause is the financial meltdown of 2008, there are serious underlying problems in the U.S. economy that pre-date the collapse. In our view, steeply rising economic inequality and its political consequences, beginning in the mid-1970s

GERTRUDE SCHAFFNER GOLDBERG is Professor of Social Policy and Director of the Ph.D. Program at the Adelphi University School of Social Work and Chair of the National Jobs for All Coalition. Her latest book, an edited collection, is *Poor Women in Rich Countries: The Feminization of Poverty over the Life Course* (Oxford University Press, 2010). MARGUERITE G. ROSENTHAL, an Executive Committee member of the National Jobs for All Coalition, is Professor Emerita of Social Policy, Salem State University. Her writing has focused on social welfare history and social, economic and criminal justice.

TABLE 1

Official Unemployment by Population Group, Hidden Unemployment, Working Poor and Job Vacancies, September 2010

OFFICIAL UNEMPLOYMENT: 9.6 percent

	percent
White.....	8.7
African-American	16.1
Men.....	16.4
Women	13.5
Hispanic.....	12.4
Asian ^a	6.4
Person with disabilities ^a	14.8
Men 20 years and over	8.0
Women 20 years and over	3.6
Teen-agers (16-19 years).....	26.0
Black teens.....	49.0

OFFICIALLY UNEMPLOYED 14.8 million

HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT

Working part-time because can't find a full-time job	9.5 million
People who want jobs but are not looking so are not counted in official statistics	6.2 million

TOTAL OFFICIAL AND
HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT 30.5 million
(19.0% of the labor force)

In addition, millions more worked full-time, year-round, yet earned less than the official poverty level for a family of four. In 2009, the latest year available, that number was 16.3 million, 16.4 percent of full-time, full-year workers.

In August 2010, the number of job openings was 3.2 million. Thus there were more than 9 job-wanters for each available job.

^a not seasonally adjusted

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, The Employment Situation in September 2010, www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf, for unemployment rates; for estimate of working poor, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Work Experience in 2008, www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032009/perinc/new05_001.htm; for job vacancies, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnovers-August 2010, www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/jolts.pdf

and gathering force in subsequent decades, are major contributors to the emergence of these problems and the failure to deal with them

Eisner: Deficits don't have to be repaid and seldom are. The federal debt or accumulated deficits were well over 100 percent at the end of World War II, ushering in an era of prosperity and growth.

effectively. We believe it is essential to take action to end the immediate jobs crisis, not only because more than 30 million people are directly afflicted but also because it is a terrible drag on the entire economy. Simultaneously, we must confront the problems that pre-date the meltdown. These must be addressed if we are to avoid more Great Recessions.

The Jobs Crisis and Recovery

THE PERSISTENCE OF VERY HIGH unemployment retards economic recovery. As economist Philip Harvey has observed, "once established, a swollen job shortage tends to perpetuate itself." Harvey points to some specific ways in which unemployment is prolonging the current recession:

It is preventing the housing market from rebounding and the housing industry from recovering. It's keeping the consumer sector waiting anxiously for customers. It's keeping capital goods producers waiting for a growth sector to serve. And it makes the financial sector fearful to lend. Businesses may invest on the margin in response to increased tax and regulatory incentives, but until they see customers with money to spend on the horizon, their appetite for risk will remain limited.

It is thus imperative that we pursue policies to significantly reduce unemployment.

Even in the year 2000, when official unemployment was the lowest in 30 years, 13 million people or 9 percent of the labor force were either officially unemployed or hidden unemployed (Table 2). In that year nearly 16 million people or 16.8 percent of full-time, full-year workers were earning less than the official poverty level for a family of four. And there were many more persons wanting work than there were job vacancies, about 3.5 to one. The official unemployment rate of black men was 8.2 percent, exactly the percent for the total labor force in February 2009 that was considered sufficiently high for Congress to enact the \$787 billion American Recovery

TABLE 2
Official and Hidden Unemployment
by Population Groups, 2000

OFFICIAL UNEMPLOYMENT: 4.0 percent	percent
White.....	3.5
African-American	7.6
Men.....	8.2
Women	7.2
Hispanic.....	5.7
Asian ^a	3.6
Men 20 years and over	3.3
Women 20 years and over	3.6
Teen-agers (16-19 years).....	13.1
Black teens.....	23.5
OFFICIALLY UNEMPLOYED	5.7 million
HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT	
Working part-time because can't find a full-time job	3.2 million
People who want jobs but are not looking so are not counted in official statistics	4.2 million
TOTAL OFFICIAL AND HIDDEN UNEMPLOYMENT	13.1 million (9.0% of the labor force)

^a not seasonally adjusted

SOURCE: For official and hidden unemployment, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, 48, 1, January 2001, tables 3, 5, 20, 35.

and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) or Obama's stimulus. Official unemployment statistics are of the civilian, non-institutional population. In 2000, a third of African-American young men were incarcerated. If they had been included in labor force calculations, the unemployment rate of African-American men would have been almost one-third, 32.4 percent, even in that year of record-low official unemployment. Chronic unemployment, averaging 6.5 percent (official) from 1974 to 2008, contributed to growing inequality in the U.S. and to a 13 percent decline in average hourly wages (in constant dollars) between the mid-1970s and the meltdown. Men over the age of 55 have a particularly difficult time regaining employment after becoming unemployed.

Since the 1970's, unstable and contingent employment, most of it involuntary, with low wages, few benefits and little opportunity for training leading to promotion has been growing faster than stable, full-time work. Not surprisingly, this portion of the workforce is composed disproportionately of women, minorities and both young (under 24) and old (over 65) workers. Related to this trend has been an increase in jobs that are contracted out and in day labor and swing shift work with short and irregular work schedules. Low-waged laborers, especially immigrant women, are routinely subjected to harsh working conditions and violations of wage and hour laws, and child care workers were heavily represented among exploited low-wage workers. A concern as we advocate for good jobs at livable wages is the finding that between 2006 and 2009, of the five fastest growing occupations, all except nursing were clustered at the low end of the wage scale; food service and home health work in which pay was barely above the minimum wage grew the fastest.

The Right to a Job at Livable Wages

SOME PROGRESSIVES CALLED ATTENTION to the chronic unemployment problem prior to the meltdown and the jobs crisis. It was their

belief that the right to a job at livable wages is a basic human right. They were inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's Economic Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that owed much to the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt. First unveiled in Roosevelt's 1944 State of the Union Address, the Economic Bill of Rights begins with the right to living-wage employment. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights included a broad conception of employment rights: "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."

Concerned that chronic unemployment was depriving millions of people of what they considered to be a human right, those calling attention to the problem were advocating an active labor market policy. In addition to temporary unemployment compensation for temporary job loss or a passive labor market policy, they envisioned a standby program in which jobless workers would be employed by government to perform much needed work. They argued in terms of "double deficits." On the one hand there was a jobs deficit with millions of people needing work. The other deficit was in public investment, which had fallen precipitously to half of its 1960s' and 1970s' levels in relation to the size of the economy. To deal with the consequent deficiencies in the physical and social infrastructure, jobless women and men could be employed at living wages to renovate dilapidated housing and schools; build and repair bridges, roads, and levees; provide child and elder care; expand recreational and cultural activities; improve parks and other public spaces; and undertake energy conservation.

It is important to point out that those who were proposing active labor market policies before the meltdown did not think that these policies should stand alone. Necessary, complementary policies included protection and expansion of government's ability to regulate corporations in the public interest; restoration

of progressive taxation; assurance of collective bargaining rights; renegotiation of global agreements to include labor rights; environmental protection; and environmental sustainability.

Lessons from The New Deal

IN THEIR DUAL FOCUS on the need for jobs and on the need of the nation to repair and rebuild and expand a deficient physical and social infrastructure, these proposals resembled innovative New Deal programs such as the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Path breaking as it was, the New Deal model for job creation was flawed in certain important respects. Not the least of these was that it reflected the deeply entrenched racism and sexism of their time. African-Americans were believed to be accustomed to low wages and were required to accept lower-paying jobs than whites; they were classified as unskilled labor no matter what their skill levels. While women were one-fourth of the labor force, only one-sixth of WPA jobs went to women. When women did get a slot in a work program, they were paid lower average wages than white men, \$3 a day, compared to \$5 for men. Twenty-first century work programs must serve disadvantaged groups in proportion to their need and pay them according to their worth, but in any case, a living wage. Whereas New Deal programs tended to emphasize the physical infrastructure, current proposals also advocate spending for the social infrastructure: child and elder care, education and health care, sectors that employ women disproportionately.

In addition to these shortcomings, New Deal work programs were insufficient to employ even half of the unemployed and were temporary despite continuing, high unemployment. According to New Deal historian William Leuchtenburg, “by any standard [WPA] ... was an impressive achievement, [but] it never came close to meeting Roosevelt’s goal of giving jobs to all who could work.” At its peak, the WPA employed fewer than half of the un-

employed, and from 1935 to 1941, the various work programs employed on average between one-quarter and one-third of the estimated unemployed....” New Deal historian Irving Bernstein wrote “throughout its history, both the President and the Congress considered WPA ... a temporary if not emergency agency slated for oblivion as soon as severe unemployment disappeared.” But Harry Hopkins, the administrator of the work programs, believed that unemployment would not be solved by temporary measures and would be a problem for many years to come. FDR’s Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins recalled that Roosevelt and Hopkins did want a permanent work relief program, but, writing in the mid-1940s, she observed that “unemployment insurance stands alone in the protection of people out of work.” It continues to stand alone, and so we have a passive labor market policy of income support for temporary unemployment but not an active labor market policy that would put the long-term unemployed to work in service to the nation.

Has the Obama Stimulus Failed?

HOW DOES THE \$787 BILLION Obama stimulus compare with these proposals for direct job creation? The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was supposed to save or create three to four million jobs. In February 2009, when it was enacted, 12.7 million people or, as noted, 8.2 percent of the labor force were officially unemployed. Between February and October 2009, unemployment shot up by nearly three million, and the rate climbed to 10.1 percent, the highest for any month since the meltdown. In September 2010, 19 months after the stimulus was enacted, the unemployment rate was still hovering around 10 percent (9.6 percent) and the number of jobless individuals was somewhat higher than in the previous October.

Does that mean that the Obama stimulus was a failure? The reviews are mixed. Paul Krugman argues that the stimulus was not big

compared to the size of the economy and was not focused on increasing government spending by much. He points out that 40 percent of the \$600 billion of stimulus money spent in 2009 and 2010 was consumed by non-productive tax cuts. Another huge chunk was used to save jobs of state and local public sector workers such as teachers, but this was not enough to offset the cuts that these jurisdictions were forced to make because of declining tax revenues in the recession. Only the remainder involved direct federal spending. Christina Romer, then head of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, originally estimated that a stimulus of \$1.2 trillion was needed, but presidential aides considered that too high, and the proposal never reached the President. It can be inferred that the size of the stimulus doomed it to failure.

The ARRA did do some good. According to an estimate of former Federal Reserve Board vice-chair Alan Blinder and Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, unemployment would have climbed to 16 percent instead of about 10 percent without the combined effect of the bank bailout and the Obama stimulus. Nonetheless, Blinder has acknowledged that we're in a "jobs emergency" that requires New Deal-style hiring of workers onto public payrolls. The Obama stimulus was not a complete failure, but unemployment remains near double digits.

Economist Philip Harvey takes the position that the \$787 Obama stimulus could have reduced official unemployment far more if it had been devoted to direct job creation. In addition to its indirect stimulus to the economy that saved or created millions of jobs, the money could have directly created an additional 7 million full-time jobs, paying the same wages as those earned by similarly qualified and experienced workers in the regular labor market and each lasting two years at the cost of \$55,000 per job (including materials and supplies). Harvey's proposed wage averages \$14.52 per hour for program participants; we prefer a higher wage. Harvey's

estimates may not take into account today's obstacles to the implementation of government job programs — some of them necessary regulations like environmental-impact reports and historic-preservation safeguards. Federal funds have largely been distributed through state bureaucracies that, like the federal agencies, are large and slow moving. For instance, an analysis of the implementation of the ARRA in California found that grants from the federal departments of Energy and Transportation were the slowest to be implemented. The National Association of Towns and Townships has complained that small jurisdictions have been neglected in the process of funding distribution that has required going through state bureaucracies, a process the organization considers unfair and wasteful.

In the 1930s, when the federal bureaucracy was much smaller than today, F.D.R. created a separate agency to administer work programs under the gifted and non-bureaucratic direction of social workers Harry Hopkins and Aubrey Williams. The approaches of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson resembled this part of the New Deal model in establishing new agencies like the Peace Corps and the Office of Economic Opportunity to plan and implement innovative programs. We believe that a federal attack on unemployment can work most efficiently by creating a new, separate federal agency empowered to create jobs directly (admittedly, the details of such an agency have yet to be worked out). A program of this size for direct job creation has never been tried, but there are precedents for believing it would be effective.

It will, however, be very difficult to make the case for more government spending at this point. One reason, but not the only one, is the perceived failure of the Obama stimulus. The case for more federal spending is made still harder by the anti-government assault of right-wing politicians and economists, the latter of whom raise alarms about the rising debt and deficit. Although Wall Street and millions

of investors were saved by a massive federal government bailout, they continue to bite the hand that fed them by bashing government aid. And much of the public also overlook the fact that government programs like unemployment insurance and food stamps are feeding, clothing and paying the bills for millions of the unemployed and in so doing are keeping consumption from dipping even lower and unemployment even higher.

The Deficit Obstacle

OBSESSION WITH THE BUDGET DEFICIT blocks our path, particularly when unemployment remains close to 10 percent after a multi-billion dollar recovery program. In fact, more money has to be spent to cure unemployment, at least initially. There would be some savings from the program as a result of decreased outlays for unemployment insurance and other income support programs, taxes paid by the workers, the increased purchasing power of the workers that would stimulate other job creation and reduced costs of the social problems caused by unemployment. Nonetheless the start-up and perhaps continuing costs could be substantial.

The dilemma is how to approach the deficit in gaining support for these start-up costs. On the one hand, we can tacitly admit the deficit is important, economically as well as politically, by coming up with such alternative revenue sources as cutting military spending to actual defense needs, rescinding the tax cuts to the rich and a stock transfer tax. The nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation has estimated that the federal government would collect an additional \$238 billion in 2011 if the so-called Bush tax cuts are allowed to expire at the end of 2010. That would provide enough additional funding to create just over 7 million full-time equivalent jobs lasting 12 months each.

On the other hand, we can discredit the attacks on the deficit. That would mean to deny that it is important economically and to point out, as James Galbraith has, that deficit phobia

is cultivated by the banks and their proxies in government because private borrowing means money in the pockets of private lenders and public borrowing puts money in the pockets of people with no obligation to repay. Galbraith holds that the analogy between a family budget and a government budget is a false one and should be debunked. Private borrowers can and do default. With the U.S. government, the risk of non-payment doesn't exist. Although it may sound glib, it is nonetheless true that the U.S. government can spend money and pay interest simply by typing numbers into a computer. Since it is the source of money, the U.S. government cannot run out. The only time that deficits are a problem is at full employment where there could be more demand for goods and services than could be met, with a resultant inflation in wages and prices. This is hardly the case or the threat now.

We can also point out that those who created the deficit by reducing taxes and waging war — remember we had a budgetary surplus in 2000 — are the very ones most obsessed with it. Robert Eisner suggests a motive for deficit hawks that has nothing to do with the need for balancing the budget and from which motives for increasing it can be inferred:

Most conservative economists do not really care about the deficit. They advocate balanced budgets because their real desire is to cut government spending, particularly on the "social programs" they abhor. And that shows up the worst effects of deficit paranoia. It is used to justify depriving the American people of their health care, their education and all of the public investment on which their future depends.

Eisner also points out that deficits don't have to be repaid and seldom are. The federal debt or accumulated deficits, he observes, were well over 100 percent at the end of World War II, ushering in an era of prosperity and growth.

A less radical position on the deficit is that the real culprit is the recession that reduces income and tax revenues and costs the govern-

ment in increased benefit expenditures, such as unemployment compensation and food stamps. The Great Recession was *responsible* for 61 percent of the deficit in 2009, and every million jobs created reduce the deficit by \$54 billion.

Of course, it may be impossible to disabuse the public of the dangerous myth that has been perpetrated by the Concord Coalition, Robert Rubin, and the like. This is too bad because ending deficit phobia would unfreeze government money to meet other needs, for example, to pay for social welfare programs, reindustrialization, and conversion to a sustainable economy. A successful movement to debunk the deficit or to put it in its place would be a major contribution to a better society

We believe that those who recognize that recovery won't happen without a massive federal program should employ a combination of two approaches: downgrading the deficit and trying to explain it but also promoting alternative sources. However, the bigger stimulus would come, not from cutting spending at this point, but spending more. Cutting spending in 1937 led to a "depression within a depression" the following year, a rise in unemployment from 14 to 19 percent. It was the external threat of World War II that forced the Roosevelt administration to spend enough to end the Great Depression.

Some Long-Run Challenges to a Fair and Sustainable Economy

AFTER A PERIOD OF POST-WORLD WAR II prosperity that was greater than any in our history, a time of "shared prosperity," the U.S. economy began to experience a profit squeeze. Between 1965 and the late 1970s, there was a drop of 40 percent in the average net after-tax profit rate of domestic nonfinancial corporations. Contributing to a new phenomenon known as stagflation or an unusual combination of stagnation and inflation, were the inflationary 1973 OPEC oil embargo, increased competition from Japan and European nations whose war-shattered economies had by then recov-

ered, and the failure to raise taxes to pay for the Vietnam War. American industry did not respond by stepping up investments that would make the U.S. economy more competitive. Instead, corporate America pursued alternative strategies that weakened the manufacturing sector, contributed to the financialization of the economy and resulted in a level of economic inequality and consequent political inequality that can only be compared to earlier periods of egregious inequality and consequent boom and bust — the Gilded Age of the 1870s and the "roaring twenties."

In response to the profit squeeze, business squeezed labor — through wage freezes and new work arrangements that increased the flexibility with which workers could be hired, fired, and scheduled. Organized labor, weakened by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and anti-Communist attacks in the following decade, had declined in density (percentage of non-supervisory workers who are union members) by one-third between 1950 and 1973 and was in no position to resist effectively. Deprived by anti-Communist purges of the movement's most progressive leaders who would have been more aggressive in organizing women and minorities in the burgeoning service sector, labor was further weakened by the frontal attack of Ronald Reagan, who fired striking federal air controllers (at the same time denying them food stamps). Contributing to a loss of manufacturing jobs and decline of that earlier engine of U.S. economic growth were globalization or transfer of capital and business operations to lower-wage areas of the world and abandoning of production for financial operations. For example, General Electric sold off its consumer appliance manufacturing division and concentrated on its more profitable credit corporation. Still another response of business was to lobby government to reduce taxes and regulations and to encourage globalization.

Through an unprecedented political mobilization, the business community and its allies in the media and academia sought to re-legitimize

the free market and to effect a return to government that keeps its hands off the economy. At the beginning of the seventies a handful of Fortune 500 companies had lobbyists in DC, but by the end of the decade, 80 percent were represented in the nation's capital. Election campaigns came to be dominated by large donors, and the increasing amounts of money spent in election campaigns — from an average of \$610,000 spent by winning Senate incumbents in 1986 to \$4.4 million in 2000—bought business enormously increased influence. Huge donations by a burgeoning financial sector bought de-regulation and consequently a scant brake on dangerous speculation and predatory lending to a middle- and working class strapped by economic decline and obliged to spend more on items like child care and housing than in the post-war decades.

The administration of Democrat Bill Clinton symbolizes how far the party of the New Deal had strayed from friendliness to ordinary Americans. Clinton presided over the repeal of the quintessential banking regulation of the Great Depression, the Glass-Steagall Act, and over trade agreements that favored business at the expense of the environment and workers, not to mention repeal of public assistance to poor women and their children. With their increased influence over the political process, business interests successfully resisted increases in the minimum wage. And business interests could also retard recognition and policies to deal effectively with an environmental crisis that posed not only limits to economic growth but threatened life as we know it on the planet.

The inter-related economic and political inequality of the last three decades has left the country with an enormous challenge. There is the immediate crisis that must be dealt with decisively in order to get beyond the Great Recession, itself related to de-regulation and to economic inequality and the stranglehold of capital on political democracy that has recently

been increased by the Supreme Court's recent decision forbidding the government from limiting campaign contributions. Direct job creation by government—sufficient to bring down unemployment to an interim goal of 4 percent — would revive the economy and restore the faith in government that we need in order to solve some other long-term problems. Depending on the type of jobs that are created, we can make a move toward greening the economy and can also begin to develop physical and social infrastructures that support a more efficient economy and a better-educated, better cared for and healthier population and workforce. Setting wages at a decent level in the work programs could also have a salutary effect, leading both to needed increases in the minimum wage as well as further up the pay-scale.

Re-industrialization is essential to revival of a U.S. economy that has become underdeveloped. Economists Robert Pollin and Dean Baker have proposed a plan for a large-scale commitment to public investment projects that would both revive manufacturing and transform the U.S. into an environmentally clean economy. For example, they propose such short-term projects as a 50 percent increase in energy efficient public bus transportation that would reduce burdensome costs of auto commuting, cut consumption of fossil fuels and emission of greenhouse gases and boost the auto industry. Longer-term projects are also envisioned. Pollin and Baker also point out that investment in traditional infrastructure and clean energy can produce far more jobs for million dollars spent than for investment in the military or fossil fuel industries. Enlightened public investment can do much to create decent jobs in the short and longer run and at the same time enable us to develop an economy that is both productive and sustainable.

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

Fields of Battle, Fields of Play

BILL LITTLEFIELD

FOR MUCH OF THE LATE SUMMER and into the fall and winter, American football, aka smash-mouth football, as the game's adherents sometimes gleefully call it, overlaps with the game most of the rest of the world calls football ... soccer.

The Cowboys, the Bears, and the Giants are in action at the same time Sheffield Wednesday, Nottingham Forest, the Seattle Sounders, and the Columbus Crew are taking the field.

If the names in the latter group seem less rowdy, ripped, and raucous than those in the former, it's perhaps no accident.

Anyway, when the two games overlap on the calendar, people invariably ask me why only one is popular with T.V. viewers in this country. I answer that in part it may be because many citizens of this country relish mayhem and damage, especially if they can view it from a safe distance while snacking.

Mayhem and damage are intrinsic to American football. Everybody on both teams understands that by hitting the best players on the other side of the line hard enough to disable them, they can dramatically increase the likelihood that their own side will win. Soccer players sometimes run into each other, too, but the contact is largely incidental to the act of trying to put the ball into the other guy's net or trying to keep it out of your own. A soccer player who clobbers an opponent incurs a penalty. A football player who bounces an opponent off the turf hard enough break his back or tear his knee apart — which, as long as he doesn't grab the guy's facemask, he can usually do within the

rules — enjoys roars of approval.

I keep a safe distance between myself and the people to whom I offer these observations, but perhaps it's not necessary. Thugs in other countries have sometimes used soccer games as occasions to beat up each other and whoever else is at hand. Here, football fans whom I might displease usually prefer to watch as the players inflict and suffer the damage.

Testifying in the fall of 2009 before a congressional committee, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell would not acknowledge any connection between the damage pro football players suffer doing their work and the brain damage many of them exhibit later in their lives. The National Football League's company line is that it has only recently been discovered that it might be a good idea to explore the possibility of some connection between the head injuries their players incur regularly on the job, and the fact that numbers of retired players have demonstrated a tendency to lose their minds. A recent survey of ex-NFL players, co-sponsored by the NFL, indicates that those retired players who are between 30-49 years old have been diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's-like symptoms nineteen times more often than men of the same age in the general population. The league's initial response to these statistics was to advise caution in the interpretation of their own survey. Then they put up posters in the locker rooms and entrusted the further study of these circumstances to a committee of three doctors employed by the league. Two of the three had previously claimed that there was no reason to suppose that getting knocked silly week after week, year after year, would make you stupid — not to mention depressed, drug-dependent, and incapable of caring for yourself — a couple

BILL LITTLEFIELD *hosts National Public Radio's Only A Game and teaches English at Curry College. His most recent book is also titled Only A Game.*

of decades later.

But I digress. There are other reasons besides our apparent cultural thirst for (or at least tolerance of) damage to other people to explain the dominance of American football in this country. It's a game full of innumerable pauses ... somebody is always scrambling out of bounds, or calling for a measurement, or failing to get up after being knocked down.

Each of these pauses stops the clock, which gives the sponsors of the televised production of the game the opportunity to sell cars, insurance, fast food, various products that require you to visit the emergency room if their benefits last more than four hours, and beer. Televised football is consumerism's comfortable partner.

Soccer, on the other hand, presents continuous action. When the game is televised, the only ads appear on the fences that surround the pitch, which is what soccer people call the field, or on a relatively unobtrusive crawl across the bottom of the screen, or on the players' jerseys. (Granted, many of those jerseys bear the names of breweries, communications companies, airlines, or financial service providers.)

Of course soccer and football are not entirely dissimilar. Both American football and soccer around the world are run by wealthy men getting wealthier. Teams in both sports inspire fans to paint themselves red, green, or blue, wear silly hats, and shout themselves hoarse. Each game certainly diverts the attention of citizens from issues such as war, poverty, and health care reform, and in that respect certainly both are circuses.

But the former game is as much about crashing into your opponent or throwing him to the ground and celebrating over his body, whether it is still writhing or broken and motionless, as it is about scoring points. In the latter, finesse and imagination nearly always beat brute force, which usually comes out looking slow and stupid. Many people connected with some of the world's most popular soccer teams maintain that although winning is certainly

important, playing the game beautifully, with creativity and flair, is essential. Anybody talking about American football in those terms would be committed, unless he was a coach or a general manager, in which case he would be ridiculed,

A recent survey of ex-NFL players, co-sponsored by the NFL, indicates that those retired players who are between 30-49 years old have been diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's-like symptoms nineteen times more often than men of the same age in the general population.

torn apart, and eaten.

The United States is not without soccer fans, of course, and perhaps it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the preference for American football among our citizens bespeaks a taste for — or at least tolerance of — violence beyond the boundaries of the gridiron. After all, blood sports flourish in lots of countries — everything from bare-knuckle bouts to cock fighting and dog fighting. Still, there's no denying that each Sunday and Monday, and on lots of other nights as well, in great numbers, our citizenry watches and bets on a game that, to some extent, fascinates and delights its fans precisely because it is violent. And NFL football, unlike back-alley brawling or animal fighting, is mainstream. Our most celebrated celebrities sing the National Anthem before the games begin and dance at halftime, when our army, wherever it is fighting, is saluted. Our air force flies over the field, as if to emphasize the connection of the deafening power of our fighter planes to the destruction about to be visited on

and by the padded men below. Commercials urge boys who dream of becoming professional football players to join the army, where they can be all that they can be — or, if not professional football players — all else that they can be. Pro football on T.V. is sponsored by international corporations, and the game counts among its fans many of this nation's wealthiest and most powerful citizens as well as the beefy lads who paint their faces and remove their shirts in the cheap(?) seats each week. We hold the owners of pro football teams in such high regard that we regularly funnel public money to them so they can build new stadiums from which they will extract more profit. Sometimes we do this even before those owners have had to resort to extorting the money from our mayors and governors by threatening to move if we don't pony up.

Like boxing, football beats the hell out of the performers engaged in it. The lives of some of the players are shortened by the work they have chosen, and in many cases those lives are profoundly diminished well before they end. In that respect those players are like coal miners or workers in the plants where asbestos was manufactured. Long and difficult battles had to be fought and are still being fought by unionists and other activists to force employers in those industries to compensate the families of the workers they'd destroyed. Those battles are still being fought on behalf of pro football players, since, as previously mentioned, historically the NFL's position has been that the multiple concussions and other work-related ills routinely suffered by their employees have not necessarily been related to their subsequent breakdowns and deaths. In preparation for the negotiation of the NFL's next collective bargaining agreement, the owners recently rallied around the proposition that two games should be added to the regular season schedule. Robert Kraft, the owner of the New England Patriots, said expansion of the season would be a win for everybody concerned...but then nobody's hitting him in the

head every Sunday.

That these circumstances have not driven fans of the game that flourishes only in the United States to search out on the vast menu of sports some other obsession leads one to consider at least tentative conclusions about what Americans have learned not only to accept, but to embrace with extraordinary loyalty.

The conclusions about those connections can only be tentative. But the evidence of the tolerance of — even enthusiasm for — the madness of war seems as obvious as it is discouraging. In the most recent demonstrations of that insanity, this nation has been attempting to occupy two countries for nearly a decade. Years ago the initial justification for bombing cities full of civilians in Iraq was exposed as a cynical invention. Dick Cheney and George Bush took advantage of the destruction of the twin towers in New York to bomb, invade, and occupy two countries from which the people who flew the planes into the World Trade Center did not come. But the general consensus that followed the discovery of that lie was not that the United States should stop killing people in Iraq, where this country still has tens of thousands of troops and mercenaries. It was, instead, that since this country had started the war, albeit on the basis of a lie, this country had better finish the war successfully, whatever that might turn out to mean. The theory here seems to be that chaos that includes an occupying army is preferable to chaos that doesn't. The same twisted rationale has been applied to the off-again, on-again war in and around Afghanistan, where local citizens and U.S. soldiers die everyday and billions of dollars continue to disappear to no purpose other than to continue a war intended to do what?

Ah, well, this has drifted a long way from a consideration of football v football, I suppose. But perhaps not such a long way. If, to some extent, we are what we eat, we are also what we watch, and what we cheer for, and what we look for in our alleged role models.

The NFL on television on Sunday afternoon has been characterized as “America’s religion” by any number of journalists, not all of them sportswriters. Tom Englehardt, the author of *The American Way of War*¹ might agree, at least in part. He writes that “America’s true religion and addiction is force,” but he draws this conclusion from the continuous wars with which this nation has been conducting foreign policy, and from an analysis of one of the most profitable and recession-proof industries in the U.S. In 2008, the \$37.8 billion in arms sales meant the U.S. accounted for almost seventy percent of the global arms market.² The business of war, like the business of pro football, is booming. In considering our nation’s terrible propensity to build and stockpile the world’s most fearsome weapons and to sell them for profit, to bomb

and invade and occupy countries, sometimes on the basis of flimsy reasoning and at other times on the basis of no reasoning at all, we should be aware that for mass entertainment, large numbers of our citizens choose a game noteworthy for the damage it does to those who play it. In this respect, as in many others, it is the game that most dependably reproduces the shame and wreckage for which games are supposed to provide a substitute and a diversion.

NOTES

1. *The American Way of War: How Bush’s War Became Obama’s*, Boston: Haymarket Books, 2010, p. 7.
2. According to an AP story published July 28, 2010, in the *Boston Globe*, testifying before an investigatory commission in England, Hans Blix, the former United Nations weapons inspector, characterized the Bush administration as “high on military action.”



Co-opted?

BHASKAR SUNKARA

VENEZUELA, A MODERATELY PROSPEROUS nation with rosy relations with both the United States and global capital, was an unlikely setting for a socialist renaissance. The 1998 election of Hugo Chávez appeared to be nothing more than a parliamentary victory for a bombastic social democrat, surprising but hardly epochal. During his campaign, Chávez stood for a reorientation of the state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA), a “third way” alternative to neoliberalism, an increased minimum wage, constitutional reform, and a government clampdown on corruption. A discontented electorate warmly received the outsider’s rhetoric, giving him 56.4 percent of the popular vote.

“Watch what Chávez does, not what he says,” was the U.S. State Department line, referring to politically expedient wealth redistribution promises that seemed bound to collide with reality. A decade and change later we can note the lack of foresight, but the Left should take the advice. Following what Chávez says is a march through the generations and across the political gamut. Keynes is summoned with reverence at one moment, but he’s not a Keynesian. Import substitution and denunciations of “the Empire” evoke Perón, but he’s not another Caudillo. There are austere outbursts against materialism and globalization, but the ex-military officer would stick out on the G20 protest circuit. Chávez’s background is marked by his disconnect from the organized working class and the historic institutions of the Venezu-

elan Left. It’s fitting then that bits and pieces of everyone from Bolívar to Keynes to Che flow from his largely improvised communiqués.

But it is also a mark of the Western Left’s own detachment from a working class subject and the Marxist structural critique that analysis of a decade plus of the Bolivarian Revolution have focused on deciphering what Chávez says, and where his sentiments are, rather than the impact of his policies or the historical context of the movement he helms. The scope of such a task is beyond this limited space, but one particular claim — about the explosion of Venezuelan cooperatives and their anti-capitalist character — deserves examination.

Held up as the model of the cooperative movement, the MONDRAGON Corporation, a network based in Basque territory, is well-known. It represents some of the best that a worker-controlled archipelago amid a sea of capitalism can do. Since its founding in 1956, the federation has sprawled far beyond the town of Mondragon and today employs over 85,000, standing one of the leading business groups in Spain. The complex stands as proof that efficient enterprises, even corporations with tens of thousands of employees, can be structured democratically and that a dynamic economy can thrive without capitalists. With the success of a worker-owned management research center (SAIOLAN), the entrepreneurial role of “productive” capital has been socialized. The corporation’s banks provide capital and technical expertise for expanding existing cooperatives and new affiliates, key in a world still in need of growth and development, and a prototype for civic investment.

And yet, the limits of this venture are impossible to ignore. As Sharryn Kashmir notes

BHASKAR SUNKARA is an undergraduate at The George Washington University and the editor of *Jacobin* (<http://jacobinmag.com>), a D.C.-based publication.

in *The Myth of Mondragon*, there is something striking about the way MONDRAGON fits with the spirit of post-'68 capitalism. She sees the cooperative's workplace complementing, not challenging, a flexible, "team oriented" post-Fordist capitalism.¹ Furthermore, a coordinating class of managers and professionals mean the division of labor is very much alive within the corporation and the entity is hostage to the whip of the world market. Kasmir cites survey data that indicate the majority of workers don't feel like their firms belong to them. But, in the least, the venture shows the John Galts of the world can "go Galt" without taking the trappings of civilization along with them.

Venezuela, a country with state funding and logistical support for the cooperative sector, would seem poised to replicate the success of MONDRAGON on a large scale. The number of cooperatives registered in Venezuela has risen from the hundreds to the hundreds of thousands over the past decade. Some have proclaimed them to be an anti-bureaucratic form of socialization, not only superior to state directed nationalization, but the germ of a new society and a cornerstone of participatory democracy. However, the reality beneath the rhetoric of "endogenous development" is less than inspiring. Out of the over 220,000 registered cooperatives, only 70,000 are active — a failure rate of 70 percent. Most of the viable cooperatives are in the service sector, hardly producing commodities for a 21st century socialist society.

Far from vehicles of worker empowerment, cooperatives have in some respects institutionalized black market work without improving conditions. Many rely on state contracts, replacing public sector union posts with temporary work. Cooperatives are free from national labor laws and their workers often paid less than minimum wage. As equal "partners" in a firm, groups of workers who feel hyperexploited within their workplace cannot engage in industrial action. This feature makes them attractive to large capitalist firms that outsource work to cooperatives,

many of them staffed by unemployed ex-union members, to minimize their reliance on combative permanent workers — post-Fordist "flexibility" at its most developed. In the short-term, Venezuela would be well served by legislation

Cooperatives are free from
national labor laws and their
workers often paid less than
minimum wage.

that marks cooperative "associates" as workers, free to organize and collectively bargain within their workplace, but even this seems inadequate.

For all its contradictions, the MONDRAGON initiative was instigated and grew from below. The Chávez government has promoted cooperatives from above through a restrictive legal framework that undercuts existing working class organization and the prospects for self-emancipation. Building a grassroots cooperative movement in concert with, and not counterpoised to, the labor movement and that movement's party could be an important part of a revolutionary movement. Atomized cooperatives, manipulated by capital, sometimes mirroring the worst features of capital, are far from this.

Progressives would do well to remember that stripped from a wider movement, cooperatives have not always been subversive. They were welcomed by Franco in Spain and Mussolini in Italy, regimes that found their non-confrontational relations between labor and management and weakened class identification a complement to corporatism.

The Venezuelan cooperatives, all "220,000 of them," have taken on a mythic quality in many circles. Criticisms of them have been derided as academic, vulgar, or "objectively

counterrevolutionary.” It’s also worth recalling then Leszek Kolakowski’s assertion that the Left based its prospects on the experience of history, whereas the Right was the mere expression of surrender to the situation of the moment.² The Left can have political ideology; the Right has nothing but tactics. Electing a charismatic populist ambassador for 21st century socialism, taking his intentions as fact, and dismissing

critiques from the Left as “ideological” does not bode well for that socialism’s prospects.

NOTES

1. Kasmir, Sharryn. *The Myth of Mondragón: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-class Life in a Basque Town*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 194.
2. Leszek Kolakowski, “The Concept of the Left,” *New Left Reader*, ed., Carl Oglesby, (N.Y.:Grove, 1969), 144-58.

1937/8 in the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party

MIKE WOOD

IN 1940 THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY, the American section of the Fourth International, split in two over the issue of the defense of the Soviet Union during war. The minority, who wanted to abandon the policy of defensism, formed the Workers Party, which later became the Independent Socialist League. Over time many members of the WP/ISL developed new class theories of the USSR. The majority of the WP/ISL argued that the USSR was neither a bourgeois or workers' state, but could instead be termed bureaucratic collectivist; meaning that it had a collectivized economy and a bureaucratic ruling class. However there were many different theories of bureaucratic collectivism. Some members of the WP argued that bureaucratic collectivist systems were progressive compared to capitalism, others argued the opposite. Some argued that it was a transitory social phenomenon; others argued it could attain more permanence than such a formulation allowed for.

A useful way of understanding the way in which the various bureaucratic collectivist theories developed and contrasted over time is to look at the relationship of such theories to the wider framework of analysis of the USSR put forward by Trotsky. The 1937/8 debate on the class nature of the Soviet Union within the SWP is an interesting example of this, although the idea of bureaucratic collectivism is not itself raised. James Burnham and Joe Carter presented an amendment to the founding conference of the SWP in 1937 disputing Trotsky's analysis of the USSR as a workers' state. Burnham was part

of the minority in 1940 that eventually formed the WP, although he dropped out of Trotskyist politics soon after this. Carter became one of the most influential figures within the WP/ISL. However, in 1937 he had not rejected Trotsky's framework of understanding the Soviet Union. My purpose here is to demonstrate this, and also to show how operating within Trotsky's framework ensured that his 1937 ideas were quite different from his 1940 ones. The 1937/8 debate is often regarded as merely a precursor to the 1940 split, when in reality the relationship between the two is more complex. A more accurate understanding of the ideas advanced in 1937 can help us better understand the development of bureaucratic collectivist theories, which are an important part of the history of Trotskyism.

Carter's 1937 theory was not his later theory in embryonic form. If we consider his later theory as a jigsaw puzzle then we can see some of the pieces were clearly present in 1937. However, they were surrounded by pieces that would later be removed, or they were in a different position relative to each other. Thus the overall picture was quite different, although some elements would remain. One such element was the idea, discussed later, of the distinction of the forms of proletarian and bourgeois power. This idea made little sense in the bigger picture of Carter's 1937 writings, but would become a crucial part of his later theory when put into a different theoretical context.

I will therefore set out Trotsky's framework for analyzing the USSR, before moving on to describe the positions taken in the 1937/8 debate in the Trotskyist movement. The first section demonstrates the basic propositions of

MIKE WOOD is a PhD student at the University of York, UK, and a member of the Alliance for Workers Liberty.

Trotsky's analysis of the USSR, as put forward in *Revolution Betrayed*. The second section details the Burnham/Carter amendment to the 1937 SWP document on the USSR, which started the debate. I also here describe the response to this

The international objectives
of the bureaucracy were only
to ensure the stability of its
borders against capitalist attack,
but it did this poorly, without
concern for the international
working class.

amendment by both the majority of the party and by Trotsky himself. The third section covers Burnham's and Carter's respective answers to Trotsky's attack. Carter's answer is presented in detail as it represents the bulk of his position at the time. The final section briefly sets out, largely for the purposes of context, a separate critique of Trotsky's views on the USSR, which was also presented to the SWP in 1937/8.

James Burnham left the WP and Marxist politics, after the 1940 split and from this point his theories on the USSR were of far less relevance to the development of the ideas of the WP than Carter's were. Burnham's 1937 ideas are of less importance to a study of the Independent Socialist tradition than Carter's 1937 ideas, and receive considerably less attention here as a result. This is not to suggest they were of less importance in the debate at the time. Carter's 1937 reply to Trotsky, discussed in some detail later, is a crucial text of pre-history of the WP/ISL tradition. It is essential to analyze the changes to Carter's position over time and the impact those changes had on those involved in debates and discussions with him. Burnham's

ideas, whilst important in their own right, are not of such importance to that project.

Trotsky on the USSR

IN *REVOLUTION BETRAYED* Trotsky characterized the USSR as having made great advances due to the economic base established by the October Revolution. However the anti-democratic bureaucracy and incompetent leadership ensured those advances were held back and their full potential not realized. The property forms of nationalized property were necessary for the USSR to be considered socialist, but: "it is exactly for the Marxist that this question is not exhausted by a consideration of forms of property". For the entire of its life the USSR, argued Trotsky, had been subject to contradiction:

The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic, insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom.

The bureaucracy had no independent program in this analysis, but instead was the natural offshoot of still continuing social struggle between the bourgeois tendencies and the remnants of workers' power. As such the bureaucracy was marked by its conservatism and inertia, both at home and abroad. The international objectives of the bureaucracy were only to ensure the stability of its borders against capitalist attack, but it did this poorly; without concern for the international working class. Within the USSR, Trotsky contended, the bureaucracy would likely fall, either to the bourgeoisie re-establishing private property or to the proletariat taking back its political power. If the bureaucracy did not fall then it would itself end nationalized property:

The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class. On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat over the bureaucracy would ensure a revival of the socialist revolution. The

third variant consequently brings us back to the first two.

The necessarily incomplete and backward development of the USSR, according to Trotsky, meant that: “Two opposing tendencies are growing up out of the depth of the Soviet regime.” This contradiction was likely, as he saw it, to be resolved on the global scale during the coming war. If Germany were to defeat the USSR, capitalism would be restored. If the USSR were to defeat Germany, then world revolution would be the result, and in fact the only way in which such a defeat could occur. The culmination of this analysis was the program of necessity of political revolution in the USSR, against the bureaucracy, in order to stop capitalist restoration and continue the October Revolution.

Trotsky’s characterization of the ongoing struggle in the USSR was therefore one of capitalist restoration, with the imminent possibility of a world revolution. That revolution would reach even the U.S., Trotsky argued, and the struggles would be fierce. He postulated “a third term for Roosevelt is absolutely excluded” as fascism would inevitably rise if the proletarian revolution did not overcome it first. He certainly did not expect to see the Soviet Union survive the Second World War. The virtues and drawbacks of this analysis do not concern me here. What is of interest is instead the way in which those who disputed his theory often did so from within its general outlook by accepting these key propositions. Even when disputing Trotsky’s conclusion that the USSR was a workers’ state Carter did not dispute the idea that the struggle within it was one of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The bureaucracy’s program was therefore one of capitalist restoration, and its rise was largely “conjunctural.” Understanding which parts of this analysis were accepted and which were rejected is crucial to understanding the political conclusions reached.

A Tentative Enquiry

THIS SECTION EXPLAINS the first criticisms

of Trotsky’s analysis offered by Burnham and Carter in 1937, in the form of an amendment to a motion to the founding conference of the Socialist Workers Party, from December 1937-January 1938. The discussion around it occurred within the Socialist Party, which the Trotskyists had entered at the time. This amendment is as interesting for what it does not say as for what it includes. Burnham and Carter still operated within Trotsky’s framework to such an extent that they did not dispute the need to call for defense of the USSR. They still saw the struggle in the USSR as one of capitalist restoration, and this helps explain the differences between their 1937 conclusions and their 1940 conclusions.

In the late 1930s there was an “outbreak,” in Draper’s words, of theories on the USSR in and around the Trotskyist movement denying that it was a workers’ state. It is unclear exactly what influence that had on the American Trotskyists. Bruno Rizzi wrote *The Bureaucratization of the World* through 1938 and 1939; however this had little impact on the U.S. Trotskyist movement. Their first encounter with this work was when Trotsky used it to attack the minority’s position in 1940, as Sean Matgamna has shown. Other criticisms of Trotsky’s theory on the USSR had been published in the United States. Yvan Craipeau’s attacks on the degenerated workers’ state theory were known to the American movement, primarily through Trotsky’s reply to them. At the same time Burnham and Carter “had both been independently drifting towards a similar position” against the degenerated workers’ state theory, as Carter later recounted. Burnham presented his amendment to the majority motion on the USSR in November 1937 and Carter decided to sign it.

The Burnham-Carter amendment is interesting firstly as it is only an amendment — it does not offer a distinctly different political perspective to the original motion. In fact it deletes very little of the motion; only section 18 on the economic foundations of the Soviet

state. Section 18 states: “the basic economic structure established by the October revolution has remained substantially unaltered”

The section continues:

To the extent, therefore, that the nationalization of the means of production and exchange... remain basically in effect, the Soviet Union retains the socioeconomic foundations of a workers’ state.

Here the resolution follows Trotsky’s line that the USSR represented a contradictory phenomenon on the verge of collapse in one direction or another. Whilst Burnham and Carter dispute this, it is interesting to note that they do not do so from the position they would come to adopt in 1940. The conclusion of the motion, as amended by Burnham and Carter, remains the need for defense of the Soviet Union in war. In fact the replacement offered also mentions the idea that the nationalized economy is a step towards proletarian revolution in itself and therefore must be defended. Whilst it was maintained by many of their critics that their position led to abandoning defense of the Soviet Union it is clear that Burnham and Carter did not have this intention. This can be seen in the brief controversy following Cannon’s report of the convention for the party press, which stated:

The resolution of the National Committee, which calls for the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack — a position which necessarily presupposes an uncompromising struggle against the bureaucracy in war or peace — was adopted by a vote of 66 against 3 for one minority position and 2 for another.

Burnham responded with a motion to the SWP Political Committee:

That in Comrade Cannon’s article appearing in the last issue of the *New International*, the section dealing with the vote on the Russian Question might be interpreted to mean that the “defense of the Soviet Union” was the point at issue between the Majority and the Minority.

Cannon agreed to publish a correction to

clarify the matter, and the subsequent *New International* featured a note from the editors denying that the Minority position disputed defense of the Soviet Union:

If the author has inadvertently made such an interpretation possible, he requests that it be corrected. The N.C. Minority resolution expressed itself in favor of defense of the Soviet Union from imperialist attack.

Nevertheless Burnham and Carter’s amendment rejected the idea that the USSR remained a workers’ state. They accepted Trotsky’s analysis that the Soviet Union, and its ruling bureaucratic clique, was a sharply contradictory social phenomenon. They agreed with Trotsky’s historical analysis of the degeneration of workers’ rule in the USSR, arguing that as the working class lost political power the bureaucracy had replaced it. As such the bureaucracy had for a time played a contradictory social role, progressive insofar as it supported nationalized property and reactionary insofar as it attacked nationalized property. In other words, their analysis of bureaucratic power followed Trotsky in framing the question in terms of capitalist restoration. Their argument was that the bureaucracy was no longer a “hindrance” to the fight of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie; it was instead explicitly a counter-revolutionary force. The contradiction inherent in the bureaucracy, they argued, had already been resolved.

In order for the proletariat to rule society they in fact have to be in charge of it, according to the 1937 amendment. Whilst the bureaucracy might once have fulfilled that role in an imperfect manner, the fact that it had become completely counter-revolutionary meant the class rule of the proletariat had been destroyed. Without such rule there could be no workers’ state. Crucially, Burnham and Carter’s argument hinged on the hostility of the bureaucracy to nationalized property, as did Trotsky’s. Effectively they agreed with Trotsky on the general framework of the problem; the direction in which the social forces and tendencies forced

the USSR, however they disagreed on how far down this road it in fact had been forced. A key moment in the development of the later bureaucratic collectivist theory of the WP was the break with this framework and the conclusion that the Soviet bureaucracy was not hostile to nationalized property at all. In 1968 Carter wrote to Draper that he had doubts on this score even in 1937:

I felt uneasy at the idea that the managers as a social group had an interest in denationalization; though it gave more weight to the interests of individual managers in that direction. I was even more uneasy with the idea of Stalin and his party having anything to gain by denationalization.

How much weight can we give Carter's recollections, written thirty years after the events? Basic problems of reliability arise. How well did Carter remember? Even if he remembered correctly, how accurately would he wish these events to be recorded? With the benefit of hindsight it is much easier to have doubts about Stalin's denationalization agenda than it would have been in 1937, and this may be twisting Carter's recollection. Also the problem of selecting the right lens with which to analyze a theory applies to our own as much as those of other people. Carter's 1968 worldview and his 1937 worldview were drastically different, and making sense of his 1937 documents on the USSR from within the wider framework of his 1968 views would undoubtedly lead to distortions. There is no evidence to suggest that this is what has happened, however; Carter does not seem to analyze his 1937 interventions as a form of proto- bureaucratic collectivism. We must treat recollections such as this with a grain of salt, but they cannot be dismissed entirely. Other such recollections are used throughout, and the same uncertain disclaimer applies.

Burnham and Carter do not use the term "bureaucratic collectivist" in their analysis, and they do not even explicitly state what type of class society they think the USSR is. It is clear

from their amendment that it is not, in their opinion, a workers' state any longer, but they do not indicate that it is a capitalist state. They imply instead a peculiar confluence of class forces with an overriding tendency towards capitalist reconstruction. Trotsky's response to their amendment quickly seized on this aspect of their position, arguing that Burnham and Carter effectively analyzed the USSR as a system in which no class ruled.

Trotsky's answer to Burnham and Carter's amendment was to stress the basic analysis of *Revolution Betrayed*. He argued that the epochal struggle of the world was one between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The Russian bureaucracy played the role only of a "gear wheel" in that struggle. The bureaucracy was pressured to act at times in defense of the property forms on which it was based, and at times to act against those property forms, thus giving it a dual character and making the state a contradictory one. The proletariat both rule and are ruled, creating, as Trotsky saw it, a contradiction in reality, not in the theory. Nevertheless, Trotsky argued that the position of Burnham and Carter had a "healthy kernel" in their analysis of the increasingly reactionary nature of the bureaucracy. He disagreed with Burnham and Carter as to the scope of the reactionary actions of the bureaucracy, but not about the consequences if they were correct.

In contrast to Trotsky's position Max Sterling, in another article against Burnham and Carter's amendment, argued that the nationalized property form in the USSR was "quite adequate" as a definition of a proletariat state, implying that the actions of the bureaucracy had little to do with the definition of the state's class nature. Sterling came to the conclusion that the Red Army cannot be reactionary as it was driven to defend progressive property forms. Sterling's article may not be particularly significant, but it is useful as an indication of the variance of the majority opinion from Trotsky on this question. Jack Weber, in contrast, later wrote for the majority that the value of Burnham and Carter's

1937/8 position was that the debate clarified the dual social nature of the bureaucracy. Sterling also reports that Carter's working definition for the Soviet Union at the time of the 1937 debates was the "Stalin State". This term is also used by Carter in his subsequent response to Trotsky. Whether Burnham would also have accepted this term is unrecorded, as is the length of time Carter used the term for. It is clear from Carter's correspondence that he was never particularly happy with the term "bureaucratic collectivism":

In your spare moments try to invent a better term than "bureaucratic collectivism". I haven't been able to find one — though I once suggested "bureaucratic state-socialism" (which Max S. [Shachtman — MW] adopted for a while) — but this has even more disadvantages.

A Bolder Defense

THIS SECTION FOCUSES on Carter's reply to Trotsky titled: "The Class Nature of the Soviet State." It is in this reply that many of the ideas that would later make up his theory of bureaucratic collectivism first feature. The conclusion reached is very different, however, as this article is written from within Trotsky's framework of analysis which Carter's later theory rejects. In 1937 Burnham and Carter's organizational position was to affirm the idea of defense of the Soviet Union whilst questioning its class character. By 1940 this would be reversed completely, with the minority pointedly not taking a position on the nature of the USSR, but rejecting its defense in war.

Carter first clarified the disagreements within the majority on how to classify a state's class nature, as typified by the differences between Trotsky and Sterling's positions, for example. He argued that Sterling and the remainder of the U.S. party majority defined class character by property relations, whilst Trotsky defined it by the relationship of the state to property relations. The majority theory denied that there could be a conflict between the class character of the state and of the economy, while

Trotsky argued such a conflict was possible. Carter then moved to the idea that proletarian power and bourgeois power are fundamentally different, arguing that the bourgeoisie can rule without political power as their power can be held economically. The proletariat cannot hold their power economically, as to hold economic power they require political power. This was to become a crucial mainstay of bureaucratic collectivist theory in future years, both in the Shachtman and the Carter variants. On this point it is worth quoting Carter at length:

In Dec. 1937 I wrote an article against Trotsky's and Shachtman's views on the SU in the SWP Internal Bulletin, "The Class Nature of the Stalinist State" [sic]. It marked a transition in my views from Trotsky's theory to that of bc [Bureaucratic Collectivism — MW]. It stressed the qualitative differences between proletarian and bourgeois class rule; asserted that the destruction of proletarian political power by definition meant the end of the workers' state; but continued the views that the nationalized property was somehow progressive and should be defended against Stalinist efforts to destroy them and, under certain conditions, jointly with the Stalinists against capitalist imperialism. One of its essential premises was that there is an inherent antagonism between Stalinism and the Russian bureaucracy on the one hand, and nationalized property on the other. This premise was rejected by me later when on reflection and further study that the actions of Stalinism... strengthened rather than weakened nationalized property and planning; that they solidified the rule of the bureaucracy. Stalinism was not leading to capitalism in Russia but was organizing a new system of class exploitation.

I do not think it is entirely correct, however, to characterize the 1937 article in the manner Carter does here. It can possibly be seen as even closer to Carter's later position than he suggests. Whilst Carter's later description maintains that in 1937 he thought the bureaucracy was attacking nationalized property, the original article also suggested that if proletarian power is reducible purely to economic power, as

Sterling and others of the majority aside from Trotsky suggested, then the proletariat was in fact becoming stronger in the USSR. This would be the case only if nationalized property were being strengthened, i.e. if the bureaucracy were strengthening it. Carter went on to say, on the very same page, that the bureaucracy was not defending nationalized property. His views here are contradictory and muddled; his position was clearly in a high degree of tension. It raised some of the questions later bureaucratic collectivist theory would attempt to answer and also suggested some of the directions those answers would come from. Nevertheless, the main force of the conclusion

Carter drew in 1937 was directly opposed to his later theory of bureaucratic collectivism. Carter's 1941 formulation of a theory of bureaucratic collectivism was predicated on the idea of the bureaucracy existing in a relatively stable fashion on the basis of a nationalized economy. Many tentative theoretical steps in 1937 would have to be abandoned before Carter's bureaucratic collectivist theory as we now know it would be arrived at.

Burnham's response to Trotsky was considerably vaguer on some crucial questions, and as such it is hard to tell exactly how much his ideas changed. He argued that the majority had assumed their own conclusion in defining proletarian power as nationalized property, i.e. the entire dispute was over whether that was the case and as such it could not be taken as a simple definition. Burnham's argument hinged on the idea that the workers no longer controlled the state; therefore it could not be any longer considered a workers' state. It is unclear from this whether he here meant that the state could be restricted to a purely political phenomenon,

As the workers no longer had effective control of the means of production they could not be considered their owners, and as such the state was not a workers' state.

a conclusion Carter strenuously avoided, or that a class definition of a society should be made with reference to the property relations within it, not the property forms. The latter idea was to become a staple of bureaucratic collectivist theory. That interpretation of the argument is supported by Burnham's idea that there is no such thing as a proletarian economy, and that with regards to the bourgeois state: "there is no direct analogy in the proletarian dictatorship". In other words, the proletariat cannot hold power only through economic forms in the manner of the bourgeoisie. However, Burnham described as "questionable" Trotsky's idea that the relationships of the

state are political but that political relationships are "concentrated economics," seeming to support the other interpretation of this article.

Burnham was still, like Carter, operating within Trotsky's framework at this point. The USSR was in a "transitory" stage between a proletarian and a capitalist state. The bureaucracy was forming a "semi-bourgeois state" or an "embryonic bourgeois state", in his view. In other words Burnham still saw the bureaucracy as hostile to nationalized property and still saw the struggle ongoing in the USSR in terms of capitalist restoration. However, he went further than Carter in answering Trotsky's point that this left the state with no clear class rule, arguing that neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie ruled at the time, but that a "new middle class" ruled. This may seem similar to the later bureaucratic collectivist theory of a new ruling class, neither proletariat nor capitalist. However, Burnham's idea here was that this new middle class was attempting to become a capitalist class, and was therefore proceeding to attack nationalized economy: "it [the Soviet

state] is the instrument of the “new middle class” (striving to become a consolidated bourgeois class) within the Soviet Union.”

Burnham’s article is also worth studying for the description offered within it of Shachtman’s views. As my earlier quote from Carter’s 1963 letter to Draper shows, Shachtman was considered one of the majority’s key theorists in defense of the idea of the degenerated workers’ state. Burnham records that whilst Martin Abern and James Cannon argued that the USSR bureaucracy had a dual character, Shachtman and Jack Weber argued that it was purely reactionary. Shachtman, Cannon, and Abern all argued that the bureaucracy had the same role internally as internationally. Burnham went on to say that Shachtman would not call for the support of the USSR in Spain or China. Burnham attacked Shachtman for his inconsistency, and it is indeed clear from this report that Shachtman’s position was highly contradictory. He presumably maintained that the bureaucracy was reactionary, both at home and abroad, and that therefore its actions against revolution must be opposed. However, he also must have maintained that the USSR was a workers’ state, and that the state must be defended on its own soil. Shachtman gave the majority report on this question to the Convention of 1937/8. He was some way from a bureaucratic collectivist theory at this point.

None of the future leaders of the WP present at the Convention, aside from Carter and Manny Garrett, supported the Burnham and Carter position. Members of the 1940 minority recorded as voting against it include Shachtman, E.R. McKinney, Nathan Gould, Hal Draper, Ernest Erber, Al Glotzer, and Martin Abern. Some of these writers never abandoned a workers’ state theory, such as Abern. Garrett subsequently supported Carter’s ideas in the ongoing battle in the WP between Carter and Shachtman’s theories of bureaucratic collectivism; however, those ideas were quite different from the 1937 position.

The natural assumption here is that these writers had yet to be persuaded to the idea that the USSR was no longer a workers’ state. A letter from Peter Drucker to Draper records Draper’s previous assertion that he “wouldn’t support it [the Burnham-Carter amendment] even now, since it suggested that the bureaucracy was restoring private property”. Crucially, all the WP members listed above not only voted against Burnham and Carter’s amendment, but also voted for the majority motion. Hence the moment when many of them were persuaded that the USSR was no longer a workers’ state is still obviously unclear. Draper wrote in 1959 that when Rizzi was introduced into the 1940 debate by Trotsky to show how abandoning defense of the USSR would lead to abandoning the idea of the USSR as a workers’ state: “That was true, some of us, like myself, had already rejected it by that time.” This leaves a very small window, which must have been filled with intense discussion in the circles, which were to become the 1940 minority. On this subject Draper wrote to Carter in April 1962 asking:

What discussions, and with whom, led up to Shachtman’s indictment of the initial discussion article “Is Russia a Worker’s State?”. Also did Shachtman get anything from discussion with Johnson [C.L.R. James — MW], who (I recall) already during the faction fight was saying Russia was not a workers’ state, though I do not recall if he already at that time had the state capitalist theory. Ditto: did Shachtman get something from Lebrun [Pedrosa-MW]?

Carter replied:

I do not think J [Johnson/James — MW] or L [Lebrun/Pedrosa — MW] had any influence. I spent many hours with S [Shachtman — MW] — most of them during subway rides and on street corners! and later when I spent a day with him editing his *N.I.* [*New International* — MW] article.

An Alternative Position

A BRIEF CODA TO THIS ENQUIRY into the 1937/8 discussion is necessary. Burnham and Carter

were not the only members of the American Trotskyist movement to reject that the USSR was not a workers' state in 1937. Along with their minority amendment a separate minority resolution appeared, signed by Martin Glee, Dan Eastman, Eleanora Dean (Maya Deren), and numerous others. This resolution was brief and characterized as a "minimum statement of agreement" between the signatories. Expressed in the resolution was the hope that further discussion could produce a "definitive position," but until that point more extensive comment on the USSR was left to the individual signatories to provide in their own name. The resolution, less than a page long, argued the basic point that as the workers no longer had effective control of the means of production they could not be considered their owners, and as such the state was not a workers' state. This could possibly be considered similar to later bureaucratic collectivist theory, but is simply too vague to allow much of a conclusion to be drawn either way.

Some of the supplements to this are much more interesting, however. Draper argued in 1985 for closer attention to be paid to the position taken in 1937 by Eastman and Dean:

I suggest the rediscovery of a thesis by Dan Eastman (Max's son) and Eleanora Dean (who later as Maya Deren became a pioneer in dance film). They submitted it in later 1938 [sic] to the Trotskyist group then being reconstituted, to be named Socialist Workers Party. Their thesis proposed a knowledgeable and well-thought-out New Class theory of Stalinism far superior to Rizzi's later one. Unfortunately they made the mistake of labeling their New Society "Industrial Feudalism," a label that turned everyone off... The positive content of the Eastman-Deren thesis was absorbed two years later into Carter's theory of bureaucratic collectivism.

The Eastman-Deren thesis was that economic forms alone are insufficient for the definition of a society's class nature; this shows a similarity with later bureaucratic collectivist theory. However, they took this idea further than

bureaucratic collectivist theory would allow it to go, as they argued that "centralized operation of the means of production is an administrative question, the control of the means of production is a social question." This was elaborated with the idea that nationalized property was only of "technical importance", not a social determinant. The logical conclusion of this, which Carter and other bureaucratic collectivist theorists rejected, was that collectivization was not inherent to the Russian economy but only a technical and administrative tool.

Where Eastman and Deren go further than Burnham and Carter is the question of Trotsky's framework of capitalist restoration, which they rejected wholeheartedly. Whilst Carter stuck, unhappily, with the idea of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, and retained completely the idea that the USSR's economy had more productive potential than in its old capitalist form, Eastman and Deren argued that the USSR had reverted to a pre-capitalist form of production, hence the designation of it as "feudalist." When Draper argued that Carter incorporated the "positive content" of this thesis into his own it is not clear whether he meant Carter was influenced by the Eastman-Deren position or that similarities could be identified. Either way, Eastman and Deren do not appear to be involved in the minority of 1940 or the WP, and their position is not otherwise referenced as particularly influential. It is best regarded, therefore, as a useful indicator of the discussions ongoing in the Trotskyist movement at the time.

Conclusion

THE 1937/8 DEBATE in the American Trotskyist movement shows the beginnings of a desire for a new theory of the USSR, but it does not show completely the direction such a theory would eventually come from. Even where writers like Burnham and Carter questioned Trotsky's theory, they accepted key parts of his framework of analysis, and reached very similar conclusions.

In the few years that followed they would both, in different ways, abandon that framework and analyze the USSR from crucially different perspectives. This debate does not, therefore, show bureaucratic collectivist theories in their infancy, but does show some of the constituent ideas of those theories in a very different format.

We can see here the importance of understanding the wider theoretical outlook from within which an author is writing. The key political difference between Burnham and Carter's respective theories of 1937 and of 1940 is their position on the defense of the Soviet Union. Other ideas are clearly constant between the two debates. Looked at on face value the 1937 positions therefore seem like a "halfway house" option, with Burnham and Carter not yet bold

enough to follow through their ideas to the political conclusions they would later draw. This view of ideological development is too simplistic. If Burnham and Carter's 1937 ideas are analyzed in relation to the wider debate on the USSR within the American Trotskyist movement, particularly with regard to Trotsky's views, it shows that their call for defense of the USSR makes sense within the context of a wider framework of analysis. Through studying the rejection of that framework and the adoption of a new one we can best understand the difference in their earlier and later positions.

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

The Soul of Man Under . . . Anarchism?

KRISTIAN WILLIAMS

THE TITLE OF OSCAR WILDE'S ESSAY "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" has long perplexed readers, especially anarchists who rightly feel that the essay belongs in their canon rather than that of the Marxists, the Fabians, or the Labour Party.¹

What Wilde presents to us in the essay is a vision for a new society and, as important, a sample of a model for political thought. Both stand in marked contrast to the unseemly connotations that attached themselves to the word "socialism" over the course of the twentieth century — faction fights, show trials, gulags, paternalism, bureaucracy, cultural sterility, and uniform thought.

The society Wilde imagines is in all respects the opposite of that. It is one in which the arts, the sciences, and the whole of intellectual life prospers; a society without property, prisons, or crime — in which no one is hungry and machines do all the dirty, distasteful, tedious work. It is, in short, a society in which everyone is free to choose his own path and flourish in her own way, to prosper — not in petty financial terms, but in terms of character. "The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is," Wilde wrote. This socialism, which will produce "true, beautiful, healthy Individualism," will free us, not only from the dangers of poverty, but from the demands of wealth as well: "No-

body will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live."²

Wilde's socialism — and it is a form of socialism — represents socialism in the service of individualism. It is a socialism based more in aesthetic ideals than in economic theories. It takes as its model the artist rather than the proletarian and is as much concerned to free the repressed bourgeois as the oppressed worker. Its tastes are aristocratic; its ethics, bohemian. It is, at once, deeply spiritual and thoroughly heretical, ethical and antinomian, rebellious and harmonious, egoistic and universally compassionate, urgent and utopian.

It is, in a word, anarchism.³

"Whatever One Chooses to Call It"

YET THE WORD — ANARCHY — does not appear anywhere in Wilde's essay.

Instead, Wilde expressed indifference, almost disdain, for ideological labels: "Socialism, communism, or whatever one chooses to call it . . .," he begins one paragraph.⁴

Does Wilde deliberately avoid the word *anarchism* because of its sectarian connotations? Or is he issuing a subtle snub, siding with William Morris against David Nicoll in the dispute that had recently divided the Socialist League?⁵ Or is it perhaps something greater — that no label is needed, or no label will suffice?

Wilde loved to subvert language — through irony, paradox, misdirection. He played with words, but his was a serious kind of play. He inverted their usual meanings, reinventing them in the process. He used them to expose false ideals and to imagine new ones.

Of course, all this verbal dynamism can lead to a great deal of misunderstanding, and people have never really been sure when, or whether,

Kristian Williams is the author of *American Methods: Torture and the Logic of Domination* and *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (both from South End Press). He is presently at work on a book about Oscar Wilde and anarchism, for which he has received support from the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation and the Institute for Anarchist Studies. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Wilde meant what he said. As the *Spectator* commented when his essay first appeared:

Mr. Oscar Wilde, in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, has apparently set himself to galvanise his readers. . . . All these literary bullets

Wilde here positions
anarchism as a type of socialism
— but a type that, paradoxically,
goes further. Anarchism is a
socialism, but anarchism is more
than socialism. It is not merely
the most extreme variety, it is also
something new.

are shot out in defence of the thesis that men should be themselves, in contempt it would seem, not merely of the public, but of all law which restricts their individualism. The article, if serious, would be thoroughly unhealthy, but it leaves on us the impression of being written merely to startle and excite talk.⁶

Perhaps Wilde's pervasive, insistent ambiguity was a kind of defensive strategy, allowing him to say outrageous and provocative things while evading the repercussions of a direct conflict with authority.

Or perhaps it was just force of habit, the rhetorical embodiment of Wilde's double life: "I live in terror of not being misunderstood," he wrote.⁷

Was anarchism the politics that dare not speak its name?

"The Kiss of Anarchy"

SO FAR AS I HAVE DISCOVERED, Oscar Wilde referred to himself as an anarchist on two occasions.

The first occurred in 1893, two years after

"The Soul's" first publication. Wilde wrote to a French periodical, in response to a list of questions: "Autrefois, j'étais poète et tyran. Maintenant je suis artiste et anarchiste." ("In the past I was a poet and a tyrant. Now I am an artist and an anarchist.")⁸

This statement indicates the direction of Wilde's political development, and connects it decisively with his development as an artist. It stands as a direct repudiation of remarks he made earlier in his career. In the poem "Libertatis Sacra Fames," published in 1880, Wilde had written:

Better the rule of One, whom all obey,
Than to let clamorous demagogues betray
Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.⁹

He was somewhat more ambivalent in his "Sonnet to Liberty," which appeared (along with "Libertatis") in his 1881 collection, *Poems*. There he begins rather ungenerously, by distancing himself from the oppressed masses, "whose dull eyes/ See nothing save their own unlovely woe." And he claims not to care about political conflict or the claims at stake:

all kings
By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades
Rob nations of their rights inviolate
And I remain unmoved.

"And yet" — he begins the final lines of the poem —

and yet,
These Christs that die upon the barricades,
God knows it I am with them, in some things.

With what things is he with them? The poem ends without specifying, but Wilde does hint at it earlier in the verse:

the roar of thy Democracies,
Thy reigns of Terror, they great Anarchies,
Mirror my wildest passions like the sea
And give my rage a brother — ! Liberty!
For this sake only do thy dissonant cries
Delight my discreet soul¹⁰

It is not the "children" of liberty that move him, not their "unlovely woe," nor the "treacher[y]" of kings, nor the "rights" of nations; it is the

“roar” and violence of the upheavals that “Mirror” his “passions” and his “rage.” It is the spirit of revolt that they share. Rebellion makes them “brother[s],” and allows the poet to see those who “die upon the barricades” as “Christs.”

We can detect here, in a less developed form, something of the sentiment that was later to inspire “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”: They each celebrate liberty, of course. But more than that, they also share the notion that oppression makes people insensitive and dull. Both refuse to treat the poor as objects of pity, and instead praise them when they resist. Both engage in the aestheticization of rebellion, and promote the idea that social conflict reflects individual feeling. And both the poem and the essay identify their rebels with Christ.

Still, while touring America in 1882, Wilde felt the more conservative poem a better expression of his views. “Does the ‘Sonnet to Liberty’ voice your political creed?” a reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner* asked. “No,” Wilde replied, “that is not my political creed. I wrote that when I was younger. . . . Perhaps something of the fire of youth prompted it. . . . If you would like to know my political creed . . . read the sonnet ‘Libertatis Sacra Fames.’”¹¹

And yet — there is hardly a line in “Libertatis” that is not contradicted somewhere in “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.” In 1880 Wilde declared himself “nurtured in democracy,” and “Liking best that state republican.” In 1891, he wrote: “democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.”¹² In the poem he is down on “clamorous demagogues” who “betray Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy” — while in the essay he is fond of “agitators,” who “sow the seeds of discontent,” because “[w]ithout them. . . there would be no advance towards civilization.”¹³ In the poem he was quite clear: “I love them not whose hands profane/ Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street;” whereas later, he expressed a preference for the “paving-stone” over “the pen”: “The very violence of a revolution may make the

public grand and splendid for a moment.”¹⁴ In his poem he worried that “beneath the ignorant reign” of the rabble “Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honour, all things fade.” And in “The Soul of Man” he remarked that “popular authority and the recognition of popular authority are fatal” to the arts — yet, it is in large part because of the promise for the arts and for learning that he advocates socialism: “the community. . . will supply the useful things, and . . . the beautiful things will be made by the individual. . . . it is the only possible way by which we can get either the one or the other.”¹⁵ As he famously concluded: “The new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. . . . The new Individualism is the new Hellenism.”¹⁶

Perhaps the only portion of the “Libertatis” that would be at home in the later essay is Wilde’s hope for a world “Where every man is Kinglike and no man/Is crowned above his fellows. . . .” This is, for certain, the only radical sentiment to be found in the poem — and, with its paradoxical form, it is also the most Wildean statement of the composition. It is, at once, egalitarian and aristocratic, but clearly Wilde was still “a poet and a tyrant,” not yet “an artist and an anarchist.”

He had not yet found that the secret of individualism lay in socialism — and vice versa.

“Rather More Than a Socialist”

WILDE’S SECOND PROFESSION OF ANARCHISM came in 1894, a year after the first. He told a journalist from *The Theatre*: “We are all of us more or less Socialists now-a-days. . . . Our system of government is largely socialistic. . . . What is the House of Commons but a socialistic assembly? . . . I think I am rather more than a Socialist. . . . I am something of an Anarchist, I believe. . . .”¹⁷

Wilde here positions anarchism as a type of socialism — but a type that, paradoxically, goes further. Anarchism is a socialism, but anarchism is more than socialism. It is not merely the most

extreme variety, it is also something new. It surpasses the category to which it belongs.

Though this interview appeared under the headline “New Views of Mr. Oscar Wilde,” in it he really only re-states some of his established positions. Beginning with poetry (“A glorious passion is poetry”),¹⁸ Wilde works his way around to politics, religion, and crime. Here many of his views are familiar from “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”: Christ is a “marvelous personality,” pirates are “very fine fellows,” and the prison system is “a perfect fiasco.”¹⁹

In one interesting exchange, Wilde also expressed “considerable sympathy” with burglars: “In nine cases out of ten they only take what we really do not want. . . . The loss of our last guinea is a loss; the loss of a thousand pounds when we have a hundred thousand in the bank is *not* a loss.”²⁰

He goes on to tell of the unhappiness a friend experienced when his house was robbed, only to conclude: “Now, had someone fallen downstairs and broken a limb, it would have been reasonable cause for distress; but, really, silver spoons! Japanese curiosities! What good are they?”²¹

The story — a bit surprising from a man whose earliest lectures centered on the need for beautiful things in the home²² — shows us something of Oscar Wilde’s attitude toward property. As he wrote in “The Soul Of Man”:

In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or perhaps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One’s regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in

him — in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living.²³

In the details of the interview, then, we find Wilde repeating the points he had made in the earlier essay. The brief mention of anarchism, in this context, suggests not a new philosophy, but a new name for his position. It announces, in other words, that Wilde’s socialist ideas are, in fact, anarchist and that “The Soul of Man” should be read accordingly.

“What the State is to Do”²⁴

IF THERE IS A CASE TO BE MADE against “The Soul’s” anarchism, it must be that Wilde assigned a role to the state. He did so: “The State is to be a voluntary manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful.”²⁵

This is a very peculiar kind of state. It is a state that does not govern: “the State must give up all idea of government,” he says, adding a few lines later: “All modes of government are failures.”²⁶

Wilde’s essay is replete with similar statements: “The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all”;²⁷ “there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad.”²⁸

A few pages later, he explains in greater detail:

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. . . . Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. . . . Of course authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary association that man is fine.²⁹

“A Dangerous Adventure”

I NOTED EARLIER that there were two occasions on which Wilde referred to himself as an anarchist. But there was also a third time, when he

came very close. This last is, in some respects, I feel, the most revealing. It's a small story, but it says much about Wilde's attitude and approach.

In August 1894, Wilde wrote to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, to tell of "a dangerous adventure." He had gone out sailing with two lovely boys, Stephen and Alphonso, and they were caught in a storm. "We took five hours in an awful gale to come back! [And we] did not reach pier till eleven o'clock at night, pitch dark all the way, and a fearful sea. . . . All the fishermen were waiting for us."

Tired, cold, and "wet to the skin," the three men immediately "flew to the hotel for hot brandy and water." But there was a problem. The law stood in the way: "As it was past *ten* o'clock on a Sunday night the proprietor could not *sell* us any brandy or spirits of any kind! So he had to *give* it to us. The result was not displeasing, but what laws!"

Wilde finishes the story: "Both Alphonso and Stephen are now anarchists, I need hardly say."³⁰

NOTES

1. See, for instance: M. Saint-Georges de Bouhelier, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *The Individualist Anarchists: An Anthology of Liberty (1881-1908)*, ed. Frank H. Brooks (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994) 101-4.
 2. Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," in *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2003) 1178.
 3. Petr Kropotkin, whom Wilde knew and admired, defined anarchism thus: "Anarchism (from the Gr. *an-*, and *apxn*, contrary to authority), is the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government — harmony in such a society being attained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being."
- Kropotkin was clear that anarchists held "their economic conceptions . . . in common with all socialists, of whom they constitute the left wing." [Petr Kropotkin,] "Anarchism" in *The Essential Kropotkin*, ed. Emile Capouya and Keitha Tompkins (New York: Liveright)

108-9.

4. Wilde, "Soul of Man," 1175.

5. See: E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 564-572.

6. Quoted in Stuart Mason [Christopher Millard], *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (London: Bertram Rota, 1967) 73.

7. Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," in *Collins*, 1114.

8. David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) 76-7.

Wilde had previously written, in "The Truth of Masks" (1885), "Monarchy, Anarchy, and Republicanism may contend for the government of nations; but a theatre should be in the power of a cultured despot. There may be division of labour, but there must be no division of mind." Oscar Wilde, "The Truth of Masks," in *Collins, Ibid.*, 1172.

When his collection of critical essays, *Intentions*, was to be released in a French edition, Wilde suggested removing "The Truth of Masks" ("je ne l'aime plus") and replacing it with "The Soul of Man under Socialism." *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000) 487.

9. Oscar Wilde, "Libertatis Sacra Fames," in *Collins*, 858.

10. Oscar Wilde, "Sonnet to Liberty," in *Collins*, 859.

11. "Oscar Wilde: An Interview with the Apostle of Aestheticism," in *Oscar Wilde in America: The Interviews*, Eds. Matthew Hofer and Gary Scharnhorst (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 2010), 102-3.

12. Wilde, "Soul of Man," 1182.

13. *Ibid.*, 1176.

14. *Ibid.*, 1188.

15. *Ibid.*, 1184.

16. *Ibid.*, 1197.

17. Percival W. H. Almy, "New Views of Mr. Oscar Wilde," in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections, Volume 1*, ed. E.H. Mikhail (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979) 232.

18. *Ibid.*, 229.

19. *Ibid.*, 231-2, Compare with "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," 1179-81 (on Christ), 1182 (on punishment), and 1180 (on law-breaking).

20. Almy, 231-2.

21. *Ibid.*, 232.

22. See: "The House Beautiful," 913-925, though here, too, he insists that beautiful things should be *used*: "Whatever you have that is beautiful if for use, then you should use it, or part with it to someone who will."

Oscar Wilde, "The House Beautiful," in *Collins*, 921.

23. Wilde, "Soul of Man," 1178.

24 *Ibid.*, 1183.

25 *Ibid.*, 1183.

26 *Ibid.*, 1181.

Wilde referred to the failure of government earlier, in a review of Chuang Tsu's writings: "There is such a thing,' says Chuang Tsu, 'as leaving mankind alone: there has never been such a thing as governing mankind.' All modes of government are wrong. They are unscientific, because they seek to alter the natural environment of man; they are immoral, because by interfering with the

individual, they produce the most aggressive forms of egotism; they are ignorant, because they try to spread education; they are self-destructive, because they engender anarchy." Oscar Wilde, "A Chinese Sage," in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 223-4.

27 Wilde, *Soul of Man*, 1192.

28 *Ibid.*, 1193.

29 *Ibid.*, 1177.

30 *Complete Letters*, 602.

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

The Popular Front, A Social and Political Tragedy: The Case of France

DAN LA BOTZ

DECADES SINCE THE SPRING OF 1934 when the Communists first proposed the Popular Front as their strategy for fighting fascism and even longer since the summer of 1939 when it was suddenly terminated by the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Popular Front — the alliance of the Communists with Socialists, liberals, and even sometimes conservative political parties — remains an issue for the left. For though it arose out of the very specific conditions of the great crises of capitalism and of Soviet Communism in that era, the Popular Front recurred to become the dominant method of Communist politics in capitalist countries. With Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, the Communists returned to the Popular Front in 1941, and continued it throughout the war and into the postwar period. The Popular Front thus became not simply a strategy, but almost a political habit, a style, the very way of being of a Communist. Throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century, many people could hardly tell a Communist from a left liberal, for liberalism had become the costume of Communism — which is not to say that Communists became liberals.

In Western Europe by the 1980s the Popular Front evolved into Euro-Communism, and eventually after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of the Western European Communist Parties became ordinary social democratic parties. Like the Social Democrats, these post-Soviet Communist Parties, most with

new names, not only shared in legislating and governing in capitalist states, but also shared responsibility for neoliberal free market policies, for social welfare budget cuts, and for the rollback of union contracts and the decline of workers' wages. Still today some old-style Communist Parties, Maoist groups, and neo-Stalinists adopt a Popular Front outlook which shapes their day-to-day work in the labor and social movements. Most recently in the United States such groups have argued that support for Barack Obama and the Democratic Party represented in some way a progressive development and a step forward in the struggle for socialism. Such a political position is, of course, a legacy of the Popular Front.

Perhaps the most important reason for discussing the Popular Front, however, is that it represents in the popular consciousness — including all too often in the radical consciousness — the heyday of Communism, the glory days of “the way we were” in the 1930s, a time supposedly when leftists united with liberals and the ordinary folk to organize labor unions, fight racism, and defeat fascism. While there is some truth in the blurry romantic impressionism of this popular understanding of the period, it tends to obscure more than it illuminates. For the Popular Front, in fact, failed to defeat fascism, while the workers it had organized into unions were soon mobilized under their national flags to fight and die by the millions in a second great war to divide the planet between imperial powers, while at the same time in the Soviet Union the hope of socialism congealed into Communist totalitarianism. The Popular Front thus represented a tragic defeat for the working class, not a victory. Yet the myth remains, and

DAN LA BOTZ is a Cincinnati-based teacher, writer and activist. He edits *Mexican Labor News and Analysis* and sits on the editorial board of *New Politics*. He is a member of the *National Committee of Solidarity*, a socialist organization in the United States.

for that reason, it is important to reexamine this storied moment in the past as we organize to meet the challenges of the present and to move forward into the future. For, contrary to what the legend might suggest, the Popular Front, that is,

The Stalinist Communist Party of the 1930s succeeded in destroying the European revolutionary labor movement and with it the hopes for socialism for generations.

the left-liberal alliance justified in terms of the ultimate victory of socialism, does not represent the way forward.

An Overview of the Period

DURING THE EARLY 1920S the Communist International, then still led by Vladimir Lenin, promoted throughout Europe, where revolutionary possibilities still seemed greatest, the strategy of the united front among workers, labor unions, and working class organizations, anarchist, Socialist, and Communist, in order to build the forces for revolution. The united front was a strategy to both build workers' power and, through joint action and frank criticism of the party's allies, to win workers from reformist leadership to revolutionary leadership under the Communist Party.

With Lenin's death in 1924 and the rise to power of Stalin by 1927, the Communist International was put through a series of dramatic and wrenching shifts. The shifts in the Communist Party strategy between 1927 and Stalin's death in 1953 form the context for understanding the place of the Popular Front in Communist thinking.

- First, in the Third Period from 1928-1934, the Communists gave up the united front and

began to characterize the labor and socialist parties as "social fascists." The Communists, arguing that the Socialists were as great an enemy as Hitler, not only refused to cooperate with the Socialists but also fought them politically and sometimes physically. In Germany, this Communist strategy succeeded in dividing the Communist and Socialist labor movements and opened the door to Hitler, to the holocaust, and to World War II.

- Second, suddenly reversing their position, in the Popular Front period from 1934 to 1939 the Communists created a political alliance not only with labor unions and Socialists, but also with petty bourgeois and bourgeois political parties — and eventually with any anti-fascist party. The result was the subordination of the left and the labor movement to capitalist parties everywhere, leading to working class defeats in France and Spain where fascism took power and to reform movements which were quickly institutionalized in countries like Mexico and the United States.

- Third, in August of 1939, the Soviet Union shocked the world by entering into an alliance with Hitler's Nazi Germany, with the two great powers dividing Poland between them. The Communist International simultaneously terminated the Popular Front, subordinating Communist politics to the Communist-Nazi alliance. Everywhere the Communist Party declined in membership while much of the left became disoriented by the sudden shift.

- Fourth, after being attacked by Germany in 1941, the Soviet Union just as suddenly returned to its Popular Front policies — only now often in the form of governments of national unity to win the war. The Communists suppressed their criticism of great power imperialism, subordinated the struggles of ethnic and racial minorities to the effort to win the war, and joined in no-strike pledges that sacrificed the wages and conditions of labor for the duration. The war also provided the context for the institutionalization of the industrial labor unions and the conversion of their once militant leaderships into bureaucratic business unions.

- After World War II, the Communist con-

tinued the Popular Front, only now using it a democratic façade for the Soviet Union's conquest of the nations of Eastern Europe. At the same time in France and Italy, as part of the postwar settlement, the Communists worked with the capitalist parties in Liberation governments to contain and to dampen revolutionary movements in those countries.

- Meanwhile in Russia, Stalin's counter-revolution of 1927-1937 not only eliminated the Old Bolshevik revolutionaries in the notorious show trials, it also took the lives of millions of peasants in the collectivization of agriculture, and through its forced march to industrialization oppressed and exploited millions of workers. The Soviet victory over the Nazis in World War II consolidated Stalin's personal dictatorship and, more important, it institutionalized the bureaucratic Communist or bureaucratic collectivist totalitarian system of the Soviet Union.

- Consequently, the postwar decolonization movement, rather than finding leadership in a democratic, revolutionary and international socialism, was guided by Stalin and the Soviet Union. In the former colonial nations — China, Vietnam, Korea — Stalinist-style Communist Parties led successful national revolutions that rid themselves of Western imperialists, but then created new one-party Communist states. Moreover, Stalinist-style government, forced-march modernization, and command economies became the dominant model for third world countries throughout Africa and Asia, with disastrous results nearly everywhere.

At the center of this world historic tragedy was the destruction of the European working class and socialist movement, which had been born in the revolutionary upheavals of the mid-19th century and which had grown to maturity in the first third of the 20th century, only to be obliterated in the 1930s and 1940s by Stalin's murder of the Russian Bolshevik revolutionaries, by Mussolini's, Hitler's, and Franco's destruction of the Communist and Socialist Parties and anarchist organizations in Italy, Germany, and France. Finally, of course, the European Jewish holocaust and the slaughter

of World War II took the lives of millions of people, many of whom had been class conscious workers who had formed the great body of the labor movement. The Stalinist Communist Party of the 1930s succeeded in destroying the European revolutionary labor movement and with it the hopes for socialism for generations.

Surprisingly for those out of the Communist party tradition, the Communists' role in the period apparently poses no problems. As a prominent Canadian Communist leader told me in a recent debate, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," and he went on to explain that the Popular Front proved to be successful, resulting in the defeat of Fascism and Nazism, in the expansion of the Soviet system to Eastern Europe, and in the post-war anti-colonial movements. The folksy pudding metaphor used to describe the agony of the era suggests that Stalin was a hero after all, that Soviet Communism was a success, and that a bright future lies in that dark past. This is the outlook of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, that "things are for the best in the best of all possible worlds" and Hegel's view that "whatever is, is right." What happened, we are told, had to happen and was for the best, even when we know that millions died unnecessarily in the process, when other alternatives existed which might have changed history, and when the results produced the monstrous Fascist, Nazi, and Stalinist states, while leaving capitalism to continue to produce new horrors. We challenge this conservative, uncritical, and ultimately unconvincing and cynical view of such a complex period by looking here at the Popular Front and the role of Communists in the Front period (1934-1939) in France.

The Crisis of the 1930s in Europe

The world crisis of capitalism which had begun with World War I was followed by the economic crisis of the early 1920s, and then by the Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s. This prolonged and painful crisis brought much of Europe to a boiling point three times, once in

the late 1910s, again in the mid-1920s, and finally a third time in the mid- to late-1930s. Revolutions in Russia, Germany, Austro-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire overthrew monarchs and brought republican government (of varying degrees of democracy) to the latter three, while they brought socialist revolution to Russia. The wars and revolutions that had shattered the old Europe and the postwar economic crises kept the pot boiling. For two decades, from 1914 to 1934, Europe was ripe for socialist revolution.

The mid- to late-1930s in Europe was a period of enormous popular struggle and resistance from Austria to Spain, accompanied at different times and in various places by peasants' strikes and land seizures, workers' strikes and factory occupations, armed resistance of the laboring classes, and even attempts at revolutionary seizures of power on a regional or local level. Europe — except for Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany — was a cauldron that roiled and seethed and threatened at times to boil over and blow the lid off capitalism.

The recurring crises of the 1910s to 1930s produced more than one generation of socialist and anarchist revolutionaries. Many had been inspired by the Russia Revolution of October 1917. Despite the Stalinist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and the rise of Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany, revolution still remained a possibility as demonstrated most clearly in Spain. Certainly in the 1920s and into the 1930s many Socialist, Communists, and anarchists believed that the way to stop fascism and to prevent the rise of new fascist political movements was through workers' revolution. This strategic vision would be ended with the coming of the Popular Front, as Communists argued that only by preserving and strengthening capitalist states allied with the Soviet Union could fascism be stopped.

Why the Popular Front?

What events led to the rise of the Popular Front? What had changed to lead the Communists to

adopt this new strategy? The Popular Front, was a result of both striving in the workers' movement and of Communist policy which was ultimately determined by the Soviet Union's foreign policy as directed by Joseph Stalin. How did these two forces then — the needs of the workers' movement and Soviet foreign policy — shape the Popular Front?

First, the Communist Party's Third Period theory of "social fascism," which it carried out from 1928 to 1935, had proven disastrous. By not only refusing to ally with the Social Democrats, but actually frequently battling them, occasionally in alliance with the Nazis, the Communists had opened the door to Hitler. Second, the Nazis' surprisingly rapid conquest of political power immediately raised the possibility of a German war against the Soviet Union, forcing Stalin to seek new allies to protect his nascent bureaucratic state. In particular, he now wanted an alliance with France and England. Third, in France, as in other countries where fascism had not yet come to power, ultra-right and fascist groups began to become bolder and to take to the streets. The working people of other nations were horrified with the prospect of fascists coming to power in their own countries as they had in Italy and Germany.

The European working classes, reading the handwriting on the wall, began from below to move, demanding unity on the left and a struggle against fascism both in their own countries and internationally. The working class desire for unity in the early 1930s initially conflicted with the Communist Party's opposition to an alliance with the Socialists and with the Socialist and Catholic labor unions. Working people in many European countries, however, now desperately wanted an alliance between Communist and Socialist Parties to stop Hitler. They wanted something like a return to the Communist Party's policy of a United Front, that is, an alliance of the left and the labor movement. Stalin would turn these movements from below in another direction.

While workers sought unity to fight fascism, Stalin had his own reasons for the Popular Front, and they were complex. He may be said to have adopted the Popular Front as the strategy for the Communist International for three reasons.

- First, the Popular Front was developed to defend the Soviet Union and its new bureaucratic ruling class. Stalin saw the Soviet Union, still threatened from within by the remnants of the revolutionary Communist left and also by peasant resistance to the forced collectivization of agriculture, now threatened from without by Hitler's Nazi Germany.
- Second, Stalin had an interest in assuring that the Communist International, as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, would continue to be a major force (in some countries the dominant force) in the labor movement. Stalin's International, therefore, had to take the initiatives to prevent the rise of competitors, particularly competitors on the left.
- Third, Stalin recognized that, should the labor movement escape the control of the Communist Party, socialist revolution in Europe would also potentially threaten the Communist Party's rule and his dictatorship in Russia. Therefore, the Communist International, in order to maintain its hold on the working classes of Europe, put forward the Popular Front as a part of what it claimed was a broader revolutionary strategy to achieve socialism.

For Stalin, the foreign policy issues were overriding. Faced with Hitler and Nazi Germany, Stalin wanted "collective security," that is, an international alliance of the Soviet Union with Great Britain and France. He recognized, however, that he could not reach a collective security agreement as long as the Soviet Union, the Communist International, and the national Communist parties were perceived as a revolutionary threat to capitalism. It was this that led him to seek to transform the old policy of the United Front — that is, an alliance between working class parties — into the Popular Front — that is, an alliance of the working class par-

ties with radical (petty bourgeois) and capitalist parties opposed to Fascism-Nazism in Europe.

Though France and Soviet Russia had already reached a non-aggression pact in 1932, Stalin was keen on turning that agreement into a mutual defense treaty. But such an international treaty could be negotiated only if there were liberal or social democratic governments in France and the other remaining European democracies; consequently it was necessary to create a Communist alliance with both Socialist and liberal capitalist parties in the Western European countries. To achieve an alliance with such capitalist parties within the context of bourgeois electoral politics, however, it was necessary for the Communist International and its affiliated parties to give up calls for revolution, and, beyond that, to become (in this specific context) the defenders of private property and of the state, especially when challenged by revolutionary socialists on the left. We turn now to see how the Popular Front alliance of Socialist and Communist parties with capitalist parties affected the left and the labor movement in the case of France.

The Popular Front in France

FRANCE WAS IN THE 1930S a major capitalist power and the center of a vast empire that stretched from the Middle East and Africa to Southeast Asia and to the Caribbean. While some 40 million French enjoyed political democracy at home, authoritarian colonial governments ruled tens of millions abroad. Within France itself conservative and liberal capitalist parties were sometime challenged and sometimes supported by various socialist currents. The Great Depression and the crisis of the thirties created new pressures on French capitalism and its democracy leading to dramatic fluctuations and sudden shifts in politics.

During the period of post-war crisis, France was governed during the 1920s and 1930s by various governments from the left and from the right, with the "coalition of the left," that is the alliance of the Radicals and the Socialist

Party, elected in 1924 and again in 1932. The Radicals were a party of the *petit bourgeoisie*, that is, of small business, whose politics ranged widely from left to right. The rightwing Radical Édouard Daladier led the government in 1933 and 1934, and as the economic crisis deepened, the far right grew and became more audacious. The fascist riots of 1934 provoked the political crisis in France that precipitated the creation of the Popular Front.

The French Communist Party represented a small yet significant force in France in the early 1930s with the social make-up, as well as the reputation and the image which allowed it to play a leading role. While not nearly as large as the Socialist Party, the Communist Party had since its founding in 1920 been the organization that attracted revolutionaries coming out of the anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and various socialist traditions. In 1922 the Communist Party had 79,000 members compared to the Socialist Party's 178,000, but in 1928, though its membership figures had fallen, it had won 11 percent of the vote, 1,064,000 to the Socialists' 1,698,000. The ultra-left sectarianism of the Third Period of 1928 to 1934 reduced the party's influence in the working class and society, and its membership declined to about 40,000 by 1930. The Communists remained nevertheless, the revolutionary working class party of France. Many workers still saw the Soviet Union as a workers' state and the Communists as the revolutionary workers party. Worker militants looked to the Communists to take the initiative.

The conditions called for action. With the onset of the Great Depression and particularly with the coming to power of Hitler in Germany in 1933, rank-and-file Communists, Socialists, and many others in French society wished to build the working class and popular unity necessary to confront both Hitler, as well as the danger of the rise of fascism in France, which seemed a real and immediate danger after the 1934 rightwing riots. Consequently, Stalin's Popular Front would exert a powerful influence

on the labor movement, society, culture, and politics.

The Popular Front's initial attraction then was the idea of unity, of a workers' front and a broader peoples' front against fascism. The Popular Front, at first as a kind of labor and left coalition, proved capable of attracting not only workers and peasants, and their unions and leagues, but also the lower middle classes. Such a united front of labor organizations was not, however, what Stalin and the Communists envisioned. They sought an alliance not only with labor parties and among workers, but also with the parties of the French capitalist class.

Unity in the 1934 General Strike and Demonstration

EVEN BEFORE THE POPULAR FRONT found its full political expression, the Socialist Party, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), the Communists and their much smaller United General Confederation of Labor (CGTU), as well as the Radical Party's middleclass followers, came together action in the streets. After rightwing riots in Paris on February 6, 1934, the Socialist Party and the CGT called for a general strike and street demonstrations, and while the Communists did not formally join the coalition that issued the call, they did mobilize their members and supporters.

The February 12 general strike — the first successful general strike in French history — was almost everywhere a complete triumph as were the protest demonstrations that accompanied it. In Paris where the largest march and rally took place, some in the SP and the CGT feared the Communists might not join the protest, or might even organize a counter-demonstration or an attack on the Socialists and trade unionists as had happened in the past, but, like the strike, the Paris demonstration of 1934 was a triumph of unity. The great strikes and demonstrations of February 1934 laid the basis among the workers for the political alliance among the unions and the parties.

Unity at all levels became the watchword. The CGT and the Communist CGT-U negotiated the reunification of the labor movement in 1935. After much negotiation, the Socialists, Communists, CGT, and the Radical Party and organizations of the petty bourgeoisie also joined together on July 14, 1935 in a political alliance, the Popular Front, based on a social democratic “minimal” program. During the negotiations, the Communist Party had worked to shape a program more moderate in character than others on the left would have liked. The Socialist Party took positions rhetorically to the left of the Communists, calling for a general nationalization of industry, while the Communist program of September 1935 called only for the nationalization of the great monopolies. The Socialists’ apparent leftism on this question and the Communists’ moderation represented a jockeying for position in an attempt to attract a radicalizing working class while at the same time maintaining an alliance with the Radicals, the petty bourgeois party, and possibly other parties to their right.

In the national elections of May 1936, the alliance of the Communists, Socialists, and Radicals won a majority and formed a Popular Front government with Léon Blum, leader of the Socialist Party as prime minister. The Communists supported the Popular Front government, but declined to participate in the cabinet, as much out of a desire to avoid alienating the Radicals and others to their right as out of a desire to protect their revolutionary credentials on the left.

The Strikes of June 1936

ENCOURAGED BY THE REUNIFICATION of the CGT and CGTU and by the Popular Front’s victory in the election, hundreds of thousands of workers struck in factories and other workplaces throughout France in May and June of 1936. While usually described as a “spontaneous” workers’ movement, the strikes were in reality organized by rank-and-file shop floor militants

from the CGT and the Communist Party. The Communist Party had been building toward a large strike through organization and mobilization since 1934, in an attempt to establish itself through a mass action as the voice of labor in the

Stalin recognized that, should the labor movement escape the control of the Communist Party, socialist revolution in Europe would also potentially threaten the Communist Party’s rule and his dictatorship in Russia.

Popular Front coalition. But the Communists could not have been successful without the support of a layer of skilled workers and shop floor militants in the plants. This Communist inspired rank-and-file rebellion led to a national strike wave in the form of factory occupations.

While the strikes began in the provinces, they soon spread to Paris, and, while strongest in the largest factories, the strikes quickly spread to every sort of manufacturing establishment and then to many other businesses. Before the strike wave was over there were 12,142 strikes involving 1,831,000 strikers, and of those more than 12,000 strikes, about 9,000 involved the occupation of the factory. The June 1936 strikes represented a national working class movement, a workers’ uprising in the factories. Democratically controlled by rank-and-file workers in the plants, the strikes had the potential to turn France upside down. For the Communists, now committed to a political alliance with the capitalist parties and to strengthening the French government, such a prospect was unthinkable.

The Communists and the Socialists, fearing that the strike could get out of hand and

jeopardize political relations with the Radicals, worked to restrain the strikes and to keep them from spreading. Maurice Thorez, head of the French Communist Party, made his famous statement that, "one must know how to end a strike." The Communist call for an orderly end to the strike became the leitmotiv for the entire period. Party and trade union leaders proposed moderate goals, and worked to keep the strikes within the limits of the capitalist system and its political framework.

The Communists — whose role in the labor movement had grown significantly since the reunification of the CGT and CGTU — proved to be shrewd and subtle in controlling the strikes, bringing them to an end, and together with their political partners in the Socialist and Radical parties, playing the role of arbiter between the workers and the employers and government. As the best history of the Popular Front and the strikes of 1936 puts it:

To retake leadership of the movement, it was necessary to put oneself at the head of it; to discipline it, it was necessary to unify it; to bring it to an end, it was necessary to generalize.... The order for a general strike was therefore a tactic designed to take in hand the spontaneous movement.

Or to put it another way, in order to end the strike, the Communists together with the CGT union officials, the Socialist Party, and the Popular Front government which included the capitalist Radical Party, had to take the control of the strike out of the hands of the rank-and-file workers.

The Communists, operating through the CGT, were now in a position in much of the country to take leadership of the strikes, facilitating negotiations with the government, and carrying out the orderly evacuation of the factories. The Communists in this way succeeded in transforming the strikes against the employers into a movement in support of the Popular Front government, while the Popular Front government simultaneously brought employers

and unions into tripartite negotiations with the government to reach a national agreement. The Communists' most important consideration throughout was the preservation of the Popular Front government of Léon Blum. With Blum at the head of a Popular Front government, thought Stalin, the Soviet Union would have an ally against Nazi Germany. Stalin's compass in plotting his course was not the needs of the international working class, but rather the defense of the Soviet state.

The Settlement of the June 1936 Strike

THE STRIKE SETTLEMENT which was negotiated by the Popular Front political partners, resulted in both industry-wide agreements in an enormous growth of the labor union movement, and in the generalization of collective bargaining agreements. On June 7, 1936, the General Confederation of French Employers (CGPF) and the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) under the auspices of the Popular Front government negotiated the Matignon Accords, the most significant labor union victory in French history. The agreement provided for recognition of the unions and their right to strike. The unions also won wage increases of between 7 and 15 percent, with an increase of no more than 12 percent overall for any firm. Though in reality in some industries the wage increases reached 15, 20, or even 25 percent. At the same time the Blum government put forward social legislation which legalized collective bargaining and established the 40-hour work week, two-week paid vacations, and other benefits. The Popular Front labor legislation represented a kind of labor bill of rights unknown before in French history.

After the strike, the CGT grew faster than any labor union movement before it in European history, claiming 5,300,000 members by 1937. The Catholic CFTU also grew from 150,000 to 500,000 members. For the first time in French history, collective bargaining became a widespread phenomenon, with 2,300 contracts

registered by 1936 and 8,000 by the outbreak of the war in 1939. While only 18 were national agreements, there were hundreds of regional pacts. All of this constituted remarkable success in winning both economic reforms and in passing labor legislation. The Popular Front had encouraged workers to fight, and fighting the workers had won what was at one level a tremendous victory. Yet, given the situation both in France and in Europe at the time, even this remarkable victory remained tenuous.

What Was Possible?

WHILE THERE IS NO DOUBT that the strikes and occupations, the union recognition and contracts, and the social legislation represented important victories for the working class, the question is, was it possible to go further? And, more important, was it necessary to go further? At about the same time that Thorez had declared that "one has to know how to end a strike," the left socialist Marceau Pivert and responded with another slogan, "Everything is possible." Pivert's words suggest that the movement could have pressed forward to socialist revolution. Whether or not everything was possible, the question remains, what was possible? Was it possible to have pushed the movement further? And wasn't it necessary to continue to lead the workers' movement further if it was not to be driven back and defeated? Without a doubt the labor movement and the left might have advanced much further, but to do so they would have to have been prepared to act independently.

But the Communist Party hesitated to lead the working class in taking steps to further workers' power because it feared that that might have threatened its alliance with the Socialists and Radicals. While a kind of *de facto* workers' power existed in many of the larger factories, the Communists did not call for creating workers' factory committees to run the factories, nor did they take the more radical step of beginning to create workers' councils, institutions of

workers' economic and political power on the model of the Russian Revolution in its first few years. Nor did the Communists fight for really strict and effective wage and price controls, and consequently within a few months of the end of the strikes, "Price rises rapidly negated the increases in wages." While there were nominal price controls, they were neither adequate nor effective and workers' wage gains quickly began to evaporate because of inflation at a rate of 25 to 40 percent.

The Communists might also have called for the nationalization of industries and workplaces under workers' control as a step toward the creation of a socialized economy. The Socialist Party and the CGT favored nationalization of selected industries, and even the Catholic trade unions had become sympathetic to the notion. The Communist Party, however, never raised the idea of the nationalization of industry during the Popular Front period (except for the nationalization of munitions plants). This was, in part, because their earlier program (from the Third Period) argued that only revolution could achieve nationalization of industry; and, in part, because after 1935 they feared alienating their bourgeois allies. The Popular Front government of Prime Minister Camille Chautemps, nevertheless, did in 1937 nationalize the financially collapsing railroads by acquiring 51 percent of the stock, but that was nationalization under the capitalist state's control, without union or worker participation in management.

During the Popular Front, the Communists were often less radical than the Socialists and the CGT, and certainly less radical than many working class militants. Why did the Communists hesitate to build workers' power upon the basis of the strikes, the progressive factory legislation, and the Popular Front's electoral success? Why did the party fail to provide political leadership to advance working class power? The reason for the Communists' restraint of the workers' movement was the party's desire to build and maintain a cross-class alliance with the French

bourgeoisie and to strengthen the state, particularly to strengthen the military, so that France would be a strong ally of the Soviet Union in the event of an attack by Nazi Germany. To have raised demands such as factory committees or workers' councils which threatened property and capital's supremacy in the workplace or to have demanded strict and effective controls on prices and profits, which would have regulated or transformed the market, would have placed the Communists at odds with the Radicals and with the haute bourgeoisie, jeopardizing the French alliance with the Soviet Union. Stalin subordinated everything to the survival of his regime in the Soviet Union, including the French working class. The Communist Party was the only party with the authority and organization at the time to have led the working class to expand its power in French society, and its failure to do so would lead to government and employer reaction that would crush the workers' movement. Before turning to that, however, we should discuss for a moment the Popular Front's policies in other areas.

The Popular Front's Foreign Policy

WHILE THE COMMUNIST PARTY ATTEMPTED to moderate the Popular Front as it dealt with labor questions — even in the face of a massive general strike and widespread factory occupations — so too it worked to moderate other policies. Sections of the French left strongly opposed the military, but after 1934 the Communists were not among them. While the Communists had in earlier years been opposed to the military and its budget, they now supported a strong France in alliance with the Soviet Union as a bulwark against Nazi Germany. Though the Popular Front nominally called for peace through general disarmament, neither the Popular Front nor the Communists supported any such policy in reality. They wanted a larger budget for a stronger French army. This had political implications for domestic politics, for the French military, like the military establishment in other capitalist nations,

was a mainstay of political conservatism, and the military budget was its life blood. Still, the French state had to be strengthened to resist the Nazis, and so the military budget had to be maintained or even increased.

Among the French left, the Communists had, before 1934, been the most vocal and active anti-imperialists. The Popular Front's role in imperial affairs, however, did not oppose imperialism, but rather aimed at reform, at making the empire more successful by making it more efficient and more humane. While the Communists and the Popular Front removed the notoriously reactionary head of the French overseas empire, they did not change the policies or the staff. As one historian has noted, "The Popular Front government coalition did not... at any stage question imperialism itself, even in its programme for government."

The Communist Party, once historically the most outspoken opponent of French imperialism, now became instead, along with the Socialist Party, an advocate of a more humane empire. For example, rather than supporting Algerian independence, as it once had, the Communist Party now supported the Socialist plan for extending French citizenship to Algeria. During the Popular Front government, though at moments there was a loosening of governmental controls, in general, repression of movements for self-determination and independence from the empire continued in Vietnam.

The Communists could not support an anti-imperialist movement because that would weaken France. A strong France capable of fighting Nazi Germany and defending the Soviet Union could be maintained only by maintaining the French empire in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

The Communists Restate Their Revolutionary Program

SURPRISINGLY, WHILE THE FRENCH COMMUNIST Party, in order to support the Soviet Union's alliance with France pursued these

moderate policies aimed at strengthening the French state and its empire and at restraining the labor movement and the left, it also paused long enough in the midst of this activity to reassert the party's long term revolutionary goals. Toward the beginning of this Popular Front period, on November 21, 1935, the Communist Party restated its conviction that socialism could come about only through a revolution that destroyed the capitalist state and replaced it with "the dictatorship of the proletariat." This working class dictatorship, the Party asserted, would, unlike Fascist dictatorships, be based on "real freedom and true democracy," where workers and the popular masses elected their own representatives subject to recall at any time.

Yet, even as they restated this commitment to the dictatorship of the proletariat as a model of working class democracy, Stalin was at work in the Soviet Union liquidating the opposition in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, dismantling the workers' councils (soviets), and ending the autonomy of the trade unions. That is, in the Soviet Union, the headquarters of the Communist International which set the policy of the Communist Parties throughout the world, the Stalinist counter-revolution was creating a dictatorship every bit as totalitarian as that of the Nazis in Germany, yet in France, the Communist called for a strategy of achieving workers' democracy and socialist revolution by way of the Popular Front.

What was going on here? How do these three contradictory tendencies — moderate policies in practice, accompanied by calls for revolution in France, and simultaneously a program of counter-revolution and dictatorship in Soviet Russia — coexist? What bound these three incongruous positions together? What held them together was Stalin's need to keep control of the working class political organizations in Europe, parties and movements which he knew could play a decisive role in domestic politics and therefore in shaping foreign policy. To keep control of those increasingly radical

movements during times of such tumult, he had to present the Soviet Union and Communism as a revolutionary alternative, even as he carried out a counter-revolution at home. It is this revolutionary ideology and rhetoric that differentiate the Popular Front from simple reformism, the Communist argument that through reformism one can arrive at revolution.

From the Popular Front to the Employers' Offensive

TO RETURN TO THE DOMESTIC ISSUES and particularly to labor, the Communists' failure to follow up on the strikes and factory occupations by building workers' power in the workplace and in politics, meant that it was the employers' who took the initiative. The failure to advance the power of the working class meant that the power of the capitalists advanced. In reaction to the strike — which had resulted in union recognition and contracts as well as social legislation, and also in a kind of de facto workers' control over various aspects of the workplace — employers organized and then fought back. During the course of struggles in 1937, the employers created new associations and chambers at the center of the right wing offensive in politics.

So, by the late 1930s, a new right wing, a kind of anti-Popular Front, developed, made up of the old political right, new middle class conservatives, and the employers' associations now under new management. This would be the right wing that would virtually welcome the Nazi invasion and that would form the political base for the Vichy government of France.

While the Popular Front remained in power, it gradually lost ground in society and in politics because it failed to take initiatives in the workplace. The first Popular Front government of Léon Blum lasted only from June of 1936 to June of 1937, to be succeeded by the more moderate socialist government of Camille Chautemps. Blum served as Prime Minister for a month again in the spring of 1938, but at that point the Popular Front, having lasted less than

two years, disintegrated.

With the Popular Front having collapsed, Édouard Daladier of the right wing of the Radical Party served as Prime Minister from April of 1938 to March of 1940, providing political support for an employers' offensive. Despite the Matignon Accords and the social legislation passed by the legislature, employers pushed workers to work more than the 40-hour week and to give up the two-day weekend. The Daladier government issued decrees (*déscrets-lois*) reducing social services and increasing taxes on consumption and on wages. Price controls were ended in order to encourage capital to invest.

Workers reacted to the employers' workplace and political offensive in the late autumn of 1938, once again engaging in strikes and factory occupations, but by November 25 and 26 the majority of the factory occupations had ended. Employers responded to the workers' strikes with a lockout. The CGT, forced to respond, countered with a call for a 24-hour general strike on November 30, and, though the response varied in different regions and industries, a majority of organized industrial workers participated in the urban areas, though white collar and service workers were too intimidated to join in.

The Daladier government's response to the strike was brutal, the worst of the inter-war period. The government arrested more than 500 militants, condemning some to a few days in jail while others served terms as long as 18 months. Some union leaders lost their posts in tripartite commissions, while others lost their positions in transportation or the postal service or suffered some sort of sanction. Where the state was the employer there were firings and layoffs, as in the aeronautics industry where 35,000 to 40,000

workers were let go. Many private employers closed their doors, fired everyone and rehired, on the basis of individual not collective contracts, only those they wanted, and they did not

want the union militants. At least 800,000 workers lost their union contracts to be rehired as individuals without union protections. In December of 1938 and again in April and May of 1939, the Daladier government issued decrees that effectively

ended the 40-hour work week and established a week of 45 hours. Jean Zyromski, a left-wing Socialist labor leader said at the time that "the power of the bourgeois state has been shown to be strong and effective." As the historian of the 1938 strike Guy Bourd  wrote, "November 30 [1938] marked the end of the dream of 1936."

The Communist Party's Popular Front policies of support for the capitalist government had disoriented and disarmed the labor movement and resulted in a catastrophic defeat. With the Popular Front and the unions defeated, and the right wing in power, there remained no effective opposition to Fascism in France. On May 10, 1940 Hitler launched an invasion of the Low Countries and France, and by June 25, the French government signed an armistice. The German Army occupied part of France while the rest of the country was controlled by the collaborationist Vichy government. In France civil liberties and political democracy disappeared, the left was suppressed, and the labor movement was subjugated. Wages and working conditions declined in France, while many French workers were sent to labor in Nazi Germany. By November 1943 over 1.3 million French workers had been sent to Hitler's Germany to work in factories there. The Popular Front had failed in France disastrously.

The Communists could not support an anti-imperialist movement because that would weaken France.

Conclusion

THE POPULAR FRONT STRATEGY not only failed to stop fascism in France, but it also tended to disorient the working class, to bring it under the influence and the sway of the bourgeois political parties. At the same time it strengthened the hold of the Stalinist Communism of the Soviet Union over the most political and committed groups in the labor movement. Following World War II, a version of the Popular Front in Eastern Europe served as a phony democratic façade for the imposition of Stalinist Communism on the countries of Eastern Europe by the Red Army's simultaneous "liberation" and conquest and occupation of those territories. Beyond that, Popular Front politics by other names — such as the Peoples' Anti-Monopoly Coalition — became a permanent feature of the Communist Party and of other parties influenced by Stalinism, such as the Maoists. The Popular Unity of Salvador Allende (1970-1973), what he called "the Chilean Road to Socialism," represented yet another Popular Front experience, this time in the Americas, with the same tragic consequences as in Europe in the 1930s. Eventually, what had been Stalin's Popular Front evolved with the adaptation of the Communist Parties of Western Europe to capitalism and electoralism into what came to be called Euro-Communism. The Communist Parties simply became social democratic Parties by another name.

The tragedy of this Popular Front experience was that another alternative was possible, and that the Communist Party and its Popular Front not only blocked the path forward, but also collaborated with the capitalist class and its state in the suppression of that alternative. Many contemporaries and many students of the period today believe that revolution was possible. But, even if revolution had not been on the agenda, the possibility existed to build institutions of workers' power, to strengthen the class independence of workers, and to advance the fight for socialism. A revolutionary socialist labor

movement would have been a greater bulwark against fascism than the liberal capitalist state.

What might have been done instead? For a moment in the mid-1930s it seemed as if the left wing of the Socialist Party, led by Jean Zyromski and Marceau Pivert, might provide a revolutionary leadership, but Pivert, though he founded the *Gauche Revolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Left), could not break from the orbit of the Socialists, while Zyromski leaned toward the Communists. Leon Trotsky and his followers in the small Trotskyist group in France criticized the Communist Party and its Popular Front line and proposed a revolutionary alternative, but Trotsky's small group proved, for whatever reason, ineffective in influencing labor and left politics significantly in that period. The Socialist Party with its long history and the Communist Party with its claim to represent the revolutionary experience of the Soviet Union, and the CGT with its labor union organization continued to exert an unbreakable hold on the French workers.

We have the advantage today, an advantage resulting ironically from the general weakness of the workers' movement, that we do not have to deal with powerful Socialist and Communist Parties. In the United States at least, no political party has the sort of hold on the working class that the Socialist, Communists and CGT had in France. The same may be said to be true in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Throughout the capitalist world leftists find themselves in the position of having to rebuild the labor movement and the left from the ground up. Yet, though it is clear that the Democratic Party in the United States is a capitalist party at home which is committed to American imperialism abroad, some on the left propose building the social movements and the left through an alliance with the Democratic Party. While some argue for working within the Democratic Party to capture and realign it, others argue for an "inside/outside" strategy seen as a war of position, taking advantage of the cover

of the Democrats to advance the left. As the experience of France in the 1930s demonstrates, such tactics tend to disorient the labor and social movements while bringing them under the sway of a political party with capitalist objectives.

What this means is that, while working to build the grassroots social movements and rank-and-file labor movements which form the motor of workers' power, we must simultaneously fight

for the political independence of the workers movement and of the left. While a rank-and-file perspective is important, we must at the same time find a way to project the notion of workers' independent political power.

ED NOTE: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, newpol.org.

Visit *New Politics* on the Internet at www.newpol.org

Savior in the Desert

Interview with Lois Martin

BARBARA SCHRAM

INTERVIEWER: *I know that you are a retired faculty member from an undergraduate social work program and before that you were a counselor at the Veterans Administration, a teacher in Africa as well as at many other agencies in the human service field. Why did you decide to spend your retirement years volunteering in the Sonora Desert in Arizona?*

LOIS MARTIN: For many years I have been concerned about the problems facing immigrants from Latin America. I read about the terrible number of deaths of Mexicans that occurred in the Sonora desert. That area is the border between Tucson, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico. When I moved to Arizona, I began volunteering, with Humane Borders, which was started in 2000 by two local ministers. Volunteers regularly drive four wheel trucks across the vast dry expanses of the Sonora desert to refill the water stations we have built and also to leave barrels of water along the paths that Mexicans trying to get into this country might follow. Many migrants, unable to get legal entry visas for the United States, walk for days (actually mostly at night when the risk of being found by the U.S. border guards is less) across this stretch of desert. It is one of the few areas on the border that does not have a fence yet and it is less patrolled by the U.S. border guards than other stretches of the border between New Mexico and California. But, it is a torturous journey with temperatures often in the 100-degree range and no sources of drinkable

Lois Martin is a volunteer worker for three undocumented immigrant support groups on the Arizona/Mexico border

water. There are no houses or other landmarks, so many of these seekers lose their way and die from dehydration. Often they get separated from their families or the group they are crossing with. They fail by the wayside due to weakness or illness and their fellow migrants often cannot wait for them. Sometimes they are abandoned to die by the so-called, "coyotes," criminals who smuggle people across the border for cash and then dump them in the desert, stealing both their money and their lives.

INT: *What are the other groups you work with?*

I have gone out into the desert with volunteers from the Samaritans. They focus mainly on locating lost or sick migrants and administering emergency medical treatment, or in the most critical cases, transporting them to hospitals in Tucson. If they recover they will be sent back to Mexico. I have taken first responders' training, so although I am not a doctor or nurse, I can do some basic first aid and know how to treat dehydration.

The third group I volunteer for is the newest one, No More Deaths. It was started in 2004, primarily by a bunch of young people who were outraged at seeing more and more dead bodies in the desert. The Border Patrol, which keeps a count of the so-called illegals who have died

BARBARA SCHRAM is Professor Emerita at Northeastern University, and is co-author of *Introduction to Human Services: Policy and Practice*, 8th ed.

during the crossing, estimates that there have been at least 250 deaths this past year. That number reflects only the bodies they have actually found! Rev John Fife, the co-founder of the other two migrant support groups, says that the number of dead is probably much higher. He also said that ten years ago there were almost no deaths recorded. He asserts that the U.S. government has created a gauntlet of death where only the strongest survive. He believes that the Border Patrol knows how life threatening the desert crossing in this area is, but they think that the threat of death will keep others from trying to enter Arizona. So, the Volunteers from No More Deaths have set up shelters in several places in the desert where the migrants can get some food, some rest in the shade, and even maps that might keep them from getting so lost.

INT. *Since it is so dangerous to try to enter the United States illegally (and many American believe it is also wrong to do so) why do so many Mexicans (and occasionally other nationalities) try to do this? Why don't they wait for legal visas like other prospective immigrants do?*

L.M.: First of all most of these people who undertake the journey are desperately poor. They are trying as best they can to simply put food on the table for their families. Many were farmers who lost their land or who came to the border areas to work in factories that have now closed their doors and moved to places where labor is even cheaper than in Mexico. Surprisingly, globalization, which should help a poor country, has made their lives more difficult. An enormous amount of cheap food (our surplus crops) floods into shops in Mexico. The small farm owners cannot compete with American agribusiness companies in price, and so they lose their farms and lay off their workers.

Finally, the waiting list for visas to enter this country legally is very long, Applying for a visa costs much more money than these people can raise and frankly they don't stand much of

a chance of being accepted, even if they get the money and are able to journey from their homes to Mexico City where there is an American Embassy. U.S. visas usually go to professionals who have the special skills we need or who are sponsored by employers in the United States. The paradox of all this is that they're plenty of farm owners in the States who count on low priced labor to plant and harvest the crops. There are also contractors who count on Mexican laborers for their building projects. Once they slip across the border into this country most find jobs and family members to help them.

INT. *What happens to the folks who get caught without documents crossing the border or living in the States without the proper papers?*

Well, that is another very upsetting part of the story and it varies a lot according to where they are apprehended. If the Border Patrol finds them in the American part of the Sonora desert they put them in trucks and drive them across the border to Nogales, which is the nearest Mexican town. That is a whole other problem. Once brought there they rarely have any money left to buy food or pay the bus fare back to their home village. They are virtually stranded. Nogales is full of impoverished people trying to survive Of course that leads to drug dealing, gang formation, and the like. The volunteer workers from No More Deaths have set up some centers in Nogales and work with a branch of the Mexican government to try to help these folks make contact with family and find a way to get back home if that is what they want to do. If Mexicans are found to be in this country illegally in other parts of the United States, they are frequently imprisoned, sometimes for long periods of time before they are repatriated. I have interviewed many of these folks and their stories are heartrending. One young man was brought to the States as a young child. His parents never had legal status so he did not have it either. At the age of 25 years, with a steady job and a family, he was picked up on a minor

traffic violation in an urban center. When it was discovered that he wasn't legal, he too was literally dumped in Nogales, without being able to notify his employer or his family

INT: *What are your future plans with the support programs?*

My new project is to create a network around the country of former volunteers who can help those folks who are being held in deportation centers in various cities, Sometimes the deportees need someone to help them obtain back salary that is owed to them by their former employers or they need legal representation. We also need to improve our ability to monitor the abuses of over zealous border guards and of course we need to lobby Congress for genuine immigration reform.

INT: *How does the Border Patrol react to the support and advocacy work the volunteers do?*

LM: Well obviously, they don't approve of what we do. They see us as interfering with the performance of their jobs. Now that Border Patrol is under Homeland Security they have stepped up their activities, Sometimes they cite us for

littering, when they see us leaving water jugs, We have to waste the time of volunteer lawyers defending against the citations they issue,

INT: *This all sounds like very draining work. What keeps you going?*

LM: I would have to answer it is people who give me the courage to continue my work. I have met some of the most amazing strong decent people among those seeking entry into the country. A group of five men I interviewed in Nogales came across a woman in the desert who was dying. Even though it meant they would be caught and sent back to Mexico, they carried her for several days till they could get to the Arizona border where she would get medical help.

Of course each of the volunteers experiences moments of feeling overwhelmed with despair but, luckily, there is always another volunteer to buck you up, The young people who work with us are especially inspiring. It gives me hope for the future to see such dedication.

This is the most satisfying work I have ever done. I hope to keep doing it as long as my strength holds out.

Remembrance of Politics Past

MICHAEL HIRSCH

IF THE PURPOSE OF A MEMOIR is to tell the story of a life or the evolution of an individual's thinking, this one by Christopher Hitchens, the jowly, balding erstwhile *enfant terrible* doesn't ring true. There's no metamorphosis in thinking here — it's more a whipsawing of opinion if not a trading up. And despite a heavy lathering of opinions, there's precious little of his adult life as lived. There's really very little in *Hitch 22* that can't be gleaned from any collection of his essays or even books, where he alternates between playing the clown prince and issuing Jeremiads against the godly and — less frequently now — the elected if not the elect. Considering that Hitchens' (and it's Hitchens, Hitch, or Christopher, never Chris, he says) likes and dislikes are as little a mystery to the reading public as are Joe Biden's hair plugs or the absence of yellow cake in pre-invasion Iraq, Hitch's tell-all-again might seem awfully familiar or even redundant. And it is.

Not boring, though. Never boring. And certainly not ghosted. And — despite what fol-

lows here — a fine read. Plus, his asides to fiction and to poetry well worth reading and knowing are bonuses in their own right if not always relevant to his points. He's at least a replacement for the late mid-brow Clifton Fadiman or the overpriced and necessarily pretentious Britannica Great Books series. Still, at the end of *Hitch 22* we know no more about

the man and why he thinks the way he does than before. Beyond a certain self reverential quality and a quiriness that makes his acidic pronouncements seem overdone if not camp, it just may be there's — just as Gertrude Stein said about Oakland, Cal. — “no there there.”

Take these remarks, offered over time.

In reviewing Walter Isaacson's biography of Henry Kissinger after its 1992 publication, Hitchens wrote:

It became very clear to me, as I finished the book, that if I were to employ the argot of popular psychology, I could say I had been reading the profile of a serial murderer.... From being a foe of Zionism when it looked like losing in 1948, to becoming an advocate of its most racist and absolutist application when it was a power to be reckoned with, is not second nature to Kissinger. It is his nature. There is no irony to ponder here, unless you consider Hannibal Lecter an ironist.

Hitch 22: A Memoir
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS
Boston, MA: Hachette Book Group,
2010, 435 pp., \$26.99

MICHAEL HIRSCH, a New York-based labor journalist and political writer, is a member of the New Politics editorial board and an editor of *Democratic Left*.

Jump ahead to the present, too-clever-by-half volume and Hitchens is actually solicitous to the awful Paul Wolfowitz, the brains behind Donald Rumsfeld's march to war and one of the reigning architects of the Iraq invasion. The Iraqi and American blood on Wolfowitz's hands alone outdoes even Kissinger's culpability for the crimes of the Chilean junta, yet Hitchens gives him a pass for being among "those in the administration who were making the case for 'regime change' [and who] were sincere in what they believed."

What Wolfowitz was sincere in believing, Hitchens says by way of example, is that the United States made no claim to recolonize the Middle East either for itself or with surrogates. He believes Wolfowitz bent no truths when he told Hitchens that "American sympathy for Israel did not extend to expansion or colonization." He doesn't doubt Wolfowitz's veracity after saying, in effect, (because these can only be Hitchens' paraphrasing) that "when the Turkish government was being more than usually obnoxious, and refusing the use of U.S. bases on Turkish soil for the deployment of a 'Northern Front,' unless Turkish troops were allowed into Iraqi Kurdistan," Wolfowitz "was without ambivalence: Turkish boots on Iraqi soil would not be allowed. If the Turks insisted on exacting that price, the liberation of Iraq would go ahead without them (which it did)."

Now Kissinger is no serial murderer, as emotionally appropriate as is that thought. When I first read the review — and on Hitchens' recommendation read Isaacson, too — I was enchanted with the description. So much for enchantment. And we know that Wolfowitz is not now nor has he ever been a regime-changing democrat. Praise for Wolfowitz is of course misplaced, as a moment's reflection would show. But Hitchens' style won't allow for reflection; in fact, nothing he's ever written sticks in the mind, except the pleasure of his skewering common enemies.

What Hitchens is is a serial character assas-

sin when it comes to enemies and an oleaginous flatterer of friends.

There's ample evidence for both in this memoir.

Beyond a certain self reverential quality and a quiriness that makes his acidic pronouncements seem overdone if not camp, it just may be there's — just as Gertrude Stein said about Oakland, Cal. —
 "no there there."

But what about style? Here Hitchens takes American journalists to task for writing as if their hands were webbed, and he would be right. What is memorable about Hitchens is exactly his felicity with language and his capacity for using humor in a humorless context as a delicate if sometimes imprecise weapon.

In a moving account of his mother, Yvonne, her hard years as the child of an abusive father, her anxiety about class compounded by her abandoning any shred of Jewish identity to marry a British officer, assimilate into the British lower-upper-middle class, efface herself with penury to assure that her sons had Oxbridge educations, and eventually flee Britain with a lover and soon after take her own life — the story itself takes up much of the book's early parts — it's hard to match his description of Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy." He relates it back to his mum, as being "the strictest verdict passed by a daughter on a male parent since the last reunion of the House of Atreus."

Or on a wintery visit with Jacek Kuron, the then-Polish Marxist and internationalist, and with other discouraged "veterans of the extremely nasty Polish Prison system" — this

years before the rise of Solidarnosc, when the Stalinist regime was still unchallenged and in command — he describes these resistors as having

a faint nimbus of optimism, visible on the very edge of a dark and cold star. It was, to put it another way, quite astonishing to see how much, and to what extent, the party-state depended on lies. Small lies and big lies. Petty lies hardly worth telling, that would shame a nose-picking, whining, guilty child, and huge lies that would cause a hardened blackmailer and perjurer to blush a bit.

This is all quite vividly done. We can feel the boot of Stalinism on the human face and heart, even as his glorious description does nothing to help us understand the command system better. For poets and court jesters and novelists, feeling can be enough. It's an accomplishment to get that far. Hitchens, though, claims to be doing more. He fails.

His take on individuals and ideas is just as subjective, and just as poorly explained. He writes of how "Saddam had given warning of the approach of his Ceausescu moment: a crazy meltdown of authority." He calls Islam in essence "a fanatical religion which makes absolutist claims for itself and promises to supply — even to be — a total solution to all problems, furthermore regards itself as so pure as to be above criticism." He pictures the Ayatollah Khomeini as "a black winged ghoul [who] came flapping back from exile on a French jet and imposed a version of his own dark and heavy uniform on a people too long used to being bullied and ordered around."

He knocks Bill Clinton for being slow to war with Serbia, when as he says "Muslim Bosnia was a site of daily slaughter by Christians," even as Hitchens and others were "trying to get Clinton to take some intelligibly vertebrate position on that," as though Clinton's (like Obama's) policy failings had anything to do with a lack of spine and not everything to do with national and even global economic interests.

He calls Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson "tethered gas balloons of greed and cynicism," — great stuff as catharsis or standup comedy but useless analytically.

Thumbing through any of his work, you find equally great language. Too often, though, it's the language that's in command. In his book on Tom Paine, he refers to arch Whig Edmund Burke's broadside at the French rebellion, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as "one of the most sulfurous counter-revolutionary screeds of all time." Counter-revolutionary it was, more lucky that prescient and a bit thick, too, given that the Girondins and not the Jacobins were still its leaders, but "one of the most sulfurous?"

Even where he tries to make an analytical point, or cast a serious observation, as when he writes of Tom Wolfe, the southern fop who is said to have used Hitchens as his model for the weaselly British writer and dandy in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, that "much of Wolfe's celebrated 'style' was part of a revival of a right-wing politics based on the defensive class-consciousness of the well-off." It's a wonderful line, but is it true?

MEANWHILE SOMEONE HE LIKES is described in Olympian terms as "glamorous and loquacious," a woman "whose career as a civil rights champion ... is barely to be equaled by any living person." The Polish Marxist-turned-nationalist Leszek Kolakowski is named a "national hero" and someone for whom Hitchens was "honored" with being invited to speak at a memorial meeting soon after his death. In another work, he names Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Long Affair*, a decidedly Burkean demolition of Jefferson as a dangerous Rousseauan philosophe, as "the most eloquent of the anti-Jeffersonian nonfictions," which is like appreciating the style of Joseph de Maistre or Leo Strauss. I could add George Will, but he has no style, only affect.

His pals Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, and James Fenton are treated throughout as though

they and he composed a quartet of oversexed lads in a beer commercial. There's even a homoerotic kiss-but-never-quite-tell rendering of Amis, while not one woman lover or dear female friend is named, even as he brags that he never had sex with any but beautiful women. His marriage is barely mentioned, though he acknowledges children.

And while he prides himself on his taste and capacity for "strong waters," he is contemptuous of any recreational drug use, including marijuana. Hitchens has more opinions than any three people have the right to maintain.

No one who has ever seen Hitchens in action should be surprised. Those around the Campaign for Peace and Democracy will remember an episode played out at a 1989 forum at New York's New School for Social Research marking the collapse of the old order and celebrating those heady days of upheaval in Eastern Europe. The evening gathering became so packed that safety considerations required restricting access and hiving off the overflow crowd. Hitchens, in his best Colonel Blimp impression, hectored the crowd that the opponents of Stalinism in Europe wouldn't scurry from a political meeting merely because it was crowded. It was left to Congressman Barney Frank, the liberal Massachusetts Democrat and Hitchens' fellow speaker, to suggest that fire marshals shouldn't be confused with the repressive power of the state apparatus.

For some, the question on the table in *L'affair Hitchens* is why did this seemingly quintessential man of the left abandon positions he was synonymous with to join the State Department's charmed circle. For this reviewer, Hitchens was never a man of the left if the term means someone who employs a class analysis of history and politics. Yes, that is harsh, because even Marxism at its best is not a science, political positions are relative and anyone is free to follow R.H. Tawney's injunction that "we are

all Marxists, you in your way and I in his." Still, there is a pale pink thread running through all of Hitchens' work, both in those older pieces that pass left muster and those that so dismally disappoint. It has to do with democracy and tolerance. Not a bad starting point, and certainly necessary but not sufficient. Absent an understanding of imperialism as a violent social order and not the product of bad manners by scrofulous people, it's no stretch to understand why quondam lefties would switch sides, especially if one side appears bloodthirsty and the other merely self-interested.

Plus, if we are honest, Hitchens was always more harlequin than hero.

GIFT PLANNING

Many of our readers contribute to the annual NP fund drive. Another way to help the magazine is to leave a bequest. A gift of this type can help ensure that New Politics continues to publish for many years to come. We ask that you consider one of the following options:

1. Giving a specific amount or a particular asset. ("I bequeath \$_____ to New Politics Associates.")
2. Giving a percentage of your estate. ("I bequeath x percent of my estate to New Politics Associates.")
3. Giving the remainder of your estate. ("After distributing the specific bequests listed above, I leave the remainder of my estate to New Politics Associates.")

For further information, please write to us at New Politics, 155 West 72 Street, NY NY 10023.

Genocide Denial Light

G. M. GOSHGARIAN

IN A SOBER, BALANCED SKETCH of the history and historiography of the 1915 Armenian genocide included in a two-part article on Turkey published in the *London Review of Books* in September 2008, Perry Anderson notes that the perpetrators' academic defenders have largely abandoned a discredited strategy of blanket denial for one of minimization or relativization, now increasingly discredited in its turn. He might have added that there has been a shift from genocide denial unabashed to genocide denial light in non-academic writing as well. The difference is that, outside the university, efforts at relativization or minimization continue to enjoy credit in the unlikeliest places. Verso, for example, has just released one: Ece Temelkuran's *Deep Mountain: Across the Turkish-Armenian Divide*, a translation of some lightly upgraded newspaper journalism that began life in the mainstream Turkish daily *Milliyet* in 2006 and appeared in book form in Turkey two years later. The cover blurb touts it as a "nuanced and

moving exploration of the living history [of] and continuing dispute on the Armenian genocide."

The reformers at the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Armenian Desk should sit up and take notice. If a radical left publisher in Britain finds genocide denial light nuanced and moving, are the politically more tolerant friends of Turkey's admission to the European Union not certain to gobble it

up? And if it allows Turkey to duck its historical responsibilities quite as effectively as the cruder kind does, what harm does it do to let the bien-pensant Armenophiles at home flatter their sense that they are "pok[ing] a stick into the wheel of the world" (151) by restyling and repackaging the basic line?

Verso is one reason to take the time to denounce *Deep Mountain*. A publishing house that has long honored its commitment to promoting critical left thought should not be promoting critical variations on standing Turkish foreign policy. If its baffling endorsement of *Deep Mountain* stems from the ignorance of things Armenian betokened by the reference to "the Armenian community of Venice Beach" on prominent display in the first line of its blurb, it is not too late for it to say so, and back up. (There is no Armenian community to speak of in Venice Beach.) Ignorance, in this case, would be the best possible excuse. If it has knowingly put its imprimatur on relativization of genocide, it ought to be summoned to say why.

Temelkuran's association with the Turkish left's ongoing reassessment of the Armenian question is the other reason to notice *Deep*

Deep Mountain: Across the Turkish-Armenian Divide

ECE TEMELKURAN

London: Verso, 2010

256 pp., \$26.95, paperback, \$16

G. M. GOSHGARIAN has translated, from the French, Gilbert Achcar's *The Arabs and the Holocaust for Saqi/Henry Holt* (2010) and Esther Benbassa's *Suffering as Identity: The Jewish Paradigm for Verso* (2010), for which he also recently translated and introduced two collections of Louis Althusser's posthumously published writings. His unpublished English version of a novel from the Western Armenian writer Hagop Oshagan's 1932 novel cycle *Remnants*, a depiction of Armenian-Turkish relations on the eve of the genocide, won a PEN-Club translation award in 2009 and is currently in search of a publisher.

Mountain. The leaders of the nascent Kemalist Republic, many of whom had Armenian blood on their hands, undertook to blot the mass murder from the historical record; their post-Kemalist heirs are still at it. Many self-identified leftists in Turkey have long countenanced the cover-up or even half-justified the crime. Indications are that much of the fragmented left is now facing up to the task of exposing both. Temelkuran, a professed “democratic,” “internationalist” “socialist” (90), plainly conceives *Deep Mountain* as part of its attempt to set things to rights. Yet much of what is to be found in her text — the remark is intended neither as provocation nor as insult, but as a demonstrable statement of fact — is akin to latter-day *national-socialist* treatments of the Holocaust. Whence the interest of calling attention to the contradiction: wider discussion of it may help spark a badly needed clarification of the ambiguities muddying the political and ideological movement that has spawned Temelkuran’s book.

Those ambiguities haunt two recent manifestations of a shift in Turkish leftists’ attitude toward the genocide. One is the ongoing protest against Hrant Dink’s January 2007 assassination and the Turkish state’s complicity in the crime. Dink was the Turkish-Armenian editor-in-chief of a bilingual weekly that he founded in Istanbul in 1996. Long persecuted by the right for helping to make the once unmentionable 1915 events a matter of guarded yet broad public discussion in Turkey, he was, for the same reason, convicted of violating a 2005 law (Article 301 of the Penal Code) against “denigrating Turkishness,” left without police protection despite his complaints about an intensifying barrage of threats on his life, and then executed in Istanbul by a teenager almost certainly acting at the behest of Turkey’s “deep state,” a nationalist network ensconced in the army, police, and administration. After his funeral, tens of thousands of people marched through Istanbul’s streets to cries of “We are all Armenians, we are all Hrant Dink.” The left-liberal Dink has

since become something of a cult figure for the still fragile movement for democratization in Turkey; pressuring the Turkish judiciary to bring his murderers to justice has become one focus of a growing struggle against the state/deep state

Ankara’s objective is to reinforce the false impression that the reality of the genocide is widely disputed by historians.

violence that has cost countless Turkish citizens their lives.

As surprising as the wave of solidarity with Dink was a public apology by individual Turks to Armenians for the “Great Catastrophe” of 1915, coupled with a condemnation of Turkey’s continuing denial of it. Posted on the internet in December 2008, it was signed by some thirty thousand Turks over the next few weeks. Initiators and signatories were protected from prosecution under Article 301 because the term chosen to designate the crime, a common name for it in Armenian, patently avoided identifying it as a genocide. The statement was nevertheless iconoclastic enough, by Turkish standards, to prompt the Turkish Prime Minister publicly to distance himself from it.

Armenian reaction to the apology and the demonstrations of solidarity with Dink has been measured. It is often noted, to begin with, that these actions reflect the views of a small minority in Turkey. Express refusals to apologize or demands for an Armenian apology, posted on the internet early in 2009 and reportedly signed by 100,000 people, show where majority opinion lies, as does the climate of nationalist, anti-Armenian and anti-Kurdish hysteria that set in across Turkey after Dink’s death. But even the critical minority’s campaign to put paid to a

one hundred year-old falsification, it is argued, has to be evaluated cautiously, because limits on freedom of speech in Turkey, with sanctions ranging from fines and imprisonment to torture and assassination, make it hard to discern moderation imposed by the state and its deep-state auxiliaries from voluntary approval of state policy. Thus the word the initiators of the internet apology chose to designate the destruction of the Western Armenians, “catastrophe,” is not irreconcilable with official descriptions of the genocide as a terrible tragedy that befell the disloyal Armenians because the state had hastily to resettle them, not least for their own protection, and thus to conduct them through forbidding regions controlled by unruly Kurdish tribes, under the same adverse wartime conditions that cost many more Muslims their lives. Article 301, in other words, may have allowed many who signed the internet statement (and raged against Article 301) to marry an apology for the “Great Catastrophe” to an apologetics for it, while conveniently prohibiting them from saying what they preferred not to: that the deportation and mass killing was a genocide, and/or that it calls for concrete, not just verbal, redress.

Temelkuran put her name to the apology, and she puts her book under the sign of her admiration for her friend and mentor Hrant. The skeptics will be pointing to the consonance of her aims with those of her Foreign Ministry and shouting that they told us so. Thus Temelkuran 1) indirectly justifies, in Part I of *Deep Mountain*, Ankara’s main policy objective vis-à-vis Armenia, a normalization of diplomatic and economic relations without prior recognition of the genocide; 2) firmly condemns, in Part II, a proposed French law, which Ankara is fighting tooth and nail, to make denial of the Armenian genocide a crime, as Holocaust denial already is; and 3) faithfully reproduces, in Part III, Turkish diplomacy’s and the Turkish mass media’s stock image of the mighty U.S. Armenian lobby and the fanaticized Diasporan masses at its beck

and call. More generally, she downplays issues of responsibility and reparations, and banishes the very thought that redress might involve territorial adjustments.

As for her main positive prescription, Turkish-Armenian “dialogue” without preconditions, it is useful to know, when assessing it, that the arsenal of measures with which Ankara has long battled international recognition of the genocide, ranging from economic reprisals to suspension of military agreements, has for the past five years been crowned by a standing offer to create an Armenian-Turkish historical commission charged with determining what *really* happened in 1915. Ankara’s objective is to reinforce the false impression that the reality of the genocide is widely disputed by historians, while allowing the Turks to point to joint scholarly deliberations — or, failing that, their willingness and the Armenians’ refusal to engage in them — as proof of the good faith and open mind they bring to resolving the “genocide” issue.” Temelkuran’s objective, she says, is to teach Armenians and Turks how to throw off the Mountain of Pain (the Turkish name for Mt. Ararat and the original title of her book) under which they both still labor because of whatever happened. The short form of her lesson is: let them talk about their “genocide” all they want, and listen sympathetically to their tales of woe until they finally get tired and stop. A certain family resemblance between that proposal and Ankara’s is hard to miss. Her humanist justification for hers, to be sure, is her own: only dialogue will allow the two sides to dissolve their differences in their Common Humanity. The purity of her intentions is beyond doubt. That does not necessarily recommend them.

Before forgetting good intentions in order to concentrate on what they pave the way for, let us look at a passage that illustrates both. It is a plea for Armenian-Turkish reconciliation. Addressed by the author, *qua* “conciliatory Turk,” to a representative — that is, not yet conciliatory — imaginary Diasporan Armenian,

it is manifestly intended as a grand goodwill gesture: "I'd like, one day, to be able to sit and drink raki with you [in Turkey]... and talk about our history, whether it be 'glorious' or 'black,' with light hearts and light words. I want us to put it behind us, and I want us to have children who don't have to know about what we're going through now" (256).

If you aren't familiar enough with "our [Turks' and Armenians'] history" to grasp why this confession is unlikely to disarm the distrustful, take any mass murder you know better. Grandpa was gassed in Sobibor, Grandma was raped for four years running and therefore not gassed, and you've just received, courtesy of Verso, a friendly little invitation to enjoy a beer and a bit of light-hearted banter about the whole bothersome business back home in Berlin with the best-selling author of *Across the German-Jewish Divide*. "Traumatized by accusation" (162), she'd like you to help her get over "whatever happened" (238) for good and all. Fair-minded to a fault, she's willing, even eager, to help you to heal the trauma of "constant victimisation" (162) in exchange. More: she generously offers to let bygones be bygones, for the children's sake, in accents bespeaking her awareness of the fundamental human decency of her gesture. She even takes the trouble to assure you, in mid-peroration, that she keeps an open mind as to whether Germany's treatment of the Jews was, on balance, "glorious' or 'black.'" Is that not, as the blurb gushes, "nuanced and moving"?

It is not, at any rate, a momentary lapse. The passage is showcased at the very end of *Deep Mountain*. Temelkuran means it, just the way it stands. The proof is that the style and substance of the coda are in perfect harmony with the rest.

The rest sounds like this: "This is our [Turks' and Armenians'] common history, something that happened to us all, whether or not you use the term genocide or blame a particular side. We have to recognize that, on a

human level, there is still great pain over what happened — for all of us" (237).

THAT ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION of our common human suffering has its historiographic corollary. While it is an indubitable certitude, in *Deep Mountain*, that it happened to us all, it is equally certain that, a century later, we do not at all know what happened. In that sense, we have, not a common, but two distinct histories, represented on "two distinct historical timelines," Armenian and Turkish. "The highlights" on them are "completely different" (151). We must, then, *forge* a common history of our common suffering. How? "We can create a common history only if we appreciate the importance of historical events on both sides" (238).

If the timelines involved are the usual two, this injunction is strictly comparable to a plea to evaluate Auschwitz with an eye to the Wannsee Conference on the one hand and, on the other, the Jews' perfidious betrayal of the Reich in collusion with the Bolsheviks and international finance capital. The formulation which has it that "what happened" happened to those who were murdered in the camps and to those who murdered them there is admissible, or not, in the case of the World War I genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians exactly as it is admissible or not in the case of the World War II genocide of the Jews and Roma. The same holds for the casual suspension of the ancillary question as to which "particular side," murdered or murdering, was to blame for the murder. As for the bid to dissolve the distinctions between genocide and the "great pain" of World War in the night in which all wartime horrors are gray, it has its analogue in accounts in which the fire-bombing of Dresden, the 1945 massacres of Sudeten Germans, German misery after the war, and life and death in the camps count as equivalent ordeals. In short, *Deep Mountain's* general conclusions about World War I and the Armenian genocide recall those of familiar revisionist histories of World War II and the

Jewish genocide — with the difference that they are rather more extreme, and come, not from the nationalist right, but from the “internationalist socialist” left.

The informed will have concluded that Temelkuran makes the genocide a “general and mutual massacre of the peoples of the East” that led to the extirpation of one of the mutually massacring sides, to cite an apology for the ethnic cleansing of Van Province that appeared as *Deep Mountain* was taking shape. Her book certainly accommodates that kind of historical argument, proffered by Justin McCarthy and others. It does not, however, make this claim, or any other. It is not history or, in any rational sense of the word, argument; it literally reveals no more about 1915 events in Anatolia, microhistorical or macrohistorical, than *Hamlet* does. Rather, it presents itself as a report on interviews about Armenian-Turkish relations and therefore, inevitably, attitudes toward the genocide, which Temelkuran conducted in 2006-07 with mainly prominent Armenians (and a few token Turks) in Armenia, France, and the United States. The aim, she affirms, is “to give the Turkish public as ... accurate a picture as possible of the varying views ... of Armenians in both Armenia itself and the Diaspora” (x) — an admirable project that would have been well served by letting the Armenians involved speak for themselves. Temelkuran prefers relentlessly to filter, paraphrase, and gloss whatever they might actually have said — a procedure she describes as “bringing to [her] task less objectivity but more insight than would be the case for a Western journalist” (x) — in pursuit of a different goal. It is to make her material illustrate a century of struggle between the friends and foes of Turkish-Armenian dialogue. She thus makes an argument about

For Temelkuran, the conclusion
is obvious: “the Diaspora is in
love with the same country
they fear” — Turkey

history after all, evaluating it with the help of a criterion applicable in the absence of all direct reference to actual historical events. It runs: a statement about history is true if it fosters dialogue. This leaves room for interpretation: how do we know whether it does? *Deep Mountain's* answer, the criterion of the criterion, runs: a

statement about history fosters dialogue, and is therefore true, if it is proffered by one of the “Beautiful People,” “people like Hrant, people like us who believe in dialogue” (180). It is even truer if it can somehow be attributed to Hrant himself.

An example will show how this validating principle is applied. It is not Temelkuran, but a rare Turkish interviewee who declares, on behalf of the Turks in her Turkish-Armenian discussion group, that “what happened” “happened to us all,” so that we must jointly write a two-timeline “common history.” Her membership in the group already strongly suggests that she is a person like Hrant and us. This is proven, as is the idea that it happened to us all, etc., when, immediately after citing her, Temelkuran points up a certain similarity between that idea and one she assigns Hrant: “that’s what Hrant meant when he used to say that whatever happened had happened to us all, and that we shared the same history” (238). *Q.E.D.*

Let us leave aside the question as to whether that’s what Hrant really meant and, if so, why the people who had him shot did not, instead, hire him on. For present purposes, it suffices to note that not all Armenians are Ece Temelkuran’s Hrant Dink. Many are, rather, “hardline sectarians” (180), also known as “shouters” (153, 248). These Armenian enemies of dialogue routinely identify themselves as such by rudely “thrusting” Turks such as Temelkuran “into the position of someone who has to ‘deny’ or ‘recognize’

genocide" (208). An interminable parade of them winds its way through *Deep Mountain*. It includes the Yerevan "rocker" who asks her to leave his bar unless she "recognizes the genocide" (25), although — paradoxically, for her — it is adorned with a huge Che Guevara poster; the children gathered at the Yerevan Genocide Memorial who scandalize her by asking, when they learn she is Turkish, whether she recognizes the genocide (29); and the "elderly couple" (151) disinclined even to put that question or any other to the young *Milliyet* reporter waiting expectantly outside their Paris bookstore, apparently because they have gathered that she does not quite recognize the genocide. Spanning the generations, the Armenian hardliners also span the political and social spectrum, from the little world of former members and sympathizers of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (one of whom, unbeknown to Temelkuran, owns that Yerevan bar) through the ranks of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, "the most hardline leftist organization in Armenian political history" (220; the ARF is in fact a social-democratic party that furnished the Second International with a vice-president last year) to a leader of the neo-liberal ruling party in France, Patrick Devedjian (who acted as defense counsel for a comrade of the Yerevan bar owner tried in France in 1986 for Secret Army activity, thus bringing us full circle). In a word, *Deep Mountain's* readers are invited to watch Temelkuran making the ostensibly shocking discovery, from Yerevan to Los Angeles, of something she surely knew before she set out: a majority of Armenians right, left, and center, of both sexes and all ages, in Armenia and the Diaspora, are, by *Deep Mountain* definition, hardline sectarian shouters and shriekers.

Temelkuran by no means denies that the Armenian fanatics who insist on genocide recognition have their opposite numbers on the other side of the Turkish-Armenian divide. One of her central theses, in fact, is that there are "hardline sectarians positioned on opposing

sides of the same game" (180). The Turkish sectarians are the ultra-nationalists and fascists. Whence a fine distinction. "Those who assault writers as they're hauled into court," Temelkuran declares (perhaps thinking of the thugs who tried to attack Orhan Pamuk when he was brought to court under Article 301 in December 2005 for affirming in an interview that "we killed a million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds") "are no more representative of my people than those who chant 'Recognize the genocide or get lost!' are representative of *all* the Armenians living in distant lands" (99, emphasis added). The "all" is all-important: it indicates that the Armenian-Turkish divide runs between a representative majority of Armenian extremists and an atypical minority of ultra-nationalist Turks. That may explain why *Deep Mountain's* "illuminating look at the part nationalism plays in the way we see ourselves and others" (the blurb) is essentially a look at the blinding effects of Armenian nationalism on Armenians. The Turkish shouters are neither named nor described, let alone interviewed. Despite the subtitle (for which the author may bear no blame), *Deep Mountain* is thus about, not the Turkish-Armenian, but the Armenian-Armenian divide.

Better, it is about two Armenian-Armenian divides. For the hardline Armenian majority is itself divided. Most hardliners, as will appear, are at least a little "like us." The worst aren't. They are a race of calculators, a race apart. The reaction they elicit from Temelkuran's photographer, assigned the role of the sturdy Turkish yeoman in *Deep Mountain*, speaks volumes. After a brief glimpse of the species and "what makes it tick," the honest fellow cannot bear to hear his GPS pronounce the word "Recalculating!" (187). The calculators form a subset of a somewhat larger coterie of cosmopolitan Armenian Los Angelenos. They are "the very picture of the 'sitting pretty' Armenian Diaspora as painted in Turkey." This pack of "wealthy businessmen and lawyers" "live in luxury" in their adopted country,

meet “poolside” in posh Los Angeles restaurants, smoke “long, thick cigars,” and speak in “exaggerated American accents” about “figures and dollars” (213–4). The irredeemable among them, true to their unnatural natures, insist on appearing anonymously in Temelkuran’s book and “are not at all that interested in talking to” her (they do not care about Armenian-Turkish dialogue). She dubs them Mr. Smithian and Mr. Brownian. They are, respectively, an “extremely influential figure in Armenian lobbying circles” and his “powerful, wealthy friend,” “prominent not only in Armenian circles but on the national political scene as well.” Both boast that they “enjoy increasing influence over policy and politicians” in the United States (182–4). The reader will get the picture, even if he has never heard of Armenians.

What do Smithian and Brownian and their ilk want? Ask, first, what they do not want. They do not want to “go into any details about what happened in 1915.” They do not want “to talk about dialogue, or mourning, or messy details” (185). They can rattle off the names of Anatolian towns, it is true, but they do not really care about the land, “the blood ... shed in the lands of Anatolia throughout history” (75) or “the people at one” with that “blood-soaked land” (5). The proof of this inhuman indifference to blood and soil? “They’d consider the [Armenian-Turkish] issue solved so long as they received reparations.” These money-grubbers want greenbacks and nothing else: “millions of dollars.” (Temelkuran, a down-home Anatolian sort for whom the logic of a Brownian’s calculations is in any case “incomprehensible,” may have missed a few zeros: the grasping Armenian-Americans who filed a lawsuit against the Turkish government and two Turkish banks in U.S. Federal Court in late July 2010 are talking billions.) Brownian doesn’t beat around the bush: “We don’t want land, we want money!” (185). “Buying peace,” Temelkuran exclaims, appalled; “how removed the sentiment is from the Middle East, how foreign ... to Turkey” (185–6).

Over against the Armenian hardliners, who are legion in *Deep Mountain*, stand those on the other side of the Armenian-Armenian divide, those who, by “leav[ing] the shouting to others” (239), provide living proof that it can be crossed. These people believe in dialogue, like Hrant. The irrefutable evidence is that they do not demand that Turks “recognize” the genocide before establishing relations with them.

This category of dialogue-minded Armenians has its poetic and prosaic subdivisions. Temelkuran encountered many of the prosaically reasonable when she travelled to Yerevan in 2006 to gather material for what has become *Deep Mountain*, Part I. The timing of her trip was not accidental. Turkey had sealed its border with Armenia in 1993, aggravating the newly independent country’s already dire poverty. Now it was offering to lift its crushing economic blockade and establish normal relations, but only if Armenia dropped its insistence that Turkey first recognize the genocide. *Milliyet* sent Temelkuran east to reconnoiter. They “can’t have forgotten,” someone may well have told her before she boarded the plane, “that the dispute over the ‘genocide issue’ is the main reason the border remains sealed” (49). Her generally sympathetic report on the country indicated that they had indeed not forgotten. Focusing on its economic misery, and giving good play to an interview with an economist and TV personality who set great hopes on a resumption of good-neighborly relations, it also showed that the Armenians had drawn the right lessons from Turkey’s economic warfare. “It’ll be great when the border’s open!” a representative tired, poor Armenian woman excitedly exclaims. “For you and for us!” “Tell [the people in Turkey],” she seems to be saying, “tell them to open the border right away!” (49).

Temelkuran told them, adding that this woman was hardly the only Armenian ready to “talk as though the border issue is completely unrelated to the ‘genocide issue’” (49). It remains to be seen whether *Deep Mountain* qualifies as prophecy. In October 2009, with Washington’s

and Brussels' benediction, Yerevan signed protocols with Ankara supposed to pave the way for a resumption of normal relations, going so far as to accept the idea of the Turkish-Armenian historical commission. In April 2010, the Armenian parliament — probably grateful for Turkish foot-dragging — froze ratification of them. There the matter stands.

Overwhelmed by Temelkuran's convincing depictions of the ex-Soviet Armenians' desperate economic plight, the Armenophile Turks who are her ideal readers will be hoping, for these poor people's own good, that the ratification process comes unstuck. But they will also have noticed that the mainstay of *Deep Mountain's* defense of Republican Armenian reason is a Turkish economic blockade. Like the objection that Part II repeatedly raises against the pending French bill to criminalize denial of the genocide — "Hrant Dink has warned" that "the Armenian community in Istanbul ... could face grave consequences if the law passes" (107) — an economic blockade, albeit a powerfully persuasive argument, is morally uninspiring. *Deep Mountain* aims to inspire and uplift. It therefore provides this crass coercive logic with its ennobling humanistic supplement.

That spiritual icing on the economic cake consists in the demonstration that there exists a subcategory of dialogue-minded Diasporan Armenians beyond Turkey's reach who want to put the "genocide issue" aside, not "to avoid economic collapse" (107), but of their own free will; their goal, like Hrant's, is a dialogical, common-humanity relation with like-minded Turks. This brings us to *Deep Mountain's* subtlest contribution to the intellectual arsenal of genocide denial: a fuzzy-logical defense of refusing to "recognize" the genocide that simultaneously constitutes a rejection of Ankara's refusal not to "deny" it. This may seem baffling, but Temelkuran offers an impassioned plea against the bitter injustice of the law of the excluded middle. She is as staunchly opposed to it as she is to the proposed French law against genocide

denial, and ultimately for the same reason. That reason is put in the mouth of a Beautiful Armenian, the psychoanalyst Hélène Piralian. When it comes to "denying" or "recognizing" the Armenian genocide, this "exquisite" (160) French-Armenian informs us on Temelkuran's behalf, *tertium datur* (there is a third possibility).

"IT IS, OF COURSE, AN INJUSTICE," Piralian is quoted as saying, "to divide a people into 'deniers' and 'non-deniers.' There are Turks whose reactions to the Armenian story fall into neither category" (162). It is of course an injustice for the same reason that it of course happened to us all: because saying so encourages Armenian-Turkish dialogue of the kind that people like Hrant, Hélène, and us are for. What kind of dialogue? "It isn't about genocide or reparations" (164). It isn't about territorial concessions, either — perish the thought: "land disputes are always resolved with blood" (217), and "Western Armenia'... has been under Ottoman or Turkish control since about 1500 CE" (217n), and, as Hrant once "thundered," "moved to tears": "Yes, we have our eyes on this land. But not to take it away — just to be buried deep within it!" (223). About neither genocide nor reparations nor (for Armenians this side of the grave) land, the dialogue with conciliatory Turks like Temelkuran, to which any Armenian can gain admission by accepting the legitimacy of the non-denialist/non-non-denialist approach to "whatever happened," is about "wounds and healing" (164). Temelkuran would appear to concede, most of the time, that the wounds to be healed are mostly the Armenians'. From this it follows that the dialogue is of a special sort, so that it might be better "if we replaced 'dialogue' with a different word: listen. Listen in silence until they've said all they need to say" (235). This will "alleviate the burden of these conflicting versions of a shared past.... That's what they need" (208).

"We," however, know that most of "them" do not know that "that's what they need." Our

fantasy therefore threatens to founder on the fact that the real supports of our imaginary relation are, on our own witness, mainly sectarian shouters, resistant to therapeutic dialogue with such as us. *Deep Mountain* proposes the classic humanist solution to this problem. It runs: 1) the basis on which we can “share [their] stories” is our “common humanity” (199); 2) de-Middle-Easternized Brownians and Smithians aside, even Armenian hardliners have a share in it; *ergo* 3) “people like us” can experience fleeting moments of communion even with hardliners. We may thus reasonably hope that they, too, will one day become willing partners in the all-embracing dialogue of reconciliation that will efface the Armenian-Armenian and, simultaneously, Armenian-Turkish divides. Meanwhile, it isn’t our fault if they haven’t come round.

The crucial corollary runs: Just as, in much of the world, our Common Humanity is Northern European, so in Eastern Turkey — Anatolia — our Common Humanity is Anatolian. With that, we have arrived at the fantasy that sustains the fantasy of therapeutic reconciliation, the one on which *Deep Mountain* ultimately rests.

Temelkuran did not invent it. Anatolianism is currently in vogue on one Turkish leftish fringe. In its innocuous adolescent Armenophile variants, it has its votaries swooning over Anatolian-Armenian folk rock, sobbing over Fethiye Çetin’s 2004 best-seller about her aged Anatolian-Turkish grandmother’s confession that she had been an Anatolian-Armenian as a girl (*My Grandmother*, Verso, 2008) and, in advanced cases, scouring the family tree in quest of that (latterly) badge of Bohemian-Stamboliot distinction, an Armenian grandmother of one’s own. In its deadly *Deep Mountain* strain, it is an elaboration of the conciliatory humanist’s first article of faith: we can come to terms with them because they are (almost) like us.

“Us,” to be sure, is us Anatolians, not us Turks. Anatolia, however, has been under Ottoman or Turkish rule since about 1500 CE. How, then, do even Armenian hardliners sig-

nal that they have not ceased to be Anatolians and are therefore capable of one day crossing the Armenian-Turkish divide? They do so “as though sending out a signal flare of some kind.” In the middle of “unemotional discussion[s] of dry matters,” “all of a sudden, unaware perhaps of what they’re doing,” they “recollect the ‘old brotherhood’ and launch into Turkish.” This “happens to them all the time” (233). They continually and irrepressibly burst into Turkish song, or recite Turkish poetry, or pepper their conversation with phrases displaying an intimate, affectionate knowledge of things Turkish. Even when they don’t know that universalizing tongue, they smile at Temelkuran “in the language of Anatolia [Turkish]” (166). They sooner or later drop their affected European or American manner to become more warm and sincere, that is, more Turkish (as is indicated by the fact that these striking shifts to the genuinely human plane are “even more striking” in the case of those who “have once lived in Turkey” [125]). And they dream of a mythical place called “Western Armenia” that Temelkuran plainly takes to be Turkey, because, troubled by their obsessive invocations of the former, she keeps asking them if they have ever visited the latter, and is repeatedly astounded to discover that many have not. For her, the conclusion is obvious: “the Diaspora is in love with the same country they fear” (163) — Turkey. Or, rather, Anatolia, and therefore also Turkey.

These imaginary relations with our imaginary relations form *Deep Mountain*’s deepest ground. They attest that what happened happened to us all because it happened to the fraternal union we once formed, restoration of which is the object of the fantasy of reconciliation between Diasporan Anatolians and the stay-at-homes. Better: *Deep Mountain* lets the Anatolian shouters themselves show, like signal flares, that that brotherly union persists in and through the Anatolian-Anatolian divide. “Something shameful happened that summer” of 1915. Shameful, indeed: Anatolian raised his

hand against fellow Anatolian. (The Turkish Foreign Ministry calls this “civil strife.”) “Who was guilty, who was stronger — it’s been talked over for ninety years.” Yet, paradoxically, “we’re still not talking.” About what? About the whole family’s “pain.” “Would it not be better to talk about that,” and “better to go slow”? After all, it’s only been ninety years. Moreover — or on the other hand — “our enemies” [that is, the foreign foes of us Anatolians] are profiting from our silly little spat about what to call our fraternal quarrel (99). As Hrant once thundered, these meddlers are passing laws on “genocide” and “genocide denial” in order “to obstruct dialogue between our people” (if you’re wondering whether the printer dropped an “s,” you haven’t understood a thing). “If the label we attach to our pain makes it impossible to discuss that pain” (100), should we not, as patriotic Anatolians, forget about “mere labels,” remember that we are “a people

bound together by tales of Anatolia,” and get on to the real, the only serious business to hand: telling and listening to those stories? It is a matter of some urgency: “our people have scattered, to Armenia, France, America, and who knows how many other places [Armenia?] — members of a Diaspora even in their own countries” (192).

It was necessary to reproduce this much of Temelkuran’s vision in order to make that last sentence comprehensible. Many a reader will still not have understood it. Those who have will also have understood that it is, at the discursive level — her manifestly good, internationalist intentions notwithstanding, there is unfortunately no avoiding the word — genocidal. One hopes the movement she belongs to will notice the fact, and point that out, not last to her.

As for Verso — it is perhaps time to send it a signal flare of some kind.

CRUSADERS FOR JUSTICE



“Injustice boils in men’s hearts as does steel in its cauldron, ready to pour forth, white hot, in the fullness of time.”

“Some day the workers will take possession of your city hall, and when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profit!”

“I’m not a humanitarian, I’m a hell-raiser.”

“No matter what the fight, don’t be ladylike! God almighty made women and the Rockefeller gang of thieves made the ladies.”

— The Autobiography of Mother Jones
*Labor organizer,
 “the grandmother of all agitators,”
 the Miners’ Angel*

The Health Workers' Struggle

... and the story of one rank and filer

PAUL BUHLE

ANYONE WHO KEEPS UP TO DATE on the saga of the labor movement, its fumbling efforts to climb out of an ever-deepening hole, its moments of national influence and its moments of furious interne-cine fighting, will likely have been receiving email memos from the Service Employees union for at least several years, and almost as likely to have been receiving bulletins attacking the leadership of same union during the last year or so. It is a curious thing altogether, along with so much else popping up unbidden on the web, and many veteran observers, not to mention labor activists young and old, often seem to lack the baseball game-style program that would explain these particular players, their positions and their revealing stats. Can anyone now remember when Andrew Stern, now much under attack despite having raced to the showers, was batting .350? How about Mary Kay Henry, his successor at SEIU, or Sal Roselli, the challenger from the National Union of Health Workers: which notable fastballer or even knuckle baller was throwing more shutouts at the employers?

Baseball metaphors have probably lost their laugh value, but the charges and counter-charging email memos often do not seem much

better at explaining things. Everybody, or at least everybody who is vocal, seems to have a team and is a rigorously loyal team player. Many spitballs, not to mention beanballs, are thrown (sorry for another Summer metaphor) by one faction against another, more than at any time in my days since the palace coup against the Old Right in 1995, and more between self-described progressive

factions against each than anytime in memory.

What's it all about? *Labor's Civil War in California*, a short history of the conflict, written from a highly partisan standpoint, pinpoints (and arguably over-pinpoints) the source of the conflict in the behavior of Andrew Stern from the early years of the new century onward. Stern was the Golden "Boy" (that is to say, not quite as elderly as most other labor leaders, and presiding over some victories rather than steady defeats) of labor's declining era, among other successes, leading the SEIU to the largest single victory since the 1940s, the enrollment of nearly 75,000 employees of the homecare industry in Southern California.

There was something about this victory, actually several poignant details, that do not quite place it in the pantheon of glorious labor struggles of the past. First, it was a political deal, like most of the unionization of public employees, at every level of government, since the 1950s. Democrats had to be finessed, and they got a big something in return. Second, the members of the workforce, containing many

Labor's Civil War in California

CAL WINSLOW

Oakland: PM Press, 2010, 115pp, \$12

Shades of Justice: A Memoir

PAUL KREHBIEL

Altadena, CA: Autumn Leaf Press,
2008, 422pp, \$19.95

PAUL BUHLE is retired from teaching and lives in Madison, Wisconsin, producing nonfiction comics. His latest is *FDR and the New Deal for Beginners* with art by Sabrina Jones.

from Mexico and elsewhere in Central America (or Asia) did not entirely know that they were joining a union! Good luck that their wages improved, bad luck that they learned they had to pay monthly dues to some mysterious organization far from their own influence, let alone control.

This type or at least this scale of victory was, nevertheless, widely viewed as the great lever hurtling a revived American labor movement forward. It didn't happen, and by the new century, Stern was evidently growing restless. Meanwhile, the hotel and restaurant workers, key to the most unionized city in the nation (no, not Detroit anymore but Vegas, home of the casinos, resort hotels and thousands of non-unionized sex workers) merged with UNITE, the remnant of the old, heavily Jewish "needles trade" unions whose industry had disappeared overseas — except for the new sweatshop thousands who remain unorganized. HERE had the energy and the plan, UNITE had the Amalgamated Bank with its financial reserves from generations of dues collections. HERE-UNITE and SEIU together abandoned the faltering AFL-CIO together and set itself upon a vigorous agenda, supported by the Carpenters, Teamsters, Laborers and Farm Workers. Within the new Change to Win coalition (or mini-federation), disillusion soon set in, and some of the key players were at each others' throats.

At this point, we pass into highly disputed territory. Following the example of the declining AFL's regional and local bodies — which merged, purportedly to save money but very much against the will of many local central labor council members — Stern devised a plan to merge ever larger former SEIU locals into super-locals. The results, considered outrageous by many, were strictly predictable: more power at the top, less at the bottom. If the super-locals were more efficient or capable of taking on management, no one could prove it.

The hyper-energetic campaign to elect Barack Obama and its aftermath proved al-

together the final precipitating factor. SEIU threw enormous dues money and energies into voter registration and drives for the big "O," quite a contrast to some other sectors of labor, notably the American Federation of Teach-

If Change-to-Win, now minus
several of its founding unions,
was destined to collapse, as some
claimed eagerly, what did that say
for the AFL main body, stuck in
the same old rut as ever?

ers, whose leaders seemed to consider Obama unreliable on defense (i.e., of Israeli interests) and anyway, unelectable as a person of color, the union's political chiefs finally bowing before the nomination results — but not cheerfully. What did SEIU or any other union get from the new president? Very little in the short run, certainly not the labor reform promised. Obama was hamstrung by Congress or...he was a Business Democrat after all, notwithstanding a friendly appointment or two.

By this time, former UNITE president Bruce Raynor (long known as one of labor's valiant figures for creating union locals across racial lines in the South, and disliked among labor's aging cold warriors for his New Left background) urgently sought to withdraw his troops and his bank account from the merger. The HERE-UNITE membership drive had not been all that successful after all. Never mind: HERE wanted the piggy bank, and arguably needed it to hold on in a recession economy, let alone advance. Thus the scenario of multiple back-stabbing that emerged, along with a bright and shiny new player on the scene: the National Union of Health Workers.

HERE A LITTLE HISTORY IS USEFUL, if perhaps not so useful as one might hope. One story has to do with Jobs with Justice, launched a bit more than twenty years ago with great hopes, by veterans of New Left vintage and Alinsky-orientation, including Stern. Fronted most curiously by one of the otherwise most intimate of Lane Kirkland's buddies, Communications Workers leader Morton Bahr, and allied with other union leaders scarcely known for a progressive bone in their bodies — but hopeful of some labor revival — JwJ had a good run. Labor solidarity across race, ethnic and gender lines, mobilization on behalf of strikers, coalitions with community organizers (notably ACORN) and so seemed to promise much. And then it ran out of steam, for a variety of reasons. Remnants still linger on locally, barely, without attracting much notice.

Another story goes back further in history properly to Local 1199 in New York City, a hospital workers' union that could be described as the last success of the Old Left (Popular Front division). The most interracial, politically progressive union carried on heroically as FBI assaults and raiding destroyed other Left unions or decimated them so far (as with UE) that they could hardly be recognized. A leadership crisis following the retirement of the old leadership ended the glory days but the 1199 past success effectively set the pace for other unions of health workers to proceed amongst the most ill-treated but also rapidly expanding sector of the American workforce.

Except that progress was proving difficult here, too, and the conflicts between and among several unions were growing ever more messy. By the early months of 2010, the NUHW was winning over handfuls of locals by convincing members of their democratic practices, while SEIU responded with legal threats, sometimes more than threats. Andrew Stern resigned, succeeded by a quietly leftwing, openly lesbian Catholic unionist, Mary Kay Henry. It was a maddening moment for NUHW supporters

because Stern had been so easy to hate (along with his leading lieutenant, Anna Burger, whom he had anointed to succeed, but who could not convince the other functionaries). Meanwhile, former UNITE leader Bruce Raynor continued to joust with HERE for money and members, bringing a portion of former HERE membership, along with a chunk of the treasury, into SEIU in the bargain. What a mess!

The efforts to explain or untangle the mess have not, so far, been a great deal of help. Finding a disinterested observer is about as hard as finding a peacenik at a Tea Party rally — or an actual socialist in Obama's circle of economic advisors. An essay by Max Fraser in the *Nation* (July 5, 2010) usefully summarizes the situation but like others, places nearly all the weight, good and bad, upon Stern the personality.

Cal Winslow's fine little book lays out fuller details and is quite helpful, in its own fashion. It does not seek far behind the layers of current discussion, it offers few deep historical insights into what has made American labor organizations so predictably bureaucratic and conservative (note: I made a stab at this in *Taking Care of Business*) and what continues to make Andrew Stern, for any and all faults, not much like, say, inept, morally repugnant figures like George Meany and Lane Kirkland who were nevertheless ardently supported by most union leaders along with the intelligence agencies that counted upon their collaboration at home and abroad.

Still, Winslow has done better than some of Stern's major critics or at least as well as others. Herman Benson, for instance, longtime head of the Association for Union Democracy (AUD), has been raging at Stern for crimes so familiar in the sectors of labor that Benson rarely bothered to criticize, a habit that Winslow unwittingly identifies by hailing the AFL figures speaking at a recent HERE convention, hailing down criticisms on Stern that anti-reformers like James Hoffa, Jr., among others that could have made more credibly by talking back at the mirror.

Not quite “a seminal moment” in US history, as commentator Juan Gonzalez insisted at the time, it is more likely destined to be remembered as another round of collective defeat-turned-inward. If Change-to-Win, now minus several of its founding unions, was destined to collapse, as some claimed eagerly, what did that say for the AFL main body, stuck in the same old rut as ever?

Winslow’s strong point is his reportage of SEIU efforts to shut down California health workers’ move toward NUHW, and his conclusion that these workers have responded by bringing a higher level of democracy, rank-and-file participation, into union practice. Is this democratization a tactic or a goal? Do we see in it the potential rebirth of the kind of democratic participation that was the nature of the IWW, sometimes the early CIO (sometimes not), the Teamsters for a Democratic Union project and so many others at local and regional levels that, with some exceptions, were always turned back?

This is a good and necessary question, and one that is not really aided by the single-minded, even obsessive project of bringing down Andrew Stern the personality, the labor leader, the apparently unwanted public face of American unionism. Or by elevating assorted critics of Stern (and his allies) into more than mere tactical allies, making them veritable paragons of union democracy.

All the more so when the sudden retirement of Stern seemingly drains much of the juice out of the current attack narrative. We never really learn, in the polemical perspectives of Benson, Winslow or another shrewd observer, Steve Early (whose union days in the Communications Workers were no strangers to jurisdictional disputes, or to thuggish union presidents until the present CWA leader, for that matter), why the marriage of HERE and UNITE did not work, or why in not working, did not lead to some kind of amicable divorce. And thus why the continued presence of Bruce Raynor, one of labor’s best in recent decades, would turn out

(according to insiders) to be the real bone in the throat of the NUHW and its obligatory allies. John Wilhelm, as the dynamic leader of HERE, another authentic labor hero and founder of CtW, was now eagerly returning his union to the AFL that he rejected only a few years ago, adding more confusion to at least some outsiders.

More perhaps to the point than all this: with so much blood on the floor, how might things be settled so that the task of organizing the unorganized can actually begin to take place again... before unions collapse under the accumulating weight of their debts and membership losses? It’s a ponder.

HERE WE CAN USEFULLY TURN to the rank and file of the NUHW, a vital, tragic but also heroic story in its own right. This rank-and-filer is someone whom I met, or seem to have met, forty years ago and then again, for a few days, when a doomed attempt was made to relaunch Students for a Democratic Society and a counterpart post-student body, the Movement for a Democratic Society. Paul Krehbiel and I were among the few non-youngsters on the latter scene, greatly changed by age but with basically the same non-Communist/Maoist, anti-imperialist, syndicalistic politics as we had when young and doubtless more vigorous.

Paul was a Buffalo (more properly Tonawanda) suburban lower middle class/ working class kid of the 1950s-60s. He traces his radicalization during the Vietnam Era with great care and candor, something remarkable for a life-time organizer/activist who did not become anything close to a professional writer. His closely-considered details include parents, pals, enemies, girl friends, teachers and others. But perhaps the most poignant stories are not quite told: how he gave up art, his deepest pursuit, for being a lifetime political activist. But we do learn how he went to art school in Toronto, not far across the border, and how he defended teachers there who had been fired. But the summer job, between

semesters, proved to be decisive.

Paul was one of those rebels for whom my magazine *Radical America*, launched in 1967, had been created. We devoted ourselves to social history, especially labor history, and our readers were mainly graduate students. But we were thinking all the time that there might be a direct way to influence a rapidly changing class conflict. The demography, a majority of white males, was melting away, and with it, a considerable segment of the automatic redneck support of war and invasion, also the racism, and so on. In 1968, dreaming at the age of twenty of being a professional sculptor and meanwhile working in a metal plant, he watched as two of his fingers were crushed by a stamper. He needed a life change.

It came as he dropped out of art school and started attending a blue collar college in Buffalo. There was Students for a Democratic Society, waiting for him. He became an activist and a good down-to-earth one, but also studied hard, as many of us did in those days (defying the stereotype of the stoned-out radical student). He naturally gravitated to blue collar organizing, including draft resistance, figured out for himself the best literature from any part of the Left to give to prospective draftees as he talked to them.

His retelling of the various local (sometimes national) activities in this sector is one of the best anywhere, so much so that it defies summary. The space between the factory and the campus, the changing sentiment of the community from the stand point of one activist, ends only in 1971, and by then Krehbiel has covered more than four hundred pages. It fast-forwards to one last, brief chapter on life after the 2000 election. One wishes he had started earlier and covered more space in the recent years, but his final lessons come to the necessity of nuts and bolts in building mass movements. No one knows better how difficult these are.

It is no surprise, then, that Krehbiel's blog, linked to *Labor Notes*, is one of passionate at-

tachment to NUHW, to its leader Sal Roselli, and to the day-to-day events in one work-place location or another. Krehbiel updates the Winslow commentary usefully — and continually.

And yet so much remains unknown, uncertain and troubling. Is the NUHW struggle a metaphor for a very different kind of unionism, one little-known in the main body of the AFL, and if so, how comfortable are fellow enemies of Stern and his successor likely to be with such a bottom-up style? Is SEIU going to “implode,” as assorted critics of Stern have been prone to predict, or, more likely, under Henry, will triage on behalf of the vigorous, healthy sections, protecting those from the damaged branches reattaching themselves (if all goes well) to the NUHW. Will the remnants of CtW slink back into the AFL? Or more likely in the saga of union quarrels, will the conflict drag on for years, driven as much by the familiar personal enmity as any other logic. Actually, this time around, money is an even bigger motive: the Federation has too little to offer the departed internationals, in return for their dues payments. But perhaps this factor might also work the other way, toward reconciliation of some kind, probably with Bruce Raynor taking a well-deserved retirement, and his faction of HERE-UNITE dissolving into an already reconciled HERE-UNITE-AFL.

A longer discussion than these books allow might turn our attention to the larger failure of the labor movement to organize much of anyone, and the propensity of unions to snatch territory from each other at great expense to their treasuries and to morale at large. There may be as many actual auto workers now as in the later 1980s, but the UAW is looking at colleges (and some AFT locals), casino workers (HERE-UNITE locals) and so on. Those non-union plants in the South and elsewhere are obviously less inviting targets. The same goes, naturally, for the undocumented workers in today's sweatshops, especially garment industry shops: these seem to have been written

off in advance. Endless other examples could be found. How do these books help an exploration of this topic and why do they not go further in exploring it?

Whatever the case, the situation for NUHW is dire. SEIU has lots of resources and lots of friends in high (as well as other) places. Settlement with SEIU, including the survival of a vigorous collection of their locals in California, would appear to be the best solution for

NUHW, if only they can get it. Seeing no easy victory ahead and wanting obstacles out of the way, Stern opted for a no-raiding agreement with the California Federation of Nurses years ago; that may be the best way out for all, and Mary Kay Henry may be the one who decides to make it on terms acceptable to NUHW.

TEACHERS TAKE NOTE

Thoreau and His Heirs

The History and the Legacy of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience"

— STUDY GUIDE AND KIT —



History doesn't have to be, well, old. With this study kit, students will see how Thoreau's actions and writings have inspired countless people around the world for more than 160 years, including

individuals who today are refusing taxes and risking jail to protest war.

\$30*



C O N T E N T S

- **"Civil Disobedience," H.D. Thoreau**
- **"Death & Taxes" DVD**, a new 30-min. video about war tax resisters carrying on Thoreau's tradition in the United States today
- **Study guide questions** challenging students to consider if Thoreau's actions and words are still relevant
- **A list of historic civil disobedience actions** since the time of Thoreau, with resources for further study

*discounts for 2 or more

"If a thousand [people] were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. "

National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee

PO Box 150553, Brooklyn, NY 11215 • 800-269-7464 • nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org • www.nwtrcc.org

An Intellectual Publisher or a Successful Huckster?

MICHAEL WRESZIN

"The Eisenhower years have been years of flabbiness and self satisfaction and gross materialism . . . The loudest sound has been the oink and grunt of private hoggishness. . . . It has been the age of the slob."

William Shannon, *New York Times* writer quoted by Richard Rovere in *The American Scholar*, Spring, 1962

"[W]e've grown unbelievably prosperous and we meander along in a heavy, humorless, sanctimonious stultifying atmosphere, singularly lacking in the self-mockery that is self criticism. Probably the climate of the late 50s was the dullest and dreariest in all our history."

Eric Goldman, historian, in "Goodbye to the Fifties and Good Riddance," *Harpers Magazine*, January 1960

"The eight Eisenhower years were great years for the Republic. . . . Largely by their own efforts, individually or involuntary association the American people made giant strides in nearly every field of endeavor under the benign laws of the Republic."

Quoted by Alan Brinkley from an unpublished Luce Memoir in his biography *Henry Luce and his American Century* New York, 2010

IF ONE TAKES THE CLAIMS of this biography seriously much of the credit for changing public opinion may well go to Britt Hadden and Henry Luce, the creators of *Time*: *Time* the Weekly News Magazine and subsequently *Time* Incorporated embracing *Fortune*, *Life*, and *Sports Illustrated*.

The first issue of *Time* appeared on March 3, 1923 published and edited by two young

MICHAEL WRESZIN is Professor Emeritus from Queens College and the City University of New York. He is the biographer of Dwight Macdonald and two other volumes on intellectual journalists.

The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century

ALAN BRINKLEY

N.Y.: Alfred Knopf, 2010, 531pp., \$35

Yale graduates with little experience and no substantial financial backing.

Henry Luce was the child of a Presbyterian missionary to China. He was born in China and arrived in the United States when he was twelve to attend the highly regarded Hotchkiss School in Connecticut. Britt Hadden was the son of a wealthy president of a Brooklyn savings bank. They became close friends. Both were obsessive strivers and big men on campus. Luce was the more serious scholar but Hadden's colorful personality made him a great favorite among his fellow students. Though good friends, they were fierce competitors. But Luce usually came in a close second to Hadden. Luce was defensive about the poverty of his missionary father and he stood in awe of Hadden's privileged upbringing, social sophistication and ability to make friends. Luce felt himself to be an outsider. At Yale they continued their competitive friendship, both served on the *Yale Record*, although Hadden became its editor, beating out Luce. Luce wrote for several other college publications and earned a Phi Beta Kappa key. While Hadden was at best a mediocre student, he was chosen by his class as "most likely to succeed" and having "given the most to Yale." Both were obsessed to be chosen for the Senior Society, Skull and Bones. When Luce made it after some fearful waiting he felt that he was now a member of the

“most exclusive society in the world.” Hadden took his selection for granted.

By 1918 Hadden and Luce were pleased by America’s entrance into World War I. They served in the Yale Reserve Officers Training Core and for a brief period were sent to a training camp in South Carolina. There they informed the uneducated hillbilly soldiers what the issues were and the obligation the United States had to save the world for democracy.

After their graduation a friend from Yale got them jobs at the *Baltimore News*. It was here that first plans to start a weekly were discussed. They would devise a magazine that condensed stories from a variety of newspapers and magazines covering all aspects of contemporary culture, news, foreign affairs, politics, sports, the arts, theatre, and human interest. A reader of the entire magazine would be able to hold his or her own at any cocktail party or dinner, so long as one did not probe the depths of a subject. Both Luce and Hadden did not think it possible to underestimate the knowledge of the average American. Their magazine would be dedicated to informing and entertaining a middle class audience. It is generally accepted that the uniqueness of the idea, the title, *Time*, and the colorful language and word creation were all the product of Hadden’s risk-taking imagination. Brinkley suggests that Luce knew from the start that he was the junior partner of any collaboration with Hadden. Luce’s talent lay in his business acumen. Hadden would be the editor and Luce the business manager. They planned to periodically switch positions but it was clear that Hadden was not cut out to manage affairs so it fell to Luce to become the business manager.

The difference between the two men was vividly described by Dwight Macdonald, an early associate at *Time*:

Luce/Hadden: moral/amoral, pious/wordly, respectable/raffish, bourgeois/bohemian, introvert/extrovert, somber/convivial, reliable/unpredictable. Slow/quick, dog/cat, tame/wild,

efficient/brilliant, decent/charming, Puritanical/hedonistic, Naïve/cynical, Victorian/18th century.

The author is clearly more appreciative of the practical and necessary talents that Luce brought to management than he is of the often reckless conduct of Brit Hadden. Not long after

His left leaning writers’
enthusiasm for the
administration angered him.

the magazine showed real promise of becoming a great success, Hadden became bored with the operation and gave more time to drinking, chasing women, and pursuing a lively, carousing night life.

Luce, on the other hand, had an enormous belief in appearances and a respect and admiration for the lives of the wealthy and powerful. Social associations were important to him although he felt uncomfortable and awkward. Luce, during his courtship of the socialite Liz Hotz, was taken with the parties, balls, dinners and Lake Forest social scene. As the son of poor missionaries in China he did not have the wherewithal to keep up but received considerable help from Nettie Fowler McCormick, the widow of Cyrus McCormick of the great farm machinery company. The two upstarts did manage to raise \$100,000 to begin the venture. By mid-1924 after a shaky beginning, the publication was definitely catching on and by the end of the year was making a profit. Three years later Hadden bragged that *Time* was a “successful established institution” noted both for its disciplined brevity and unique and entertaining style. Hadden proved to be a world class word-smith. He was credited for using the *Iliad* as a model in developing such compound adjectives as “flabby

chinned,” “snaggle-toothed,” “coffee-colored,” “bandy-legged,” and “trim-figured.” While ridiculing an Alabama Senator, Tom Heflin, Hadden created the verb to “heffle” which he defined as “to talk loud and long without saying much.” The magazine was well received and viewed as lively, witty and entertaining. Brinkley notes that despite some obvious failures and weaknesses “it was consistent and homogeneous. It presented readers with a familiar and predictable experience.” The editors bragged about their “cover-to-cover readers.”

Brinkley makes much of this phenomenal achievement and for the most part credits Luce. As Hadden spent less time at the office, Luce actually took over the editorship. Their close friendship gradually fell apart and by 1928, five years after the founding, Hadden was on his death bed. In addition to poor health from alcoholism he was diagnosed as suffering from *Streptococcus veridans* that led to severe blood poisoning from which he failed to recover. Luce visited every day and despite Hadden’s weakened condition kept insisting that they launch a new business magazine. Hadden was contemptuous. He had little use for businessmen and corporate America in general. Luce’s grand venture of an oversized glossy format printed on cream-colored pages appalled Hadden, who described it as “high class Babbity.” He had been devoted to turning *Tide*, a house organ to solicit advertising into a general magazine dealing with advertising. *Tide*, as developed by Hadden, deliberately ridiculed some of the advertisers in *Time*. He was dedicated to exposing and ridiculing the culture of consumption and the absence of any ethical standards that allowed companies to promote shoddy goods and lie about their products. Luce hated Hadden’s cynicism and quickly ended the magazine in 1930.

What took place during those last bedside discussions is not clear except to say that in a handwritten will Hadden insisted that his share of the stocks in Time Inc. remain in his fam-

ily. Luce needed to purchase them in order to have controlling ownership of the company by giving him unlimited power to shape its future. He used that power immediately to launch *Fortune*. There is a much more incriminating account of Luce’s response to Hadden’s death and his subsequent purchase of the controlling stock in Isaiah Wilner’s, *The Man Time Forgot: A Tale of Genius, Betrayal, and the Creation of Time Magazine*. Wilner makes much of the fact that despite an effort by Hadden’s cousin and a *Time* editor, John S. Martin, to have a major obituary in the magazine it was nixed by Luce and the editors. Only a brief notice appeared. Brinkley views Martin’s pleas as an “overwrought effort” and significantly ends the chapter with the notice that Hadden’s name was removed from the masthead.

Brinkley speculates on several scenarios if Hadden had lived. He concludes that the history of the company would have been profoundly different but that Hadden’s “raffish Menckelike outlook ... represented the disillusioned, skeptical, flippant culture of the ‘Jazz Age’” which was passing and that Luce on the other hand was the “serious, earnest questing exception to his generation’s style; and his sense of purpose, even of mission may have been better suited to the more sober 1930’s than Hadden’s ironic temperament . . . “

Brinkley then launches into the phenomenally successful creation of *Fortune* which Hadden had so ferociously opposed. This was followed later by *Life*, the equally successful picture magazine. All of this clearly proved that Luce did not need Hadden. He performed brilliantly as the sole editor-in-chief. He notes that Luce “rarely spoke of Hadden” and that over time fewer and fewer people had ever heard of him. Brinkley states that Luce saw “nothing to gain from dwelling on his former dependence on his longtime friend.” The outrage of Hadden’s mother is not mentioned.

Throughout the biography, Luce’s intellectuality is repeatedly stressed. He had been

precociously intelligent in his school days. He was always preoccupied with ideas. He was, despite bias and dogmatism, an “intellectual omnivore.” He “devoured ideas” from many sources and sought out “interesting thinkers” on issue after issue.” All were amazed at his intellectual curiosity, but, as one editor noted, he didn’t “believe anybody could tell him anything” and that he had no one to talk to on his intellectual level. In later life Brinkley reports that he developed “intellectual relationships” with [such] major theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, Henry Sloane Coffin, Henry Van Deusen, and Paul Tillich. Little light is shed on those conversations. It was the evangelical, Billy Graham, that Luce loved for his “old fashioned religion and his “extremely conservative politics.”

Luce, Brinkley reports, had no use for small talk and repeatedly insisted that he had no intellectual equals. Clair Booth Luce, his second partner in a disastrous marriage, recalled that he “could think of no one who was his intellectual superior.” When she suggested Einstein he dismissed him as a man who borrowed the ideas of others without crediting their work. Unfortunately few of these ideas or issues is ever discussed. The books he read are seldom cited. At my count only two, a biography of President McKinley and a rather strange and oblique reference to Lionel Trilling’s critical study of Matthew Arnold are mentioned. But there is no discussion here of his opinions concerning Arnold’s focus on Culture and Anarchy. At one point he did discuss the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in a letter to his son Peter. Again there is no development of the discussion.

Brinkley repeatedly stresses the amazing success Luce had with his publishing ventures. One example was his ability to recruit famous writers and significant leaders to write for his magazines. The list of important literary figures that initially contributed to *Fortune* is astonishing: James Agee, Dwight Macdonald, John Hersey, Robert Fitzgerald, Robert Cantwell and John Kenneth Galbraith. Later many of the left

leaning writers quit, angered by his increasingly right wing positions. He often pandered to celebrities and leaders to get them to write for him. They did so for the tremendous circulation insured. Alfred Kazin recalls Luce’s “taste for Big Ideas and Big Thinkers” and it was through them and his publications that he would inform the world.

Surely one cannot dismiss his achievements in the world of publishing. As Brinkley notes, “in his own time he was among the most powerful media figures in America and perhaps the world.” His leftist critics did not simply disdain Luce they feared him as the head of a powerful propaganda machine capable of narrowing the horizons of readers while at the same time manipulating and mobilizing them. They believed that the “easily deluded middle class could easily fall under the influence of a powerful and persuasive media.”

What is one then to make of this record of dubious opinions held by an allegedly powerful intellect. The last Democrat Luce supported was Al Smith largely because of his strong religious faith. No other Democratic president or aspirant received the support of Luce publications. He found Kennedy attractive and pandered to him, but the magazines supported Nixon in 1960. Luce had little use for FDR and was early on an opponent of the New Deal. His left leaning writers’ enthusiasm for the administration angered him. He was determined to get *Fortune* “straightened out ideologically.” His critics charged that he had turned *Fortune* into an organ of conservative political propaganda.

Always fascinated with “Great Men,” Luce treated Mussolini and even Hitler with some admiration and respect in the 1930s and *Time* treated Hitler and the Nuremberg rallies as great spectacles managed by a great man. Joshua Billings, one of his most astute editors, remarked that even as an older man Luce maintained his “boyish susceptibility to Greatness.”

With *Life*, the picture magazine accompanying *Time* the Luce publications maintained a

sentimental and Pollyannaish vision of America. Brinkley is aware and seemingly tolerant of the “amiable positiveness” of the Luce vision. He writes that in “an era blighted by Depression, prejudice, social turmoil, and the shadow of war, *Life* offered the comforting image of a nation united behind a shared, if contrived, vision of the American Dream.” Even when the devastating pictures of poverty by Margaret Bourke White were available, *Life* did not use them and when James Agee and Walker Evans chronicled the lives of Southern share-croppers on assignment from *Fortune* the editors declined to publish the pictures or Agee’s difficult text. From the very first issue of *Life* there was an affirmative celebratory view of Americans happily pursuing the American dream. When the magazine pictured the workers at the great Fort Peck Dam in Montana, the shabby squalor of their miserable shanty town was muted and the residents photographed “in restaurants and bars, laughing drinking and flirting” in happy satisfaction. All of this is recorded by Brinkley but he appears to appreciate Luce’s affirmative challenge to the inevitable grim realities stressed by leftist critics.

Luce, Brinkley insists, was never a racist and gave constant support to civil rights but he often spoke of African-Americans and Jews in the most blatant of stereotypes. As Brinkley apologetically explains, he occasionally fell into the “casual bigotry of the upper class” of his time, referring to the “the Jewboy doctor who lived in a “swank Jew apartment on Riverside.”

With the approach of war, the Luce publications thrived in an atmosphere of patriotic unity. Luce supported Wendell Wilkie with wild enthusiasm in the election of 1940 much to the chagrin of some of his editors. On February 17, 1941 Luce published in *Life* “The American Century.” Brinkley sees it as “the most influential article he would ever publish.” It simply stated that America had the greatest power and the greatest commitment to democratic values and it should devote all of its power and technological know-how to spreading these values

throughout the world. It implicitly wanted an immediate declaration of war against Germany. The response to his essay was tremendous. While many agreed, others still demanding peace saw Luce as a propagandist war monger. Many on the left saw the statement as an imperialist manifesto demanding American world wide domination. Norman Thomas criticized Luce’s “nakedness of imperial ambition.” Brinkley argues that the message of the essay “could not accurately be described as imperialism.” This statement is followed by a “But” used constantly to mitigate previous statements. In this case Brinkley concedes “that the U. S. mission in the world did indeed profoundly change the shape of the nation and the globe.” John Lukacs, the erudite conservative historian, sees Luce as a perfect example of evangelical imperialism. While influential it was hardly original, much of it taken from Walter Lippman and Archibald McLeish. The title echoed a phrase used decades earlier by H.G. Wells.

Following the “American Century” article with the coming of the war, Luce launched into his save China from totalitarianism campaign through the good offices of Chiang Kai-shek and his wife. Together they would bring great modernization to China. He ignored all charges of widespread corruption among the Nationalists. He would listen to no one who was skeptical concerning Chiang and insisted that the war be expanded into China. He was outraged at the refusal of both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations for not coming to the aid militarily of the Chinese nationalists. When his own reporter, Teddy White, refused to knuckle under and continued to attack the Generalissimo, he was fired.

Brinkley notes that Luce’s hopes for the post-war world were largely incoherent. In his view the State Department had betrayed China and he used all of the right wing rhetoric about losing that vast country. When the Korean War came he hoped it would lead to a war with China and was outraged at Truman’s dismissal of that

great man, General Douglas MacArthur.

All through the fifties he waged an obsessive war against Communism. He denounced Paul Robeson and attacked his editors for not stressing his “traitorous attitude toward the U.S.” There is no discussion of the government’s treatment of the actor and activist. He charged State Department staffers such as John Carter Vincent and Owen Lattimore with responsibility for the sellout of China. Brinkley has a “but.” He claims Luce’s attitude toward Communist subversion was more “nuanced” than many of the hard core anti-Communists. His supporting evidence is Luce’s contempt for Senator Joe McCarthy. True, but he opposed McCarthy because his reckless accusations gave the good cause of anti-Communism a bad name. Brinkley goes on to argue that Luce’s “broader interest in Communist ideas. . . . was an intellectual one” and he spent most of his time repudiating liberal anti Communism and favoring his own Cold War brand. His model was Sidney Hook. Luce’s attacks on Dean Acheson and General George Marshall were hardly nuanced. Acheson was seen as a “symbol of error and disaster” and he charged Truman and Marshall with “endangering the future of humanity by their incompetence.”

He continued to give speeches that were, according to Brinkley, “fumbling and unintelligible,” demanding a more aggressive foreign policy. When the Vietnam War broke out he had great hopes that it might expand to China.

Luce wrote the introduction to a tedious

book on the need for national goals which was denounced as having little substance. Brinkley agreed with that judgment.

In conclusion, after this dreary record of a man allegedly devoted to intellectual discussion and ideas, Brinkley concludes that Luce’s power was controlling public opinion but in fact he was unable to exercise as much power as he wished. He detested and opposed F. D. R. but his criticism had very little impact on Roosevelt’s policies. He railed for years about the failure to support Chiang and nationalist China but never overcame America’s unwillingness to challenge the Communist regime. Although he had close relationships with Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, rarely did they take his advice. The Luce publications, Brinkley states, were “reflections of the middle-class world, not often a shaper of it.” He did not change the world but he played an important role in the creation of new forms of “information and communication.” His magazines were “always the most important of his achievements.” The editors insisted that Luce share the credit for that achievement. After Luce died in 1967, Briton Hadden’s name was restored to the *Time* masthead.

I closed this volume unclear as to why Henry Luce deserved such a massive and largely generous biography. Just what great service did the Luce publications provide other than an early version of the sound bite culture we have grown to accept?

Is a Dream a Lie if it Doesn't Come True (or is it something worse)?

STEVEN COLATRELLA

LET ME BEGIN WITH A CONFESSION: While the 1980s are a blur to me, I recall the 1970s with a crispness and precision that has led me ever since to replaying the mental tape of those years, trying to understand how things ended up as they did. The latter decade to me still means the awful decline of popular music, Reagan's smarmy self-righteous speeches, the horrors of the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua and seemingly fruitless protests to stop them, the AIDS crisis, homelessness, and most of all the literally physically crumbling infrastructure around us as jobs were lost, factories closed, neighborhoods and cities rotted, a process so well captured in Michael Moore's films.

Jefferson Cowie has given us a wonderfully readable, if necessarily depressing, account of the working class in the 1970s. It turns out that the tape is worth replaying. This was, after all, the turning point; the moment when working class hopes in the United States, and around the world, might have been realized to a greater degree in struggles over control of work and for social justice; or alternatively, the 70s could have been the last hurrah, the point where the

illusions of a New Deal and social democratic hopes went down in flames, followed by a resurgent capitalist class's arrogant victory lap that seems to still be going on, despite Wall Street's having turned to ashes most of the resources society entrusted to it. How, and why the latter scenario won out over alternative futures is the subject of Cowie's *Stayin'*

Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class.

This book is the most important work on the U.S. postwar working class since at least John McDermott's neglected *The Crisis in the Working Class* of 1980, and is likely to get more notice than that unsung work did given its unfortunate timing. As a work of history, it might be the most groundbreaking and original national history of a working class since E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, even given its opposite theme which is partly overstated in the subtitle. For Cowie, aside from providing us with a highly readable and very plausible account of the defeat of U.S. working class hopes and projects through that decisive decade, has also overcome a number of the weaknesses that eventually developed in the school of social history that focused on working class studies. These often involved close, highly detailed accounts of the origins and growth of particular groups of workers in specific crafts, cities or regions. The relationship drawn between such workers and popular culture or religion often seemed to try too hard

Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class

JEFFERSON COWIE

New York: The New Press, 2010,
464 pp., \$27.50

STEVEN COLATRELLA has been a union organizer, Fulbright Scholar, chair of Political and Social Sciences at John Cabot University in Rome, and President of the Iowa Sociological Association. He is author of *Workers of the World: African and Asian Migrants in Italy in the 1990s* (Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press) 2001.

to copy Thompson's seamless weaving together of English popular culture and working class self-making. Thompson had tied together the material and symbolic into a socialist humanism embodied in a class on the move. Instead, later approaches, at times drowning readers in detail more appropriate to Ph.D. dissertations, favored identity politics and then postmodern discourse methodologies, and ended up finding the working class an impossible project in the first place, as though it had never happened. Finally, the school of working class historians emphasizing culture seemed stymied by the challenge of continuing their story past the New Deal without it losing coherence, as an autonomous class with its own cultural expressions no longer seemed discernible. Some stuck with either cultural issues, or politics, or union struggles, or, decreasingly, struggles at the point of production. *Stayin' Alive* instead is able to give readers a holistic account of the life of the class as a whole, and its narrative weaves work, politics, union and workplace struggles, music, film, myth and reality together without once losing its way.

Cowie knows that the working class of the 1970s seems today as if it never happened and indeed points out that the rank and file rebellions of the Miners for Democracy and of the Steelworkers who supported Ed Sadlowski's reform efforts, or the Teamsters for Democracy, or the various wildcat strikes of the era, seem to have disappeared from all narrative, history, and memory. But even a working class that has disappeared as an independent or effective actor on the stage of national politics is one that existed at least at one time for real, and Cowie has not forgotten that. For this, Cowie's book is indispensable. But perhaps as importantly, despite the pessimism and seeming finality of the subtitle, the book makes clear that class was in the 70s, and remains, the central issue in U.S. political life. That it is also demonstrably less salient in mobilizing people to fight to improve their conditions merely means that one side is

winning, or even has won. Race and gender are never absent, indeed are investigated in this book, and are shown to be among the weak points of the working class of the period. The

By treating race and gender not
as intellectual categories, but
as concrete struggles by black,
Hispanic, and women workers.
Cowie moves beyond postmodern
obsession with identity and its
abstractions,

subsequent retreat of white workers into patriarchy and whiteness in reaction to unexpected and bewildering defeat after defeat is not an afterthought, but the basis on which to begin any serious project for overcoming the divisions in the class that have helped paralyze us in the subsequent decades. In short, by treating race and gender not as intellectual categories, but as concrete struggles by black, Hispanic, and women workers, and therefore as subjects of practical political projects whose efforts called for further political projects by working class men and whites and by working class organizations and allies, Cowie moves beyond postmodern obsession with identity and its abstractions, to concrete and practical alternatives that failed, even for good reasons, but did not necessarily need to fail.

Cowie's careful reconstruction of the critical turning points of the 1970s — the deflating of the hopes of the reform movements, the massive corporate unified lobbying campaign to crush labor law reform, the gutting of the social democratic hopes embodied in the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, and most of all the failure and thinness of every effort at merging the various social movements

of the 1960s with the working class rebellions of the 70s — shows that these defeats were not inevitable, even if the odds were against the efforts to forestall them. Postmodernism, with its contempt for any hint of teleology, nevertheless by its very name suggests a teleology, that the “end of grand narratives” or simply of the working class as a political project, has had its own inevitability. *Stayin’ Alive* shows that this is not the case. Indeed, a strength of the book is that it makes clear that economic and cultural problems have political solutions — solutions in alliances, policies, organization. The reverse is also true, that economic and political problems become insoluble when they are treated as cultural. The latter is what so many intellectuals, comfortable in their dismissal of working people as subjects of social transformation, have spent their energy doing for many years now, as meanwhile neoliberal capitalism has gutted every basis for democratic citizenship or for social justice.

Instead, Cowie takes us back through the attempts to put together a new whole that might have been, and might yet be, greater than the sum of its parts — from efforts to link civil rights and labor struggles as in the early UFW behind Cesar Chavez and the now forgotten Farah strike, to working class feminist efforts like 9 to 5 and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, to Martin Luther King’s support for the Memphis sanitation workers’ strike (where he met his death) — though he misses the promise of the Welfare Rights Movement and its links with King’s own Poor People’s March. Jimmy Carter’s failure to appreciate the visionary possibilities of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill — the attempt by two politicians to overcome the fragmentation in the Democratic Party manifested in the McGovern Campaign — and, its idea of planning for full employment as perhaps the last real chance at a social democratic alternative to neoliberal free markets, was Carter’s real downfall. The Iran hostages merely drove in the last nail. The book thus, in keeping with its theme of the

70s as the key transitional moment between the glory years of the postwar labor-capital accord and the viciousness of the capitalist 80s through today, also reminds us that we got where we were because specific political projects, each flawed in key ways, but not inevitably so, failed.

But working class possibilities were also lived out through and in relation to the music and film and TV of the era and Cowie’s discussions of the presentations of working class life — and of Hollywood’s role in particular in an attack on the working class, often coming from directors and writers with roots in the very New Left that often saw the working class as a bastion of the status quo (*Easy Rider* for instance) are among the liveliest parts of the book. It does not take a lot to have noticed that Rocky, in fighting a black man, is no longer a working class hero against the powerful but against a different foe in a way that fosters division. But *Stayin’ Alive* shows the weakness of even a film like *Norma Rae*, which, by emphasizing the development of a feminist heroine rather than the collective ability of her and her fellow workers to bring about change, not only limited the film’s impact on working class revival but in fact changed history. I never liked the portrayal of the stereotyped union organizer in that otherwise excellent film, and in fact it turns out that in the real struggle initiated by textile worker Crystal Lee Sutton, her mentor organizer was a coal miner, not a New York intellectual as in the film. Left out of Cowie’s book, though, and one of the few limits of its account, is Vietnam, which was admittedly winding down as his story begins. Participation in that war was a major working class experience in the 70s. As shown by Jonathan Neale in *A People’s History of the Vietnam War*, the film industry invented the myth of demonstrators greeting veterans returning home from the war by spitting on them, a theme that has been reprised from *Coming Home* to *Rambo* to TV’s *NCIS* involving utterly fictional such greetings of veterans of the Iraq war. It never happened, and indeed, one of

the few authentic meeting places between New Left and working class were in the coffee houses and other activities set up to provide support for the GI movement in opposition to the war, a movement that, as Cowie does mention, played an important role in the very factory rebellions and union reform movements that his book begins with. This example merely underlines his point though: Hollywood has not been a friend to the U.S. working class. Cowie's title example, the entirely made up story that became the film *Saturday Night Fever* makes this clear, with its theme, later hammered home in film after film (*Pretty Woman*, *Working Girl*, *Officer and a Gentleman*, *Flashdance*) that hope for working class people only comes from getting out and away from their own class roots (and, as these examples all show, from sleeping with the boss, or at least with someone from the upper class).

WRITING OF MUSIC, Cowie shows equal insight, though mostly suggestive, as he points to the inability of various efforts to connect working class interests and countercultural expressions. Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline*, the Band's revival of and transformation of traditional instruments and musical themes, Ray Charles' crossover allegedly country album (mostly inspired by country's storytelling), Johnny Cash's reciprocal moves in the direction of countercultural themes, all failed to create a new synthesis. None got the play that Merle Haggard's "Okie" got as its irony was misunderstood and it was taken as a white blue collar anthem against welfare recipients, gays, and antiwar protesters. As Cowie shows, by decade's end, the only integrated music, and one that at least challenged patriarchal and racial categories within the working class, was disco. The problem is that disco quickly fell to corporate control and technological repression of songwriter and musician alike, and was not long after racialized through the "disco sucks" movement, leading to a more highly segregated musical scene in the 80s and 90s than had prob-

ably existed since early in the century. Strangely, the book, though stopping nearly at very start of the 1980s, does make one cultural foray into the following decade, and that is to note the distorted message of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA." This mega-hit was actually put to a different music than the original acoustic when the song had been intended for Springsteen's protest-oriented *Nebraska* album. Put to the highly charged chorus, the words became a kind of neo-fascist anthem much to the artist's chagrin, and seemed to many radicals at the time like a part of a perfect Reaganite storm (along with *Rambo*, the Statue of Liberty anniversary, and the 1984 Olympics). Recalling Devo's charming but as Cowie shows, disarming reorientation of working class experience from Akron and Kent State University, prefiguring the 80s move from rebellion to de-evolution and postmodern irony, is another of the unexpected reminders of how things went down, that for those of us who lived through those years with growing anxiety and disorientation, makes one grateful for the book's appearance now.

The unwillingness of the author to go beyond the somewhat arbitrary border of the calendar line between the 1970s and 1980s limits the work somewhat, though the transition to the Reagan administration and its earthshaking transformations of American life and the U.S. working class is a justifiable boundary. But it means that the discussion of the PATCO strike, the decisive and undeniable moment of working class defeat, is cursory, when it deserves the same full discussion that the author provides for Humphrey-Hawkins for instance. The union movement did not move as one to defend PATCO, and so sealed its fate, but to be fair, every union person I have ever spoken with has pointed out that only one union, the Machinists led by alleged socialist Bill Wimpinsinger, needed to go out on strike in support to close down all the airports and give the strike a chance of success. There is enough responsibility go around for the defeat, as there

would be some years later in that of the British miners against Margaret Thatcher. Together, the defeat of these two strikes guaranteed the ascendancy of neoliberal, free market ideas and policies across the Atlantic world, and later, through implementation of the IMF structural adjustment programs, across the planet. In short, the roots of globalization are in the failure of these struggles. Cowie does not bring the international scene in at all, and given the seemingly hermetic parochialism of U.S. political life, this is understandable. But it also means that the extent to which the U.S. working class has suffered defeats in part for not understanding its international position in relation to workers in other countries is left out of the story. But for what is here, for its humanity, its memory, its reminder

that political agency can change outcomes, and most of all for reminding us that “those steel mills and their surrounding communities may be gone, but the workers are still out there — part of the new Wal-Mart working class” this book is required reading for anyone looking to revive working class hopes and alternatives to America’s disastrous love story with capitalism. Neither dream, nor lie, the working class was, and remains, the majority of people in the United States and rumors of its disappearance have been greatly exaggerated. But any revival of working class politics will need to learn from the failures and limits of the struggles of 1970s, and this book is a good place to start examining those.



Marx and the non-Western World

MICHAEL LÖWY

THIS TRULY PATH-BREAKING BOOK goes against the grain of the conventional wisdom which reduces Marx to an Eurocentric and economistic thinker; as Douglas Kellner comments, Kevin Anderson shows that Marx “is the sophisticated and original theorist of history some might not have ever expected him to be.” Analyzing a variety of Marx’s writings, including his journalistic work written for the *New York Daily Tribune* as well as unpublished material on non-European societies, it brings to the fore a global theorist whose social critique was sensitive to the various forms of social oppression and struggle.

The concept of “margins” may be criticized as too vague and imprecise but it has the advantage of bringing together various aspects of historical development which are peripheral to the capital/labor contradiction and to the Western industrial capitalist world: colonialism, nationalism, race, ethnicity, and non-Western societies. What Anderson argues is that one can find in

Marx at the Margins, On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies

KEVIN B. ANDERSON

Chicago, The Chicago University Press,
2010, 319 pages, \$66 (hard cover); \$22.50
(paperback)

Marx’s writings from 1848 to 1882 a *movement*, an intellectual and political evolution, in the direction of an increasingly complex and multi-layered conception of development and revolution. In the *Communist Manifesto*, as well as in his first articles on India (1853), one can still find an “Orientalist” — according to Edward Said’s well known criticism — i.e., unilinear and Eurocentric approach, leading

to a qualified support for colonialism. However, in his articles on the Opium Wars in China, or the Indian Sepoy rebellion (1857-1859), there is already a clear anti-colonialist stance, which will be later developed, in a very powerful way, in the chapter on “primitive accumulation” of *Capital*. Similarly, Marx’s writings on Poland and even more so on Ireland reveal an increasing awareness of the importance of movements for national liberation, while his comments on the Civil War in the United States, focusing of course on the struggle for the abolition of slavery, show also his concern for racial oppression: “In the USA ... labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin” (1866).

The most original contribution of this book is without doubt its discussion of Marx’s ethnological notebooks (1879-1882). Some of this material has been included by Lawrence Krader in his work, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (1972), but much of it is yet unpublished; thanks to his participation in the edition of a forthcoming volume of the new MEGA (the German edition of *Marx*

MICHAEL LÖWY, born in Brazil in 1938, lives in Paris since 1969. Presently emerit Research Director at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research), and lecturer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. His books and articles have been translated into twenty-nine languages. Among his main publications: Georg Lukacs: From Romanticism to Bolshevism (Verso, 1981); Romanticism Against the Current of Modernity (with Robert Sayre, Duke, 2001); Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin’s ‘On the Concept of History’ (Verso, 2005); Franz Kafka, Rêveur Insoumis (Stock, 2004).

and *Engels Complete Works*), Anderson had access to these manuscripts, and presents some of them here for the first time. The notebooks — which contain extracts from M. Kovalevsky, R. Sewell, K. Bücher, and several other anthropologists and historians, often followed by Marx comments — documents not only his anti-colonialism, but also his deep interest in the pre-capitalist and non-Western forms of communal property, particularly in India, Algeria, and Latin America. In a very interesting comment on the French colonial policy in Algeria, Marx refers to official material of the French National Assembly in 1875 — quoted by Kovalevsky — where the same “Rurals” that suppressed the Paris Commune in 1871, denounce communal property in Algeria as a danger, since it is “a form that supports communist tendencies in people’s minds”; those representatives of the French bourgeoisie, adds Marx, “are unanimous on the goal : destruction of collective property.”

As Anderson points out, this concern with the persistence of communal forms, even into his own century, explains his embrace of Russia’s

Marx came to the conclusion that Russia can follow a different path, and its rural communes could become “the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia.”

rural commune in the 1880’s. Marx had already explained, in a letter to a Russian journal in 1877, that his historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe (in *Capital*) was

not to be considered as “a general course fatally imposed on all peoples.”

A few years later, he came to the conclusion that Russia can follow a different path, and its rural communes could become, as he wrote in a letter from March 1881 to the Russian revolutionary Vera Zas-

soulitch, “the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia.” Finally, in the preface, co-authored with Engels, to the Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto* (1882) — his last writing — he states : “If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia’s peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development.”

As Anderson observes, important anti-capitalist movements have developed recently in places like Mexico and Bolivia, based upon indigenous communal forms, in an unexpected confirmation of Marx’s intuitions.

The Crime of Poverty

BETTY REID MANDELL

LOÏC WACQUANT HAS EXPANDED the theory of the neoliberal state beyond the usual economic definition. He has linked the criminal justice system with the welfare system as two parts of the same policy of enforcing conformity to an unstable job market of temporary, part-time, low-paid, and flexible employment. Other criminal justice scholars and welfare scholars have analyzed these as separate spheres. While they have seen both as repressive, they have not seen them as interconnected.

Wacquant is Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and Researcher at the Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris. He received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. This book was originally published in France in 2004, and published in English in 2009.

In this review, I add material from my own research and experience, which supports Wacquant's theory.

Wacquant does not subscribe to a conspiracy theory about the state's "building a Janus-faced Leviathan" (312) that increased the penal system while retrenching welfare. Nor does he think officials were following a carefully laid out master plan. Rather, he believes that bureaucrats, legislators, and politicians engaged in

a trial-and-error "post-hoc functionality" to create a universal neoliberal system. He disagrees with the prevalent conception of neoliberalism,

which is essentially economic. His own definition of neoliberalism is as follows:

Neoliberalism is a *transnational political project* . . . carried by a new global ruling class in the making, composed of the heads and senior ex-

ecutives of transnational firms, high-ranking politicians, state managers, and top officials of multinational organizations (the OECD, WTO, IMF, World Bank, and the European Union), and cultural-technical experts in their employ (chief among them economists, lawyers, and communications professionals with germane training and departmental categories in the different countries). It entails . . . the articulation of four institutional logics: 1. *economic deregulation* . . . 2. *welfare state devolution, retraction, and recomposition* . . . 3. *the cultural trope of individual responsibility* . . . 4. *an expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus*. (306-307)

While the ideology of neoliberalism emphasizes small government and laissez-faire at the top, it "is anything but laissez-faire at the bottom. Indeed, when it comes to handling the social turbulence generated by deregulation and to impressing the discipline of precarious labor, the new Leviathan reveals itself to be fiercely interventionist, bossy, and pricey." (308)

This "post-Keynesian era of insecure employment" creates a "deficit of legitimacy" which the state handles by using the penal apparatus to hold as a club over those members of the working class who resist the discipline of the new

Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity

LOÏC WACQUANT

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009, 384 pp., \$85.36, pbck, \$17.96

BETTY REID MANDELL is co-editor of *New Politics*, and a welfare rights activist. She is co-author of *Introduction to Human Services* (Allyn & Bacon, 8th ed., 2011) and editor of *The Crisis of Caregiving: Social Welfare Policy in the U.S.* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2010).

fragmented service wage-labor by increasing the cost of exit strategies into the informal economy of the street. Those who are disruptive or who have been “rendered wholly superfluous” are neutralized or warehoused. This state could be called “liberal-paternalist”—*liberal* and permissive at the top, with regard to corporations and the upper class, and *paternalist* and authoritarian at the bottom,” establishing a “new government of social insecurity.” (8)

The neoliberal revolution began in the United States from 1973 to 1996, in the wake of the progressive movements of the 1960s. The social state has atrophied and poverty has been increasingly criminalized, culminating with the 1996 law on Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity, which replaced the right to “welfare” with the obligation of “workfare.” This was the “forsaking of the Fordist wage-work compact and the Keynesian compromise in the mid-1970s.” Concurrently, the penal state expanded as a response to the Civil Rights Revolution and the urban riots. The state has created an assistance-correctional mesh without precedent or equivalent in the Western world. (106) Nobody can opt out of wage labor without exposing himself or herself to a material and symbolic degradation worse than the most demeaning job. The public aid bureaucracy is now an administrative springboard into poverty-level employment. It inculcates the duty of working for work’s sake among poor women (and indirectly their children). The war on poverty has turned into a war on poor people, in what Wacquant describes as the current government policy on poverty—prisonfare and workfare.

Both the men in the penal system and the women in the welfare system are considered morally deficient unless they periodically provide visible proof to the contrary. Their behavior must be supervised and regulated. If they do not conform to rigid bureaucratic requirements, they are cast “outside the civic community of those entitled to social rights, in the case of public aid recipients, outside the society of ‘free men’

for convicts,” a kind of “social death for moral failing.” (15-16)

Wacquant believes that this suggests an overall “(re)*masculinizing of the state*” in the neo-liberal age, an oblique reaction against the social changes wrought by the women’s movement “and their reverberations inside the bureaucratic field.” (15) This may be true in an oblique sense, but some women colluded in this. Many feminists did not oppose welfare reform, and 90 percent of those affected by the reform are women. The leadership of the National Organization for Women (NOW) opposed it militantly, but they were unable to bring along most of their members. In fact, some of their members made nasty comments to the leadership about their opposition to welfare reform. Many middle-class women did not view forcing poor women to work in low-wage jobs as a threat to their own well-being. When the welfare law was passed, the Urban Institute warned that it would bring down wages for the lower third of the work force, but many middle-class women were not particularly concerned about the lower third of the work force. Now that many of these women are part of that lower third and are applying for food stamps and/or cash assistance, they may look at the issue differently.

Shredding the Safety Net

THE SHREDDING OF THE SAFETY NET began in the 1970s. This included:

- Welfare for the childless unemployed virtually disappeared. Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Los Angeles County ended General Assistance. Massachusetts ended it for the able-bodied unemployed when Governor Dukakis was governor in the 1970s. It now gives some disabled and elderly people and children only about \$300 a month. The food stamp program contained a work requirement for childless adults until the current recession, when the stimulus package removed the requirement.
- Public housing and subsidized housing for the poor declined. The middle class received

the lion's share of housing assistance in the form of mortgage subsidies. Public subsidies for private development residential projects for the affluent increased.

- Unemployment insurance declined. Although the Obama administration increased unemployment insurance and food stamps as part of the stimulus package, it is never enough to cover the large numbers of unemployed people.

- Welfare payments for AFDC declined dramatically. They have continued to decline under TANF. In Massachusetts, for example, the inflation adjusted value of the maximum TANF monthly grant has declined \$448, or 41 percent, since 1988. The average grant is less than \$500 a month. That is in the top range of states' payments, and much more than what Southern states pay.

- Free medical coverage in charity hospitals for the poor was cut back. However, the Children's Health Insurance Plan has been expanded.

The cutbacks proceeded apace with an explosive increase in military spending and spending on prisons.

Welfare Reform

WHEN THE REPUBLICANS TOOK OVER Congress in 1994, led by Newt Gingrich, they and the overwhelming majority of Democrats in Congress ended entitlement to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which gave cash assistance to low-income parents and their children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was a cornerstone of the Republican "Contract With America," and was introduced by Rep. E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-Florida) who believed welfare was partly responsible for bringing immigrants to the United States. The U. S. Chamber of Commerce heralded the law as a "reassertion of America's work ethic."

President Clinton signed the bill, and justified his support of welfare reform by arguing that remaking "welfare" into "workfare" "is the price to pay to achieve efficiency and success in the pitiless capitalist competition that now

spans the globe." (78) He argued that the poor would ultimately benefit because it opens up the gates of employment to them. In fact, it was not reform but a counterrevolutionary measure

The war on poverty has
turned into a war on poor
people, in what Wacquant
describes as the current
government policy on poverty
— prisonfare and workfare.

that abolished the right to assistance for the country's most destitute children. "Under cover of a reform intended to benefit the poor, the PRWORA instituted one of the most regressive social programs promulgated by a democratic government in the twentieth century." (79)

In the public mind, welfare has been linked with black women. President Reagan's image of the "welfare queen" going to the welfare office in a Cadillac instilled a vision of black women defrauding the welfare system. In fact, most welfare fraud is done by vendors—pharmacies, doctors, dentists, nursing homes, hospitals, and sellers of medical equipment. A Massachusetts study found that 93 percent of fraud was done by vendors. But the image of recipient fraud has been so pervasive that even recipients subscribe to it, often protesting that they "are not like those other lazy people."

Frances Fox Piven once said, "I am constantly amazed by how little facts matter in the debate on welfare." The image of welfare as a program for blacks persisted even though, until recently, the majority of recipients were white. Wacquant cites 1995 statistics showing that 39 percent of recipients were white, 35 percent were African-Americans, and 18 percent were Hispanic. But after 1996, white recipients left the

rolls faster than black recipients, due partly to job discrimination. Statistics for FY 2007 show that of 1,696,951 families, 32.4 percent were white, 35.5 percent were African-American, and 27 percent were Hispanic.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, a powerful welfare rights movement led to a sharp rise in the welfare rolls, which became blacker and browner. The majority of participants in the movement were African-American mothers. The movement enlisted a new cadre of federally financed legal services lawyers and newly receptive federal courts. In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the 1935 New Deal statute created a legal right to help—an “entitlement.” The benefit levels, always well below the poverty line, were still up to the states, but they could not turn away anyone whom the federal statute defined as eligible for assistance.

The conservative war against welfare began in the late 1960s. A work requirement was included in the AFDC program by the Work Incentive Program in 1967 (called WIN by officials and WIP, pronounced whip by welfare recipients and their advocates). The plan required recipients to work if adequate childcare arrangements could be made. Expanded public day care facilities were to be provided, but they never materialized. A follow-up study found that WIN failed to achieve its objective of putting welfare recipients to work. It said, “WIN will probably never do much more than deal with a revolving group of the most employable clients, most of whom may well have found employment even with WIN.” This is also true of the TANF program.

The WIN work requirement was tightened even further by the Talmadge Amendment of 1971, which forced recipients to work and eliminated several components of the original program, including training, job search counseling, and family support.

The 1967 WIN program, the strengthened work requirement of the Talmadge Work Incen-

tive amendments (WINII), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) redefined the terms and target populations of welfare, instituting a “workfarist” approach to federal antipoverty policy. Federal assistance turned away from needs-based New Deal welfarism and toward the principle of rewarding, encouraging, and enforcing work. These initiatives helped to create the political capacity for doing away with the entitlement status of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

President Reagan’s budget director David Stockman said, “There are *no* entitlements. Period.” The attack on Social Security has been unsuccessful so far because the program is popular with the middle class, especially the aged. Welfare had no politically powerful advocates.

The main message of PRWORA was to downsize the rolls. The program was transformed into a block grant to the states. States had no obligation to help anyone and could impose time limits far shorter than the new five-year ceiling on a family’s eligibility. Many did that, but states also had the flexibility to reframe their programs in positive ways. The state of Wisconsin was considered a model in implementing workfare and eliminating cash assistance. The governor of the state was Tommy Thompson, who later was appointed head of the United States Health and Human Services by President George W. Bush. Ironically, Wisconsin is now one of the leaders in food stamp recipients. “Milwaukee won fame a decade ago by ‘ending welfare,’ but nearly 40 percent of its children receive food stamps” in 2009.

The techniques of radical reduction were: “shut the front door almost completely; staff the back door with the equivalent of a tough nightclub bouncer; and, in between, hassle applicants to the point where they just give up and go away.” (There are two state policemen stationed at the Department of Transitional Assistance in the Roxbury section of Boston, where I do outreach.) In some states, clients are fingerprinted and photographed.

I can testify to the hassle that clients face. To establish their eligibility for assistance, clients must often produce over 20 documents. They sometimes wait for hours to see a worker and, more often than not, can't reach their worker by phone because the workers' mailboxes are full. Workers lose documents, make mistakes entering data on the computer, and some are rude to clients. In interviews, workers are glued to their computers entering data, and often have little communication with clients.

At the back door, people are sanctioned for a variety of reasons and for no reason — being late to a work assignment (no excuses for sick children, late buses, or car breakdowns) or didn't show up for an appointment at the welfare office (no excuses for failure to receive notice of an appointment or inability to understand English). In some states multiple infractions of this sort can result, legally, in lifetime disqualification.

The welfare rolls dropped precipitously, particularly after 2002, when the five-year cut-off period was reached by the first wave of recipients. In many states, cash assistance for low-income mothers with children virtually disappeared. "Overall, the rolls shrank from 14.3 million mothers (and a few fathers) and children in 1994 to under four million in 2007. In 1995, nine million of the 145.5 million children then poor were in families that received welfare. By 2006, only four million of the 12.8 million poor children were in families getting TANF. Since the beginning of the recession, the rolls increased by one million. By 2009 there were about five million people on the rolls, just a little over a third of what there were 15 years before.

Welfare reform not only aimed to take away cash assistance from families; it also aimed to reform them. It assumed that mothers' child rearing practices were deficient—mothers lose their grant if they don't get their children vaccinated and if their children are truant from school. The law promoted marriage as a way to get out of poverty. This was both a privatizing move and a patriarchal move, "conferring

economic security only to those mothers who conform to traditional father-mother norms." The preamble to the law said, "Marriage is the foundation of a successful society." It went on to give a laundry list of numerous social ills caused by nonmarital childbearing and single motherhood—among them child abuse, truancy and crime. If a mother gave birth to a child while receiving a grant, she was denied any money for that child, a provision called the "Family Cap." Teenage parents have to live with their parents or another guardian, or live in a supervised group home. They cannot receive TANF unless they attend school or a G.E.D. program. Program rules promote abstinence, and compel mothers to identify biological fathers and cooperate with child support enforcement.

When TANF was reauthorized in 2006, it included \$1.5 billion dedicated to promoting married fatherhood. It also gave states incentives to spend their TANF block grants and their own state funds to support pro-marriage, pro-father activities. Other federal policies funded marriage and fatherhood promotion, including the Office of Child Support Enforcement and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Even Head Start got involved.

PRWORA does not support more than a year of higher education, and that must be vocational education. Therefore, welfare recipients are unable to get a college degree and so are blocked from advancing on a career ladder and earning higher wages. At about the same time, the government stopped funding college programs for prison inmates, thus insuring that they too could not advance in a career. "Funding for prison colleges was eliminated in 1995, at the peak of the 'tough on crime' frenzy in American electoral politics. Within that year some 350 such programs closed nationwide, ending the presence of the most affordable and transformative programs in American criminal justice."

PRWORA as well as SSI ended cash assistance to all legal immigrants, although their

children who were born in the United States were still eligible for assistance. (Undocumented immigrants were already ineligible for most government programs.) A few years later, the rules were eased to allow some immigrants who had been in the United States legally for five years after August 22, 1996 to receive assistance from both TANF and SSI. States were given the option of giving or denying noncitizens cash welfare, Medicaid, block grant benefits, and other state and local public assistance, and some states picked up the cost of TANF for immigrants.

As people were kicked off the welfare rolls, poverty increased. During the first year of the recession the number of people living in poverty increased by 2.5 million.* The poverty rate in 2008 was 13.2 percent, up from 12.5 percent in 2007. There were 39.8 million people in poverty in 2008, up from 37.3 in 2007. The poverty rate for children was 19 percent, 14.1 million, up

*The poverty rate was set in 1963, and even then was insufficient to provide a healthy diet. It is a uniform rate for the nation, except for Alaska and Hawaii. The federal poverty level for 2009 was: \$10,830 for one person; \$14,570 for two; \$18,310 for three; \$22,050 for four. Wider Opportunities for Women and Diana Pierce have devised what they call the "Self-Sufficiency Standard" which calculates how much money working adults need to meet their minimum basic needs without subsidies of any kind. Unlike the federal poverty standard, it accounts for the costs of living and working as they vary by family size and composition and by geographic location. For example, in King County (South) in Washington state in 2009, the self-sufficiency standard for a three-person family consisting of one adult, one preschooler, and one school age child, was a yearly wage of \$50,172, which would require an hourly wage of \$23.76. Welfare in the state of Washington, including TANF, food stamps (SNAP), and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program), is \$13,411, about \$5,000 less

Criminologists have established
that there is "no robust
correlation — in any country
and at any time — between the
rate of imprisonment and the
level of crime."

from 13.3 million in 2007. The 2008 poverty rate was the highest since 1997—24.7 percent for blacks and 23.2 percent for Hispanics. Over half (53.3 percent) of children growing up alone with their mother were living in poverty. The government reported that nearly 50 million Americans are experiencing what it delicately calls "food insecurity." In 2008, 22.5 percent of all children experienced

food insecurity (going hungry), including 25.7 percent of blacks, and 26.9 percent of Hispanics. Food stamp use is at a record high and surging by the day. About six million Americans receiving food stamps report they have no other income. One in eight Americans now receives food stamps, including one in four children.

The number of people without health insurance rose from 45.7 million in 2007 to 46.3 million in 2008.

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, the number of homeless Americans is up by 61 percent since the recession began in December 2007.

Fleeing Felons, Fleeing Benefits

PRWORA stipulated that anyone convicted of a felony that involved the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance was prohibited from receiving both TANF and food stamps for life. However, it said that states could exempt people from that ruling. Individuals wanted in connection with a felony or violating terms of their parole or probation (called "fugitive felons" or "fleeing felons") were prohibited from receiv-

than the federal poverty level. (Diana M. Pearce, "The self-sufficiency standard for Washington State 2009," Center for Women's Welfare, School of Social Work, University of Washington, p. 7).

ing SSI, TANF, or food stamp benefits. The law also made the “fugitive felon” status grounds for the termination of tenancy in housing assistance programs. In 1998, the Higher Education Act was amended to prohibit anyone with a drug conviction from receiving federal financial aid for post-secondary education.

The Social Security Administration said that between September 1996 and April 2007, the “fleeing felons” policy stopped benefits for about 323,000 people and led to the apprehension of 44,500.

The Veteran’s Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 prohibits veterans who are fugitive felons, or their dependents, from receiving veteran’s benefits in health care, Vocational Rehabilitation and Education Service, Insurance Service, and Loan Guaranty service. As of June 2004, the VA had run 2.2 million warrant files against 11 million VA records and found 32,346 matching files. These matches led to 11,153 referrals to various law enforcement agencies and the apprehension of 402 felons. As a result of the matching program, 8,299 fugitive felons were referred to the VA for benefit suspension, resulting in \$54.5 million in overpayments.

The definition of “fleeing felon” is confusing and imprecise. Databases are often inaccurate and are not kept current. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2001 that “In the view of most experts, inadequacies in the accuracy and completeness of criminal history records is the single most serious deficiency affecting the Nation’s criminal history record information system” and found through in-depth audits of state criminal history records “unacceptable levels of inaccuracies.” Since the Bush administration exempted the National Crime Information Center from the Privacy Act, there is no requirement for government agencies to maintain its accuracy and no opportunity for an individual to challenge incorrect information in it. People have no way to know if there is a warrant out for them and cannot easily correct

errors in the databases.

In 2002, the GAO (General Accounting Office) issued a report on implementation of the fleeing felon provisions in various programs. They found that there is confusion over the meaning of “fleeing” and that both federal agencies and states have differing interpretations of the term. For example, could a person be considered “fleeing” if they do not know there is a warrant or if they are not arrested due to lack of law enforcement resources? The GAO recommended that the fleeing felon program be strengthened. They recommended that Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) match their files with the National Crime Information Center. They also recommended that legislation be enacted to apply fugitive felon rules to Old Age, Survivor, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). The Social Security Protection Act of 2004 added those programs to the fleeing felon prohibition.

HUD agreed to identify tenants in housing assistance programs who are fugitive felons and subject to eviction. HUD estimated that because of this program, they would be able to “avoid” subsidies of \$24 million annually.

HHS disagreed with the GAO, as they wanted to give states flexibility to implement their own eligibility rules and procedures in TANF and food stamp programs.

FNS did not go along with the GAO recommendation. Congress amended the Food and Nutrition Act in the 2008 Farm Bill to prevent states from disqualifying needy households from federal SNAP benefits if the individuals were not intentionally fleeing justice. Twenty-nine states have now opted out of the 1996 ban on food stamp benefits to persons with drug felony convictions.

There has been considerable litigation across the country regarding what constitutes a “fleeing felon.” A nation-wide class action suit, *Martinez v. Astrue*, forced Social Security

to change its definition of “fleeing.” Beginning April 1, 2009, SSA had to prove “intent” to flee before it could deny benefits. SSA was ordered to pay benefits that had been wrongly withheld since January 1, 2007. Approximately 80,000 people were potentially eligible for full retroactive reinstatement of benefits totaling over \$500 million. In response to a request from SSA, Congress quickly acted upon legislation that would bar prisoners from receiving those benefits, and President Obama signed it into law.

Expanding the Penal Apparatus

WACQUANT DESCRIBES THE SURGE of the penal state as “the result of a policy of penalization of poverty that responds to the rise of social insecurity and the collapse of the ghetto as a mechanism of control of a population doubly marginalized on the material and symbolic planes. The “‘invisible hand’ of the deregulated market called for and necessitated the ‘iron fist’ of criminal justice at the bottom of the class structure.”

The confined population doubled in ten years after 1973 and quadrupled in twenty. By the end of the twentieth century, America locked up seven times more than France, Germany, or Italy and ten times more than Sweden or Denmark. Over the last 30 years, the United States has seen unprecedented numbers of people imprisoned, and the rates of the incarcerated—particularly of minority men—have skyrocketed.

The prison population numbered 2,250,000 in the year ending June 30, 2006 (the latest official data available). Of these, 191,080 were in federal custody, 1,365,438 in state or state-contracted prisons, and nearly 944,000 were serving sentences in local or county jails. According to a Pew report, in 2009 one in every 31 adults is either in jail or prison or on parole or probation, a total of 7.3 million Americans, at a cost that exceeds \$68 billion annually, not counting juveniles.

This dramatic rise can’t be explained by the rise in violent crime. Rather, it results from the “extension of recourse to confinement to a range of *street* crimes— misdemeanors that did not previously lead to a custodial sanction, especially minor drug infractions” (126) after the federal government declared its “war on drugs” in 1983. The only exception to this punitive pattern was the economic crimes and misdemeanors of the privileged classes and corporations. The state penal apparatus has been expanded to contain social disorders (as opposed to responding to crime) in decaying lower-class and ghetto neighborhoods ravaged by economic deregulation and welfare curtailment. It feeds a thriving cultural industry of fear of the poor. TV programs on crime increased 86 percent between 1985 and 1995 (132), and have continued to increase since then. Of all public expenditures, “corrections” had the fastest expansion from 1975 to the present. The carceral system is the third largest employer in the nation, just behind Manpower Incorporated and Wal-Mart.

This increased reach was achieved by implementing four major penal planks:

1. “Determinate sentencing,” which drastically reduced judicial and correctional discretion.
2. “Truth in sentencing,” which requires every convict to serve a minimum portion of his sentence before he becomes eligible for parole.
3. “Mandatory minimums,” which established a plank of compulsory and irreducible sanctions for specific offenses, without regard for the injuriousness of the crime.
4. “Three strikes and you’re out,” which refers to the inflexible sanctions imposed on recidivists and the implementation of life sentences (or twenty-five to life) when the accused has committed three specially designated felonies.

The numbers of people under “criminal justice supervision,” including probation and parole, also expanded dramatically from 1980 to the present. The FBI Identification Record called the Criminal History Record Information (CHRI), often referred to as a “Rap Sheet,”

contained 54,210,800 individual files by 1997.* These records, available to employers and housing managers, prevent released prisoners from finding housing or getting a job.

Other policies that added to the prison population include the “zero tolerance,” and “broken windows” theories. These policies blur the distinction between actual crime and merely bothersome or offensive behavior. And they divert public attention from white-collar and corporate crime, human damage and economic costs of which are vastly greater and more insidious than those of street delinquency. Wacquant debunks the “zero tolerance” theory of crime, as administered by Mayor Giuliani in New York City and his police chief William Bratton. They increased the number of police and transferred police from desk jobs to street patrols. At the same time, Giuliani transferred nearly one billion dollars from social services to public safety.

Between 1993 and 1998, the number of arrests increased by 41 percent, mainly by arrests for minor offenses, even as the total number of offenses reported to the authorities plummeted by 46 percent. As a result, “by the third year of Giuliani’s first term, the city police were making *more arrests than there were offenses reported to them*, and the number of complaints for police brutality . . . had jumped 50 percent.” (263)

The “broken windows theory” postulated that the “immediate and stern repression of the slightest violations or nuisance on the streets stems the onset of major criminal offenses by (re)establishing a healthy climate of order.” (264) Wacquant says that even the inventors of the theory had no link whatsoever with any criminological theory. It was a posteriori theory designed “to dress up in rational garb

measures that were popular with the (mostly white and bourgeois) electorate.” (265) In fact, criminologists have established that there is “no robust correlation—in any country and at any time— between the rate of imprisonment and the level of crime.” (275) “Across the country, FBI data show that crime in 2009 fell to lows unseen since the 1960s—part of a long trend that has seen crime fall steeply in the United States since the mid-1990s.” Yet there has been a steady rise in the percentage of Americans who believe crime is getting worse. “The vast majority of Americans—nearly three-quarters of the population—thought crime got worse in the United States in 2009, according to Gallup’s annual crime attitudes poll.”

Wacquant points out that other countries have followed the lead of the United States in implementing these repressive polices. The “broken windows” theory has been recommended to mayors of French cities by the French Ministry of the Interior, in what Wacquant calls “such an outpouring of falsehoods, not to say transatlantic tripe.” (267) In almost all Western countries, the prison population has expanded. It has doubled in France, Belgium and England; it has tripled in Holland, Spain, and Greece; and it has quintupled in the United States. (7)

While politicians of the Right invented the penalization of poverty, it was “employed and refined by their centrist and even ‘progressive’ rivals.” (302). The biggest increase in incarceration in America occurred under the administration of President Clinton. “Across the Atlantic, it is the Left of Blair in England, Schröder in Germany, Jospin in France, d’Alema in Italy, and Gonzalez in Spain that negotiated the shift to proactive penalization.” (302) The root cause of the punitive turn is not late modernity, as some claim, but neoliberalism, “a project that can be indifferently embraced by politicians of the Right or the Left.” (303) Wacquant did not mention the 2008 presidential election, which added Obama to the roster of leaders who embrace neoliberalism.

*In Massachusetts, it is called the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI). A campaign to ease the requirements of the CORI in order to enable people to get a job or housing has been spearheaded by progressives in the black community. Governor Patrick has supported their campaign, and they have had some success.

Welfare reform led to a dramatic rise in privatization. Rather than a mammoth expansion of public bureaucracies that would defeat the goal of shrinking the welfare state, the state resorted massively to private operators in both the for-profit and the nonprofit sectors. This increased administrative complexity and unpredictability destabilized nonprofit agencies by eroding their traditional role as self-professed protectors of the poor, and weakened government by draining experienced managers away from public bureaucracies just when the state needs to augment administrative oversight over contracts to guarantee basic accountability. Due to the lack of oversight, private contractors engaged in massive fraud and corruption. The same thing happened on the penal side, leading to the stupendous growth of private correctional operators that were more concerned about cutting costs than the welfare of prisoners in their care.

Delinquency

DURING THE 1980s, American cities, with the support of the federal Department of Justice, established databanks that catalog teenagers believed to be real or potential delinquents. Wacquant describes this as “a convenient pretext for placing segregated neighborhoods and their residents under reinforced and penal surveillance.” (136) He gives a detailed discussion of the rise and fall of juvenile crime, emphasizing the lack of secure wage work. The fight against street delinquency became a moral spectacle that enabled political leaders to “reaffirm the authority of the state at the very moment they declare its impotence on the economic and social front.” (273)

The goal of rehabilitation of the 1970s changed to a tough-on-crime approach. In the 1970s, the Commissioner of the Department of Youth Services Jerome Miller closed all the reform schools in Massachusetts and placed the inmates in alternative settings that aimed at rehabilitation and community integration. In a

2008 letter to the *Boston Globe*, Miller bewailed the fact that

Managerialism has become the prevailing ideology of DYS. A Faustian bargain was struck that set loose the all-too-familiar dark impulses that tend to haunt those who impose services on inmates, be they captives of the euphemistically labeled “juvenile justice” system or the more bizarrely limned “child welfare” system.

Words like “care,” “help,” or “concern” have been replaced by terms such as “alternative punishments,” “setting limits,” and “structured environments”—usually code words for rationalizing isolation, neglect, and occasional staff violence.”

Immigrants

WACQUANT DISCUSSES the privatization of prisons in detail, but he doesn't discuss how the dramatic rise in imprisoning undocumented immigrants has contributed to that. Much of this expansion has occurred in recent years. Immigrant detention is the fastest growing sector in the private prison business. By the end of 2009, while the nonimmigrant prison population has recently leveled off, the U.S. government admitted over 440,000 people a year in immigration custody in approximately 400 facilities at an annual cost of more than \$1.7 billion. The system is set to triple again even without new legislation. Already 6,300 additional beds were added in 2007 and 4,150 in 2008. With ICE's 2009 budget approved, the number of beds will reach a record high of 33,400.

After 9/11, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) worked with local police to target both legal and illegal immigrants with criminal records for deportation. CBP's border patrol began to turn over illegal border crossers to the justice system for criminal prosecution instead of simply deporting them, as they had in the past. Many of these criminal immigrants are long-term legal residents of the United States

and are also the parents, children, or siblings of U.S. citizens and lawful residents. CBP and ICE call this policy “enhanced enforcement” and “zero tolerance.”

The use of private prisons began in 1983, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) outsourced immigrant detention to the newly established Corrections Corporation of America; GEO Group (formerly Wackenhut) got its start imprisoning immigrants in the late 1980s. These

prisons are publicly owned by local governments, privately operated by corporations, publicly financed by tax-exempt bonds, and located in depressed communities. They are marketed to municipal county governments by promising job creation and new revenue without taxes. Although they are technically in the custody of the federal government, they are in fact in the custody of corporations with little or no federal supervisions. They have racked up record profits.

Unlike the U.S. criminal justice system, immigration law provides no guarantee that all accused have the right to a court-appointed lawyer. At least 104 immigrants have died in ICE custody since 2003. “Given the lack of oversight and legal protections, the gains to be made from cost-cutting, and the apathy surrounding prisoner well-being, these deaths are predictable.”

The men and women held behind the (prison fences) are never seen, never discussed. The prison is treated as a waste dump, similarly placed on the community’s edge, where property values are low, and there are no neighbors. The prisoners themselves are society’s refuse, its discards, outcasts, and outsiders who have lost their membership rights in the human community.

Most welfare fraud is done by vendors — pharmacies, doctors, dentists, nursing homes, hospitals, and sellers of medical equipment. A Massachusetts study found that 93 percent of fraud was done by vendors.

Virginia Democratic Senator Jim Webb said that the fact that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world indicates

that “we are doing something dramatically wrong in our criminal justice system,” yet he apparently saw no contradiction in advocating an end to mass incarceration while supporting legislation calling for increased immigration enforcement and the doubling of immigrant-detention beds.

The Obama administration has not stopped the flood of prosecutions or contested the misperception that immigrants are disproportionately responsible for crime. Instead it has supported Secure Communities, a new criminal aliens program, extended federal-local cooperation in immigration enforcement through the 287(g) program, which allows DHS to delegate immigrant-detention to local law enforcement; and has deployed more U.S. marshals, ICE agents, and federal prosecutors to the Mexican border. Since 2003 the combined budgets of CBP and ICE have more than doubled, rising from \$7.4 billion to \$14.9 billion in 2009.

Sex Offenders

SEX OFFENDERS EVOKED HYSTERICAL reactions from the public and officials. The passage of Megan’s Law in 1996 began a nationwide proliferation and laws and regulations that continually shrank the physical and social life spaces accessible to sex offenders. Formerly treated as a medical problem, sex offenses became criminalized. Incidents of vigilantism multiplied after Megan’s Law was passed. In both the United States and Western Europe, sexual offenses have risen to the top of the public agenda, even as their incidence decreased.

Medical and mental health professionals opposed such laws and supported a medical approach to rehabilitate sex offenders, pointing out that the penal treatment only aggravated the problem. "The main effect of the laws named after little Megan Kanka may paradoxically be to *amplify risk* and *increase* the chances that convicts for sexual offenses will commit new crimes by condemning them to a manner of social exile without recourse or return and subjecting them to relentless pressure and intransigent surveillance." Wacquant says that when sex offenders are correctly diagnosed and treated, they have the lowest rate of recidivism of all the various kinds of offenders.

Race

WACQUANT SAYS THAT THE GHETTO functions as a "social prison," a continuation of slavery and Jim Crow, all of which functioned as instruments for "the extraction of labor and social ostracism of an outcast group." (198). While whites begrudgingly accepted "integration" in principle, "they abandoned public schools, shunned mixed public space, and fled to the suburbs by the millions to avoid mingling and to ward off the specter of 'social equality' in the city, thanks to federal government support for suburban development upholding the color line." (203) The virulent backlash against the Civil Rights movement fueled the retrenchment of welfare, the abandonment of cities, and the aggressive expansion of the penal apparatus of the local and federal state. "The prevalence of imprisonment among the black lower class results in family, occupational and legal disruptions, curtailment of social entitlements and civil rights, and the temporary or permanent loss of the right to vote." (198)

A Pew Foundation report gives the following statistical breakdown of the prison population:

1 in every 11 African-American adults is in jail or prison.

1 in every 27 Hispanic American adults is in

jail or prison.

1 in every 45 white American adults is in jail or prison.

Most of the juveniles who have been sentenced to die in prison are black. Of those sentenced to life without parole, the majority are black. Some were as young as 13 when they were sentenced.

The vast disparities in federal sentencing for crack vs. powdered cocaine have unfairly imprisoned tens of thousands of nonviolent African-Americans. In August 2007, the U.S. Sentencing Commission issued new guidelines for sentencing crack cocaine users, modifying a 100-1 disparity between sentences meted for crack and powder cocaine possession, saying it was unfair because while the drugs are virtually the same, crack cocaine sentences are often five times as long. About 3,000 crack offenders were eligible for release within the year. The Sentencing Commission said that most of the convicts eligible for release were small-time offenders who were nonviolent. The Bush administration opposed the commission's decision to make the new guidelines retroactive for inmates currently serving sentences for crack cocaine crimes, but the guidelines remained in force.

Since Obama took power, Attorney General Eric Holder has voiced support for eliminating the disparity, and the Democrats have introduced bills to get rid of it. Republicans opposed those bills. Obama has not pushed the issue. When asked about it he said, "Do we really want to spend all our political capital on a very difficult issue?" He wondered whether instead we should "spend more of that political capital" on school programs. This is an example of Obama's reluctance to pay special attention to the black community. Derrick Jackson has this to say about it:

Even though Obama is president of "all the people," he knows that the black male unemployment rate of 16.9 percent needs disproportionate remedies, compared to the 9.8 percent unemployment rate of white men.

Yet he remains wedded to the trickle-down rhetoric of, “The most important thing I can do for the African-American community is the same thing I can do for the American community, period, and that is get the economy going again.”

Other Countries Follow the U.S. Lead in Welfare Reform

MANY COUNTRIES have followed the lead of the United States in introducing work requirements in means-tested transfer programs. Britain enacted work-based welfare reform in the 1990s. It became “a policy orthodoxy, a social-policy counterpart to ‘flexible’ modes of labour-market governance. Increasingly, this is celebrated as a paradigmatic example of ‘Third Way’ policy-making.”

The federal government of Canada instituted work requirements for welfare recipients in 1995. It gave the provinces block grants, which increased provincial power over social programs. Ontario introduced Ontario Works in 1997, following the election of the province’s first neoliberal government. It is a compulsory work-first program administered in ways similar to TANF in the United States, and with the same rhetoric of “preventing dependency” and fostering “self-sufficiency.”

New Zealand instituted work-based welfare reform in 1998. Their requirements were more lenient than U.S. requirements. In the United States, states are allowed to require work of recipients whose youngest child is one year old. In New Zealand, parents of children over age 14 are required to look for full-time work. Those with children 7 to 14 are required to look for part-time work. Those with children younger than 7 are required to attend an annual meeting to discuss their prospects for future employment.

In Australia, recipients are required to look for paid part-time work of at least 15 hours a week when their youngest child turns 6 years, if the parents are married, and 8 years if the parent is single.

States Face a Budget Crisis

WACQUANT SAYS THAT IT IS HARD to see how the expansion of the penal state can go on indefinitely since it “threatens to bankrupt the large states that lead the pack in the frantic race for hyperincarceration, such as California, New York, Texas, and Florida.” (42) In fact, states are facing a budget crunch and are beginning to reevaluate their penal policies. The New Jersey legislature introduced a bill in December 2009 that contained a comprehensive package of reforms that would help ex-offenders rejoin society’s mainstream and lower the chances, and costs, of recidivism. About two-thirds of people released from prison in New Jersey had ended up back inside within three years, costing the state about \$48,000 per prison inmate per year. The proposed reforms seek to end practices under which former prisoners are denied employment because of minor convictions, even in the distant past, and crimes that have nothing at all to do with the work being sought. The bill would lift the ban on food stamps and welfare benefits on people with felony drug convictions and would expand education and training opportunities for inmates. And it would end the practice under which the prison system earns a profit by overcharging poor families for the collect calls they receive from relatives.

In February 2009, a federal three-judge panel in California ordered the prison system to reduce overcrowding by as many as 55,000 inmates within three years to provide a constitutional level of medical and mental health care. The ACLU argued that prisons are so overcrowded that they represent “cruel and unusual punishment.” California’s prison system was the nation’s largest, with more than 150,000 inmates. The court estimated that the state could save \$803 to \$906 million annually if it reduced its prison population. California faced a \$26 billion budget gap. The 2009 budget included severe cuts to social welfare programs, schools, and health care.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger initially supported the reform and planned to reduce the prison population by 27,000 inmates, but law enforcement and victim's rights groups stopped that. The state's Attorney General Jerry Brown said that he planned to appeal the ruling all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court. Mr. Brown was in the process of raising money for a possible run for governor. Gov. Schwarzenegger has shifted between supporting the court-ordered changes and fighting them, as political pressures intensified, but in January 2009, in response to protests against cuts at California's universities and state colleges, he proposed a constitutional amendment barring the state from spending a higher percentage on prisons than on higher education. He said that in the past 30 years, prison spending increased from 3 percent of the state general fund to 11 percent while spending for higher education declined from 10 percent to 7.5 percent. While university officials and students cheered the proposal, powerful corrections unions condemned it. Gov. Schwarzenegger proposed prison savings through privatization.

A 2009 study by the Boston Foundation in Massachusetts found that spending on corrections agencies has exploded in the past decade despite only a modest increase in the number of people incarcerated, and accounts for a bigger chunk of the state budget than each of the budgets that oversee higher education, social services, and public health. During the recession—when the state slashed spending on local aid, higher education, and public health—corrections funding has largely been spared. The report predicted that spending on prisons and jails would surpass spending on higher education in the following year. The report called for Massachusetts to enact prison reform, including making more nonviolent prisoners eligible for supervised parole, shortening sentences for offenders who complete education and substance abuse programs, and eliminating certain mandatory minimum drug sentences.

States are beginning to review their policies

on capital punishment. In 2009 the country had the fewest death sentences since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. New Mexico became the 15th state to abolish the death penalty. A study by researchers at the University of Texas found that the death penalty is hopelessly flawed, irreparable, does nothing to reduce or prevent crime, and has been known to execute innocent people.

States are also reevaluating their policies on mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses. The Massachusetts Senate passed a bill that would restore parole eligibility to drug offenders. Inmates would also be eligible to participate in work release and other reentry programs during the mandatory minimum part of their sentences. New York is putting more discretion in the hands of judges and more treatment options in the hands of offenders. Michigan has repealed most of its mandatory minimum drug sentences and established new sentencing guidelines.

Theory

WACQUANT STUDIED WITH PIERRE BOURDIEU and describes his theory as “a Bourdieuan theory that attempts to avoid the rigid opposition between the materialist and symbolic lineages.” The key concept is “bureaucratic field.” Wacquant draws on Bourdieu's distinction between the left hand of the state, meaning the maternal and nurturing policies of the welfare state, and the coercive and controlling police functions of the state. (6) The bureaucracies that administer social functions—public education, health, housing, welfare, and labor law—compete with the bureaucracies charged with enforcing the new economic discipline via budget cuts, fiscal incentives, and economic deregulation.

Bourdieu proposes to view the state “not as a monolithic entity but as a splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods, which he calls ‘the bureaucratic field.’” (289)

Michel Foucault predicted in the 1970s

that the prison was an institution in inevitable decline, destined to be replaced by more diffuse and diversified instruments of social control. Wacquant says that this theory has been disproved by the dramatic rise in imprisonment in almost all Western societies. He says that the theory of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, as set forth in their book *Regulating the Poor*, worked well for the Fordist-Keynesian age and accounts for the two major welfare explosions during the Great Depression and in the 1960s, but the model “has been rendered obsolete by the neoliberal remaking of the state over the past quarter-century.” (290)

Wacquant presents his theory as a “provisional account,” which he admits is one-sided and overly monolithic. It doesn’t take into account the vagaries of policy implementation or the resistance efforts from below “which have been variegated if remarkably ineffectual in the United States.” (xix)

Piven believes that Wacquant has stretched functionalism too far. While the criminal justice system does function to discipline the people in the lower social class to accept the “post-Fordist” labor market, as Wacquant says, it also functions to provide jobs for people in depressed rural areas of the country, and getting people elected to public office on a “tough on crime” platform, fueled by a media that inflames people’s fears of crime, even as the actual rate of crime declines. Piven points out that welfare has always been puny and stigmatized. Welfare policy has always been integrated with the labor market by “the principle of less eligibility,” which ensures that

welfare grants will be kept lower than the lowest wages so that paid work is a more attractive choice. Piven says,

What was new in the 1996 reform was not work enforcement so much as its administrative reinvigoration, a shift that was justified by the broader movement of women into the workforce. Much of the 1996 law was directed at the incentive structure of the program and had the effect of increasing the pressures on state governments and local administrators to use sanctions freely and more vigorously enforce wage work or at least work-like routines. This meant that whatever cultural and political protection gender roles had once allowed lower class women who were mothers was now stripped away. To be sure, lower class women, and especially black women, had always been workers. Nevertheless, dominant ideas about the obligations of mothers that had once justified what little support they were allowed by the welfare system were now discredited.”

I have done activist work in both the welfare and prison fields, but until I read Wacquant I had not realized how intimately interwoven they were. Reforming prisons will not only free a lot of prisoners, but it can also free a lot of money to spend on social services, education, and welfare.

This is not the easiest book to read. Some of Wacquant’s sentences are convoluted and hard to decipher. He is sometimes a bit repetitive. But the book is, as Piven says on the book jacket, a tour de force.

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

Fate of a Champion

REGINALD WILSON

IT USED TO BE SAID that if you walked down any street in a black neighborhood during a Joe Louis fight you would not miss a word of the broadcast because every radio in every house would be tuned to the same station ... and turned up loud. A few years later, the same thing could be said about a Sugar Ray Robinson fight. Sugar Ray and Joe Louis dominated their respective divisions for nearly three decades. There was one other thing said about Sugar that made him unique to older men: "Pound for pound, Sugar Ray Robinson was the greatest fighter to ever step into the ring. He had it all: speed, power, endurance, savvy and style. There will never be another like him," reminisced men in their seventies or eighties who felt themselves lucky to have seen him fight.

The rollicking life of Sugar Ray Robinson is told by the book under review here and by other books — *Pound for Pound: A Biography of Sugar Ray Robinson*, by Herb Boyd (Harper-Collins, 2005) and *Sugar Ray: The Sugar Ray Robinson Story*, (Sugar Ray Robinson and Dave Anderson, New York: Da Capo, 1994). All the books tell much about the colorful life of Sugar Ray but less about the times, but more of that later. In any event, the trajectory of Sugar's life at an early age and Joe Louis's, and mine, were so similar because we were part of the Great Migration happening at the time: the migration

of blacks escaping the Hell of life in the South to the Purgatory of the North; the stream of blacks attracted by the promise of jobs — dirty, physical, and hard — but jobs nevertheless and the stress of blacks escaping Jim Crow life in the South.

Joe Louis Barrow came North to Detroit from Alabama; Walker Smith, Jr. (Sugar) came from Georgia and my par-

ents came from Mississippi and Arkansas to Detroit where I was born. All three of us were thrown into the turmoil of Detroit's Black Bottom and Hastings Street and found some respite at Brewster Recreation Center. For 25 cents a month membership, the Center provided escape from the streets with checkers, table tennis, and amateur boxing.

The press of the Migration can be grasped from two stark numbers: Between 1910 and 1930, the influx of people into Detroit grew from 5,000 to 125,000! Herb Boyd's book, because he is almost a native Detroiter, is much richer in describing the social milieu of growing up black in Detroit in the early thirties. Haygood, while not a native, relies on his research to give us a broader picture of race relations at the time: the 1923 Ku Klux Klan rally around City Hall; the 1925 Clarence Darrow defense of Dr. Ossian Sweet for standing up to a white mob; etc. Leila Smith was so concerned for the safety of her two daughters and five-year-old Walker, Jr. that she took them back South! But "The South was still the South," and Leila saved her money and moved her family back to Detroit within a year. There, Walker Jr. found Brewster Recreation Center and his hero — Joe

Sweet Thunder: The Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson

WIL HAYGOOD

New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
2009, 461 pp., \$27.95

REGINALD WILSON is a member of the editorial board of *New Politics*. He is Senior Scholar Emeritus of the American Council on Education

Louis Barrow — was starting to accumulate amateur boxing trophies for the Center. Little Walker followed him around like a puppy. The first seeds of becoming a boxer were planted.

When discussing his book, Haygood usually preceded his talk with a brief film clip of one of Sugar Ray's fights to give his audience, most of whom were under age sixty, a glimpse of what Sugar Ray's famous style and power were all about. In 1950, three young men from Detroit were eager to see Sugar Ray's power for themselves. They drove from Detroit on the newly opened Pennsylvania Turnpike to New York. They hung out in the heady atmosphere of the post-fight excitement of Sugar Ray's Bar as the crowd exploded with collective shouts when their conquering hero appeared. Some years later the three men were: one, the Deputy Chief of the Detroit Police Department; two, the Chief Physician of the Wayne State University Health Service and; three, myself, the President of Wayne County Community College.

How Sugar Ray got his name provides an amusing aside. Before his first fight Walker's manager got a request for his AAU card (required to certify he was an amateur). George Gainford, his manager, knew Walker didn't have one, but George always kept a bunch of extra cards in his pocket. So, he reached in and pulled out one of a boxer who was no longer fighting — Ray Robinson. After Walker's victory, someone said, "You sure got a sweet fighter there." A woman in the crowd shouted, "Yeah, sweet as sugar." A sportswriter printed it the next day and Sugar Ray Robinson was born.

From there Sugar Ray went on to compile — 1940 to 1965 — a record unequalled in boxing history: 85 amateur fights, 85 victories, 69 by knockout, 49 in the first round! 194 professional fights (109 knockouts), 19 defeats, only one by KO!

II

SO WHAT IS ONE TO MAKE of this Sugar Ray Robinson and his life and times? Let's look at

both sides of his life as depicted by Boyd and Haygood: *THE GOOD SIDE*: Besides the spectacular boxing record — travel all over Europe, Hawaii, Canada, Trinidad, Mexico, and Jamaica. Earning millions and having homes in New York and California. Owning a nightclub, a restaurant, a barbershop, a beauty parlor and

The wrecked lives turned me away
from the mayhem of the ring long
ago and made me an advocate for
its abolishment.

Cadillacs, Lincolns, and several sport cars. *THE BAD SIDE*. Dying broke and in debt. Plagued with diabetes, arteriosclerosis and hypertension. And finally ravaged with Alzheimer's disease, sadly robbing him of "the memory of his greatest triumphs before thousands of cheering fans." (Boyd, 260). The thousands of broken bodies, the thousands of wrecked lives — from the great Joe Louis ending as a doorman in Vegas, Henry Armstrong nearly blinded. And thousands like them. They were the detritus of seconds, sparring partners, and the defeated pugilists that it took to produce one Sugar. It was that which turned me away from the mayhem of the ring long ago and made me an advocate for its abolishment.

And yet there are thousands of young men, overwhelmingly African-American, who would give their eye-teeth to be like Sugar Ray Robinson, young men who have bought the myth so painfully spelled out in black lives and literature. It is the myth of black superiority in sport and strength as a reversal of the equally held myth of black inferiority that has been held for centuries.

For instance, after Jack Johnson finally de-

feated the white champion, Tommy Burns, in 1908 (after chasing him all over the globe), the myth of the “white superiority of strength” was gradually transformed into “white = intellectual superiority; black = brute physical superiority.” There had been statements and thoughts of that, of course, long before Jack Johnson but his startling and decisive victory caused mass hysteria in the press. Before the fight, Jack London, in his newspaper column, declared, “The white man must defeat the black man.” (Yes, that Jack London, the socialist.) After World War II, as opportunity gradually opened for black athletes in other sports than boxing, they swarmed into them and gradually began to dominate them. This was not only an American phenomenon but also a universal one. “After England was defeated by the Sri Lankans at the 1996 world championships, the chairman of the English Cricket Board said, “If our team keeps going the way it has been going, then our game will die.” The British black boxer, Jimmy Dublin, once said, “We don’t do very well at reading and writing, but we’re made for physical things.” Thus, the reversal was accepted by both the whites and the blacks, if not quite so blatantly.

AFRICAN-AMERICANS NOW DOMINATE nearly every American SPORT and this is thought to be perfectly normal, rather than based on opportunity and inordinate training as well as recruiting the “best” into training at the earliest age and opportunity. Football is the major sinner in this respect. American colleges are usually ranked by their football and basketball teams’ performance, curiously, rather than by their “academic merit.” So it is “normal” that their football coaches make more money than their presidents, and their black or other disadvantaged athletes are given extra weight on their SATs (for admission purposes), for their athletic ability rather than their educational disadvantages. Since it is presumed that they are being groomed for the professional teams, their educational needs are given only enough

attention to keep them eligible. This outrageous activity is sanctioned by the more prestigious universities as well as the other schools and the NCAA. “Decades of popular scientific speculation about the special endowments of black athletes have shaped the thinking of entire populations,” says the massively documented study of this phenomena (*Darwin’s Athletes* by John Hoberman, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1997). It will be hard to dislodge this belief in either race because it serves a purpose in both races — both nefarious. The myth of the black super athlete is attractive to African-Americans and it’s equally attractive to whites who tend to believe that they have to “earn” their place in athletic prominence whereas African-Americans are “naturally” gifted and require less thought and effort in their attainment. Thus, blacks were suitable for the line in football but were kept from the quarterback position which required skills and knowledge, or so it was assumed. Even today, when blacks make up 52 percent of professional football players, they are rarely the quarterback of any team. Affirmative action is OK on the athletic field but is fought fiercely when it is applied to the classroom, as the Grutter case, involving affirmative action for blacks, confirms at the University of Michigan. As I watch the overwhelmingly white spectators stream from the stadium after watching a predominantly black victory, shouting “We won! We won!” I wonder who “we” is.

Basketball is equally unbalanced. Blacks make up nearly 70 percent of the players. John Thompson, former basketball coach of Georgetown University, was once asked what racial balance he would prefer on a basketball team. He replied, “For diversity, I would like two or three whites. If I wanted to win, give me five blacks.” The answer is both sad and poignant. Black players often beg their coaches to find a white player to make their team more attractive to the spectators.

People forget that Michael Jordan was at first rejected by his high school coach. He went

back and practiced until he got better and made the team. There is nothing “natural” about “Air Jordan.” You might “still hear talk that blacks possess an extra bone in the heel” that make them good at sprinting (Hoberman, 125). That theory held until Kenyans started winning the New York marathons!

The belief that African-Americans have a natural athletic ability (with limited intellectual endowment) while whites have to work hard athletically but have great mental agility, is a tenaciously held thought by both whites and blacks and shows “how sport has damaged black America and preserved the myth of race” (Hoberman, 1).

And what of Sugar Ray Robinson? We will never see his like again. The days of spectacular heavyweight or middleweight champions is gone forever. (Q. Who is the current heavyweight boxing champion? A. Some black guy, I think). Black youngsters must be persuaded that there is another active way to claim their humanity in attempting to make an impact on the world around them. To begin with, the vision of Paul Robeson comes to mind. He was an All-American in football at Rutgers and a Phi Beta Kappa in scholarship, as well as valedictorian of his class. He also made a tremendous and lasting impact on American society. That’s a start.



Portrait of a Misfit

As Seen in the Art of Dan Clowes

KENT WORCESTER

THE EPONYMOUS ANTIHERO of Dan Clowes' latest graphic novel, *Wilson*, exudes the kind of nervous, antisocial energy that can get people into trouble. He mutters to himself, picks fights with strangers and treats his relatives like dirt. He calls it as he sees it, but he doesn't consider the feelings of others. A one-time philosophy grad student, Wilson opens the book by saying, "I love people!" and then does everything he can to prove the opposite.

The artist/writer Dan Clowes has a knack for creating dyspeptic, self-involved characters who rail at the world without trying to change things for the better. In many respects, *Wilson* is the latest in a long line of Clowesian oddballs who poke fun at social conventions but lack any significant degree of self-awareness. He is the kind of bitter outcast who has intelligent things to say but doesn't have any friends to share his bon mots with. In recent years Clowes has practically specialized in creating deeply uncharismatic, socially marginal types who inhabit the bohemian edges of college towns and cities. His comics are sharply observed, and sometimes side-splittingly funny, but they may strike some readers as borderline misanthropic.

Clowes got his start in the mid-1980s, with

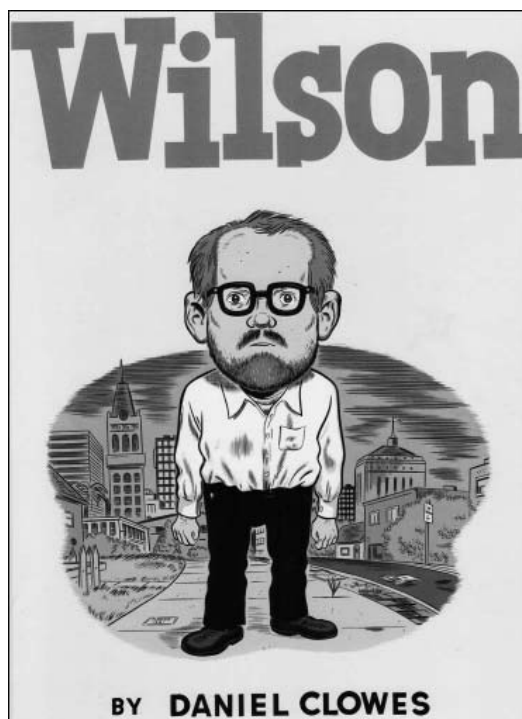
a humor title called *Lloyd Llewellyn* that Fantagraphics published. He then worked on a comic book series called *Eightball* that became one of the most influential non-superhero comic book titles of the 1990s. His best-known effort to date is the existential drama *Ghost World*, which centers on the troubled friendship of two teenage girls.

It was made into a movie in 2001 from his Academy Award-nominated script. He also penned the screenplay for *Art School Confidential*, which

Wilson

DANIEL CLOWES

Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly,
2010, 78 pp. \$21.95

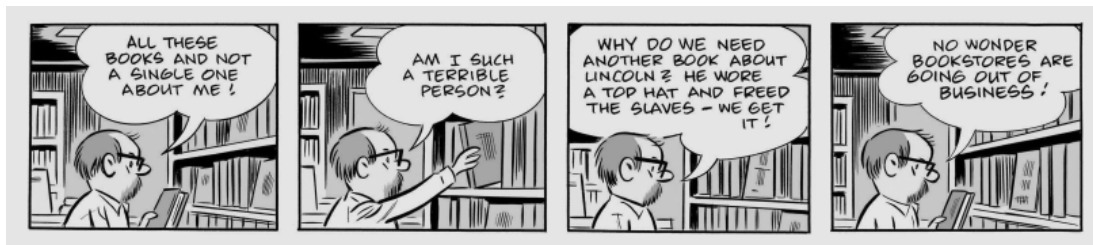


KENT WORCESTER is the coeditor of *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (2004) and *A Comics Studies Reader* (2009).

FELLOWSHIP



7.



came out in 2006. Fantagraphics have published several collections of his short format comics, and in the past few years he has contributed cover art to *The New Yorker*.

Clowes' comics combine deadpan humor, vividly realized storylines, and precise, super-clean artwork. *Wilson* represents a departure from his earlier books in that the story is told through a series of stand alone pages, each with its own look and title. The result is a graphic

novel that in some ways resembles a short story collection. While some of the pages are monochromatic, with spare, minimal figuration, others offer densely rendered, seemingly realistic environments. Wilson really likes to talk, and many of Clowes' pages are filled with his lonely rants. In other cases he pesters pretty much everyone he comes into contact with. In a few pages silent, ruminative panels predominate.

Wilson is that part of ourselves that should have learned to grow up by now. On the back cover, he's in a four-panel comic strip, browsing in a bookstore. In the first panel he says, "All these books and not a single one about me!" In the second he says, "Am I such a terrible person?" Next he asks, "Why do we need another book about Lincoln? He wore a top hat and freed the slaves — we get it!" In the final panel, still looking at books, he says, "No wonder bookstores are going out of business!" The joke, of course, is that there actually is a book about Wilson, competing for reader interest and market share with all of those Abraham Lincoln biographies. *Wilson* may not save your neighborhood bookstore, but it usefully reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously.



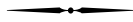
New Politics
155 West 72 Street, Rm. 402
New York, NY 10023 USA
Address Service Requested

IN THIS ISSUE

If the pension system supposedly makes workers all “stakeholders” in capitalism, it does so to the same degree that a pickpocket who leaves the victim enough change to buy a lottery ticket accords the mark a stake in pickpocketing.

Barry Finger

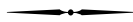
PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS AND THE CRISIS



Many self-identified leftists in Turkey have long countenanced the cover-up or even half-justified the crime of the genocide of Armenians.

G. M. Goshgarian

REVIEW, ECE TEMELKURAN, *DEEP MOUNTAIN:
ACROSS THE TURKISH-ARMENIAN DIVIDE*



Beyond a certain self reverential quality and a quirkiness that makes his acidic pronouncements seem overdone if not camp, it just may be there’s — just as Gertrude Stein said about Oakland, Cal. — “no there there.”

Michael Hirsch

REVIEW, CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, *HITCH 22: A MEMOIR*

NONPROFIT
ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PEORIA, IL
Permit No. 6000