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a journal of socialist thought

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ERRATA

EDITOR'S NOTE: In #50, the Winter 2011 issue, some errors occurred in Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg and Marguerite Rosenthal's article "The Jobs Crisis." Please see our website (newpol.org) for the correct version.

From the Editors

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men and Women

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.

ANAÏS NIN, DIARY, JUNE, 1941

(DURING THE DARKEST DAYS OF WORLD WAR II)

IN 1966, we received a remarkable article from Poland from two activists, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, who shared our view of the reactionary nature of the USSR and the Stalinized states of Eastern Europe. We published it in two issues. Both men were imprisoned. When they were released they formed KOR, an organization that brought together workers and intellectuals. That led to Solidarity.

In this issue we are publishing Au Loong Yu's "How Socialist Is the Chinese State?" a review of Wang Hui's *The End of Revolution*. Au writes from Hong Kong; we think his action in publishing this piece is indeed courageous, right in the tradition of Kuron and Modzelewski.

We need not remind our readers that we are in the middle of a terrible 35-year backlash against the Civil Rights and the feminist and

gay movements. But look at the courage of a Dr. Mila Means who, despite death threats, dares to step forward to replace the murdered Dr. George Tiller in Wichita. And look at the courage of men and women in Wisconsin, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria! These are men and women who, like Nat Turner, refuse to live shrunken lives. Courage is derived from *cor* (heart); their expansiveness should give heart to us all.

We have tried in much of this issue to tell of such courage in action.

MARVIN AND BETTY

N.B. We have just learned that the New England War Tax Resistance has awarded us a \$750 grant. We are honored to be recognized by these courageous men and women.

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 September 1, 2011, and May 31, 2012. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, August 1, 2011. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500.

MARVIN AND BETTY

The Essential Bob Fitch

JANE LATOUR

OF ALL THE PROFILES written about Bob Fitch during his lifetime—in *Forbes Magazine*, *Monthly Labor Review*, etc.—two of the best were penned by student journalists. In typical Fitch fashion, he made time for the students, sharing his experiences, insights and passions. Jessica Johnson met Fitch while interning for the late veteran labor journalist Martin Fishgold, a friend of Fitch and his fierce partisan. Johnson began her profile with this description: “When you meet Robert Fitch, it’s impossible to put the soft-spoken, bespectacled academic together with his infamous reputation.” She was intrigued by the erudite, credentialed academic and the intensity of the invective leveled against him by detractors. Her profile was written in the late 1990s, while Fitch “was fighting his way through what is likely to be a highly controversial book on union corruption.” It took Fitch until 2006 to get *Solidarity for Sale: How Corruption Destroyed the Labor Movement and Undermined America’s Promise*, into print. But prior to that, whether on the page or in public discourse, Fitch was eager to share his analysis of unions, corruption, and the structure of the labor movement. Sadly, at the very time labor is under serious assault by powerful enemies, his brilliant critical mind, his passionate, edgy voice are now absent from the discussion.

Upon learning of Fitch’s death on March 4, his friend Bertell Ollman summed up his

essence: “Bob was full of joy—full of ideas.” Ollman and his wife, Paule, were among the

He placed great value on the Greek virtues of courage, wisdom, self-control, and justice.

friends who visited Fitch in his small apartment on East 17th Street after his accident on January 25, when he broke his leg on an icy bridge while on the way to teach at LaGuardia Community College. Bringing healthy treats to the convalescent, the couple enjoyed hours of conversation with their friend, as they had for decades. My own friendship with Bob began on an autumn evening in 1985 at Charles Evans Hughes High School, after teaching our respective classes to Local 3 electrical apprentices. We walked down 18th Street together and into each other’s lives. We shared countless phone conversations, dinners, movies, walks and talks. Over the years, we read each other’s work, collaborated on projects, walked on picket lines. In the process, he taught me so much.

He placed great value on the Greek virtues of courage, wisdom, self-control, and justice. He produced a prolific stream of articles for numerous publications in a prose style that was always elegant, witty, and engaging. He was inspired by the lives of Thomas Paine and George Orwell. Like Orwell, he believed that, “good prose is like a window pane.” Clarity was an important component of his work. He was always striving to make the work accessible for his ideal readers.

JANE LATOUR is an associate editor for the *Public Employee Press*, District Council 37, AFSCME. Her oral history about women pioneers in nontraditional blue-collar jobs, *Sisters in the Brotherhoods: Working Women Organizing for Equality in New York City*, was published in paperback by Palgrave/Macmillan in July 2009.

Like Orwell, he made political writing into an art, and set out from “a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice, writing because there was some lie he wanted to expose.” His work—the books and essays—with crystal clear expositions of Marxism, the economy and capitalism, urban planning and politics, on labor, the working class, and the Left, will endure.

In “Professor Fitch; A Man Full of Ideas,” Delon Rhone, a staff writer for an independent student newspaper at Brooklyn College, described what the professor envisioned as his next step: “Fitch says that he sees himself completing his most challenging work in the near future. ‘In five years,’ says Fitch, ‘I see myself completing my most ambitious book.’” That was written in December, 2006. While he never finished what he viewed as his magnum opus, Fitch was hard at work on the project. He spoke at numerous venues about various aspects of the book he jokingly referred to as *The Bob Fitch Theory of History*—a work that would unite his analysis of labor, the Left, Barack Obama, the Democrats, the fiscal crisis, and capitalism.

While reviled by many as an enemy of labor, the exact opposite is true—he was labor’s

champion. “I love the labor movement both for its history and its promise,” he wrote. “Only organized labor has the potential to reduce the huge and increasing inequalities in American life; the growing insecurity; the reduced horizons for both youth and old age. Only workers sticking together have the power to straighten backs; to look employers in the eye and demand justice. Realistically, only a powerful, inclusive labor movement has the potential to realize our democratic values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.”

What his friends will miss is his warmth, his ever engaging need to argue the world, to question every assumption, to challenge the status quo — to upend the easy explanations; his sense of humor and self-deprecating wit, his generosity and capacity for joy. In summing up his life, Fitch’s ex-wife Mary Oppenheimer, with whom he co-authored two books, *Ghana: End of an Illusion*, and *Who Rules the Corporations*, offered an apt quote from the great Rosa Luxemburg, whom Fitch deeply admired: “Freedom is always and exclusively for the one who thinks differently.”

General Strikes and Massive Demonstrations Challenge Neoliberal Reforms in France

RICHARD GREEMAN

SINCE THE CRASH OF 2008, European governments and the banks that control them have been trying to make the working people pay the bill for the massive bailouts that saved the financial markets from near-total collapse. As in the United States, a previously undetected “debt crisis” has been declared while traders continue to pay themselves fabulous salaries and bonuses. Suddenly there is “no money” when it comes to paying for the health, education, retirement, and social services that benefit the general public. The idea of taxing the profits of the wealthy — who allegedly use their money to “create jobs” — is considered anathema. Austerity and belt-tightening (for average working families) are the order of the day.

Popular reactions to this one-way, top-down class warfare have varied from place to place. The United States has remained largely quiescent, with unions, social movements, and anti-war groups paralyzed by their leaders’ complicity with the banker-dominated, neoliberal Democratic administration of Barack Obama. As a result, much popular anger against the banks has been channeled by the ultra-right Tea Party movement. On the other hand, Greece, with a Socialist government, has seen widespread spectacular rioting, particularly among students and unemployed youth. Spain experienced its first general strike in generations, and in Great Britain there have been big

mobilizations against drastic cutbacks in higher education.

However, nowhere have popular reactions been more massive and more militant than here in France, where the right-wing Sarkozy government proposed pension “reforms” that would push the minimum retirement age forward from age 60 to 62 and the minimum age for receiving full benefits from 65 to 67. In the fall of 2010, these reforms were met by weeks of massive one-day national strikes and huge popular mobilizations. As a longtime French resident and witness-participant, I would like to share my on-the-spot observations and conclusions about this historic movement.

Massive Strikes, Millions in the Streets

MONTPELLIER, FRANCE, OCT. 15, 2010. On the one hand, it is thrilling to see millions of citizens taking to the streets as well as hundreds of thousands of workers striking in defense of their hard-won social rights defying an increasingly reactionary government. Indeed, what is most heartening is that the ‘troops’ seem to be more radical than their official leaders — the union chiefs and Socialist Party politicians. Recent polls showed the French public not only supports the one-day strikes (which make life Hell for commuters and parents of schoolchildren); nearly half are in favor of an open-ended general strike to make the government yield — a strategy advocated by the far-Left parties like the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party) as well as by militant rank-and-file workers and local unions who are chomping at the bit.

Once again I am reminded about what I

RICHARD GREEMAN, a longtime socialist and international activist, is best known for his translations and studies of Victor Serge.

love about France: a still-living revolutionary tradition of popular mass mobilization and struggle that goes back to the *sans-culottes* of 1789, the revolutions of 1830, 1848, and 1871 (the Paris Commune), the sit-down strikes of 1936, and in my own lifetime, the nationwide student-worker uprising of May-June 1968. More recently, there was the 1995 nationwide strike of public employees that went “wildcat,” paralyzed France for two months (during which Parisians cheerfully commuted by bike and even boat), and forced an earlier conservative government to withdraw its unpopular welfare “reforms.” It’s also a great pleasure to see a nasty right-wing s.o.b. like Sarkozy humiliated by millions of angry, jeering citizens blocking the trains and taking over the streets.

On the other hand, I also have a disheartening feeling of *déjà vu*. Why? Because the unions used the same dilatory tactics of spaced one-day public sector work stoppages in 2009, and the government simply bided its time until summer, when the French go on vacation, and rammed the cuts through parliament late one August night. And this wasn’t the first time these tactics failed.

Indeed, ever since the runaway general strike of 1995, every time the French have massively demonstrated and gone on national strikes in opposition to government attacks on their labor and welfare rights (as in 2009, 2008 and 2003), the official leaders of the unions have imposed the delaying tactic of spaced one-day national work-stoppages and demonstrations — marches and counter-marches designed quite precisely to “demonstrate” to the government their ability to call out their troops (and thus presumably to rein them in). These demonstrations are great for letting off steam, but inevitably they run out of steam. Time is always on the side of the government and the capitalists in the class struggle. The masses’ only strength is in numbers and resoluteness, and their most effective tactic, once they are mobilized, is to stay mobilized, spread the movement to all sectors

of the economy, go for broke, and paralyze the country until the bosses give in. As they did in 1936, 1968, and 1995, still in living memory.

The apparent purpose of the leadership’s military-style maneuvers is to make a show of force and induce the government to invite the union leaders to a round table — thus recognizing their legitimacy as the official representatives of labor. This plays out in the media through competition over how many demonstrators went into the streets in each successive demonstration. Social struggle reduced to sports statistics. The unions count 3.5 million people; the police count fewer than half. The union leaders go on TV and call it a success: the government says it is not impressed and won’t budge. Then the politicians get into the act. With presidential elections looming and Sarkozy’s popularity at an all-time low, the Socialists, who in power also imposed neoliberal cuts, grandstand their support for the movement. They, too, have an interest in prolonging the struggle against Sarkozy in the hope of reaping the results of his unpopularity at the polls. Former Socialist presidential candidate Segolène Royale encourages the youth, specifically high schoolers, to join the demonstrations. The Right (which has been cutting back teachers like mad) cries “scandal.” Another political horse race.

Contradictory Goals and Tactics

THE GOAL OF THE MASS MOVEMENT is quite different. The strikers and demonstrators sincerely want to use their mass power to force the government to rescind the cuts, as the Chirac-Juppé government was forced to do in 1995, when rank-and-file assemblies ignored the unions’ cautious tactics and took matters into their own hands. Those 1995 strikes got out of hand and continued for two weeks until they achieved complete victory and the cuts were rescinded. Paradoxically, this victory was a stinging defeat not just for the government but also for the unions, who were delegitimized as responsible “social partners” unable to control

their troops.

This is worrisome for the brass at the CGT, CDFT and other federations, since only about 23 percent of French workers belong to unions, which are supported not by dues but by government allocations. Since 1995, the unions have

The French, 90 percent of whom never see the inside of a (tax supported) Catholic church, are nonetheless a pious people, and Vacances (vacation) is the name of the god they worship.

tightened their control over the movement to prevent another wildcat breakaway. And you can't cynically turn mass enthusiasm and anger on and off like a water tap without exhausting it, so such tactics inevitably spell defeat for working people whose dream of retiring keeps receding into the future while they remain on the treadmill.

Similar mass struggles are happening all over Europe, where the same neoliberal cutbacks are being imposed in the name of paying "the debt" (created by bailing out the banks). Yet here again, the Left politicians and union leaders, far from seeking strength through international solidarity, remain staunchly isolated within their national boundaries, despite the obvious fact that the European Union has created a common economic zone! But the unions and left parties depend for their "franchise" on the national state, which subsidizes them directly.

One hopes the French people, who are always full of surprises, will find some way out of this impasse in which their "representatives" — the union leaders and the official left parties — are apparently their worst enemies.

Update on French Strikes

MONTPELLIER, FRANCE. OCT. 21, 2010. I ended my last week's report with the hope the "the French people, who are always full of surprises, will find some way out of this impasse. A week later, the biggest "surprise" is the entrance en masse of French youth, considered 'apolitical,' into the arena of the social struggle. All over France, high schools are being blocked by their students, while the presence of beautiful young faces is overwhelming in the huge nation-wide street demonstrations that keep intensifying. I'm not sure you're getting these exciting images on U.S. and British TV, but you can view some at www.liberation.fr/societe/01012297576-les-jeunes-en-renfort.

A poll in yesterday's Paris daily *Libération* indicated four out of five French people think the government should give in and negotiate, while 69 percent support the demonstrators, who are demanding the withdrawal of the bill putting full retirement off to age 67. (Curiously, only 43 percent actually favor outright withdrawal. I assume most of the others consider themselves "realists" and hope for a favorable compromise with the inevitable, considering the move toward "austerity" all across Europe.)

"Youth + Labor = People Power?"

ACTUALLY, THIS MASSIVE MOBILIZATION of French youth should not come as a surprise. Last year there were weeks of strikes and protests among high school and university students against education cutbacks, and in November 2005 there was serious rioting among mostly French-Arab and French-African youth in the ghetto-like projects that surround Paris and other French cities (when Sarkozy, then Minister of Interior, made a name for himself by calling them *Racaille* ["Scum"] and threatening to scrub them with a high-pressure hose.) In 2006 the French youth revolt went more political, when the right-wing government passed the CPE (First Job Contract) bill, a labor "reform" (presumably aimed at encouraging the hiring

of youth), which deprived workers under 26 of their legal rights as workers. All over France, students blockaded schools, went down into the streets, attempted to block trains and eventually dragged the reluctant unions to support their demonstrations. In addition, the outpouring of us parents and grandparents in support of the kids was massive, and after six weeks of chaotic disruptions, the Villepin government was forced to throw in the towel and withdraw the bill.

A recurrence of 2006 is Sarkozy's worst nightmare, and he was recently quoted as saying in private: "As long as the young people don't get involved, I can handle the movement against my pension reform." The government's response to the youth involvement has been to try to drive a wedge between the generations by provoking violent incidents around the high schools and encouraging mysterious *casseurs* to burn cars, presumably in the hope of alienating the adults with the specter of violence. At the same time, Sarkozy's spokesmen paternalistically maintain that teenagers shouldn't be meddling with an adult issue they don't understand, especially since the reform is actually designed to help young workers by lowering Social Security payments. On the Left, the head of the *Force ouvrière* union, equally paternalistic, was quoted rejecting the help of the youth as "the weapon of the weak" (presumably like "women's tears")! On the other hand, generational solidarity is strong in France, as witness a hand-made sign reading: "(*Son*, 26): Mom, what's work? (*Mother*, 57): You'll find out when you're 67!"

Elites versus Masses

THE MASSIVE ENTRANCE OF THE YOUTH into the arena has changed the balance of forces in today's standoff between an intransigent right-wing administration and most of the population. The second "surprise" since last week has been the mobilization of the truckers (mostly independent) and the refinery workers, which has resulted in gasoline shortages at service stations all over France and deliberate slowdowns ("snail

actions") by trucks on the highways. This is all the more remarkable in that the French truckers, who can retire at 55 under a special dispensation, are striking purely out of solidarity. More and more, the movement is in the hands of local committees and worker assemblies, who vote to continue and expand the symbolic one-day strikes called by the cautious national union leaderships. In Marseilles and elsewhere, there are ongoing tugs of war between demonstrators, who block refineries and gas depots, and the police, who disperse them only to find them back the next day.

The deepest fears of both the official Left (union leaders and Socialist politicians) and the Right are that the movement will "get out of hand." Editorialists wring their hands about a tragic descent into chaos. In place of the traditional struggle between Left and Right within the institutions, today's struggles are between the established elites and the rank-and-file, what in the U.S. we prudishly call "the working middle class." The French, with typical Gallic irony have adopted as their identity a government Minister's contemptuous slur by calling themselves *les Français d'en bas* ("the Frenchmen at the bottom").

Different Interests, Different Tactics

AS I SEE IT, THESE STRUGGLES — between establishment Rightist and Leftist elites on the one hand and on the other between elites and ranks — are being carried out in parallel, but they have different goals, and thus need different tactics. The goal of the strikers and the masses in the streets is clear. They want Sarkozy to withdraw the "reforms." Period. Their most effective tactic is equally simple: all-out unlimited mass strikes until the government yields — as it did in 1995 (when the union-initiated movement against an earlier pension "reform" got out of hand) and in 2006 (when the CPE went down in flames).

On the other hand, the goal of the official Left (Socialists, Communists, and their

affiliated unions) is to weaken Sarkozy, bring the government to the negotiating table and re-legitimize themselves as a viable alternative to the Right with a view toward the 2012 presidential election. Their tactic: prolong the crisis by measured, periodic shows of force. Of course, this delaying tactic resulted in defeat for the workers in 2003, when the strikes predictably petered out during summer vacation and the government raised the minimum number of years you have to work to earn a pension from 37 to 42 (which particularly hurt women who have taken off years for childbearing). Nonetheless, after the success of yesterday's sixth successive national mobilization of up to 3.5 million in the streets, the union leaders are calling not one more but two more spaced symbolic one-day national strikes: one in a week and the other in two weeks!

Meanwhile, the whole country is going wild, and no one knows what will happen between now and two weeks from now. On the government side Sarkozy, ever more intransigent, is moving up the date of the final vote of his reform in the Senate, while among the youth and workers in transportation, petroleum, chemicals, and other key industries the ongoing strikes and spontaneous, daily, local actions are intensifying all over France. One reformist union leader was quoted saying "by marginalizing us, Sarkozy turned the power over to the streets." So why did Sarkozy put his Presidency on the line by uniting the fractious French unions against him, freezing them out of the action and refusing to negotiate?

My Analysis

SHORT ANSWER: "France has the stupidest Right in the world," well represented by this little man with the big inferiority complex. (Demonstrator's slogan: "Carla, we're like you: we both get screwed by the head of state.") Long answer: ever since 1995 when the Gaullists got back into power after Mitterrand's 14-year long "Plural Left" (Socialist-Communist) administration,

the Right has been looking for a showdown with organized labor in an attempt to duplicate the neoliberal triumphs of the 1980s when Thatcher (after stocking up on coal for years) crushed the miners' union in a prolonged strike and Reagan fired all the Air Controllers. The Gaullists' first attempt at cutting benefits unilaterally under the Chirac administration was the ill-fated Juppé Plan of 1995, which provoked a runaway general strike and had to be rescinded. Villepin's 2006 attack on the labor rights of youth (CPE) had the same fate. In both cases, the Premier took the rap, and the President saved face. It took an egomaniac like President Sarkozy to take personal responsibility for the cuts and thus paint himself into a corner.

Today's Right forgets that the official Left is their best ally. During the May-June, 1968 General Strike, the Communist Party (CP) and its affiliated CGT union leaders saved capitalist France by blocking the striking students from making contact with the striking workers, negotiating a modest wage-hike with the government on behalf of the strikers, declared the strike officially "ended" (ignoring a massive vote among the workers to continue it), and agreed to channel the movement into parliamentary elections which the Right won.

Indeed, going further back in French labor history, in 1936 during the general strike and factory occupations whose slogan was "Everything is Possible," the CP/CGT leader Maurice Thorez famously declared: "You have to know how to end a strike." The CP/CGT, allied with de Gaulle, saved French capitalism in 1944-45 at the time of the Liberation when the workers were still armed and French big business, having collaborated with the Nazi occupiers, should have been expropriated. The same Thorez told French workers to "roll up their sleeves," rebuild the country, and put off the revolution until after the recovery. Despite these betrayals and sellouts by the official Left, the French working class has not been seriously defeated by capitalism — at least not in the way that British and American

labor has, and the French have learned the lessons that solidarity works, that resistance pays off and that mass strikes are their strongest weapon.

There is no predicting what may happen as this conflict moves toward a showdown — desired both by Sarkozy and by the vast majority of the rank and file French, who in polls favor an unlimited general strike to bring the crisis to a head (even if half of them accept the necessity of pension cuts). So stay tuned for future developments.

The Crisis in France Continues: Third Report

MONTPELLIER, FRANCE, NOV. 1, 2010. For months working people all over Europe have been mobilizing — more or less successfully — to defend their livelihoods against austerity measures imposed by the central banks. On the pretext of a sudden and exaggerated panic over the debt, European capital is imposing a take-back of whatever social advances working people may previously have won in terms of salaries, job security, public services, health, retirement, and unemployed benefits. These austerity measures are embodied in directives from the European Union and IMF, and the required cuts are being imposed by governments of both Right and Left. (Greece's Papandreu and Spain's Zapatero are both Socialists).

Popular resistance has been strong: Greece was in turmoil for most of the spring, and September 29 was marked by a one-day general strike in Spain as well as a mass international demonstration at European Union headquarters in Brussels. Nowhere has this conflict been sharper than here in France, where an undefeated, un-Thatcherized working class conscious of its long revolutionary traditions has for months been defying the rigid right-wing government of Nicolas Sarkozy with a series of nationwide general strikes and massive demonstrations of historic dimensions.

Eerily Quiet Streets

HOWEVER, AS I WRITE THESE LINES, things are eerily quiet here in Montpellier, with stores closed, highways uncrowded and city streets near empty. Alas, the reason for this vacuity has nothing (and everything) to do with the mass agitation and national strikes over pension cuts that have brought France to the brink of crisis over the past few weeks. Today is le Toussaint, an obscure Roman Catholic festival (think Tishibov) celebrated as a National Holiday by the officially secular French Republic with a three-day weekend and a two-week school vacation. The French, 90 percent of whom never see the inside of a (tax supported) Catholic church, are nonetheless a pious people, and *Vacances* (vacation) is the name of the god they worship.

This disappointing dénouement to the tension that has been building here for months was alas all too predictable, and the Sarkozy government was openly counting on the *vacances*-effect when it deliberately brought the crisis to a boil by rushing the final version of the pension-reform law through the Senate last week, creating a *fait-accompli*. The angry, determined, consciously anti-capitalist social movement that has been coming to a boil for months has now dispersed, and it is difficult to imagine it resuming with the same intensity ten days hence. On the other hand, Oliver Besancenot of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) is confident the movement will “rebound” on Saturday, Nov. 6, when the unions have programmed yet another one-day nationwide mobilization.

Be that as it may, last Thursday's national strike/demonstration (Oct. 28), much less well attended than the previous six, already had something autumnal and valedictory about it. It was of course the seventh in the series of spaced one-day general strikes orchestrated by the leaderships of the various French union federations (CGT, FO, CFTD, CFTC, Sud-Solidaires). This stop-and-go strategy of “attrition” has mainly served to “let off steam” — rather than

building up the pressure against the arrogant, intransigent Right-wing government of the much-hated Sarkozy; it may well have run out of steam. Nonetheless, the level of anti-capitalist consciousness, self-organization, inter-professional and inter-generational solidarity attained by this mass movement has reached historic levels with over three million in the streets. This experience will not be forgotten....

What Kind of Society?

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THE FRENCH is that although more than two thirds have consistently voiced support for the demonstrators and strikers (despite real inconveniences like closed gas stations and cancelled commuter trains) only 43 percent actually agree with their goal — withdrawal of the “reforms.” Remember when U.S. liberals used to condemn our anti-war and Civil Rights protests with bullshit about “I agree with your goals, but object to your methods”? Here the public approves of the radical means, even when they don’t really believe in the goal! What this not-so-silent French majority is saying to Sarkozy is simple: “Don’t play us for fools. We know you’re a bunch of corrupt politicians and super-rich profiteers, and we refuse to work until we die to pay off your gambling debts while you dine with bankers at Fouquet’s and go off on their yacht.”

This was precisely how the arrogant President-elect celebrated his 2005 election victory (snubbing his own Party’s celebration), and Sarkozy’s open contempt of democracy has not been forgotten. “Take a good look at your Rolex: it’s time for revolt!” is a popular slogan. The French — both Right and Left — are very

conscious of their history, and this sense of history reinforces the very open class-consciousness

— and class hostility — on both sides. Ancestral memories of civil wars between sans-culottes and aristos are part of French identity. Indeed, the word “guillotine” has recently been bandied about (Sarkozy famously boasting it was out of style).

Obviously, these strikes have been about much more than pension cuts — which in

any case are generally perceived as the first of many such “reforms” all designed to definitively tear up the post-WWII “social contract” between labor and capital. “Dignity” is the word on everyone’s lips. “If I can be tried as an adult at 13,” reads a sign held by a high school student, “I’m old enough to demonstrate at 16.”

La Grogne (generalized popular grumbling) has been in the air for months, as the pleasure-loving French see their lives getting worse under this neoliberal offensive. The economic slogan of the Sarkozy administration is “Work More, Earn More,” but work has become hell for thousands of employees through the introduction of Kafkaesque management techniques designed to isolate each individual worker and make her personally responsible for constantly receding, arbitrary “goals.” This management-imposed sense of failure, combined with arbitrary reassignments designed to de-skill and de-professionalize employees, has led to more and more frequent suicides in the Post Office and the Electric company, where my neighbor, a highly skilled line-man proud to work way up on high-tension transmission pylons, got transferred to a humiliating job behind a computer keyboard with a 70-minute

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daily commute from his home. In *Suffering at Work*, a book and TV documentary, prominent psychiatrist Christophe Dejours revealed how French management uses psychological pressure to destabilize its employees and literally drive them crazy.

At stake ultimately for the French is the question of what kind of society they want to live in: a society based on social solidarity or one based on “greed-is-good” individualism? The demonstrators’ answer to Sarko’s “Work More, Earn More” is “Work Less, Live Better.” Like Britain’s Thatcher in the 1980s, the French president is aggressively provoking class war from the top down in order to break the resistance of the working classes and impose the neoliberal agenda once and for all. With two or three million in the streets and 70 percent against him in the polls, the French people are telling Sarko: *Fous le camp, pauvre con!* (“Fuck off, Little Prick!”).

The Class-Conscious French

ANOTHER THING I LOVE ABOUT FRANCE is the clarity with which class interests get articulated in the political arena (as opposed to the United States, where bankers and bus drivers are all “middle class”). Since 1789 (and on through the revolutionary struggles of 1830, 1848, 1871, 1936 and 1968) France has been an ideal “Marxist laboratory” for the study of class conflict. Today, France is basically still ruled by the legendary “200 Families” — a restrictive caste of landed aristocrats intermarried with industrialists and bankers who live in exclusive neighborhoods, graduate from elite schools, belong to exclusive clubs, etc. It expands slowly by marriage, merger, and cooptation and is almost impossible to penetrate from the outside.

This financial and industrial oligarchy, today represented by Sarkozy and the MEDEF (Chamber of Commerce) has been tightly organized since the 19th century, when it used its influence on the state not just to discipline labor but also to grant French industrialists profitable

arms contracts at higher than world-market prices. In June, 1936, this tight little oligarchy had the shit scared out of them when a wave of sit-in strikes broke out all over France upon the election of a Popular Front government led by Socialist Leon Blum. Blum immediately negotiated a compromise including the 40-hour week and France’s first paid vacations, and from then on, it was “Better Hitler the Blum” as far as the 200 Families were concerned. This attitude (reinforced by traditional French Right-wing, anti-Semitic nationalism) goes a long way toward explaining France’s 1940 military debacle and the willing (and profitable) collaboration of French industrialists with the Nazi occupiers while thousands of French workers were being deported to slave labor in Germany. Yet today, Sarkozy’s party brazenly dares advertise itself as the “Shameless Right.”

The oligarchy had a lot to answer for in 1944–45 when France was liberated. The Resistance took power under the Gaullist-Communist coalition, and collaborators were being tried and sometimes executed. Some big industries were nationalized, but there was no general expropriation of collaborators’ property. The Communists, under orders from Moscow, supported de Gaulle in saving France for capitalism, but at a price. The elite was forced to agree to the “social pact,” and the French constitution that emerged from the Liberation defined France as a “social republic” under which workers have economic rights and where salaries are defined as including both cash and a “social salary” of defined benefits — including retirement.

These benefits are considered constitutional rights, and since the return to power of the Right in 1995, working people all over France have been fighting a rear-guard action to preserve them. The issue is clear to all: Sarkozy and the MEDEF are out to replace the social republic with the dictatorship of the market, that is to say, of the banks. At last Thursday’s demo here in Montpellier I saw a little boy carrying a sign that

read *La Bourse ou la Vie* (“Your Purse or Your Life”) with a play on the word *Bourse* (“Purse”) which also means “The Stock Exchange.” (He told me his father helped him.)

Politics Rears Its Ugly Head

RATHER THAN GLOATING OVER his apparent victory, Sarkozy has for once remained low key. With a view toward the 2012 election, the paternalistic president is now hinting he might make a few unilateral changes in the pension law (which cruelly punishes women, who typically are out of the labor force for several years of childbearing and might not be eligible to retire until 70.)

Meanwhile, with the angry French masses forced to wait until the 2012 election to dethrone their hated president, the Socialist Party seems to be emerging as the other “winner” in this crisis. Sarkozy’s potential Socialist presidential rivals, Ségolène Royale and Martine Aubry, have recently promised to abrogate the pension cuts if elected in 2012 — forgetting that they had previously accepted the cuts as inevitable (with minor modifications). The other Socialist presidential contender, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, has made no such promise. In 2007 on Sarkozy’s recommendation he was named president of the IMF responsible for imposing these and similar austerity cuts on the European level.

Thus the official Left plays party politics, using the strikers and demonstrators as pawns on the electoral checkerboard. The millions of angry workers and youth in the streets were not thinking about 2012 when they told the “Little Prick” to “Fuck Off.” On Sept. 23, at the height of the movement in Paris, there was talk of coming back the next day, surrounding the National Assembly and bringing down the government. Didn’t strikers topple Juppé’s government in 1995 and Villepin’s in 2006? Didn’t their great-great-great grandmothers march with their kitchen-knives to the Palace at Versailles in 1789 and drag the king and

queen back to Paris? However, the CGT vetoed this move on the grounds that it would be too “political” (!) Militants were advised to lobby their representatives back in their constituencies (although they were all in Paris, the Assembly being in session). I guess there’s “politics” and politics.

Again: Whom Do Union Leaders Represent?

THUS, THE UNION LEADERS HAVE ONCE AGAIN, as in 2003 and 2007, managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by tactics designed to disperse and dissipate, rather than unite the energies of three million militant working people and students backed by the huge majority of the population. How do they get away with these repeated sellouts? If one were paranoid, one might even imagine the union leaders who imposed these defeatist tactics on the mass movement were actually “in the pay of the government!”

Technically speaking they are. In France full-time officers and staff of the various union federations (Communist, Socialist, Christian etc.) are entitled to government-funded salaries as well as professional expenses and something like civil servant status. French “pork-choppers” are paid on the basis, not of their actual dues-paying union memberships (which on the average are down to U.S. levels), but of the number of votes their union gets in workplace elections. Union reps may thus be seen as functionaries serving as transmission-belts between groups of employees and government or management.

In case of conflict, these union bureaucrats represent their federations on the intersyndical (inter-union committee) where, through various compromises between more or less militant unions, they come to agreement on both the objectives and the tactics of national (or for that matter local) actions. It is this highly bureaucratized intersyndical that has called this series of one-day national strikes cum mass demonstrations, whose official goal was not the actual withdrawal of Sarkozy’s reforms (which is

what the strikers want) but an official role for the union leaders in negotiating the cuts (accepted in as inevitable).

It costs the intersyndical nothing to call a symbolic one-day strike to pressure for inclusion. On the other hand, unlike unions in the United States and U.K., French unions don't have strike funds, so employees who participate in these symbolic one-day national work stoppages lose a much-needed day's pay — which is why the mobilizations are more popular when called on a Saturday.

The problem for the union bureaucrats is to keep the pressure on while keeping it from getting out of hand. So strikes are limited to one day and widely spaced. Moreover, these mass mobilizations are organized in such a way as to maintain the division between public and private sector workers, between members of the various union federations, between different trades and professions, between different regions and between workers and students. They take the form of long parades led by blaring sound systems, with the demonstrators herded into successive separate ranks by category. Nobody gets to see the other groups or measure the strength of the whole demonstration, and when these marches reach their destination, they are dispersed before people can get together to discuss the day, exchange information — much less hold a rally or general assembly.

Another missing element in the unions' disunity strategy is any visible move toward uniting European workers' resistance to these cuts, which are imposed by the European Union and Central Bank. While the European bankers and capitalists are united in making the workers pay the bill for the Crash, the Left and the unions — whether in Greece, Spain, France, or Britain — confine their struggles within narrow national limits. Their Leftist leaders sing "The Internationale" at rallies, but in practice they disunite the workers of Europe, who face a united European bankers' Internationale.

The great frustration in this situation is

that, assuming I am not totally misreading the mood of the masses, there is a real potential here in Europe for militant, international popular struggles, including cross-border actions and mass strikes that aren't just one-day symbolic affairs. (Even a one-day international general strike would scare the bejeezus out of the ghoulish bankers attempting to suck the life substance out of European labor.) The stage is set for a showdown. On the one hand, the "shameless" Right does not deign to hide its objectives. On the other, the masses are angry and ready for a fight. It is the shameless Left, beginning with the Communist CGT, that disarms the masses, diverting the power of the militant millions into establishment channels like negotiations and elections, confining it within local and sectorial boundaries, and disregarding its most potent weapon: the open-ended mass strike.

How do they get away with this scam? Many rank-and-file militants are aware of the situation, but remain frustrated by a union apparatus that holds most of the cards when it comes to controlling the movement. However, they remain isolated because no organization unites them. Neither Besancenot's NPA, nor the Trotskyist Lutte ouvrière (LO) have taken any initiatives to expand and intensify the movement, for example by setting up rank-and-file coordinating committees or for calling general assemblies or mass meeting at the end of the official parades. On the contrary, rather than denouncing the defeatist tactics of the CGT and its shameful history of sell-outs, the "anti-capitalist" far-Left organizations uncritically endorse the spaced, one-day symbolic strikes proposed by the unions, while abstractly calling for greater militancy.

Despite the sellouts of 1995 and 2003 (never mind 1936 and 1968!) the CGT remains a sacred cow, and no one on the Left dares criticize it much less unmask the Communists' historic role as what the U.S. Socialist Daniel DeLeon used to call "labor lieutenants of the

bourgeoisie.” This self-censorship — call it “anti” anti-communism — is a form of political correctness left over from Cold War days, when the Communists were persecuted and still got 25 percent of the vote and when Sartre refrained from criticizing the gulag.

The cream of the jest is that the French CP, now down to 2 percent of the vote, long remained the most rigidly Stalinist CP in the West, ignoring Khrushchev’s 1956 secret speech denouncing Stalin. The CPF defended the Russian tanks crushing of the Hungarian workers’ councils in 1956 and the invasion of reformist Czechoslovakia in 1968, remained aloof from the reformist Eurocommunist trends of the ‘80s, and never engaged in serious self-criticism. Yet the CGT remains a sacred cow, and even the Trotskyist NPA and L.O. continue to tail-end it “from the Left,” concentrating their fire on the reformist Socialists (SP) while seeking alliances with the equally reformist CP.

Of course, the struggle is far from over, and the French (and European) workers remain full of surprises. One can only share Olivier Besancenot’s hope that the mass movement will “rebound” on Nov. 6 and develop into a full-fledged, open-ended, Europe-wide general strike. But if it does, it will not be thanks to any help from the official Left or its far-Left apologists.

Postscript

JANUARY 2011. AS I FEARED, the Sarkozy government succeeded in pushing its “reforms” intact through a tightly-controlled right-wing parliament if for no other reason than the fact that the mass movement only really got going in the fall of 2010, when it was already too late, rather than in the spring, when they were proposed with little open opposition. All energies are now focused on the 2012 elections, during which the neoliberal Socialists hope to make a comeback. Ségolène Royal, who lost the presidential election to Sarkozy in 2007, is now positioning herself as “the new Mitterrand.”

One recalls that Mitterrand’s historical 1981 Socialist victory after years of conservative rule occasioned dancing in the streets all over France, much as Obama’s did in the United States in November, 2008. However, in both cases, disillusion soon settled in as Leftist electoral euphoria was replaced by neoliberal realpolitik. To this observer, the conclusion is clear: Put not your faith in princes. Only massive social movements based on the autonomous self-organization and self-activity of the masses of working people, youth, unemployed, oppressed women, and ethnic minorities can defeat neoliberalism and open the door to a new society.

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Revolutionary Challenges in Tunisia and Egypt: Generations in Conflict

STUART SCHAAR

THE GREAT SYRIAN POET, Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998) more than four decades ago called on a new Arab generation to break with their dictatorial, bankrupt, and corrupt leaders and their supporters. Qabbani, from his London exile, hoped that young people would transform the Arab world into a new free and vibrant society where citizens could develop their full potential and flourish. His prophetic vision in "The Catastrophe of Arab Defeat" could not be realized until new technologies in the contemporary Information Age empowered young digital-savvy men and women. By the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 mobile phones, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter gave a new generation the means to organize revolts against police states in the North African countries of Tunisia and Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. The power of numbers — tens and even hundreds of thousands of hits on the same sites and the resulting massive crowds that turned out to demonstrate — allowed internet users and other citizens to break the bonds of fear that had held multitudes of people prisoners of conformity and intimidation.² When mass protests broke out, dictators everywhere rushed to grant concessions to their "subjects" such as raising subsidies on food staples, building affordable housing, giving monthly payments to unemployed youth, distributing cash, and increasing the salaries of their police forces in

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To you my friends, I mourn
The ancient books and our mother tongue like
battered shoes
Our speech is full of holes
Smut and scorn and whorish words....
In our mouths poems turn to salt....
We cloaked ourselves with the skin of civilization
But our souls belong to the stone age
With reed and flute no war was won....
For five thousand years we lived in a cellar
Our beards are drooping
Our currency is unknown
Our eyes are haven for flies.
My friends...Try reading a book
Try writing a book....
Try sailing to lands of fog and snow
Where people do not know you exist
Outside your holes
They take you for a breed of wolves....
If only someone were to grant me safety
and I were able to meet the Sultan
I would tell him:Your majesty, your wild dogs
Have torn my clothes...
Your Majesty just for having been in the vicinity
of your deaf walls
And for attempting to uncover my grief
Your soldiers kicked me with their boots
Forced me to eat dirt....
We call for an angry generation to uproot history
We call for a generation rising
With new faces
Forgiving no mistakes
Forfeiting and stooping never more....
You are the generation that shall break the siege
Healing us of our afflictions
Ridding us of our illusions...¹

From Nizar Qabbani, *Hawamish Ala Daftar al-Nakba* (*Annotations to the Notebook of Defeat*). This poem first appeared in a chapbook following the 1967 war. Translated from the Arabic by Kamal Boullata.

an attempt to ward off revolutions.

In recent years, new Arab media supplied independent sources of information to wide audiences, as the number of periodicals and satellite TV stations multiplied in the Gulf, other Arab States, and Western Europe. New networks formed to diffuse these publications and media over large geographic areas. Many new television channels led by Saudi Arabia's *Al-Arabiya* and Qatar's *Al-Jazeera*, broadcasting in Arabic and employing journalists homegrown and raided from Western channels, offered unadulterated news without Western spins. The staffs of news magazines and newspapers published in Arabic translated the best articles gathered from mainstream and alternative presses throughout the world. Arabs could follow global events without learning foreign languages or needing external intermediaries as news providers. This media explosion offered print and on-line readers and TV-viewers in-depth coverage of world events and analysis, which aimed at educating large masses of people and added to their political sophistication.³

A large array of news in Arabic democratized the media. At the same time, internet social networks provided users with a myriad of sites where individuals could write and receive messages in their own as well as foreign

vernaculars. Poor people began learning foreign languages in order to navigate the worldwide web. They now participated in the Information Age along with the richer, privileged, and more educated youthful elites. The latter launched a movement of revolt, which spread through poor neighborhoods where internet cafés proliferated. Usage of the internet varies from 25–40 percent in the Arab world, making it a mass media of great importance for its mainly young users. Spreading the word of revolt to urban slums and mobilizing youth for mass demonstrations for the first time became possible through texting, tweets, and postings in Arabic on social media sites and mobile phones.

Tunisian and Egyptian Youth Collaboration Since 2005

BETWEEN 2005 AND 2008, middle class young leaders from Tunisia and Egypt, both ruled by dictators, collaborated in preparing for large-scale nonviolent revolts, which by the end of 2010 began shaking the Arab world. As early as 2005 they read the writings of an American professor, Gene Sharp, who, in several books and pamphlets, laid out blueprints for overthrowing dictatorships without resorting to force.⁴ They studied how Mohandas Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the United States

Mohammed Bouazizi was 26 years old when he died of self-immolation in Tunisia in January, 2011, protesting abusive treatment by government officials. Bouazizi is regarded as a hero of the nation of Tunisia. His death sparked the revolution that ousted President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.



"History is full of instances where people, against enormous odds, have come together to struggle for liberty and justice, and have won ... The essential ingredients of these struggles for justice are human beings who, if only for a moment, if only while beset with fears, step out of line and do something, however small. And even the smallest... of acts, adds to the store of kindling that may be ignited by some surprising circumstance into tumultuous change. ...not only silence in the face of tyranny but defiance..."

— Howard Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*

marshaled nonviolence to galvanize mass protest movements that successfully mobilized millions of people to liberate India from British rule and gain civil rights for African-Americans living in the United States. In 2008 some Egyptian bloggers, then in their twenties, visited Serbia where a youth movement allied with factory workers had orchestrated a nonviolent revolt against their dictator, Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, forcing him from power. Meeting with youthful members of the Serbian Otpour (Resistance) movement, which helped orchestrate the revolt, the Egyptians learned how to organize a large-scale decentralized campaign, characterized by mobility, without a permanent office and recognized leaders (to avoid arrests). With good humor and much inventiveness, the Serbian youth leaders had created simple and forceful posters and repeated the same slogans continually. By doing so, the Serbs succeeded in eradicating fear of Milosevic's police state in the minds of demonstrators and transformed them into revolutionaries. When returning to Cairo, the Egyptian emissaries shared what they had learned with their Tunisian counterparts.⁵

The revolts in both North African countries did not break out suddenly in reaction to local events. The youthful leadership had time to develop the theoretical bases for revolution and benefit from experiences elsewhere, thereby allowing them to avoid pitfalls stemming from inexperience. They learned that they had to have on hand when demonstrations began considerable supplies of fresh lemons, onions, and vinegar as antidotes to tear gas as well as bottles of soda and milk to apply to eyes when the police or army flung canisters of gas into crowds. They likewise knew that they needed medical personnel to treat any wounded and clinics filled with first aid supplies. They prepared rudimentary body armor composed of kitchen pots to protect heads, cardboard and crushed plastic bottles, which they placed under demonstrators' clothes to protect against body blows from armed thugs and rock throwing regime loyalists.

Anyone watching both revolts on TV had to be amazed at the high level of organization of the leadership. Senior members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, after initially boycotting the demonstrations, joined at a critical moment when armed pro-Mubarak supporters, including

Spreading the word of revolt to urban slums and mobilizing youth for mass demonstrations for the first time became possible through texting, tweets, and postings in Arabic on social media sites and mobile phones.

police officers wearing civilian clothes, attacked them in Liberation Square in the center of Cairo. The experienced older Islamists helped organize the crowds into brigades to prepare rocks for throwing against their adversaries. They also divided the demonstrators into task-oriented groups, imposing a solid organization on amorphous protestors. In effect, they saved the day. But they had to share the limelight with thousands of young people from all walks of life — men and women — who risked their lives daily by returning to the Square to join their fellow protesters. Money collected from local supporters allowed leaders to buy blankets and in Egypt to purchase tents for those staying overnight on protest sites. A volunteer convoy system developed, bringing food and water to demonstrators. In Cairo, a croissant brigade supplied those who slept at Liberation Square with pastries, tea, and coffee as dawn rose. The leaders of the revolt decided to emphasize one demand and repeated it over again, interspersed with the singing of respective national anthems. “Down with Ben Ali,” the Tunisian strongman,

and “Down with Mubarak,” the Egyptian dictator, became the slogans that each country's demonstrators reiterated tirelessly.

When Wael Ghonim, the thirty year-old Google executive who helped organize the campaign, set up shop in Cairo, he applied his knowledge of marketing and created a revolutionary brand that Egyptians could relate to, thereby facilitating their joining demonstrations. In June 2010, he placed on Facebook photographs of a dead victim from Alexandria, Khalid Said, before his police tormentors tortured him and after, a horrible photo showing his battered and terribly disfigured face. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians entered the site and left in revulsion, ready to revolt. After having spent twelve days in prison blindfolded in January 2011, Ghonim gave an interview to a popular talk-show hostess, in which he broke down in tears over the deaths of protesters while he was confined. His sincerity, humility, and spontaneous grief galvanized those Egyptians on the sidelines who joined the demonstrations, swelling their ranks multifold.

The Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia

EACH COUNTRY HAD ITS OWN HISTORY of repression and death that pushed its population to revolt. In Tunisia under Ben Ali, the one-party state brooked no opposition. His Minister of Interior rigged all national elections while Ben Ali made Parliament into a rubber stamp for presidential decisions. The president's wife, Leila Trabelsi's family milked the country for billions of dollars and invested their wealth in overseas properties and bank accounts. Successful businesses faced shakedowns from members of “the family” amounting to some 25 percent of profits or annual worth. Anyone investing in areas dominated by the family quickly faced official harassment, denials of import and export licenses, and either had to close, or share their businesses with one or another of the Trabelsi clan. Madame Ben Ali, originally a hairdresser, bought a PhD from Tours University in France,

much to its shame, and rumors spread that she intended to run for president when her husband stepped down or succumbed to prostate cancer, which he fought in recent years. The police also took bribes for minor infractions and in the past year, petty corruption in their ranks began to rise to unprecedented levels.

Unemployed youth, especially students with bachelor's degrees (equivalent to a U.S. associate's degree from a Community College), faced new dilemmas in recent years. In order to lessen vociferous complaints about few students passing end of the year examinations — the pass rate a few years ago was a mere 35 percent — Ben Ali forced university professors to inflate grades. In the last couple of years 70 percent of those who sat for the bachelor's examination passed. Previously, a student who received a grade of 16 out of 20 could expect to enter one of the important professional schools in the country or overseas. With grade inflation, students recently need 18 or 19 out of 20 to enter such schools, leaving the elite even angrier, since it was almost impossible to score that high on any examination.

On December 17, 2010, in Sidi Bouzid, a small forgotten town in the center of Tunisia, Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six year old high school drop out and fruit peddler, whose produce a local police officer confiscated, set himself on fire before the town's municipality. The next day, lawyers, wearing their black court robes, marched on that site where Bouazizi's mother, surrounded by members of her family, demonstrated and demanded redress. The victim's cousin, Ali, filmed the scene and placed it on YouTube. That galvanized a much wider protest movement. One of their own had been singled out and slapped in the face by a local policewoman before some fifty witnesses, thereby wounding the collective pride of Sidi Bouzid's citizens. The immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi provided the spark that exploded into general revolt.⁶

His death on January 4, 2011 set off mass national demonstrations, which led to the flight

of the country's President, Zine Al-Abadine Ben Ali with his wife Leila Trabulsi and some of their family to Saudi Arabia. The Tunisians had internalized the plight of the 26 year old and, suddenly, many of the country's youth, under or unemployed themselves, felt assaulted by a political system mired in corruption and favoritism, which tyrannized them and took away their dignity. Overnight, they lost their fear of the dreaded 53,000 strong national police force, (a smaller number than most people thought, according to the first post-revolutionary Minister of Interior) and found the courage to die for their freedom. The transformation took everyone by surprise and, under the weight of determined crowds throughout the country, men and women of every class and ideological background confronted armed police and members of the country's single party's militia in a startling show of courage, reminiscent of earlier periods of Tunisian nationalist history, that suddenly put the small country on the map. The Jasmine revolution, named after Tunisia's national flower that both men and women carry or wear, became a model for the rest of the Arab world to emulate.

The Egyptian Revolution

EGYPT HAD THE LARGEST AND MOST important popular uprising. On January 25, the anniversary of a police revolt in 1952 in the town of Ismailiya near the Suez Canal that had led to the overthrow of the ruling *khedive* (king) and the creation of the military government secretly led by Gamal Abd al-Nasser, another popular explosion broke out. Young opponents of the regime, led by youth from the April 6th Movement (commemorating a workers' strike on that date a few years earlier) using their cell phones and social media sites called one of their periodic demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak's regime.⁷ Surprised by the surge in the numbers of protestors amounting to tens of thousands and inspired by what had happened in Tunisia, young activists who had prepared for

this moment over several years now found themselves at the head of a revolutionary movement. The crowd took over Cairo's Liberation Square and the revolt spread to Alexandria, Suez, and other Egyptian cities. Opposition political party rank-and-file, including the youth wing of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood broke ranks with their elders and joined the people on Liberation Square, emboldening them to call for the dissolution of the Mubarak regime. After eighteen days of mass protests, many of them marked by violence provoked by pro-Mubarak supporters, the ranks of revolutionaries swelled all over Egypt. Workers, demanding pay hikes and improved benefits, went on strike for economist reasons and paralyzed the country's economy. The army stayed mostly neutral, stating publicly that they would not fire on the protesting crowds. In all, over 365 people lost their lives and more than 5,000 wounded ended up in hospitals and makeshift clinics.

The United States waffled, one day calling publicly for Mubarak to stay in power, the next calling for his retirement from the political scene, and then they reversed themselves under pressure from allied states such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Jordan. The rulers of these states wanted President Mubarak to stay in power. Finally on February 11, 2011 the High Military Council staged a coup, with the blessing of the demonstrators, and sent President Mubarak and his wife to the southern resort town of Sharm al-Shaykh. When Omar Suleiman, the caretaker Vice President (appointed by Mubarak), announced that the president had resigned and had handed power to the military, Egypt broke out in gala street parties. These were reminiscent of the celebrations all over Europe and the United States at the close of the Second World War.

Recurring mass demonstrations in Liberation Square every Friday kept pressure on the transitional military supreme council to prepare for elections for a new parliament and president. They forced out Suleiman, the former head of Egypt's military intelligence. In Tunisia protes-

tors at the Kasbah before the prime minister's office staged multiple events to remove the officials left over from Ben Ali's regime, including the prime minister himself. Their continued actions forced the new military-backed regime to appoint Béji Caïd Essebsi, an 84 year old former interior and foreign minister from the Bourguiba era, to lead a new government.

On Fridays following noon prayers masses of people gathered in Tunis and Cairo to keep the pressure on their respective militaries and transitional governments. Every time the crowds surged in numbers, the military in both states granted concessions.

The revolutions affected the two countries' economies both negatively and positively. Strikes broke out, with workers and administrators demanding salary increases and purges of directors appointed by the old regime. Tourism, a key sector of North African economies, fell dramatically as Europeans were frightened away by the uprisings. Many hotels were forced to close and thousands of workers found themselves jobless, adding to post-revolutionary jitters. Many expatriates returned from abroad, however, bringing skills and capital with them, which will have positive effects on future growth. Both states promised to create new jobs, build affordable housing, and subsidize food staples in order to control rising prices. The Washington consensus, whereby the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund forced both states to privatize industries, shrink the state sector, and lower subsidies came under attack as a prelude to rethinking the entire policy of liberalization as espoused by the United States and the European Union. Both states will need bail-out funds to meet the demands of their revolutionary populations.

The Islamists

DICTATORIAL RULERS such as Ben Ali and Mubarak had Western support in return for their active role in the War on Terrorism and their aggressive persecution of Islamist move-

ments, which both states outlawed. Tunisia allowed the United States to establish a military base in its Sahara — in a direct line south of Bizerte — to track al-Qaeda and other Islamists or vice versa roaming through the desert.

Regime change means that the Tunisian *Al-Nahda* Party and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood will now be free to organize openly. Repression created unity within their ranks, but now I expect a splintering to take place within these movements as they begin to vie for political power. The more extreme elements have begun to break away from those who want to accommodate with electoral politics. There have been signs that this is beginning to happen in both countries.

In Tunisia *Al-Nahda*, led by Rachid Gennouchi who recently returned from long years of exile, is beginning to reorganize a mass base in preparation for forthcoming elections. The more radical Liberation Party (*Hizb al-Tahrir*), a radical offshoot in Tunisia of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, has staged demonstrations recently in front of bars and brothels, in an attempt to shut them down. They have also harassed and threatened feminists demonstrating in the center of Tunis after Ben Ali quit power. This group wants to install a regime based on Islamic law (*shariah*) and while denouncing violence, the party does not rule out rebellion or civil disobedience to create an Islamic state. The party's Secretary General Abdelmajid Habibi has declared that if the party won power (an unlikely probability in modern Tunisia) they would then ban other parties.

In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood, after many years underground, appears to be fracturing as well. Its youth movement joined the April 6th movement in Cairo's Liberation Square, disregarding orders from their elders in the party to stay away. They want the Brotherhood to reform and become more democratic, which may not be possible, given the party's history of tight centralization. Radical wings of the Brotherhood have broken off as well to

prepare separate electoral campaigns.

At first, after Mubarak quit power, the military higher council had allied with the Brotherhood to win a referendum calling for elections this coming summer. It won by more than 70 percent of the electorate despite the opposition of the April 6 movement and other youthful revolutionaries. Meanwhile the military frightened the youth movement by arresting thousands of protesters and have just sentenced a blogger to three years in prison for criticizing army rule. By mid-April, however, the military had shifted its stance and called for a secular Egypt. The drama lies in whether other political figures running for president will be able to organize mass political parties over the short run to sweep their parties into power. At this point, organizational advantages lie with the Brotherhood and Mubarak's old disbanded party. Much has to be done by the revolutionary movement to use old fashioned methods of canvassing and meetings throughout the country to convince the population to vote for them. Time constraints will make their tasks onerous. With 42 percent of the population illiterate in Egypt, and computer illiteracy even higher, the internet will be of marginal help in bringing out the vote. The parties of Allah and the old guard might therefore have a decided advantage.

That is not the case in Tunisia, where literacy is high and the population has experienced massive social transformations under Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali. As an indication, the Constitutional Commission of some 150 members chaired by the ex-dean of the Law School, Iyad Ben Achour, just voted overwhelmingly that women and men should have an equal number of candidates for forthcoming elections for the assembly, which will create a new constitution. The interim President, Caid Es Sebbsi, in a far ranging interview with the French weekly, *Jeune Afrique*, also stated that the Islamist Liberation Party will not be recognized and that the gains that women have made in Tunisia will continue to be enforced. This

time, an octogenarian, as a good Bourguibist, has reaffirmed major principles that Tunisia has long upheld, drawing a red line that he and many of the youthful revolutionaries will fight to uphold.⁸

The Neighboring Libyan Revolt

PRESSURES MOUNTED ON AUTHORITARIAN regimes from the Atlantic shores to China. Something had cracked in the Arab world after the Tunisians demonstrated their courage and ousted President Ben Ali. Fearful masses grounded down by security police and militias in next-door Libya also began the process of throwing off their repressors.

The ruler of Libya, Muammar Qadhafi, had condemned the removal of the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali. Demonstrations in Benghazi, Tripoli, and other cities, against Libya's home-grown dictator led to significant violence, with several thousand protesters killed and many more wounded by security forces and hired mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa. As violence mounted against demonstrators, more Libyans joined their ranks. The state cut off the country's internet service and most telephone lines, making it difficult for outsiders to follow events on the ground. Nevertheless, *Al-Jazeera* continued reporting outside the country and interviewed participants in the revolt by satellite phones. Tweets and cell phone movies reached TV viewers with appalling messages and scenes. Qaddafi and his son Seif al-Islam gave increasingly violent speeches, calling the protesters "rats," drug addicts, and agents of Al-Qaeda. The Libyan leader added a threat that "either I'll rule you, or kill you." As the East of the country liberated itself from his control, the president called on his loyal subjects in the Western capital, Tripoli, to pick up arms and attack his opponents. The more he ranted and raved in his usual incoherent style, the more state officials quit their jobs while denouncing his actions.

The international community lacked unity.

Too many Western countries had entered into multi-billion dollar contracts with Libya while ignoring Qadhafi's human rights record. While speaking about the need for spreading democracy worldwide, they once again collaborated with a notorious dictator. When oil prices rose to \$120 per barrel towards the end of February, some Western powers took limited steps to set up war crime investigations, freeze assets of Qadhafi, his family and entourage, and place travel bans on them. Anti-government Libyan leaders pleaded for the institution of a no-fly zone over the country and other actions that would speed the end of dictatorial rule. The United States instituted unilateral sanctions and froze Libyan bank accounts in the U.S.

The population of Eastern Cyrenaica, with Benghazi as its center, ejected Moammar Qadhafi's military and set up a counter incipient state, while reiterating that Tripoli remained the capital of a united Libya. The rebels formed a ragtag army after raiding state arms depots and responded to Qadhafi's forces attacks with counterattacks of their own. Army officers who defected from the Libyan military found it difficult to train and create a disciplined force to confront state troops. Despite the application of a NATO no-fly zone over the country, a stalemate developed between the opposing forces. Qadhafi clung to power and relentlessly attacked his opponents. If he succeeds in staying in power, his Tunisian and Egyptian neighbors would have much to fear since the Libyan dictator could back opponents of his bordering regimes. He has already done this ten times in sub-Saharan Africa, sowing havoc with his oil money, and will have ample funds to do the same in the future closer to home. His demise will therefore give further hope to the new generation that has sparked the Arab revolt

against dictatorships and has already changed the region dramatically.

NOTES

1. For the complete poem see Marvin Gettleman and Stuart Schaar (eds.), *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp. 194-198.
2. See David Faris, "The digital Roots of the Revolution," *meta-activism project*, February 11, 2011 at <http://www.meta-activism.org/2011/02/the-digital-roots-of-the-revolution> : "...as a catalyst for what happened on January 25th [in Egypt], *social media were not just ancillary but critical*." See Stuart Schaar, "Arab Dictatorship under Fire in the New Information Age," *Economic & Political Review* (Mumbai, India), Vol. XLVI No 6, February 5, 2011, 12-15 posted on Gertrude Ezorsky's blog, *New Politics*, February 7, 2011.
3. Fatema Mernissi has been tracking these trends in Morocco for the entire Arab world.
4. See Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 4th ed. 2010). This publication is available in the public domain on the website www.aeinstein.org. See also Michael True, "Gene Sharp: Scholar of Strategic Nonviolence," *Peacework Magazine* (May 2005); Samuel P. Jacobs, "Gene Sharp, The 83 Year Old Who Toppled Egypt," *The Daily Beast* (February 14, 2011); Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution," *The New York Times*, February 17, 2011 and Stephen Zunes, "Attacks on Gene Sharp and Albert Einstein Institution Unwarranted," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, June 27, 2008.
5. David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, "A Tunisian-Egyptian Link That Shook Arab History," *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011.
6. Al-Jazeera English in the series People and Power had an important film on the subject in February 2011, summarizing these events.
7. See the astute article by David Faris, "Revolutions Without Revolutionaries? Network Theory, Facebook, and the Egyptian Blogosphere," *Arab Media & Society* (September 2008), 1-11 describing organizing through Facebook of the April 6, 2008 strike. I'd like to thank Professor Todd Gitlin of Columbia University for bringing this article to my attention.
8. Marwane Ben Yahmed, "Béji Caid Essebsi [interview]," *Jeune Afrique*, No. 2621, 3-9 avril, 2011, 58-63.

Wisconsin's Cheesehead Revolt

PAUL BUHLE

BY THIS TIME, the usual *New Politics* reader may well have seen dozens if not hundreds of Youtube videos revealing the demonstrations in Madison, Wisconsin, during February and March, not to mention sights and sounds of solidarity-with-Wisconsin rallies around the country and in their own community. (Being good *New Politics* readers, they would have joined in.) The details have been hard to follow, even close to the scene. Each day from late winter to late spring brought some new twist on the venality of the governor, put in office with a less than convincing vote, thanks to rightwing cashflows and also thanks to disillusionment with the Democrats. And nearly every week brought some new measure of solidarity within the state or from those coming to express good wishes. Look carefully at those photos and Youtube images of crowds marching around the capitol (or milling inside, during three February weeks), and you are certain to see joy along with rage, the palpable enjoyment of people from all walks of life united in a cause, strangers to each other no longer.

Why Wisconsin? And why has the movement against the Right been marked by such good spirit, such militant non-violence, even avowed sympathy from the local police? Let's back up a little. Wisconsin has known plenty of labor-connected violence, from the Bay View Massacre of 1886 to the National Guard crack-down on Allis-Chalmers, crushing a leftwing local as the Second World War ended. Madison,

the state capital, has been a largely white-collar city, especially since the closing of the Gisholt Steel complex that had thrived in wartime but dwindled by the 1960s. Oscar Meyer, once a hometown business but now only part of a corporate giant, is a lonely factory survivor.

Still, state workers by the tens of thousands play a vital role in every part of the economy and culture, joined by many thousands of health workers, as the city has become a center of state services of various kinds — and a tourist destination. These working people heavily supported the changeover of city administrations, with the counter-culture-flavored leadership of the recently re-elected, former student radical Paul Soglin. He was an affable administrator with his own, anti-interventionist foreign policy and a progressive, eco-conscious city council.

This sounds more chummy than in real life, reflecting an old habit of Madison's collective self-congratulation, the liberal city that somehow gives developers nearly everything they want ... after a nice, civil discussion. And invites white-collar corporations with Pentagon contracts to expand the sprawl, with tax-breaks to boot. Progressives have had a hard time since the 1990s when as a third-party beyond official Democratic control, they held a majority in the city council. The Chamber of Commerce has been sneaking forward, and the the last mayor's eagerness to overrule landmarked heritage decisions for the sake of a vastly expanded downtown hotel marked a major and flagrant business-class victory.

More to the point here, unions have been boxed in by rock-ribbed Republicans and business Democrats. No governor proposed wiping them out until now, but the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation has had a blueprint for

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twenty years with the same goals in mind. Teaparty Republicans, playing their hand or overplaying it (according to different views), empowered by the elections but no more empowered than Republicans in state power of earlier generations, are determined to press the case against state employees.

The most dramatic piece of state labor history in the last half-century has been, without a

Behind the scenes or within the scenes, especially when the crowd set itself to occupy the Capitol building through the nights of protest, the logistical work of Teaching Assistants was the most remarkable.

doubt, the little Teaching Assistants Association at the University of Wisconsin. Their origin, in the overstaffing of discussion sections among many other issues, goes back to the early and middle 1960s. Their victory goes back to the 1970 strike, and the student peace activism that shut down the campus intermittently from 1967 onward.

There's the rub. In October of 1967, a nonviolent sit-in against the recruitment on campus by Dow Chemical, makers of napalm used widely and with vast destructive effects in Vietnam, was set upon by city police. A high official of the police force, best known for the John Birch Society pamphlets in his waiting room, poised for action as university officials caved into Board of Regents demands to clear the building. Dow recruiters might have announced their meetings off campus, of course; and university officials might have openly requested them to do so. No such. Right here, the new era of Madison began, although it took a half-dozen years or

so for the adjustment to register in city hall. Always suspect in most of the state for liberalism, Madison became a veritable hothouse of cooperative enterprises, antiwar, feminist and gay, ecological sentiment, and a live-and-let-live lifestyle that suited government workers quite as much as committed leftwingers.

Lots else naturally happened between those days of wine (that is to say, inexpensive marijuana) and roses (daisies placed in the end of National Guard rifles—we really put them there) and the mostly gloomy present. On the one hand, the grand newspaper strike of the later 1970s, broken but leading to a worker-owned press that died only when Soglin's designated successor was beaten by a bank candidate; on the other hand, the TAA and the other white collar unions of the district, including the growing suburbs, successful dug in, elected mostly pro-labor politicians, and provided real benefits. For society's least fortunate, such as special needs children, Dane County pushed the state forward toward model policies of humane care and training. It was no small thing.

The Walker proposal for a "budget repair," effectively wiping out collective bargaining for state employees among other ills, came as a shock. No Republican governor had attempted anything like this, not even "Tommy" Thompson, the state's dominant, that is to say, bullying, political figure at the end of the century. Suddenly, thousands of perfectly ordinary residents, including many teachers and their husbands, wives or domestic partners, also prison employees, health workers of all kinds and sundry crafts employed by the state, stepped forward. As a later formula had it, "Facebook called them out, Twitter organized them, and Youtube documented them."

The impression of spontaneous action in the mass outpouring, day after day, and the unprecedented crowds over the weekend, was misleading. The scene had been set politically not only by the threatened (soon, enacted) vote by the Republican-dominated legislature to

carry out the measures, but also by the departure of fourteen Democratic state senators, crossing into Illinois (a small Wisconsin joke: leaving the state for a weekend by going to Illinois is unthinkable to the state that draws hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans every summer for lakes, taverns and the sex trade). As unlikely as it seems, Democrats with their backs against the wall had acted boldly. They always seemed to be looking for an opportunity to compromise, but the other side was uninterested.

So when an NEA affiliate, as well as AF-SCME and also the AFT (representing mostly health workers, and a few scattered locals of teachers, mostly in small towns) worked hard to mobilize their members, along with Teamsters, dozens of craft locals, painters to boilermakers, rarely seen in solidarity actions, they were acting with a kind of permission. But it is also true that the turnout exceeded anyone's prediction, and raised the projections as well as the actual work of mobilization by the unions ever upward. Not to mention the ardent support by city police, county sheriffs, and firefighters, all of them legally protected from the worst effects of the so-called budget repair bill. And not to mention the hundreds of high school and middle school students marching from their schools to Capitol Square, holding up signs as proof of their devotion to their teachers. Electrified by music and chanting, they were having fun without a moment of unplanned disorder.

Behind the scenes or within the scenes, especially when the crowd set itself to occupy the Capitol building through the nights of protest, the logistical work of Teaching Assistants was the most remarkable. In a sense, they had been preparing for this moment since 1970-71, when the University of Wisconsin first reluctantly agreed to a contract, something contested every decade or so. Recent developments — actually, a secret agreement between the Chancellor of the university (herself a former UW grad student and TAA member!) and the Governor to give the school a special status and incidentally wipe

out the TAA — set the young unionists in quiet organizing sessions. They were fighting for the union's life, skillfully.

One of the strangest series of events happened early, on Day 5. A planned Tea Party counter-demonstration flopped, with perhaps 300 to offset the 30,000 demonstrators. The Fox News audience had been revved up by warnings of chaos on the streets, not to mention imagined union bosses and their paid thugs. Actually, because this was the first Saturday of public events, people of all types, schoolchildren, teachers, oldtimers from the 1960s (labor and/or civil rights as much as the antiwar or student movements), more than 90 percent from assorted parts of Wisconsin but visitors from Chicago, Minnesota, and Iowa, some nostalgics from East or West Coast had come to revive their memories of youthful radicalism on the campus. It was a demographic revolution as well, in no small part because the service unions like SEIU are as heavy with minorities and women as the roofers are still white and male.

The crowd of the next day, a Sunday, was a bit smaller but perhaps even stranger. A brief troupe of four blow-up reindeer, eight feet high, with a sign, WHITE TAILS FOR WORKERS. The issues of the deer populations never leave Wisconsin politics for a day. One of the favorite signs of the crowd — measured by the number of people who patted an arm or slapped the back of the sign-holder — amounted to only four words: BEER CHEESE BRATS UNIONS. Wisconsinites have them, love them, don't intend to lose them.

Another weekend soon after saw, on a Saturday, New York State Troopers with their banner, and some National Troopers Coalition folks marching. Sometimes stopping to shake hands with the state police (whose leader has denounced the governor). Sunday saw several hundred National Letter Carriers folks (including their national veep, a great speaker, hailing from Minnesota), mainly Illinois, some Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan. To the friendly pats and waves of "Thank You"

came back “Thank you, glad to be here.” Also Michael Moore, who gave a spectacular speech, also the singing of “The Star Spangled Banner” (a half dozen voices rung out, a second afterward, “Play Ball!”), followed shortly by versions of “Solidarity Forever” and “This Land Is Your Land” by a visiting Tom Morello, formerly with Rage Against the Machine.

As the days wore on, and the total non-violence allowed the aged and parents with babes in arms to march again and again without anxiety, as more folks were bringing dogs (often with signs on them) and kids walking along, the usual (and instinctive, during my lifetime of demonstrations) craving of uniformed police to demand and command order disintegrated. Madison police, whose chief declared he would not enforce orders asking his men and women to become storm troopers, had relatives aplenty among teachers and social workers, and they were downright friendly. Sheriffs from distant parts of the state were cool and suspicious at first. Then things eased as they brought their families to Madison for the weekend — a normal tourist thing to do — or snapped pictures of each other and us with cellphone cameras for the folks back home. It could not be worth their time to compile photos for FBI or Red Squad files; there are just too many of us looking affable. Put another way: the threat of official violence had been neutralized.

But where was it going, especially after the crowd of 150,000 rocked the Capitol inside and out, easily the largest political demonstration in Wisconsin history? The IWW had never entirely disappeared from Madison, although its presence in recent years had been largely limited to a print shop in the left-leaning East Side. Wobblies, armed with a new poster drawn by Eric Drooker, talked about a General Strike, and even the official newspaper of the region's AFL-CIO carried a serious discussion of how and under what conditions a general strike of government workers or others, perhaps all others, might be carried out.

The “Myth of the general strike,” an idea propounded almost a century ago by French syndicalist Georges Sorel, had shrewdly suggested that the myth was a fact in itself, a vision of a revolution that swept away the existing system and replaced it with real economic and social democracy. And this was the real sense of a general strike in Wisconsin. For public workers to have struck would have proved the Republicans' claim that they were more interested in money than in the public welfare; rather, by insisting that everything but union status was negotiable, public unions took money off their table. They were asking for dignity, for the right to exist as a collective body. It was the most powerful appeal possible. The General Strike, then, was akin to “Free Huey Or the Sky's the Limit,” a warning to California authorities not to send away Huey Newton or kill him. (They didn't, although Newton turned out to be rather a disappointment in other respects.)

If not a General Strike, what could the crowd and its leaders, such as they were, actually do? Legal stratagems followed, aided by some small victories along those lines. A massive campaign to elect a liberal or even progressive candidate for the state supreme court over an outspoken reactionary turned out enthusiasts in numbers and vigor not seen since the Obama campaign of 2008. In the end, perhaps through ballot manipulation, the Right won again. But the notion has persisted that by rolling up petitions for the recall of a number of Republicans in the legislature, a real change can be affected, or such a scare thrown into the GOP that the unions, environmentalists, supporters of women's rights and others can rest a bit easy and prepare for more.

So it stands as this issue of *New Politics* goes into production. Each week, often each day, of the Wisconsin battle has brought surprises. Each demonstration has sprouted dozens of new and often funny, homemade signs ridiculing the Republicans and especially the Governor, along with his cronies. The spirit is very much alive. Where will it find its top form again?

Global Governance and Revolution in the 21st Century

Strikes, Austerity, and Political Crisis

STEVEN COLATRELLA

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IS ARGUABLY the name for what might pass these days for “a committee for the management of the affairs of the bourgeoisie as a whole” — though we should recall that the much repeated phrase by Marx and Engels stated that “the executive of the modern state” filled this role, not, for instance, the legislature or other state institutions. Global Governance is a set of institutions and relations among political actors that transforms the relationship between national states and their territorial citizenries, and alters the relations of power between different state agencies. In general the executive and those agencies that are further removed from popular control, such as central banks, are strengthened. (Elected legislatures and institutions, more easily influenced by popular pressure, decline in power and status.) The objective is to transform states more effectively into instruments of capital, and of global and finance capital in particular. Global Governance institutions are thus not a new form of state in themselves, and even less a world government. They are instead a means of determining the orientation of national states and their policies by limiting the “thinkable” ideological and policy options available to them

to those favorable to capital; of “elite socialization” — influencing the ideological and political orientation of state personnel through interaction with like-minded others such as at Davos, EU summits, the G8 and G20, and through the revolving door whereby individuals rotate between private finance, Global Governance institutions (such as the IMF, World Bank or WTO), and key national government offices; and of external pressure and even coercion through methods ranging from IMF structural adjustment programs and debt, to WTO trade rules, to UN Security Council Resolutions, to NATO military force.

Global Governance organizations act as Hegel’s “universal authority,” something between an executive committee and a bureaucracy that sets the agenda for and coordinates state policies throughout much of the world. Global Governance institutions are where the real power seems to be politically in the capitalist world today. These institutions embody Arundhati Roy’s crucial insight that globalization means not that national sovereignty is at risk, but rather that democracy is — especially if by democracy we mean a democratic content and agency, and not merely a procedure. Global Governance institutions, as Marx made clear regarding state bureaucracies in his critique of Hegel’s theory of the state, are not universal, neutral institutions; rather they occupy a universal space, as public power, but they represent particularistic, indeed class interests. Representing capitalist interests, and particularly finance capital, global governance organizations use the present crisis to call on states to enact as public policy austerity, budget-cutting for social services, just as in an

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earlier cycle they called on states to privatize, deregulate, and liberalize. These policy requirements, coming as they do from beyond the level of national governments, are not in themselves

Marx makes clear that the entire house of Hegelian cards falls on a single point, the crucial one for us here: the bureaucracy, including the executive and judiciary of the modern state, is not universal in scope nor neutral in interest.

a negation of national state power, but rather a transformation of it in class terms.

National states, complex creations that express the complicated class relations and outcome of class struggles historically in each national territory, are, through the imposition and mediation of Global Governance, liberated from the local class struggles that have heretofore shaped them, expanded and/or limited their policy options and structures. They are instead increasingly interrelated globally as instruments of an ever-more coherent global capitalist ruling class, by outlook and by unity in action, that is by consistent purposeful action in the interests of their own class globally and nationally. Thus, a meta-level objective of Global Governance emerges, that of carrying out the project implicitly analyzed in the third volume of Marx's *Capital*, where it is defined as the development of a unified single rate of profit, with shares in the value produced system-wide distributed according to the size of capital invested. Understood politically, this creation of a single rate of profit, once national with some aspects of the economy international, is now a project

of globalization. The historical struggle over realizing this project, at least up to the early 19th century is arguably the focus of the second and third volumes of Fernand Braudel's celebrated *Capitalism and Civilization*.

In such a context, capitalism, which can with justice be described in many ways —as value production, as market relations and so forth, is best understood as both Marx, in Chapter 32 of Volume One of *Capital*, and Braudel in his monumental work understood it: as the concentration of wealth and centralization of power in the fewest hands, as monopoly. To achieve this concentration and centralization, capitalism has in recent decades, as is well documented, carried out a program of expropriation and renewed exploitation, usually termed neoliberalism. We can define the current period as neoliberal, however, only if we see the latter as a program of a larger force that is anything but anti-state or liberal in any traditional sense; rather, neoliberalism has been imposed by government policy.

But today it is even clearer how crucial Global Governance, and both its transformation and use of the national state and its capitalist class character are to the project of concentration and centralization. For since the onset of the world economic crisis in 2008, and even before that in the use of the debt crisis in the global South to impose neoliberal policies, it has been clear that capitalism today is a political and not at core merely an economic project. That project, at all times serving the larger objective of concentration and centralization, and therefore of ruling class unity globally, today goes by the name of austerity.

Austerity intensifies to a much greater degree the project of concentration and centralization, using direct political means to impose greater inequality. Yet in doing so, by exposing the central role of Global Governance institutions in formulating and initiating policies favorable to an ever smaller capitalist elite, and by reducing the social base in virtually every country for the dominant policies, austerity has

brought about the preconditions for a political crisis not only of national governments, but of Global Governance itself. That crisis has not been tardy in arriving.

Opposing this renewed wave of austerity and neoliberal globalization is a host of movements, organizations and protests, at times uniting in action a diversity of class actors. But increasingly, in the past three years since the financial crisis broke and turned into a global recession, the opposition has been spearheaded by the working class in country after country. Since spring 2010 increasingly purposeful strike waves have directly opposed the austerity imposed by national governments, and the austerity called for by Global Governance institutions. The past year has seen the rise of an ever greater global wave of mass strikes against the abstract universal of Global Governance. This planetary strike wave by a world working class was, until the winter of 2011, the most direct, and impressive obstacle to realizing the austerity program of global capital in the face of a crisis.

That crisis itself results from the limited options for profitable investment around the world, from capital's reluctance to invest where the power of the organized working class is strong and where welfare policies reflect this power, and from the rising power of workers in new key sites of global capitalist production. The so-called financial crisis grew out of this reluctance to invest in production in one part of the world, and the rising strikes and protests of workers in newly industrialized areas in other parts. The crisis in turn has been used to politically overcome these limitations, allowing capital to expand further in the direction of neoliberal privatization and through policies further concentrating and centralizing wealth and power, policies formulated and initiated at the level of Global Governance, be it informally as at Davos' World Economic Forum, and G20 summits, or formally through the EU Commission, IMF, WTO, and the national central banks, and enforced as well by those direct but

unofficial means such as ratings agencies' credit evaluations and of course, the investment and currency markets.

This nearly universal imposition of austerity has provoked upheaval in many countries, constituting the last straw for the legitimacy of government policies and therefore for Global Governance itself, now widely seen as the initiator of such policies, and for whom national governments are understood as instruments, rather than as representative of the national population and responsive to its needs. These anti-austerity struggles took primarily the form of mass strikes, with epicenters in any number of European countries, but also in Egypt, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Africa, India, and China. The strike wave fed and spearheaded the process of opposition in Egypt and the various revolutions and revolts in Arab countries have all included a major presence of strikes in key sectors. So the strike wave, which included very militant strikes and protests in Greece, France, Britain, Italy, Spain, and Portugal in the late fall and early winter of 2010, by the winter months of early 2011 had given way to a full-blown revolutionary movement across all of North Africa and the Gulf states. This revolutionary wave found its first echo in the apparently least likely of places, the United States, where first in Wisconsin, then across Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and as far away as Maryland, New Jersey, and Texas workers defended collective bargaining against a direct political attack through strikes, mass protests, and occupations of state capitols.

The direct mass political opposition to openly political class interests, is a response to the combination of a narrowing of the social base benefitting from political policies to an ever smaller elite, an inevitable result of the concentration of wealth and centralization of power as predicted by Marx, and of the mass opposition to these policies which in itself further hollows out the legitimacy of the dominant class alliance of political forces. The weakest links in the

chain, as in 1917 in Russia, in this case the Arab regimes with their lack of popular support, broke first, while Greece, France, and other formally democratic governments held for the time being. But the political crisis of Global Governance, and its manifestation in the specific conditions of each national state, a crisis in part the result of Global Governance itself understood as the process of greater global ruling class coherence, and narrowing of the social base benefitting from social policies, is not an Arab crisis, but a global, a universal one. The Arab revolutions have been preceded by those in Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, by the global strike wave that has been manifest in many countries of Africa, Asia, and Europe as well as the Middle East, and by the revolutionary upheavals in Thailand where events went right up to the brink of the result in Egypt before Red Shirt pro-democracy militants made up of peasants and urban workers were massacred in the streets of Bangkok, and in Honduras where a democratic government representing the poor was overthrown in a coup, leading to mass protests repressed violently.

To understand more fully what is happening and why, we need to examine the class composition of the two key class actors, the ruling class as it is in the process of transforming itself through Global Governance, and the broad working class which has found new bases of structural and associational power resulting from globalization itself.

Hegel and Bureaucracy: Why Global Governance Does Not Represent the World's People

HEGEL TRACED THE DEVELOPMENT of modern society and came to a similar conclusion to that of Max Weber: modern society would be governed by bureaucracy. However, for Weber bureaucracy is the end result of a long process of instrumental rationalization of society that is a product of capitalism but not fully reducible to it. For Hegel instead, bureaucracy is an

organic part of modern society based around the need for law to regulate the competition and fragmentation of civil society. Hegel sees the bureaucracy as a form of “rule,” of political power in itself that encompasses the executive and judicial powers. This is possible, and according to Carl K.Y. Shaw, is compatible with liberal doctrine despite Hegel’s opposition to formal separation of powers, because both the executive and the judiciary have the same basic task: to concretize the abstract universal of a society embodied in its code of laws and norms, into particular judgments and practices in concrete, real world situations involving civil society. Without such judgments, and such concretization, society and the state would become detached from one another, as the particular interests (in Marxist terms the class interests) of civil society would atomize society, pulverizing it, and in the process destroy any possible universality, that is, any possible connection of human members of society with each other and therefore any larger purpose or common interest as well. Thus the bureaucracy, and the executive and juridical power it wields, provides for the possibility of modern bourgeois civil society with its market economy and capitalist relations:

The particular common interests which fall within civil society, and which lie outside the universal interest of the state...are administered by the corporations (i.e., bodies representing industrial interests — SC)... the business of these administrators is to look after the private property and interests of these particular spheres...On the other hand, these circles must be subordinated to the higher interests of the state...The task of upholding, within these particular rights, legality and universal interests of the state, and that of bringing these rights back to the universal need to be performed by delegates of the executive power, i.e., the executive civil servants and the higher consultative bodies.

Nor is this all. For the state itself, as an individual state, is merely the representation of a particular interest or set of interests within a

larger international, that is, universal community (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* §340). Marx responds in his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*,

The bureaucracy is the 'state formalism' of civil society... The bureaucracy must therefore protect the imaginary universality of particular interests... in order to protect the imaginary particularity of the universal interest... The corporation represents the attempt by civil society to become the state; but the bureaucracy is the state which has really made itself into civil society.

This is a ruling class that rules — the bureaucracy of Hegel is a ruling authority. But it is directly linked, by individual biographies and by “elite socialization” to the capitalist class as a whole or at least to its dominant global and financial sectors. Ralph Miliband noted the direct ways in which capitalists ruled over workers and over political life, including their direct use of “class action” through control of investment, a power feebly theorized by observers of globalization like Thomas Friedman as the “electronic herd” that punishes governments by disinvesting from their countries, their currencies and their government bonds when policies cut against their interests. Hal Draper, in his monumental study of Marx and Engels’ politics, noted that on a number of occasions they made clear that the state bureaucracy could be a class and indeed could, under certain circumstances, even be the ruling class. The policy makers of global governance organizations are one in practice, elite socialization, career trajectory, and outlook with the global capitalist class, especially its global and financial sectors.

Marx makes clear that the entire house of Hegelian cards falls on a single point, the crucial one for us here: the bureaucracy, including the executive and judiciary of the modern state, is not universal in scope nor neutral in interest. Its interest is a particular interest as opposed to a common one. Its power derives not from knowledge per se, but from its relation to a set of

class interests present in the civil society, namely the power of capital and the class of capitalists. So, the bureaucracy of global governance rules, and it rules on behalf of a certain set of class interests. As Draper shows, the modern capitalist class is historically unique in its inability to rule directly in its own name, requiring a separate class of politicians, a view strangely enough confirmed recently by the *Economist*. Yet this solution involves the need to maintain control over such a governing (as opposed to ruling) class, and global governance, with its merging of careers in politics and business/finance, and in national and global politics, is meant to resolve this problem.

Globalization claims to bring us all together, that is, it presents itself as the ultimate universalist project, as the grand narrative. Global governance presents itself as universal law. Even heads of state can be called before the bar. In practice, of course, the only international law, the only universal set of rules and regulations that emerge, are those that are compatible with capitalism. But this does not negate the fact that, like the state itself, global governance addresses a real need in society, “the state’s beginning,” wrote Hal Draper in explicating Marx and Engels’ theory of the state, “its prototypical source, lies in indispensable functions of society.”

Global governance, then, arises to fulfill a series of actual needs, some of society as a whole, some of the class that rules global capitalism. It serves to regulate the activities of world economic life, provide law and organization to what would otherwise quickly come to resemble the chaos suggested by Hegel without the universal class of the bureaucracy, or the atomized social breakdown so strikingly painted by Polanyi.

In the case of global governance, certain crucial theoretical underpinnings have been developed within chaos theory, which “provides a mechanism that allows for free will within a world governed by deterministic laws.” By setting up or controlling initial conditions, it is not necessary to control in a deterministic way the

outcome of every individual event in a system. “Planning” in short, no longer takes the form of a bean-counter deciding on the quantity of widgets produced by every factory, but rather the setting up of conditions, such as interest rates

Given the greater representation of India and China as areas of labor action on a big scale, the numbers of workers involved in strikes recently likely dwarf those of earlier strike waves worldwide.

by Central Banks, and access to finance (in part through the privatized global governance institutions known as ratings agencies), which are sufficient to move the overall economic activity over huge areas of the world in the direction generally desired. But chaos theory points out that even slight changes in initial conditions can lead to big changes in outcome. Thus the range of acceptable behavior must be especially narrow and rigid, as in the imposition of neoliberal policies with little tolerance for variation. Global governance is needed to set up the rules, and to do so in a way that the behavior of actors will be generally as predictable as another capitalist intellectual asset — game theory — suggests. It is this narrow range of acceptable behavior, established by such initial conditions — interest rates, the limits on public spending established by the IMF or European Commission, the ratings of governments and business activity by agencies, finance itself, which Schumpeter called “The General Headquarters of the Capitalist System,” that workers around the world are now challenging in one of the world’s great strike

waves.

Hegel’s bureaucracy, now in the form of the EU, IMF, WTO and so on, however, would be politically irrelevant were it not that it could respond to the aforementioned need of capital for an alliance with a political class. This political exchange has, as Giovanni Arrighi has recorded, moved from one hegemonic state to another over the past five centuries or so, each new hegemon increasing in scale and transforming the workings of capitalism as a world system. These hegemonic powers, most recently Britain and now the United States, have served the function, delineated above, of providing order and coherence to the global system. But there are now three problems with the mechanism that Arrighi sees as central to the maintenance of capitalism through the transfer of finance capital and political power to new, larger political actors. First, the military power of the United States is so great, both absolutely and relatively to other potential competitor states, that it seems unlikely that it can be replaced without it using its unmatched military force to resist its decline and the rise of a new hegemon; second, no competitor, including China, increases potentially the scale of hegemonic power geographically, thus interrupting the secular tendency of capitalist politics up to now; third, each hegemonic power after Venice, has seen dilution of the pure capitalist character of the hegemonic state. Though Arrighi does not say so, it is likely that this growing relative complexity of the class forces influencing the hegemonic states stems from the related processes of the growth of organized working class power and accompanying revolutionary movements and of the diffusion and deepening of democratic structures and policies.

Global Governance addresses all three of these problems: while the United States remains a hegemonic state, it is also clear that it is in visible decline; yet Global Governance converts its military superiority into an instrument that serves more directly the dominant class inter-

ests of global economy and polity, so that U.S. power and Global Governance are often difficult to distinguish from one another. Second, because Global Governance is able to influence, through elite socialization and determination of initial conditions, nearly every state (except those openly hostile or in revolt against it) in the world, expanding geographically the scale of hegemonic power available to capitalism in its political exchange. Third, by the methods discussed above, it circumvents, and in some cases reverses the tendency toward democracy and working class power in society and government.

The World Strike Against Global Governance

THE SOCIAL INJUSTICE OF GLOBALIZATION in itself, wrote Adam Webb, in one of the few prescient articles foreseeing today's revolutionary movements,

has not turned into the extreme discontent that brings down regimes. But under conditions of a profound economic downturn, (note: Webb specifies a crisis like that of the mid-1970s or even of the 1930s, and arguably the crisis that began in 2008 is precisely somewhere between the two in force — SC) it would have much greater impact. A critical mass of humanity already senses that global capitalism has not delivered for them... Furthermore, the victories of capitalist globalization in recent years rest on uncertain legitimacy.

Structural Adjustment Programs in the wake of the Debt Crisis starting in the early 1980s led to mass protests and riots in nearly every country of the Global South. These struggles found their counterpart in the global North in the anti-globalization protests from Seattle in 1999 through Genoa in 2001. By the early years of the new century, governments representing mass movements for radical change had come to power in several countries of Latin America. By 2007-8, however, the notably diverse forces opposed to capitalist globalization, while formally still intact and partly represented at

the World Social Forum, had to some degree become more homogeneous, as workers used the classical weapon of the strike to oppose the policies that sustained and worsened inequality nearly everywhere.

The crisis of legitimacy is therefore today arguably more severe than ever. The expansion of the G8 to the G20 and the endless discussion of expanding the Security Council, the IMF granting greater voting rights to Brazil, China and India, are the weakest reforms imaginable, hardly on the scale needed to shore up a failing systemic legitimacy worldwide. The EU, one of the few global institutions which once had pretensions of being a social democratic and pacifist alternative to U.S. hegemony has become an instrument for imposing neoliberal privatization and wage austerity in the face of the crisis. The G20 has failed to even plausibly address climate change, and addressed the economic crisis only by increasing the funds and power of the most discredited and hated of all global governance institutions, the IMF. The European Commission, IMF and G20 all agreed on austerity, the battle lines have become clearer than ever before. One's allegiances in such circumstances should not be in doubt, as it is now impossible to favor both the EU and the Greeks and French striking to resist its demands, both the IMF or WTO (even in "reformed" versions) and the strikes and protests around the world against every policy implemented in accord with the presumably universally accepted authority of these institutions representing the capitalist class's universality only, that is the political organization of capitalist production on a world scale.

If Greece was the first country where European working classes directly faced the entirety of global capital in the form of finance, state banks, the IMF, and the EU, the workers in much of the rest of Europe began to see their own struggles in those on the front line: some recent examples include the global day of action in solidarity with Turkish UPS workers, British

union support for the struggles of Indonesian coffee workers, the recent commercial calling on French workers to participate in a general strike in early September. There remain, to be sure, vast differences in conditions of life between workers in different parts of the world, but solidarity begins with common struggles, as the Wisconsin revolt taking its cues from Arab protesters makes clear. In identifying, increasingly, global governance-directed policies as their target and the cause of their life conditions, the working class, in practice, is miles ahead of political science today, and not for the first time.

We can compare the present strike wave with the worldwide strike waves analyzed by Professor Beverly Silver in her *Forces of Labor*. Using the *New York Times* and *Times of London* as sources with worldwide information gathering capacities and as indicators of the importance attributed to strikes by establishment observers, this pioneering work identified the reality of worldwide strike waves. The strike waves during the three-year periods around the end of the First World War and the end of the Second World War were the largest worldwide, concentrated on North America and Europe. But other peaks, between the 1950s (1956-8), late 70s (1979-81) stand out with around 1200 to 1300 major noted strikes.

In a world in which industry and services are more widely diffused by global capital, in which logistics of transport play a key role, and in which the majority of people in the world for the first time live in cities, the struggle against global capitalism has in the past two years predominantly taken the form of mass strikes. This global strike wave arguably began around 2007, with strikes by workers in new industries in newly industrializing countries, such as Bangladesh and Vietnam, as well as Egypt, and the former Eastern Bloc countries such as Poland. Strikes continued in these countries, with only a few countries such as South Korea and the Philippines, as well as the United States, witnessing a decline in strikes over the next two

years. In the first three quarters of 2010 strikes came to be more specifically oriented in a number of countries against government imposed, and global governance organization sponsored austerity policies, including international days of action with some significant coordination and large national general strikes.

Today, the newspapers used by Beverly Silver, rarely cover even major strikes around the world. This may reflect in part the hegemony of neoliberal assumptions that strikes and labor are things of the past. Using instead the approach of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics of registering strikes involving over 1000 workers, with the addition of those that have a major impact on significant sectors of national or global economy, and using a wide international selection of national news sources, I have personally accumulated a file of well over 1000 such strikes, reaching Silver's threshold for a major strike wave. Further, given the greater representation of India and China as areas of labor action on a big scale, the numbers of workers involved in strikes recently likely dwarf those of earlier strike waves worldwide. Thus, BBC monitoring found at least 93 strikes in Russia, many of them illegal, in 2008. Egypt, experiencing a historic strike wave going on for three years now, saw 49 strikes in July of 2010 alone. While numbers for strikes in China are difficult to ascertain, according to Ching Kwan Lee, there were 58,000 labor protests involving 3 million people in China in 2003, which rose to 87,000 protests in 2005. No one doubts that the past year instead has seen a massive increase in organized worker protest and strikes there. Vietnam saw 200 officially noted strikes in 2009. The year 2009 saw general strikes in France and Guadeloupe, and protests against banking policies and government austerity in Ireland, Poland, Latvia and strikes in Romania. The number of working days lost to strikes in the UK in 2007 was the largest in a decade. India has had two massive general strikes in 2010, one in July that was the largest strike in the country

since the Bombay Textile Strike in 1982, and another in September, involving 100 million workers, that was likely the largest national strike in world history.

These strikes addressed any number of complaints by workers, from low wages to non-payment of wages, from hours to health care. The dramatic rise in prices in spring, 2008 following the start of the financial crisis led in turn to a strike wave by workers in the industries and agricultural sectors benefitting from the spike in prices in raw materials and crops — cocoa workers in Mozambique, copper miners in Chile, tin miners in Bolivia, demanding pay increases, a share of the increased income to their employers generated by the value produced by their own work. These strikes arguably prevented any solution for investment capital, searching desperately for a place to make profits given the collapse of real estate prices in the United States and northern Europe and of financial markets, and given the continued inability to really get Iraqi oil production on track as a source of global profits. But since late spring, 2010 the strike waves have been directly focused at government policies and especially at aspects of the austerity programs mandated by global governance institutions. That Fall Greek truckers were blocking roads to protest an IMF and EU mandated liberalization of their industry, while thousands of Croatian shipyard workers protested the sale of their shipyard required by the EU as a precondition for their country's entry into the European Union. Irish firefighters, Portuguese oil workers, Romanian Finance ministry workers, Buenos Aires teachers, Ukrainian sausage casing makers, Bangladeshi dock workers, Bulgarian police — the list goes on and on of categories in both private and public sectors striking against austerity policies.

In country after country, from French, Romanian, and Spanish general strikes that are themselves part of the struggle against EU mandated austerity, to India (100 million on

strike in mid-September 2010), South Africa, Kenya, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, where strikers oppose government policies of austerity to maintain debt payments, to strikes over wages and working conditions in Egypt, China, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, and elsewhere, the strikes have the common features of being strikes either by production or by logistic workers whose work is highly integrated into the global market and who in almost every case must clash with police or directly confront government policies restricting wages, or else by public sector workers protesting austerity. Frequently these groups of workers all move together. And, in relevant situations, as in South Korea where unions and other associations prepared for protests against the G20 meeting scheduled in November 2010, the protests and strikes are directly aimed at global governance organizations themselves. These struggles have now given way to revolutions, in which policies of the IMF, or the results of such policies, are one of the sources of discontent as much as are dictatorships.

Further, production in nearly every country operates now under the initial conditions set up by global governance organizations within the acceptable limits appropriate to neoliberal capitalism globally. In every single case the issue of inequality and unfairness within the country and as a result of global political decisions or global economic mechanisms is raised by the strikers. In short, these increasingly take on the character of political mass strikes against global governance and the class system that it governs.¹ Today's strikes, protests and revolutions are aimed at a common class enemy and against political institutions, including those of Global Governance itself, that openly favor the concentration and centralization characteristic of capitalism.

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

Good Neighbor Imperialism

U.S.-Latin American Relations under Obama

WALT VANDERBUSH

THE EXPECTATIONS FOR CHANGE in U.S. policy toward Latin America when Barack Obama was elected president seemed as high among most governments and citizens of Latin America as the expectations of the voters in the United States who cast their ballots for him. Many analysts believed that the relationship between the region and the United States had reached a new low point during the two terms of Obama's predecessor, President George W. Bush. While the most popular explanation for that outcome emphasized the "neglect" of or the "forgotten relationship" with Latin America, that neglect explanation understates the importance of both the Bush administration's activities in Latin America and the actions of Latin American people and governments in creating the situation that confronted the newly elected President Obama. Bush administration officials did seek to influence political and economic developments in ways that would maintain regional hegemony for the United States, but they were unable to do so as easily as the U.S. government had in the past.

When Barack Obama took office in January 2009, he confronted a much different situation in Latin America from what his predecessor had faced eight years earlier. In 2001, a fading Fidel Castro in Cuba, and Hugo Chavez, whose position in Venezuela was somewhat tenuous, were the only Latin American presidents who might be described as challenging U.S. influence

from the left. Eight years later, Chavez was far more secure, a Castro-headed government was enjoying a resurgent relevance in the region, and they had been joined in office by enough kindred spirits to constitute what many described as a "red tide." Russia, China, and Iran were wandering around the region, and, for the most part, the leaders of all three of those countries were more welcome in Latin American capitals at the end of 2008 than the outgoing U.S. president. The United States was also being challenged by new regional organizations and meetings, from which the colossus of the north was deliberately excluded.

As I noted above, the most popular explanation for those developments was that the United States was understandably preoccupied with developments elsewhere in the world. At war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and concerned with potential security threats in Iran and North Korea, it would not be surprising that the focus on the Middle East and Asia would take attention away from Latin America. While there was a diversion of energy and resources toward the Middle East and Asia, Latin Americans did continue to experience the heavy hand of the empire to the north. The Bush administration responded to the rise of the Latin American left with threats (in Bolivia, the Ambassador's words clearly backfired and helped to garner support for Evo Morales during his presidential runs), by working with opposition groups (in Venezuela, the support by U.S. officials for those implementing the 2002 coup was clear, even if any actual U.S. role in the coup is more difficult to determine), and by attempting to separate the "good left" from the "bad left" in a divide and conquer sort of strategy (Lula

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in Brazil was the good, pragmatic left, while Chavez was the classic bad, populist left). The Bush administration also continued to advocate economic neoliberalism, deregulation, and free trade orthodoxy as the one size fits all solution for the region's economies. Finally, there was a security or even terrorism framing put on contentious issues such as drug trafficking and immigration. The combined militarizing of our relations with the region, political interventions, and efforts to impose its preferred version of free market capitalism throughout the region add up to what Greg Grandin described at one point as "new imperialism" in Latin America. The concept of imperialism has made a comeback of sorts over the last decade. What is particularly interesting is that the idea of empire is openly engaged by both the advocates of a robust U.S. military presence around the world and the critics of the same activities.

As the title of this article suggests, I believe that the Obama administration has continued with the imperial policies of the Bush administration, although they have accompanied those policies with a much different tone and far more conciliatory rhetoric. In effect, we are now the sort of "good neighbors" who shake hands and exchange pleasantries even with those we don't like very much, but we clearly remain committed to asserting economic and political power in the area. The actual period of the good neighbor policy in United States relations with Latin America is sometimes seen as a break from the overall U.S. strategic interests in exerting control over the region. But in practice, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region in the early 1930s coincided with support for dictators and oligarchies in many of the same countries that we had previously occupied. As long as those governments supported U.S. geopolitical and economic interests, we would keep our troops at home. Underneath the change in appearance and discourse, an implicit imperialism continued to characterize U.S. policy.

In the rest of the article, I will first make

the argument about continuity from Bush to Obama, starting with Cuba, a country toward which there seems to have been some policy change. The case of Honduras provides a par-

The Cuba embargo lacks any global support as indicated by the yearly UN resolution that condemns the policy. The 2010 vote was 187-2, with only Israel joining the United States.

ticularly instructive example to test how the Obama administration responded to an extra-constitutional removal of an elected leader, who had become allied with the "bad left" in Latin America. On the other side, relations with Colombia seem to suggest at least continuity with the aggressive policy of military support to the most consistent U.S. ally in South America. Next, the approach to "intermestic" issues such as immigration and drug trafficking by the two administrations will be assessed. Finally, relationships with Brazil and Venezuela will be discussed. In the concluding section of the article, I will offer a few possible explanations for the continuity between the two administrations.

Candidate Obama

WHILE RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT, Barack Obama did not give a lot of attention to the region of Latin America. The most important speech he gave was on May 23 before the Cuban American National Foundation in Miami, Florida. Unfortunately titled, "Renewing U.S. Leadership in the Americas," the speech directly criticized the Bush administration record in the region and offered some general ideas about

what his administration would do differently. Obama describes the Bush approach: "...its policy in the Americas has been negligent toward our friends, ineffective with our adversaries, disinterested in the challenges that matter in peoples' lives, and incapable of advancing our interests in the region." The basic problem then was that negligence and disinterest did not allow us to "lead the hemisphere into the 21st century," but when Obama becomes president, "We will choose to lead." "It's time to turn the page on the arrogance in Washington and the anti-Americanism across the region that stands in the way of progress." If "we leave the bluster behind," then "we can renew our leadership in the hemisphere."

As some analysts have suggested about the Obama campaign more generally, it was easy to read into the message of "change" whatever sort of shifts from the Bush years that one could imagine wanting. In terms of foreign policy, when Obama said that he would meet with people such as Ahmadinejad, Castro, and Chavez without preconditions, it wasn't a reach to assume that he would surely want to lift the embargo with Cuba too. Or as a person of color with recent family immigration experiences, surely he would move quickly on the immigration reform issue. And when he told those of us in places such as Ohio and Pennsylvania that he wanted to renegotiate NAFTA, we could imagine that he was ready to move beyond free trade orthodoxy in Latin America. A careful reading of his limited legislative record as a senator and his campaign speeches would have given pause to those expecting dramatic changes in U.S.-L.A. relations. In that Miami speech, he directly said that he would keep the embargo with Cuba in place. On immigration, while he had co-sponsored the DREAM Act (to provide a path to citizenship for those who had come to the United States as children), he had also voted for the Secure Fence Act, which authorized building several hundred more miles of wall between the United States and Mexico.

And the renegotiation of NAFTA was not because he recognized the harm being done to Mexican peasants or workers, due to both the agreement and unfair U.S. trade practices, but rather to somehow bring manufacturing jobs back to the rust belt.

Obama in Office

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S INITIAL APPOINTMENTS to key foreign policy posts suggested the possibility of continuity with the Bush and Clinton administrations. Secretary of Defense Gates was asked to continue on from his work for President Bush, and Secretary of State Clinton showed Obama's likely comfort level with the foreign policy approach of the last Democratic president. President Bush's Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs, Tom Shannon, continued in that position until he was nominated by Obama to be the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil. Arturo Valenzuela, who became the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, was one of the authors of Plan Colombia when he worked in President Clinton's administration. Jeffrey Davidow, who came out of retirement to serve as White House Advisor to the Summit of the Americas, had a Chilean embassy position at the time of the Allende overthrow, and he served the Clinton administration as Ambassador to Venezuela and Mexico, as well as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. The former Ambassador's known positions on trade, the drug war, and Cuba did not suggest that his pre-summit counsel would be in the direction of significant policy change toward Latin America.

Before leaving for his first summit with Latin American leaders in Trinidad and Tobago, only a few months after taking office, President Obama announced that he would end the Bush administration-imposed policies of limiting remittances and travel by Cuban Americans to the island. The announcement of the change for Cuban Americans was clearly timed to preempt the universal criticism that the United States

would be getting for the embargo at the Trinidad and Tobago summit. That embargo lacks any global support as indicated by the yearly UN resolution that condemns the policy. The 2010 vote was 187-2, with only Israel joining the United States. Israel casts a vote with the United States, but it maintains trade and investment with the Cubans. For a president who promised that multilateralism would replace his predecessor's unilateralism, it would be hard to rationalize being on the losing end of a 187-2 vote as part of a commitment to cooperate rather than go it alone. Latin American media previews of the meetings consistently mentioned that the one thing Obama could do to indicate real change in U.S.-L.A. relations would be to lift the embargo.

A year after the summit, President Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was asked about the embargo, and she gave an interesting answer: "It is my personal belief that the Castros do not want to see an end to the embargo and do not want to see normalization with the United States, because they would lose all of their excuses for what hasn't happened in Cuba in the last fifty years." So, the country's top diplomat seems to understand that the United States currently has the policy preferred by the government that we are trying to weaken, and yet the Obama administration is unwilling to change the policy. Instead of change, we have seen the Cuban government listed as a "state sponsor of terrorism"; and the United States continues to provide funds for Cuban dissidents by way of quasi-governmental organizations. That last practice led to the arrest of Alan Gross who, after entering Cuba on a tourist visa, was apparently working for Development Alternatives, Inc., a subcontractor of the State Department, with the assignment of providing satellite communications equipment to Cuban dissidents when he was arrested in December 2009. Adding to the costs for the U.S. government of such a policy, the Cuban government is able to discredit its civil society opponents

who receive such financial assistance as U.S. government "mercenaries." For good measure, the Obama administration designated Cuba (along with Iran, Sudan, and Syria) as a state sponsor of terrorism, subjecting anyone from Cuba or traveling through the country to enhanced security checks. In January 2011, Obama took another step toward loosening the travel ban along the margins, but most U.S. citizens will still not be able to travel to the island, and the embargo remains as firmly in place as ever.

At the April 2009 summit, President Obama's interactions with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez received the most U.S. media attention. After first shaking the hand Chavez offered him, President Obama then accepted a book by Eduardo Galeano that the Venezuela leader gave him the following day. It is likely true that President Bush would not have let himself get in that situation, but it is hard to imagine that President Obama had any other option than to accept the offered hand and book. In general, the rhetoric between Caracas and Washington has been toned down since the Bush years, but no substantial change in policy is apparent. With Bolivia, another country on the "bad left," Obama has also continued with Bush era policies. At the end of June 2009, the United States permanently eliminated Bolivia's trade preferences, which had been temporarily suspended by President Bush. President Evo Morales responded by accusing Obama of having "lied" in Trinidad and Tobago. The expectations had been quite high at the beginning of the summit that the Obama presidency would bring about reduced tensions among the United States and the Latin American left, but certainly policy toward Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia did not change markedly over the first several months of the new president's term.

The next major test for the Obama administration came only a couple of months after the summit, when President Zelaya was removed from his office by the Honduran military early in the morning and flown out of the country

(with a stop at a U.S. base in the country for refueling). The initial response by the Obama administration was to describe the removal as illegal and to call for the suspension of the country from the OAS, suggesting that they

But overall, a President who voted for the Secure Fence Act when he was in the U.S. Senate has generally not deviated from the Bush administration approach.

might have learned from the Bush administration's acceptance of the 2002 military coup that temporarily removed Chavez from power. Still, almost all of the U.S. aid to Honduras continued to flow, members of the Honduran military continued to train at the renamed School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the U.S. Ambassador stayed in Honduras. Over time, the U.S. rhetoric clearly changed, and U.S. statements and actions pushed the Obama administration away from the widespread Latin American resistance of the post-coup government's legitimacy. A little more than a week before the November 29 elections, the United States signaled that it would accept the outcome of the election. Although Panama took a similar stand at the time, that position had not been publicly taken by any other government in the Americas before the United States did so. Others, such as Colombia and Costa Rica, recognized the new Lobo government in Honduras soon after the election was held, but the United States was not part of the region's mainstream. There was considerable domestic pressure on Obama to move in that direction — whether from paid Honduran lobbyist and former Clinton administration official, Lanny

Davis, or from Bush administration official, Roger Noriega, or perhaps most effectively, South Carolina Senator Jim Demint who put a hold on the confirmation of Obama's Latin American team until it was clear that the United States would recognize the new government. In the analysis of one Argentine diplomat: "Obama has decided that Latin America isn't worth it. He gave it to the right." That likely overstates somewhat the Obama administration's actual differences with the position of the Republican right on Honduras. But still, in what was arguably the most important Obama administration decision about U.S. policy toward Latin America to that point, the choice is either to believe that he caved in the face of pressure from a South Carolina Senator or that he was more than willing to move on as if a military coup in Honduras had never happened.

Secretary of State Clinton's rhetoric suggested that she was generally comfortable herself putting pressure on Latin American governments who challenged the United States. At the end of 2009, she offered a not very veiled threat to Latin American countries who were developing relations with Iran: "I think if people want to flirt with Iran, they should take a look at what the consequences might well be for them. And we hope that they will think twice." The Obama administration went on record as telling countries in the region — not just Venezuela, Bolivia, or Cuba had diplomatic ties with the Iranians, but the Brazilians did as well — that they should expect significant costs if they did not follow the U.S. foreign policy line in that case.

At the end of 2009, the Obama administration showed quite clearly that their approach to Colombia would be more of the same as well. In this case, that meant that President Obama signed an agreement in October 2009 giving the United States access to seven bases in the South American country to replace the access in Ecuador that ceased when the ten-year lease at Manta was not renewed by the Correa govern-

ment. From the perspective of regional leaders such as Chavez and Lula, there were a number of problems with that decision. First, there was no evidence of consultation by the U.S. government with Colombia's neighbors, including Brazil. The secretive bilateral agreement with Colombia did not seem consistent with the words of a U.S. president committed to a new era of cooperation with his neighbors. Complicating things even more, the Venezuelans were able to report that a U.S. Air Force document said that the use of the base in Palanquero, Colombia, "...provides a unique opportunity for full spectrum operations in a critical sub-region of our hemisphere where security and stability is under constant threat from narcotic-funded terrorist insurgencies, anti-U.S. governments, endemic poverty and recurring natural disasters." In this case, not only does the Obama administration seem to be fully supportive of the military solution to drug trafficking, but the wording here suggests that the empire believes in military solutions to both poverty and anti-U.S. sentiment. The language was eventually removed from the document, but the damage was done.

Besides Colombia, the most consistently pro-U.S. government in the region has been Mexico. The issues of contention between the United States and the bordering country have included immigration, drug trafficking, and trade. President Fox, who was in office from 2000-2006, was particularly disappointed in President Bush's unwillingness to use political capital on a comprehensive immigration reform, even though the former Texas governor had consistently offered rhetorical support for the policy. When President Calderon succeeded Fox, he initiated a more aggressive and militarized challenge to drug traffickers in Mexico. The U.S. government passed the Merida Initiative, which was occasionally described as a "Plan Mexico," given its similarity to the Colombian drug policy. In the area of trade, the Mexican government has long argued that Mexican truckers should be allowed to transport goods

to U.S. destinations, and had sought the elimination of some barriers to the sale of Mexican foodstuffs in the United States.

In the case of the "drug war" in Latin America, the Clinton to Bush to Obama continuity is very clear. New words from the current U.S. president were initially well received south of the border. In a joint press conference in Mexico with President Calderon, President Obama said that, "A demand for these drugs in the United States is what is helping to keep these cartels in business. The war is being waged with guns purchased not here, but in the United States." While he acknowledged the shared responsibility, President Obama did not alter the U.S. policy in any significant way. Through the Merida Initiative, we continue to arm the militaries of Mexican and Central American governments, ensuring that from Colombia to the U.S.-Mexico border, the primary U.S. role is to provide additional arms to militaries with dismal human rights records. At the same time, the logical policies that would flow from the Obama rhetoric — renewal of the assault weapons ban or redirection of resources to the demand side — have not been enacted. It is much easier politically to provide the Mexican military with Blackhawk helicopters than it is to take on the gun lobby or implement effective drug rehabilitation services in U.S. prisons. In response to the criticism from the gun lobby, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) even stopped releasing statistics on the percentage of weapons seized in Mexico that had been purchased in the United States.

President Obama suggested during the campaign that he would support comprehensive immigration reform, as had his predecessor. As president, Obama has appointed dozens of Latinos to important positions in his administration, and the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court was an important statement. But in the two years that he has been in office, the substantive policy changes from the Bush years have actually been in the direction

of more troops and agents on the border, and an increase in deportations during each of the two years. Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano announced in October 2010 that in addition to the record number of deportations, the Obama administration had audited more employers suspected of hiring illegal labor in their first 20 months than the Bush administration had during its entire time in office. On the other hand, the Obama administration did voice its displeasure with the SB 1070 legislation passed in Arizona, and the Attorney General has pursued a legal challenge to the state's rights to implement that sort of immigration policy. But overall, a president who voted for the Secure Fence Act when he was in the U.S. Senate has generally not deviated from the Bush administration approach. The nicer words for our neighbor cannot mask the ongoing policy of coercion — walls, deportations, and the creation of a hostile enough environment that will lead undocumented people to choose to leave on their own.

One of the most popular presidents in the world, much less the Americas, was Lula da Silva in Brazil. President Bush maintained friendly enough relations with Lula, but it was clear that during the years both were in office, the Brazilian president was increasing his influence, while the U.S. president's influence was receding. Lula played a role in the development of regional organizations, effectively dealt with Chavez in Venezuela, renewed a friendship with the Castros in Cuba, worked together with "emerging powers" China, Russia, India, and South Africa, and forcefully challenged the United States on issues of fair trade. While President Obama seems to have developed a friendship with the outgoing Brazilian President, his administration does not seem to have figured out a strategy for dealing with the country. Lula exchanged visits in 2009–2010 with President Ahmadinejad in Iran, he rebuffed Secretary of State Clinton's request for support in the UN for sanctioning Iran, and in May, 2010 he and Turkish Prime

Minister Erdogan negotiated a commitment from the Iranians on their nuclear programs that is said to have made the Obama administration "furious." In December, 2010, the Brazilians and the Argentines recognized the state of Palestine, in what was both a response to the Obama administration's officially ending the attempt to negotiate a temporary settlement freeze in the West Bank and another statement about the willingness of important countries in Latin America to take stances on international issues that are unwelcome in Washington.

The worst relationship the Bush administration had with a Latin American leader was certainly with Venezuelan Hugo Chavez. In an interview on a Spanish-language television station during the week before Obama was inaugurated, the incoming U.S. president noted that Venezuela was "exporting terrorist activities" and generally "hindering progress in the region." It is curious that Obama would unnecessarily start to make arguments about Chavez that sound a lot like those of Bush and his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. It is hard not to conclude that the Obama administration has the same goal as the previous administration of isolating the "bad left" in Latin America. According to Eva Golinger, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) provided almost \$2 million to opposition groups in Venezuela during 2009, more than double the amount from the last year of Bush's presidency. Both the Bush and Obama administrations tried to discourage the sale of arms to Venezuela with the argument that they could end up in the hands of Colombian rebels, but neither U.S. president had much success on that front. Rather than any direct U.S. policy, it appears that the biggest challenge faced by Chavez is due to the lingering economic problems in the country. While Chavez and the Obama administration have generally steered clear of the name-calling on both sides that characterized the Bush years, there are signs that the Venezuelan president's patience might be wearing thin. In December

2010, Chavez confirmed that he would not accept the appointment of Larry Palmer as the Obama administration's Ambassador to his country. Palmer had made "disrespectful" comments about Venezuela in email responses to questions from Senator Richard Lugar as part of the confirmation process, and those replies were then posted on the Indiana Republican's website. The Venezuelan President said that Palmer would be detained at the airport and sent home should he try to enter the country.

Explaining the Continuity

THE OVERALL POLICY CONTINUITY would be understandable if U.S.-L.A. relations were at a good place when President Obama took office. But given the nearly universal sentiment that relations were at a low point, the failure to shift course begs for an explanation. We are left first with the possibility that in the case of Latin America, Barack Obama's worldview is similar to his most recent predecessors'. Their "leadership" in the Americas includes aid and encouragement to those who oppose governments on the left; an economic embargo and prohibition of travel to Cuba by nearly all U.S. citizens; a militarization of drug policy and a security-first approach to immigration; and attempts to provide open access for U.S. investors and goods in Latin America. President Obama may simply share a set of beliefs about Latin America held by at least the post-Cold War U.S. presidents. As a supplement to that idea, we might return to the idea of regional neglect. In that scenario, President Obama has been distracted by an ongoing economic crisis and more pressing foreign policy concerns in other parts of the world. So, without the time and energy for transforming Latin American policy, the default is continuity. But just as with the Bush years, there were certainly policy decisions being made — the Honduran coup, bases in Colombia, Bolivian trade preferences, and increases in deportations — that suggest it's not neglect, but rather how the Obama administration engages the region

that is the problem.

A second set of explanations would focus on the impact of U.S. domestic politics on foreign policy toward Latin America. With many of the contentious issues having both international and domestic political implications, significant Latino ethnic interest group activism present in the United States, and the lack of real military or hard security threat in the region, policy toward the rest of the Americas seems particularly open to domestic political calculations. In that case both Bush and Obama may be affected by similar political pressures; therefore, we get similar outcomes. Presidents from both parties after all want the support of U.S. agro-industry, which continues to be both heavily subsidized and then protected on the rare occasion when the Brazilians or another Latin American producer is still too competitive. Presidents from neither party seem willing to risk the potential loss of Electoral College votes that might result from challenging an anachronistic embargo that is still supported by many Cuban Americans in South Florida. Defense contractors have the same interest in securitizing drugs and immigration, and corporations want the government to protect private property in Latin America when nationalizations and expropriations are put on the agenda, regardless of who is in the White House.

In the end, we may really be left here with yet more evidence that the U.S. policy toward Latin America is embedded in larger structural forces that mean partisan differences in policy are usually more symbolic than real. The Caribbean is supposed to be "America's lake," Latin America's resources should be available for U.S. investors, and this is a region in which we are meant to lead. Regardless of who holds the presidency, the United States has expectations for the region — sign free trade agreements or eradicate coca crops — and it tries to cajole or coerce Latin American governments to fall into line. Control over Latin America was among the earliest U.S. foreign policy goals, and it

has really never changed. The current U.S. president is still more popular in the region than his predecessor, and his administration's language is somewhat more measured when he deals with anti-American sentiment, but in the end, he's still the leader of the "Colossus of the North." The change is really in the South, where resistance from Bolivian social movements and Brazilian or Venezuelan presidents is making it clear that the United States is no longer able to dictate policies in the region. Compounding the problem for the U.S. president is that the economic and ideological resources at his disposal are shrinking, and the competition from China and others outside the region is increasing.

While Obama faces a situation in the region made more difficult as a result of the Bush policies, we continue to see evidence of a similar overall approach to the region. The training of Latin American military personnel in the United States continues — at the renamed School of the Americas (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), much of the focus post-Cold War is on preparing those troops to fight against drug trafficking. The Central American corridor linking Mexico to Colombia is increasingly well stocked with U.S. military resources and U.S.-trained troops. The proposed access to seven bases in Colombia and the increasing militarization of the United States-Mexico border add to the security effect. Finally, free trade agreements with Mexico (NAFTA) and Central America (CAFTA-DR), as well as those awaiting ratification with Colombia and Panama, effectively marry U.S.

military power to economic interests in a way that would be familiar to past critics of U.S. imperialism in the Americas. President Obama has not aggressively pushed ratification of the trade agreements with Panama and Colombia to this point, but with the Republican pickup of seats in the 2010 election, he will have a new opportunity to extend the economic component of that security corridor further into the region.

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs slammed the "professional left" in an August 2010 briefing for their criticism of President Obama: "I hear these people saying he's like George Bush. Those people ought to be drug tested." He went on to suggest that the left wouldn't be satisfied until "we've eliminated the Pentagon." While it is tempting to respond with a sarcastic comment about how easy access to those drugs is guaranteed as long as the U.S. government bases its drug policies in the Pentagon, the argument here is that when it comes to Latin America, the "professional left" should feel free to argue that Obama is much more "like George Bush" than not. While he is still somewhat more welcome in Latin American capitals than his predecessor, that's largely because he is a more soft-spoken neighbor, not because he holds different views about the neighborhood itself. Given how big the opening left him by President Bush, Obama's failure to reshape the U.S. approach to Latin America is all the more shameful.

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

The Bard ISM Student Organization Controversy

LEON BOTSTEIN

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, Bard College and I as its president have been the object of unsubstantiated, exaggerated, and often vitriolic accusations regarding a student group on campus that has chosen to affiliate itself with an organization called the International Solidarity Movement. Some of those who have posted on blogs and written emails claim that ISM is a “terrorist” organization committed to the destruction of the State of Israel and its people. The information on the Bard ISM student website is being misrepresented to suggest that the College and its students are involved in illicit activities, encouraging and training terrorism.

When the first allegations came to our attention, I asked that College representatives meet with the students involved and find out the facts. The facts are, first, that ISM, like all student organizations at Bard, is neither sponsored nor endorsed by the college. No student organization represents or has ever represented the College. Student organizations are founded and supported by students and speak for them alone. Second, ISM’s activities, like those of all other student groups, are guided by the general rules of the College. There are dozens of student groups at Bard, ranging from the Bard Christian Fellowship, Chess Club, and Black Student Organization, to the Jewish Students Organization, Musical Theater Company, and

Darfur Action Campaign. The policies of the College include a steadfast commitment to the fundamental civil rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. With respect to violence, the College has a clear no-tolerance policy. Although there may be a constitutional right to bear arms under certain circumstances, that right cannot be exercised on the Bard campus. We aspire to a standard of civility, including freedom from fear of violence, appropriate to an institution of higher learning.

Our investigation has shown that the students affiliated with ISM have done nothing that remotely resembles the accusations leveled against them and the College. They have exercised their proper right to free speech and assembly. They have invited speakers and held meetings. I have asked members of the College administration to maintain close contact with the group to insure that their actions remain within College regulations and U.S. law. Contrary to what one might assume from recent hostile postings, the ISM operates legally within Israel and the United States and does not appear on any State Department terror watch list.

From what I have read, I personally do not share the views of ISM or the members of the small Bard student group, but that difference of opinion is precisely what needs protection. The students have every right to organize and to affiliate so long as no laws are violated. Accusations regarding improper use of facilities or improper conduct require evidence and due process. Slander and hyperbole are insufficient.

Particularly in the wake of the shooting of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords, I want to take this opportunity to urge those who are

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outraged by ISM to temper their rhetoric and look at the facts. At stake here at Bard is not terrorism or violence, but a deep disagreement regarding politics in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Colleges and universities must be safe havens for freedom of expression

Ideas we fear cannot be
fought through censorship.

and dissent on the most sensitive and contentious issues. Crucial to a democracy and the education of its citizens is the ability, with civility, to listen, learn, understand, debate, and rebut ideas and claims, particularly those we find wrong or dangerous. Ideas we fear cannot be fought through censorship. If we believe the views of others to be seriously in error, we need to use argument, reason, and evidence to persuade. Creating a climate of fear by obscuring the truth, engaging in character assassination, exaggerating the facts, and suggesting the existence of activities that do not in fact exist is not constructive. Insulting those with whom one disagrees, vilifying them, and impugning their integrity are not proper means in a college environment — or in the public arena of democracy — to register dissent and advocate one's opinions.

We would like to think that the Internet has become a vehicle of diversity and free expression that will enhance public debate. But it appears that the opposite is also true. The Internet is capable of fueling a new kind of hysteria that spreads like wildfire, encouraging guilt by association and the forging of premature conclusions without benefit of evidence, poisoning personal relationships and the atmosphere of public debate.

For all those who are writing about ISM

in an effort to create a campaign to badger the College into preventing the students from maintaining their group, the following statement constitutes my answer as the President of Bard. The College will maintain its firm commitment to the right of students and all members of the community to exercise free speech and the right of assembly and association. The rules of the College will be maintained. All activities at the College center on the free exchange of ideas, public service, and the education of individuals. Furthermore, the College maintains no political positions. Each individual on the campus is entitled to his or her own beliefs. The Bard community, I am pleased to report, has representatives of every imaginable political and philosophical persuasion, and has in its chaplaincy representatives of all major religions, just as it supports and honors atheists and agnostics. The College is therefore neither liberal nor conservative. It is committed to a high standard of excellence in the conduct of inquiry, scholarship, research, teaching, and debate.

On a personal note, for those who have cast aspersions on me as an individual and as a member of the Jewish community, I am pleased to put the following in the public record. I was born to Russian-Polish Jewish parents, most of whose family members did not survive the Holocaust. My father was the only survivor in his family. I came to the United States from Europe as a small child. Two of my uncles died in the Warsaw Ghetto. My aunt was a righteous gentile honored by Yad Vashem. I am a long-standing member of the Conservative Synagogue in Kingston, NY. I am a contributor to the UJA Federation. I have served since 2003 as Music Director of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, pro bono. As a proud member of the Jewish community, I cherish the heritage to which I was born. That heritage is defined in part by the thinking of Maimonides, Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. The

Jewish spiritual and intellectual tradition with which I associate myself is one of dissent, debate, and commitment to reason and argument. As a Jew who is a citizen of the United States, I am particularly indebted to this country's protec-

tion of fundamental civil rights, including free speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and the equal protection of all, particularly those in the minority.

It is ironic that the dissent that our constitution protects and that exists on our campus about the politics in the Middle East (as it does on many other campuses throughout the nation) is no wider than the dissent that flourishes today in the State of Israel among its citizens, which can be followed by any willing observer in the pages of the Israeli press. Therefore I urge those who disagree with ISM and wish to protect and strengthen the State of Israel to take a step back from slander, distortion, and vilification, and instead make the best arguments they can as to why the views they fear are wrong.

There is no doubt that the maintenance of democracy and its freedoms contains the inherent danger that freedom will be abused by those whose purpose is to undo it. That risk is unavoidable in a democracy and one that we must take. This country is already reeling from the inevitable fear and self-censorship that will follow in the wake of the shooting of Representative Giffords. A climate is brewing in which people will be increasingly reluctant to assemble and express their views out of fear for their safety. Our universities and colleges need to resist this trend. We must, with courage, take the risk of defending freedom and democracy by the exercise of freedom itself.

GIFT PLANNING

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A Young Radical's View of Marriage

AMY LITTLEFIELD

A UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN STUDY¹ found that becoming a wife creates seven added hours of housework per week for women. For men, housework decreases by one hour per week after marriage. Another way to say this is that gender roles some like to claim are dead are in fact alive and well. The study took a “nationally representative” sample of couples (including, presumably, some who believed they were flouting the division of labor) and relied on time-diary data from 2005.

Beyond household chores, radicals have objected to marriage on multiple fronts and for obvious reasons. For Emma Goldman, the institution of marriage crippled women in the same way that capitalism crippled men: “It is like that other paternal arrangement—capitalism,” she wrote in the essay “Marriage and Love,” published in the 1917 collection *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Capitalism “robs man of his birthright, stunts his growth, poisons his body, keeps him in ignorance, in poverty and dependence, and then institutes charities that thrive on the last vestige of man's self-respect,” she wrote. And marriage does the same to women, all under the guise of protecting them.

“The institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute dependent,” wrote Goldman. “It incapacitates her for life's struggle, annihilates her social consciousness, paralyzes her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare, a travesty on human character.”

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Engels wrote in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that the monogamous family and its marriage ties, “based on the supremacy of the man,” were created for the secure transfer of property rights — the “express purpose” of such ties was to “produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property.” Both land and wealth were primarily exchanged through marriage as far back as there are writer records.²

For proof that the connection between marriage and property — and the notion of wives as property of men — is still alive, albeit in mutated form, we need look no further than pop artist Beyoncé's recent hit “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)” and its refrain: “If you liked it then you should have put a ring on it.” Accompanied by sporty dance moves and intended as a ballad of female empowerment, the message is nonetheless a regressive one: that a man can stake a claim on a woman through marriage, if he has the financial capital to do so.

Feminists, certainly, have had their objections to marriage, not merely for the extra housework it creates. Marlene Dixon called the institution of marriage “the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women.”³ Betty Freidan wrote in the feminist classic *The Feminine Mystique* that marriage stunted the mental growth of middle-class housewives. Simone de Beauvoir had no use for marriage, writing in the hallmark *The Second Sex* that “Marriage is obscene in principle insofar as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge.”⁴

Then there is the fact that non-heterosexual couples cannot marry in the majority of places

in the United States. While conservatives argue against same-sex marriage on the basis of “tradition,” historians such as Nancy Cott have noted that change is the only true tradition in the history of marriage, which has fluctuated according to evolving views on race, sex, and religion. For Cott, the exclusion of same-sex couples conflicts with a historical trend toward gender equality in marriage.⁵

Among people who can and do marry, data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention show for every two couples who married, one got divorced in 2009.

In fact, marriage appears to be failing as a model for many families. According to an analysis of 2000 Census data by the group Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice, only 22.4 percent of households included a married heterosexual couple with biological offspring. That group has used such data to reframe “family values,” expand the conservative definition of “family” and promote policies that support all families.⁶

Marriage also appears to be more popular among whites, leading some writers, including Joy Jones in an infamous 2006 *Washington Post* piece, to suggest that “Marriage is for white people.” A study of 2007 Census data showed 80 percent of white, non-Hispanic family groups and 82 percent of Asian family groups were married couples, while such couples composed only 45 percent of black family groups and 65 percent of Hispanic family groups. Black feminists have argued that economic inequalities rooted in racism and slavery are partly to blame for the gap. Add to that the fact that one in nine black men ages 20–34 are incarcerated (compared to 1 in 30 men overall in the same category) and the likelihood of black women finding partners of the same race decreases substantially.⁷

But that has not stopped critics from alternately blaming black men and black women for not marrying. The Wedded Bliss Foundation, for example, creator of the event Black Mar-

riage Day, encourages marriage as a stabilizing force for the black community and a way to reduce single parenthood, telling black women — in language eerily similar to the what 1950s magazines told white, middle-class housewives

How does one balance personal happiness with the struggle for collective liberation?

— that “Marriage is the best environment for a woman to be all she can be.”⁸

Marriage is a vehicle through which the state regulates which pairings are acceptable — as we saw with the historical criminalization of mixed-race marriages — and which people are fit to raise families — as we see with the modern attempts to ban gay marriage and prohibit gay families from adopting children. Throughout history, marriage has been used as a way for the state to regulate bodies and sexualities, determining which people are fit to marry, disenfranchising people of color, and punishing women from lower classes who did not or could not fit the mold of the acceptable wife. The criminalization of mixed-race marriage continues in a certain way, as the state regulates marriages between immigrants and residents, deciding which couples have the legitimate right to live together on U.S. soil. Marriage is one of the most personal and prevalent ways the state involves itself in the private lives of people.

So what possible good can marriage offer a young person with political convictions? Tax incentives, for a start. A chance at a ceremony paid for by other people and attended by loved ones who support the union. An easy way to inform strangers of the status of one's heart.

A cascade of domestic implements related to cooking, cleaning, and keeping house. But is that worth entering an institution that is imbued with sexism, racism, state control, and social privilege, and potentially taking on an extra seven hours a week of housework?

SUCH QUESTIONS WEIGH ON MY MIND as I reach the age where people I know are actually entering the “obscene” and crippling institution.

Years ago, when I first registered for the social media website Facebook, it was routine for people to virtually “marry” close friends by selecting a friend’s name on the profile section dedicated to relationship status. By elevating close female friendships over any potential marriage bonds, my friends and I mocked the institution of marriage and played with gender norms, albeit in a superficial way. Despite being in a real-life, heterosexual partnership, I remain “engaged” to a college friend on Facebook, a status that has recently caused confusion among family and friends, who have begun to notice that I am now out of college and at the age when I might marry. This, I think, marks a significant milestone.

For me, the question of whether to marry is tied to the larger issue of how fully to embrace other institutional privileges. For example, I can afford to own a car, but does that necessarily mean I should buy one, and thus support environmental degradation and foreign wars fought for oil? For those of us who choose to live in civilization — and even, I would imagine, for those who live off-the-grid and use bicycles for transportation and rainwater for sustenance — these questions connect the personal to the political. How does one balance personal happiness with the struggle for collective liberation?

Like the choice to own a car, marriage is a personal decision connected to the oppression of others. If I choose to get married, am I turning my back on friends and comrades in same-sex relationships who never can?⁹ Am I supporting

an unequal institution imbued with racism and misogyny? Am I committing to extra hours of dish-washing and floor-mopping? Marriage, it should be noted, is less practically useful than a car. One can certainly get around in society without it, albeit with fewer economic benefits.

Just as some educators may choose public-school teaching in order to reform the system from inside, some radicals may seize the opportunity to reform marriage, to create their own, more-balanced reality within the institution. Yet what the University of Michigan study seems to suggest is that gender roles do in fact still govern relationships, even, perhaps, for progressive couples who may believe they are equally dividing housework. The difficulty of balancing family with work — a balance all “modern” women are expected to accomplish with grace — is a daunting prospect for me, and one that I believe has driven my early attempts to decide on a career quickly. So far, my like-minded partner and I do a pretty good job of balancing housework chores. But if we were to keep track of our hours doing housework, as the couples in the study did, I wonder if we would be surprised by what we discovered.

Some couples — including one I know well — have chosen to hold commitment ceremonies, which are like weddings minus the wedding. There is no exchanging of rings, changing of names or signing of government paperwork, and the lack of tax benefits is balanced by the benefit of — well, not having to be married.

Still, plenty of modern-day radicals and feminists do choose to marry, and some have inspired quite a backlash in the process. Jessica Valenti, founder of the blog *Feministing*, has written about her marriage ceremony, where she skipped the white dress, had both parents walk her down the aisle, kept her last name and confidently entered what she believed would be an equal partnership.¹⁰ But when her wedding was featured in the *New York Times* Style section, feminists and misogynists clambered over each other in their haste to call Valenti a hypocrite.

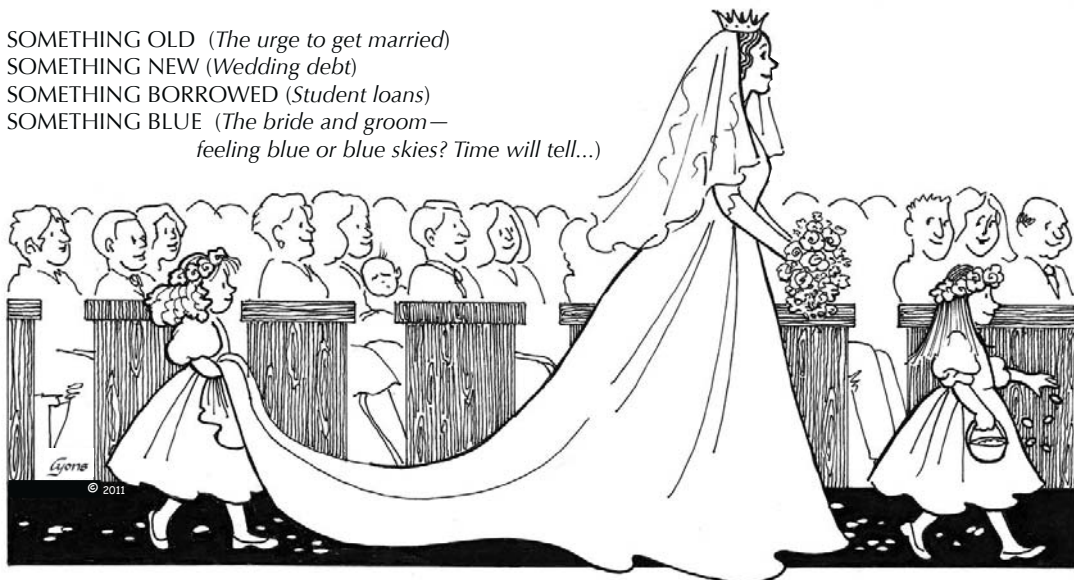
Perhaps more than anything else, that debate revealed that today's feminists are conflicted about marriage (and that today's sexists are enabled by the Internet). Many young feminists, myself included, are internally conflicted over the prospect of marrying.

Personally, I like the idea of having a public ceremony — minus the religious trappings — where I declare my love for my partner in front of those I care about, and then we eat cake. I even like the idea of both of us being dressed up when we do this. But, particularly with the divorce rate as high as it is, I don't feel eager to enter an institution that I associate with social inequality and housework. In my foggy vision of the future, my partner and I stand before a gathering of family and friends and recite love poems or self-made vows, then share a meal with people we love. At some point, maybe, there is dancing, which, unlike marriage, Emma Goldman might have appreciated. Then we move on with our equal and independent lives, with some commitment to togetherness and chore-sharing. It's a simple idea, and one more ancient than the origin of property rights. Best of all, it means I don't have to dump my friend on Facebook.

NOTES

1. The 2008 findings were part of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (<http://ns.umich.edu/htdocs/releases/story.php?id=6452>).
2. Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005) 48.
3. Marlene Dixon, "Why Women's Liberation? Racism and Male Supremacy" (<http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/UHS/APUSH/2nd%20Sem/Articles%20Semester%202/8%20Dixon.htm>).
4. Simone de Beauvoir, trans. H.M. Parshley, *The Second Sex* (Vintage, 1989) 444.
5. Nancy Cott, "No Objections: What history tells us about remaking marriage," *Boston Review* January/February 2011 (<http://bostonreview.net/BR36.1/cott.php>).
6. See <http://reproductivejustice.org>
7. See "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008," The Pew Center on the States (http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=35904).
8. See <http://www.weddedblissinc.com/>
9. This is not to say all people in same-sex relationships want to get married. There is a strong and right-minded branch of the queer rights movement that believes marriage, imbued in capitalism, oppression of women and state control is nothing to envy.
10. Jessica Valenti, "My big feminist wedding," *The Guardian*, April 24, 2009 (www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/apr/24/feminist-wedding-jessica-valenti).

SOMETHING OLD (*The urge to get married*)
 SOMETHING NEW (*Wedding debt*)
 SOMETHING BORROWED (*Student loans*)
 SOMETHING BLUE (*The bride and groom—
 feeling blue or blue skies? Time will tell...*)



The Greater Toronto Workers Assembly A Hopeful Experiment

HERMAN ROSENFELD

IT IS A SAD IRONY, that in the midst of the deepest economic slump since the Depression, it is working class and socialist political institutions that have been in crisis. Even with the inspiring new movements in a number of U.S. states, the Mideast and some European countries coming up on the political horizon, the larger union movement here has remained mired in a sluggish defensiveness. As well, there are no class-based political parties or movements that can articulate and organize for an alternative to a political and economic system based on private capital accumulation.

With an initial discrediting of neoliberalism that followed in the wake of the near financial meltdown, it now seems to be consolidating itself, as governments and mainstream political parties define their exit strategies of austerity. The recent and inspiring events in Madison, Wisconsin show that there remains a potential and necessity to respond, both in terms of an immediate fight back, but in a deeper, wider, and more political way. But we are living in a kind of transitional era, where the old forms of working class organization and politics are sorely in need of a replacement, and the theoretical and practical bases of those replacements are still in the process of being born.

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The Greater Toronto Workers Assembly is one attempt to create a working class institution that tries to address this crisis within the class and on the left on the level of a city, in this case, Toronto, in the province of Ontario, Canada.¹

The Assembly seeks to do a number of things at the same time:

- Create and maintain an organization based on the common class interests of unionized workers, the unorganized, the unemployed, people in temporary and part-time jobs and other forms of precariousness, the poor and student and community activists;
- Develop a common basis for socialist, anarchist and other groups and individuals and others on the anti-capitalist left, to work together in struggles, to contribute to building a common anti-capitalist political movement;
- Create a centre of discussion, analysis and struggle, helping to build resistance to the crisis measures, and contributing to moving it to a higher level.

The Assembly was created in October 2009 and so far has had mixed results. Inspired by American political activist Bill Fletcher, Jr, and others, it is an exciting and creative way of trying to address some of the chronic weaknesses of the left and working class movements. It has brought together socialists and other radicals from across very different movements in a unique common project. It has provided a new space and reference point for public (and to a limited extent) private sector union struggles and transformation efforts. And it has started a number of campaigns and political initiatives.

It remains an experimental project, subject to important weaknesses and pressures, which

makes it tentative with no guarantee of survival in the longer term. The lack of working class and, in particular trade union militancy, and the general political environment of neoliberal hegemony provide a larger political backdrop that is not conducive to building a collective socialist or anti-capitalist project, based on the working class. Different political traditions and views, lack of collective experience working together, different priorities, alternative visions of what the assembly is and should be, as well as the contradictory nature and divisions within the working class base we are trying to reach, all act as centrifugal or divisive forces making the process difficult to sustain. Nonetheless, the Assembly has taken some important beginning steps.

Why an Assembly?

THE PROPOSAL FOR THE WORKERS ASSEMBLY was raised by the Labour Committee of the Socialist Project, a small group of left activists and intellectuals, which saw itself as contributing towards the creation of a larger, socialist political movement. It was based on a number of concerns:

- The segmentation of the working class: The deep divisions in the working class created by 30 years of neoliberalism — rooted in dramatic labor market transformations — have contributed to huge differentials in collective experiences and living and working situations, resulting in a politically divided class. Indeed, the very notion of working class is seen as strange and contested by many and needs to be rebuilt through collective experiences of solidarity and struggle, along with political education and organization;
- Decline and conservatism of the union movement: Unions deal with the specific needs of their members in particular sectors. The neoliberal period has reinforced this, leading them to ignore the needs of the rest of the working class, the unemployed, those in communities (even trade union members in communities), and those most oppressed by capital. (For example, the otherwise exem-

plary struggle in Toronto, led by the local labor council to raise the minimum wage, ignored demands of anti-poverty movements to raise social service rates.). During this prolonged period for the most part, they have refused to challenge their dependence on employers

Real change must go towards a larger political project that aims to bring the class together and challenge the system as a whole.

through raising independent political demands and struggles. Without a conscious political and organizational transformation, unions can be defensive, isolated, and an easy target for employers.

- Social movements based in communities tend to be isolated from the rest of the class: Social movements of the poor, unemployed, and other segments of the working class tend to narrow their work to their own particular issues and can begin to see their struggles as being apart from the larger class, and in opposition to unionized workers. Many become dependent on the state for provision of services. They are also prone to a politics and ideology of a kind of semi-anarchism.² Both social movements and trade unions are locked into a practice characterized by a series of demonstrations and protests. Real change must go beyond this towards a larger political project that aims to bring the class together and challenge the system as a whole.

- Divisions between groups and individuals in the socialist and anti-capitalist left and their lack of a real presence in the political life of working class people: There have been few spaces for the radical left to work together on a common project of building a socialist or anti-capitalist political movement larger than themselves and engage in the necessary common experiences and theoretical work. A key element of this is working to root their politics

in the struggles of working people.

The need for a different kind of working class organization was made apparent in the wake of a series of public sector strikes that occurred in southern Ontario in the summer of 2009.³ In Toronto, the “third way” city administration demanded a series of contract concessions from the municipal unions, regarding sick days and retirement benefits. Using the same false arguments made against autoworkers in imposing concessionary demands in the bankruptcy reorganization of the U.S.-based auto companies (e.g. “autoworkers make \$70 per hour”), they demonized public sector workers. The municipal unions and the local labor council did not educate and mobilize their members and did almost no education with the public. The strikers were politically isolated and, even though they fought off many of the concession demands, suffered a political defeat — which left a feeling amongst many working people in the city, that somehow, they were “privileged.”

What contributed to the problem was the fact that much of organized labor in Toronto had been politically tied to the Mayor and the left-center group of city counselors that remained silent throughout the struggle. The latter’s politics were based on an alliance with a group of business interests that fancied itself as “progressive,” even though it was based in finance and real estate interests. The “neoliberal urbanism”⁴ of the administration and the alliance with the formal labor movement contributed to the isolation and political defeat of the unions.

In the municipal elections that took place in the fall of 2011, the administration and its allies suffered a stunning defeat at the hands of a right-wing populist mayoralty candidate, with ties to Canada’s major right-wing political establishment. The political isolation of the union movement from the working class population of the city, the lack of a left alternative to the social democratic/neoliberal alliance with the official labor institutions and the demobiliza-

tion and defensiveness of the left in the face of the resurgent right, demonstrated the need for a left/anti-capitalist political voice in the city and, in particular, the labor movement.

Creating the Assembly

THE SOCIALIST PROJECT sent out invitations to activists engaged in working class communities, left trade union activists and colleagues on the anti-capitalist left. It called for a meeting to propose the idea of an Assembly to them. This allowed a committed core of people — beyond the SP — to build towards the new project. From that core, the organizers put together a series of consultations, given the name of “consultas.”⁵ The idea was to consult with trade unionists, the radical left and community-based workers’ movements, both to test the ideas underlying the Assembly, but also to enrich and transform the project.

There were three consultas. The first brought together workers organizing inside unionized auto plants and anti-poverty organizers. It explored the similarities, differences, and experiences of building resistance and doing political education. Participants learned that political organizing, mutual solidarity — and even building a common class identity — require different kinds of approaches, depending on the spaces in which we work.

The second brought together a group of left trade unionists to discuss how to relate to the activist and progressive Toronto labor council. Participants asked, “What can we provide that the labor council can’t?” and, “How can we build a solidaristic relationship with the Labour Council and its campaigns, while maintaining our political and organizational independence?” It was a difficult but rewarding discussion that explored the limits of the mainstream labor movement, and talked about the need to provide a class-struggle approach to employers and governments, and an anti-capitalist orientation to political campaigns. It also emphasized the need to define the overall labor movement in a broad

and inclusive manner, which must include and organize the unemployed, precarious workers and the poor.

The third brought together a small number of activists to discuss the relationship between class and other forms of social identity under capitalism.

Launch of the Assembly

THE FIRST ASSEMBLY WAS HELD over the first weekend of October 2009 and had mixed results. About 100 people attended from across the left and key activist communities (anti-poverty, immigrant rights, left rank-and-file members of the public sector labor movement, student groups, environmentalists, etc.). But it was weak on private-sector unionists, communities of color, indigenous groups and feminists. Although the Assembly has come far since then, these components still remain weak areas for the project.

The first few Assemblies — held approximately 3 months apart — dealt with a series of questions that would set the project on its feet: the nature of the organization, financing, the geographical space, the vision statement, the form of internal organization, coordination of leadership and Assembly campaigns.

There were differences over whether the Assembly would be a coalition of existing organizations. This question was central to the entire conception of the Assembly — and it has been a bone of contention throughout the life of the organization. If it were to be a coalition, it could never be more than a coordinating center for existing political projects, some single-issue community movements, and other political organizations of the left. The organizers had a different conception, which was formally endorsed in the first two Assemblies: that the organization would be made up of individual members, working to build a different kind of politico/organizational form. While it was formally endorsed and resolved, the nature of the organization and its relationship to other

ongoing political and organizational projects in working class communities of Toronto still remains, at least in practice, an issue.

The Assembly easily agreed that Toronto would be the central focus of its activities, but it remained open to the formation of sister projects in other cities. By the end of 2010, there were fledgling efforts to create Assemblies in the Ontario cities of Kingston and Ottawa.

The organization adopted a vision statement that provided a flavor of the kind of project that the GTWA would hopefully become. (The statement is available at: <http://www.workersassembly.ca/vision>)

A number of working committees were established that have continued to operate: Internal Education (which has organized a series of “Coffee House” discussions on critical political issues for members and supporters); Membership and Finance; a Labor Caucus, a Culture Committee, and a Campaign Committee. The role of the latter was to debate and discuss both criteria and suggestions for campaigns that would become the central activity of the Assembly.

Over a series of months and through three Assemblies, the committee organized a series of collective discussions that resulted in the selection of a Free and Accessible Transit campaign. It was ratified in a heated debate at the Assembly. The campaign was developed in the spirit of the Right to the City campaigns being organized in some U.S. cities. The idea is that public transit — central to the needs of working people across the city, and a key strategic element in creating good jobs, dealing with climate change, and structuring life in the city — should be free of fares and treated as a non-commodified right for all people. This is a highly charged and controversial demand, but forces the Assembly to confront some of the key elements of neoliberal urbanism, and engage in the process of political education and mobilization of working class people of all strata.

Another theme of the campaign was ac-

cessibility — the availability of transit to all communities in the city, especially the poor and people in communities of color in outer and inner suburban areas and people with disabilities.

The controversy stemmed from the reluctance of the defensive and traditionally business-oriented transit union in the city of Toronto and the reticence of the mainstream labor movement in Toronto to go beyond the traditional corporatist approach of that union. This became less of a factor as the neoliberal attacks on the labor movement and the public sector started increasing in the ensuing months.

Over time, the transit campaign organized meetings in the downtown and inner suburban areas, wrote and distributed educational materials, co-organized a protest over accessibility and a street rally. It has begun to participate in community activities and is co-sponsoring a summer protest demanding free transit during smog and weather emergency days.

The Labor Caucus initially organized itself as a kind of caucus for union members, mostly based in the city's public sector unions. But it also included social activists close to working class communities in the city and union activists whose main center of work was not in their unions, but in social movements in communities, such as anti-poverty, migrant workers, and non-status people. Initially, this enriched the political orientation of the caucus and militated against a narrower concern with the economic interests of individual union contract battles. The labor caucus chose to focus on a campaign in defense of the public sector unions and public services. This was also ratified by the entire Assembly.

The Assembly Labor Caucus organized a number of forums on the need to defend public sector unions, the rights of public sector workers, public services and the importance of building alliances between public sector unions and social service recipients. We held a labor conference in February and agreed to organize a series of educationals on the relationship of

capitalism to challenges being faced by public sector unionists, a flying squad, and a larger series of forums.

The Assembly also set up a committee to work on plans for doing education during the G-20 protests in the summer of 2010. Later in the history of the Assembly, a committee was set up to work on International Solidarity issues and another called the Feminist Action Committee was in the process of getting itself organized as I wrote this article.

The first few Assemblies experimented with an Interim Coordinating Committee framework, where the Visions Statement and basic organizational format was worked out. Later it became an elected coordinating body, but it included most of the same folks that had volunteered previously.

Assembly Challenges

THE ASSEMBLY IS VERY MUCH A WORK in progress and faces a number of key challenges which will determine its success or failure.

They include:

- Learning to grow together through political differences: A big challenge for the Assembly is to create an environment where those of us from different political experiences and ideological spaces can develop common understandings and perspectives, while honestly airing our differences. This can really happen only while we engage in ongoing struggles and processes, and debate and summarize our experiences.
- One such experience was the protests against the G-20 meetings, held last summer in the city. While we collectively participated in educational activities, we had major differences over strategy and tactics of the actual street protests, and in particular, how to relate to those associated with trashing stores and mild forms of property violence. The debates were extremely difficult and taught us a number of important lessons in moving forward. It clarified and highlighted important differences — and helped us develop key methods of maintaining dialogue and debate. Many

of us made mistakes in relating to those with whom we differed during this experience, and not all of the political differences would be resolvable (or even could be accommodated within the Assembly project). We did end up working together to oppose the massive police violence and state repression that continues against political activists and protesters.

- Within some of the committees of the Assembly, we have had political debates that need to be resolved. For example, in the Labour Caucus, there are differences regarding the level of emphasis we want to place on working to transform the existing union movement, or working with workers outside of organized unions.

- Responding to political openings and contexts: The election of a right-wing populist mayor in Toronto and the likelihood of governments of similar political orientations coming to power at the provincial and federal levels place enormous pressures on working people in the city. Like many U.S. locations, an era of austerity is beginning to unfold, with attacks against public programs, the poor and unions a key feature. Inspired by the Madison uprising, it seems that resistance is also beginning to build in the labor movement in Toronto and among community social activists.⁶ What role does a project like the Assembly have at a moment like this? Should we concentrate on building the resistance movement? What kind of educational role should we provide and how do we find space to organize and deliver it? How do we balance working with unions such as the public sector workers locals that are organizing their own educational and mobilizational campaigns, and the need to build left and class-oriented movements within unions? What can we do to create new relationships between social movements in communities and unions, and how can we bring an anti-capitalist or socialist orientation to them? How can we build our own movement through these experiences and challenges? These are all critical questions we need to answer as we look to operate in this new context.

- Different movements — different approaches and emphases: There are a series

of left and activist movements that operate outside the Assembly — each of which have different kinds and levels of relation to the Assembly. As other activists become more and more disenchanted with the accommodation of social democracy with capital, some of them — who have been traditionally part of the Canadian social democratic party, the NDP — have been organizing left critiques of social democratic political practice, but remain within the political orbit of the party. There are socialist political groups who work within a seventies-type Marxist-Leninist discourse, but do solid work with disadvantaged youth and produce newspapers and leaflets. Finally, there are social movement organizations that work within specific segments of the working class, such as the poor, non-status people and precarious workers. Each of these has its unique perspectives on how to build towards more radical outcomes: advocates for the explicitly political projects have attended Assembly events and even General Assemblies, but have not figured out how best to relate to the project. The Assembly, for its part, has welcomed many of those from these movements — but it isn't clear how the Assembly project can accommodate their participation. The social movement groups tend to be preoccupied with their (important and socially progressive) struggles, and tend to see the Assembly as a base of support for them, but have not necessarily bought into the idea of building a larger, class-based project. Those groups that are rooted in particular forms of semi-anarchist world-views, reject some of the premises of the Assembly, yet wish to maintain relations and forms of participation and mutual support. These issues need to be worked out over time.

- Differences over the nature of the Assembly: This question contributes to a number of differences within the Assembly over the nature of the project itself. While formally an individual membership based organization, many activists from already-existing social movements still see the Assembly as a kind of a coalition, and argue that it should be more of a resource for them and a collective colleague of their movements. This difference remains

apparent in the continuing debate over dues.

- **Gender and Race issues:** Like much of the far left in the city, there is a low level of participation from people of color. Feminists within the Assembly have worked to increase the role and number of women activists and have organized women to chair most of the General Assembly activities. There is also a new Feminist Action Committee. The Assembly is working hard to create a space where people of color and socialist feminists are comfortable. As the Assembly expands its base outside of the activist and academic left, it will increase the number of people of color. An increasing percentage of unionized workers in Toronto are people of color and women and the right-wing agenda of the new city administration will hit immigrant communities hard. Some of the campaigns — such as Transit — have already organized activities in these communities.

Growth and Survival at the Dawn of the Age of Austerity

THE PRINCIPAL CHALLENGE for this experiment to work in the longer run, aside from the points raised above, is its ability to build a beachhead for a class-based, anti-capitalist or socialist orientation within the broader working class of Toronto. In an environment of growing resistance which seems to be building as employers and governments re-launch their neoliberal restructuring project, it means creating a pole of reference that offers the potential of an anti-capitalist politics, that can address the actual concerns of unionists looking to transform their unions; people in working class neighborhoods looking for decent paying and secure jobs and some democratic input in transforming their communities, and working class people who want to go beyond simply protesting. No such

political option exists today in Toronto, let alone Canada. Our ability to move in this direction will be the real test of this experiment.

NOTES

1. Some of the points raised here were previously included in, “A New Type of Political Organization? The Greater Toronto Workers Assembly” by Herman Rosenfeld and Carlo Fanelli, the *Socialist Project Bulletin*, August 6, 2010, and “Toronto Assembly Ties Together Everyone Hammered by Recession,” Herman Rosenfeld, *Labor Notes*, November 20, 2010.
2. There are different forms of anarchism involved in the movement in Toronto: some closely identify with the working class and work in the Assembly, others reject such identification.
3. “Lessons Learned: Assessing the 2009 City of Toronto Strike,” Julia Barnett & Carlo Fanelli, *Socialist Project Bulletin*, January 19, 2010, and “Toronto City Workers on Strike: Battling Neoliberal Urbanism,” Greg Albo and Herman Rosenfeld, *Socialist Project Bulletin*, July 2009.
4. The application of neoliberal principles and practices to the operation of the state at the city level. In this instance, there is a pretense of “progressive” politics, but it remains rooted in the dominance of private capital accumulation and elites rooted in the financial and real estate development sectors, and looks to reorganize city governing institutions to enhance the profit-making capacity of these elites. It also looks to reorganize communities and labor markets in order to accommodate these goals.
5. The term “consulta,” originally described the large public consultations organized by the Zapatista movement in Mexico. A local Canadian reform project used the term to refer to their consultative processes, via the Canadian activist and author Judy Rebick. The SP appropriated it from them.
6. One of the principal municipal unions in Toronto has indeed learned many lessons from its political defeat in 2009 and has developed an educational and mobilizational campaign against privatization and in defence of public services. The Toronto Labour Council has also begun to organize against the right-wing agenda.

Letter from Ireland: Zoom, Zoom

The Irish General Election 2011

LILY MURPHY

*Zoom zoom zoom zoom / The world is in a mess
With politics and taxes / And people grinding axes
There's no happiness.*

— SO SANG ELLA FITZGERALD ALL THOSE YEARS AGO

"IT IS NOT THE COUNTLESS CUPS of coffee I drink that keep me up all night, it's the thought of this country going down the drain." One night while standing at a bus stop in town in the usual summer weather of rain and cold wind, that is what one man roughly somewhere in his fifties said to me in conversation and to be brutally honest it was something which took me aback. On the bus I sat and thought and asked myself why would someone like him be so upset about the state of the country because he sure won't be around when we are still paying for the greed-filled sins of those whom we trusted to govern us, sure I more than likely won't be around; I will be long gone in the ground and Ireland will still be paying for the sins of her offspring.

February 25th marks the day Irish people will go to the polls. It may mark the day when a great change will come to the Irish political landscape, or it will mark the day of a change of hands but not a change in policy. In 1897 the Easter rising patriot James Connolly wrote: "If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin castle, unless you set about the organization of a socialist republic your efforts would be in vain." Connolly's words were ultimately prophetic: in 1922 we did

indeed hoist the green flag over Dublin castle and remove the English army from at least one part of the island but as the years traded themselves in for decades, they showed that we as a nation were prepared to fumble in our greasy tills and while our master's accents changed, nothing else did. The setting up of a semi-independent state proved that the nationality of the oppressor had changed into a native one; it proved that society did not change — it remained oppressed and Connolly's words prove timeless.

But onwards now we go into the thirty-first general election this state will witness, ninety years after the founding of this state, ninety years and we have come through everything a little country such as this could have succumbed to. Ireland has always been a country in the grip of woes, political, economic, and social, but we have not succumbed to defeat. November, 2010 saw the introduction of the international monetary fund to sort out our affairs; our sovereignty has been rattled, but our sense of identity remains stalwart and true; we Irish are after all, a stubborn bunch!

The mighty mess that Ireland has been dragged into by the few who hold power has shone the international spotlight on the emerald isle, and it causes one to question how such a small country of little over three million people could not sort out its own socioeconomic affairs. On the day the IMF men walked the streets of Dublin, the domestic media howled as if it were the black and tans back on the streets to kick

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the living Christmas out of us. That very day I walked through the streets of my own town where I bumped into an old college friend who couldn't hold her tongue regarding how she will be on a plane to Australia in a few months to,

“If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin castle, unless you set about the organization of a socialist republic your efforts would be in vain.”

— JAMES CONNOLLY

as she said, “get out of this dump.” I felt sick to the gut: this dump is her country; this dump is my country; this dump is the country that so much blood was shed for, this dump.

With negative attitudes and feelings of despondency and without the ideals of brilliant minds and social values in place, Ireland as a country has proven to be impotent; it has proved so by asking for help off the dreaded IMF. Ireland has experienced ninety years of some sort of independence, it was a good run I suppose; that is what my drunken friend spat out after one too many beers at a house party one night when the talk turned political. I agreed, yes it was a good run, ninety years: it took long enough to shit in one's nest, I said in response.

But that was 2010; this is now 2011 and the people of Ireland can take their anger out on the ballot box, vote out the corruption which has brought *Roisin Dubh* to her knees. Sometimes when I try to talk of the confidence and expectations this country can have I find myself being more pessimistic instead of being more optimistic, and I have every right to be. I was born into a society where Celtic tiger notions gave way to an absurd guarantee that one would

enjoy social protection, a job for life, a big house and a bigger car, and even a social standing that our ancestors could only have dreamed of, but all of these notions were nothing more than false notions built on unstable capitalist ideals. Now they have left us feeling dumb and desperate.

As a country what have we come to and where the hell are we going? I asked myself as I recently read in a newspaper how a young mother died of hypothermia in her flat when the communal heating in the derelict and nearly empty block of flats where she was living with her children was turned off by the council during one of the coldest winters Ireland has seen in years. Amid all of the hype of a general election, we must not forget the reality of modern Ireland, such as that tragic story. The grit and rawness of modern living in a broken society must be addressed and the razzmatazz of a general election must not become just that, all glitz and glory. It must be about the people because that is what democracy is supposed to be, for the people by the people.

Unlike the people's revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, no great revolt occurred here in recent times; the only rumblings were the likes of Pearse and Emmet rolling in their graves. Yes, we could have built a socialist republic; we could have built a democratic republic; instead we made do with a priest-ridden capitalist regime, which is still struggling to come out of the big economic crash of 2008. It got me thinking about a utopian society that could have been and, due to the fall of capitalism, is still a reality and can be built on the foundations of the crumbled capitalist system. From the pub talk of barstool socialists and from my utter disgust at the road which this country has taken, I went away and familiarized myself with one Robert Owen, of course no longer living because he died in the 19th century, but Owen's vision of a utopian society gave birth to New Lanark, a physical example of how a just and equal society can actually happen. From a dream can spring nations.

As this election brings about the usual sound bites and mud flinging politics, it must be stressed that this will be the one and only opportunity for Ireland to go forward, but in order to go forward we must first look back, look back at the mistakes that have been made and vow never to make them again, look back at the ideals that could have been built on and vow to finally implement them. General election 2011 will give way to the opportunity to inherit the ideals of Connolly, the vision of Collins and the aspirations of Wolfe Tone, but can the outcome of a general election be applied as the solutions

of a broken society? We can only wait and see and wait in great hope.

So the 30th Irish parliament has been dissolved; people will be pestered for their vote off desperate politicians; electricity poles will be attacked with posters of pearly toothed smiles of honest do-gooders; the air waves will become the vuvuzelas of political promises; the TV news programs will report on nothing but canvassing cahoots; the Irish general election 2011, Zoom zoom zoom zoom, let the show begin....

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Torture and Historical Memory

ROBERT PALLITTO

NORTH AMERICANS SEEM TO BELIEVE that torture has no history here. It happened in medieval Europe, at the command of dictators in far-off places, or as part of leftist insurgencies. For the United States, torture is anathema to our way of life, violative of our liberal-democratic commitments. From George Washington to George W. Bush, U.S. presidents have denounced torture unequivocally. Or so it was, as the story goes, before the September 11 attacks. In the aftermath of those attacks, as collective grief, anger and vulnerability gripped the nation, voices emerged asking us to reconsider our prohibition on torture. Surely the post-9/11 world was different, and we needed to adjust our thinking and our actions in order to survive in it. And so for the first time, policymakers openly discussed the torture option as a means to preventing future attacks. The long-honored ideal of universal respect for human dignity had to give way to the new realities of a world facing global terror networks.

To anyone who has traced even the broad contours of U.S. history, however, the narrative presented above is plainly at odds with reality. Torture and associated practices of state violence have continued uninterrupted in the United States from colonial times through the present. To be sure, slavery, “settlement” of the frontier, and world war, among other events, provided increased opportunities for torture, but there

has always been one or more segments of the population facing such treatment no matter what larger-scale conflicts were occurring. It is not something-we-might-have-to-do-someday, but rather something our government has been doing all along.

Correcting the view that our nation is confronting the torture question for the first time can help build resistance to the seductive force of pro-torture arguments. Those arguments are “seductive” in two ways — first of all, in their apparent inevitability. Federal appellate judge Richard Posner has written that “only the most doctrinaire civil libertarians (not that there aren’t plenty of them) deny that if the stakes are high enough, torture is permissible. No one who doubts that should be in a position of responsibility.”¹ Statements like these, made from a position of assumed objectivity or authority, are deployed in a way that obfuscates the speaker’s function as apologist for what those in power are doing. It just so happens that the “obvious answer” coincides perfectly with state actions needing justification. Then the “avuncular” voice of the apologist, as Alice Ristroph puts it, chides us for our naïvete in questioning the way things are.² It’s like a parent talking to a child about how things work in the “real world.” Or Judge Jerome Frank lecturing the Rosenbergs’ lawyer on how judges have to make tough decisions sometimes.³ It’s a disabling argumentative move: the child must first exhaust herself establishing her right to speak before she can get to the merits of her argument. But a clearer view of the history of state violence shows that we have been here before. The turn to torture is neither unprecedented nor inevitable.

Pro-torture arguments are seductive in another way as well: they license the indulgence

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of violent impulses. The question of indulgence versus renunciation of violence is as old as government, at least. Killing captives, executing convicts, purging shame — all of those acts, so often repeated, amount to an expression of rage through violence. We know people commonly experience those impulses. Government was created to curb them. But renouncing them is frustrating, as Freud said, so there is a certain relief when violence is officially sanctioned.

What does history tell us? The Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641) is an important document in the development of our modern civil liberties protections. However, it explicitly permits torture, though “not with such Tortures as be Barbarous and inhumane.”⁴ In 1776, complaining of atrocities committed by British troops, General Washington suggested that he might retaliate in kind, “however abhorrent and disagreeable to our natures in cases of Torture and Capital Punishments.”⁵ As Judge Ruffin presided in 1829 over a case involving the beating of a slave, he found the master not liable, ruling that a judge could not disturb the political order structured by laws protecting slavery.⁶ Filipino insurgents in the early 1900s were tortured using the “water cure”: U.S. soldiers held them down and forced water into their stomachs until they bloated dangerously. In 1936, a Southern sheriff’s deputy hung a murder suspect from a gallows until he “confessed,” prompting Chief Justice Hughes to remark that the case record “reads more like pages torn from some medieval account.”⁷ And in the 1960s, the CIA developed and disseminated a manual, KUBARK, that instructed interrogators on coercive interrogation techniques, including the use of pain, fear, drugs and electrical stimuli.⁸ In the 1980s, Chicago police in “Area 2” beat, burned, and shocked suspects with such frequency that a federal judge claimed their torture routine was “common knowledge.”⁹

This partial and highly abbreviated list of incidents is drawn entirely from official sources. Each item reflects an official statement by a gov-

ernment actor; there is no doubt as to whether the documents exist, or what they say. I have collected more than one hundred such state documents, dating from 1641 through the “war

I suggest that we think about torture on a continuum with other forms of state violence.

on terror.” Taken together, these documents provide a record of state torture from colonial times until the present, showing that there has been no torture-free or cruelty-free period of U.S. history. In fact, if one divides U.S. history into five parts — the colonies and the early republic; slavery and the frontier; imperialism, Jim Crow and World War; the Cold War; and the War on Terror — it is apparent that each of those periods saw numerous acts of state torture and violence.

A striking similarity is evident as well, even among documents created centuries apart. Rhetoric of violence links marginalized groups in a number of ways. First, the justification of adopting the methods of a “savage” enemy appears repeatedly. State actors claim that the United States abhors certain violent or brutal tactics, but in the same breath declare those tactics necessary in fighting a particular group that uses them. Consider, for example, the words of a U.S. cavalry officer testifying to Congress about the 1864 massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho non-combatants at Sand Creek:

It is the general impression of the people of that country that the only way to fight them is to fight as they fight; kill their women and children and kill them. At the same time, of course, we consider it a barbarous practice.¹⁰

In similar terms, Secretary of War Elihu Root in a 1902 letter described brutalities

committed by Filipino insurgents and opined that U.S. soldiers' retaliation by "unjustifiable severities, is not incredible."¹¹ At the same time, similar racialized language is used to dehumanize targeted groups, as in the case of Native Americans, Filipinos, North Vietnamese, Arabs, and African-Americans.

A second theme in the rhetoric of violence is the logic of exception. The logic of exception is not entirely dissimilar from the theme of adopting the enemy's tactics: both are employed rhetorically to suggest that a necessary deviation from the norm has occurred — that the event in question is to be understood as unusual, aberrational. Torture is justified by the need to preserve the nation or protect its people. Here, Justice Jackson's famous dictum is often invoked: "The Constitution is not a suicide pact." In the literature of political theory, the "state of exception" is associated with Carl Schmitt. In Schmitt's terms, the sovereign claims the power to act outside the "normal" law-bounded political order; this claim can be grounded in a specific constitutional provision, or it can be based on a commitment to preserve the very state itself, a commitment that is analytically prior to the constitutional rules governing "ordinary" situations.¹² In either case, the state of exception provides a space for state action that suspends legal rules that could protect individual rights and restrict state power. Of course, a problem of scope results, in which the exception threatens to swallow the rule of "normal" constitutional politics. One commentator has claimed that "when exceptional circumstances arise justifying actions taken under the rule of necessity, and when the executive has the authority to decide when those circumstances exist, there is a risk that such exceptions may become increasingly normal." These exceptions to the "normal" liberal-constitutional political order simply happen too frequently to accurately be called exceptions. Violent events, often displaying patterns of repetition, are so numerous as not to appear exceptional at all. We can see, through

the work of Schmitt and others on the "state of exception," how the executive accomplishes the normalization of a "necessity regime."¹³

Justification is cumulative. One excuse leads to another, especially when those repeated statements have to do with justifying objectionable state behavior. Justifications can take the form of legal doctrines (such as the Eighth Amendment jurisprudence of "cruel and unusual punishment"), in which case they actually gain precedential significance, but close reading of official statements of any kind can lead to better understanding of state violence: past, present, and future. Inaugural addresses by governors and presidents exhibit similarities. President Madison in 1813 and Mississippi Governor Charles Lynch in 1836 chose to include in their inaugural addresses a reference to violence that both condemns it (when done by others) and justifies it (when done by the state).¹⁴

This process can be seen even more clearly in the legal context. In 1942, a U.S. military tribunal tried eight Nazi saboteurs, and six of them were electrocuted within a week of conviction. As part of the justification for this summary process, the government claimed that the men were unlawful combatants who were not entitled to be treated as prisoners of war or as criminal defendants. Sixty years later, that same "enemy combatant" designation was used to strip rights protections from post-9/11 detainees, as Louis Fisher has shown.¹⁵ Thus, legal jargon coined by the Roosevelt administration facilitated detainee treatment in the Bush administration. Colin Dayan's treatment of the law of "cruel and unusual" similarly exposes the way justifications for brutality became fixed in precedent.¹⁶ We can see those same justifications employed in the post-9/11 context just as effectively as they were in the nineteenth-century slavery-related cases and the twentieth-century capital punishment cases. In the realm of law, such formulations assume, literally, life and death significance. If a justification is offered by the state and accepted by a court, the original defendant loses,

and subsequent defendants as well lose their challenges to the state's decision to put them to death. As legal precedent, justifications for violence acquire a force that is often immovable.

What I have said so far serves one of my aims in building a fuller historical record on torture: that is, to show that the use of torture, and apologetic discourses about torture, have a long history in the U.S., one that is coextensive with the history of American political development. But I also hope to expand the conceptual understanding of torture in a particular way. I suggest that we think about torture on a continuum with other forms of state violence. "Torture" is often constructed in opposition to other forms of state violence, such as the execution of a condemned prisoner. Foucault's reference to the public dismemberment of a convicted murderer is meant to show not only that such punishment was horribly painful but also (and more importantly) that by contrast modern punishment sought to eliminate the spectacle of public infliction of pain. Thus, modern penology moved away from such grotesque displays, and its methods appeared less like torture. But certainly the more "sanitized" versions of discipline and punishment still amount to state violence, even if they are not readily understood as torture. Execution by lethal injection, and shooting wounded prisoners, are examples of state violence that do not fit with conventional notions of torture. In fact, regarding capital punishment our jurisprudence says, quite circularly, that capital punishment is not torture because courts and legislatures consider it to be a lawful sanction that we actually use (and, conversely, we see it as lawful precisely because it is used). Forms of state violence such as capital punishment and summary execution are important to scrutinize because they shed light on what "torture" means — both in opposition to, and as extension of, the notion of state violence.

One reason to locate torture on a continuum of state violence is that we can then respond with condemnation to a range of actual

violent practices, such as the ritual humiliation inflicted on prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Some of what military personnel and contractors did to prisoners there — photographing them naked, putting collars and leashes on them — does not fit the legal definition of torture stated in the 1984 Convention Against Torture (CAT) or the 1994 U.S. code provision prohibiting torture. Both the CAT and the US Code definitions require an act that causes "severe pain," whether physical or mental. In contrast to definitions of torture focusing on the infliction of severe pain, Parry suggests viewing torture on a continuum, as "potentially escalating pain" caused by state violence.¹⁷ Presumably, his conceptualization would require us to look at use of threats, use of lesser pain, and use of fear and aversion. In addition to more iconic manifestations, then, for Parry, torture includes "also the infliction of potentially escalating pain for purposes that include dominating the victim and ascribing responsibility to the victim for the pain incurred." With this modification, Parry hopes to avoid "exoticizing" torture, which can happen when the term is reserved for the most extreme and shocking events — events that happen in secret or happen in faraway places.¹⁸ Instead, the continuum approach reminds us of the state violence that happens around us, here in the United States, in varied contexts. Techniques used at Abu Ghraib that did not produce severe pain and techniques such as "walling" that are intended to suggest greater violence than what is actually happening are more easily addressed using Parry's approach. The virtue of his definition is that it shows "a kinship between torture and forms of domination that rely on discipline instead of pain. If there is such a kinship, then torture is not exceptional conduct that belongs in a separate category, and the torture/not-torture distinction can no longer be used to legitimate lesser forms of state violence."¹⁹

This is a crucial point. As another commentator has put it,

To call something torture is almost always to

condemn it, with the result that we have to confine the term, lest we be forced either to reexamine the legitimacy of our other coercive practices or to accept the fact of coercion as a routine aspect of our personal, social, and political arrangements.²⁰

The argumentative move of saying, “We don’t torture” is frequently used so that the state can condemn torture on the one hand while engaging in violent practices in the other. I noted above that President Bush followed past presidents in publicly denouncing torture, but at the same time he was denouncing it his administration was officially authorizing such practices as waterboarding (which simulates drowning by covering a blindfolded subject’s nose and mouth with a water-soaked cloth) and stress positions (prolonged standing in the same position, which produces intense pain and swelling in the joints). In a strange and ironic way, saying, “We don’t torture” actually made it easier to engage in violent state practices such as these: they gained legal cover because they were constructed as not-torture. Let me be clear: I believe that both stress positions and waterboarding *do* meet the U.S. Code definition of torture, but my point here is simply that constructing them as not-torture has facilitated their use.

While legal definitions of torture are necessary to regulate the behavior of state actors, definitional exercises certainly have their limits. Philosopher Jeremy Waldron has suggested that “there is something wrong with trying to pin down the prohibition on torture with a precise legal definition.” The reason that a “precise legal definition” was so important to the Bush administration, of course, was that it needed to green-light certain interrogation practices by calling them something short of torture. “Insisting on exact definitions may sound very lawyerly,” Waldron cautions, “but there is something disturbing about it when the quest for precision is put to work in the service of a mentality that says, ‘Give us a definition so we have something to work around, something

to game, a determinate envelope to push.”²¹ Waldron suggests that inquiries into what constitutes torture, or what forms of state violence are out of bounds, should be guided by what he calls a “legal archetype” rather than a definitional exercise. The anti-torture archetype draws on a range of beliefs about the way individuals are to be respected in their personhood and about the limits of state intrusion on people’s bodily integrity. Viewed this way, the question of whether to torture, or what the term “torture” means, goes deeper than positive (statutory) law and asks about the role of law in society and about what sort of people and what sort of community to be. It is not merely a matter of drawing a line between torture and “mere” cruelty, but rather of determining what kinds of cruelty have been possible (and actualized) in our world, now and in the past, and what they suggest about a state that decides to employ them.

The historical record teaches us that torture and other state violence have always been a part of U.S. politics, and from that fact we may conclude that the impulse to violence is always co-present with governments, even liberal-democratic governments. Such a conclusion suggests the need for continuous vigilance that should not slacken in view of the Enlightenment, or the end of the Cold War. But the liberal-democratic political order produces a profound ambivalence about torture that reflects a tension between political imperatives and ideological commitments. The global war on terror, or global political influence, requires violence, but that violence must be reconciled with principles of government restraint in order to preserve legitimacy. Thus we see what appears to be a compulsion to confess and justify actions at home and abroad. Simultaneously we see public disavowals of torture alongside public justifications of torture. This contested discursive terrain generates both an opportunity and an obligation for people of conscience to remain involved in contesting “torture.”

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CRUSADERS FOR JUSTICE

"History is not going to make our revolution an easy matter like bourgeois revolutions in which it suffices to overthrow the official power at the centre and to replace a dozen or so persons in authority. We have to work from beneath... There at the base, where the individual employer confronts his wage slaves, where all the executive organs of political class rule confront the object of this rule, the masses; there, step by step, must we seize the means of power from the rulers and take them into our own hands."

— Letter to Isaac Deutscher

A Marxist theorist, philosopher and economist, Rosa Luxemburg was a leader of the left wing of the German Social Democratic Party

In Defense of Public Education

MEGAN BEHRENT

ANYONE LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES today has, undoubtedly, been bludgeoned over the head with the key argument of those who don the false mantle of education reform, despite never having set foot in a classroom themselves: that the biggest obstacles standing in the way of education today are teachers and their unions.

We are in the midst of an all-out war on teachers and their unions. Couched in the rhetoric of “education reform,” unionized teachers have been declared public enemy number one in an attempt to dismantle the last vestiges of public services in this country. Beneath the calls for “reform” from the new corporate education enthusiasts, as well as from both Republican and Democratic politicians, is an insidious and dangerous attempt to discredit the very idea of public education. In the process, these noble reformers also hope to open up public education to investors and profiteers from the business world, for whom education represents a multi-billion-dollar industry.

For teachers, the current climate is like entering a twilight zone where one’s commitment to education, to students, and to the communities they serve has become increasingly suspect — proof positive of a secret desire to stymie the efforts of the corporate reformers and to prevent students from learning — obviously, the number one reason people decide to spend their lives in the field of public education.

Davis Guggenheim’s *Waiting for Superman*,

released last fall, has become the icon of the teacher-and-union bashing movement. In this much promoted movie, Guggenheim purports to take on the hard questions in public education by joining the chorus of those for whom teachers are the problem, and charter schools the solution. This glossy film-length brochure for charter schools was not, however, greeted with the acclamation and fervor its director had hoped to elicit. Instead, it launched a backlash against the “public school bad, charter school narrative” that it helped to promulgate. Protests erupted around the country and at the box office where it was a failure.

The reality is, despite the media barrage against “bad” teachers (a cover for the attack on ALL teachers), the vast majority of the U.S. public supports teachers. Nonetheless, the ongoing media campaign against teachers has had very real ideological effects on popular opinions about education.

A recent poll by *Time Magazine* encapsulates many of the contradictions in popular debates about education. Over 61 percent of those polled thought that teachers were underpaid, and 77 percent strongly or somewhat agree, “teaching is among the most under-appreciated professions.” At the same time, 50 percent think unions are obstacles and 66 percent oppose tenure — despite the fact that the elimination of tenure and teacher unions would make teaching an even more unattractive, underappreciated, and unprotected profession with a higher turnaround rate than exists even now. To improve education, the vast majority of people cite the need for greater parental involvement, more training and more support for teachers and higher salaries. Only 6 percent of those polled believe that more test preparation would

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be beneficial to our students, and yet, a staggering 64 percent believe that teacher evaluations should be based (at least in part) on student test scores — a reform that would inevitably increase “teaching to the test” and a stripping down of curricula to focus less on critical thinking and more on what is “testable.”¹

The numbers in this poll are both a testament to the profound inroads that have been made into public consciousness about education by the corporate deformers, as well as the enduring support for teachers and a common sense notion that testing, longer days, and rewards are hardly the panacea for all of the ills of our public education system that is claimed by the deformers. Above all else, they make clear the dire need for a new movement for education reform, led by teachers which could challenge the one sided war on public schools and demand accountability not just from teachers but from those who systematically underfund our schools, and ensure massive inequity and segregation in public education. Teachers clearly need to launch a new PR campaign to turn back the anti-teacher tide and put themselves at the forefront of a struggle for quality, equal public education.

In this regard, the teachers in Wisconsin have led the way. Despite a massive media onslaught against teachers, their unions and public unions more generally, support for teachers in Wisconsin increased during the course of their sickout. For any teacher who has been told that we have to hold back militancy for fear of exacerbating anti-union sentiment among those who have it worse, Wisconsin proves that it is when teachers lead the struggle for social justice, for unions rights and for our students’ futures that we gain the most support.

Are Teacher Unions to Blame?

TEACHER UNION BASHING has become a popular sport in the United States. The union bashing disease has infected every aspect of popular debate on the topic of education. As

the *New York Times* explained in an article examining the polarization and dichotomies that dominate discussions about education, in this debate, the dominant argument is that, “If you support the teachers’ union, you don’t care about the students.”² The narratives put forward by reformers such as Guggenheim among others, “create an image of public-school teachers as

Poverty, not the teacher,
is the key reason for the
failure of our schools.

cosseted by government largesse, our nation’s new “welfare queens.”³ The notion of teacher unions as monstrous behemoths protecting the worst teachers, and preventing education reform is a myth, which has absolutely no bearing in reality. In fact teacher unions are the only reason we have such crucial educational reforms as caps on class size. As a high school teacher in New York City, my classes cannot exceed 34 students. This number is still appallingly high, but it is only because I have a union that I don’t have 50 students per class, which would mean 250 students per term.

Much has been made recently of teacher tenure, which, if one were to believe Law & Order protects child molesters and murderers — an idea which is unfortunately prevalent if categorically untrue. Far from ensuring lifetime entitlement to a job, tenure simply assures the right to due process — a right that, frankly, all workers should have. The idea that due process is somehow fundamentally at odds with a student’s right to an education is like arguing that equal rights for women makes them bad mothers, thus, making the 19th amendment, for example, at odds with the rights of children — an idea that is certainly promulgated by the

worst of the extreme right wing bigots, but, impossible to defend by those with an iota of rational sense.

Tenure protects not only teachers but our students. It protects teachers from the whims of administrators and allows us to advocate for our students without fear of retaliation. To weaken tenure is to go back in time to the days when nepotism and prejudice were rampant in the hiring and firing of teachers and the right to academic, political, and intellectual freedom was systematically denied to public school teachers. Teachers are the primary advocates for students in the public education system as we know it. Tenure exists to allow teachers to exercise their professional judgment when it comes to what is in the best interest of their students.

Rather than teachers' rights on the job counterpoising to students' rights to an education, we should see the two as inextricably linked. As one union activist and early advocate of school reform, Margaret Haley, argued, the "freeing of the child" or the student through education,

...can only be secured by the freeing of the teacher (...) To the teacher it means freedom from care and worry for the material needs of the present and the future — in other words, adequate salary and old age pensions, freedom to teach the child as an individual and not to deal with children en masse. In other words, fewer children for each teacher. Last but not least, the teacher must have recognition in the educational system as an educator. The tendency is to relegate her to the position of a factory hand, or a taker of orders from above.⁴

Unions historically have played a key role in fighting for such "freeing" of the teacher and the student. In fact, despite the union bashers' claims, the quality of a school's education has more to do with poverty and income levels in the community it serves than whether or not the teachers are unionized. If there is any correlation between teacher unionization rates and school success, it is that the highest performing school systems both internationally and in the United

States are more likely to be highly unionized, with high percentages of experienced, tenured teachers. As Paul Thomas argues in *The Guardian*, the attempt to blame teacher unions for the failure of schools lacks any empirical evidence and its flaws can easily be highlighted by looking at just two examples:

First, the new reformers hold up Finland as the model for education reform — while failing to identify two crucial facts: that Finland has low childhood poverty (about 3-4 percent, compared to over 20 percent in the United States) and that Finland's teachers are nearly 100 percent unionized. Consider, also, South Carolina, a high-poverty state with a reputation for having a weak education system. South Carolina joined the accountability era at the beginning, taking "A Nation at Risk" seriously and creating standards, testing, and accountability in 1984. Despite nearly three decades of precisely the process supported by the new reformers, South Carolina finds itself still ranking at the bottom of education in the U.S. The real dynamic here is that South Carolina remains a high-poverty state — the true cause of low test scores — and also that South Carolina is a non-union state, with no union contracts for teachers and no tenure.⁵

Indeed, a comparison of schools in the United States based on states in which teachers are under union contracts or not is quite instructive. Comparing the scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress between states that have and do not have binding union contracts, Matthew Di Carlo, a senior fellow at the non-profit Albert Shanker Institute, notes:

Out of these 10 states, only one (Virginia) has an average rank above the median, while four are in the bottom 10, and seven are in the bottom 15. These data make it very clear that states without binding teacher contracts are not doing better, and the majority are actually among the lowest performers in the nation.

In contrast, nine of the 10 states with the highest average ranks are high coverage states, including Massachusetts, which has the highest average score on all four tests.

If anything, it seems that the presence of teacher contracts in a state has a positive effect on achievement.⁶

Di Carlo acknowledges that many other factors undoubtedly influence these results and thus his critics might rightfully object to his findings. “They might say,” Di Carlo says of his critics, “that there are dozens of other observed and unobserved factors that influence achievement, such as state laws, lack of resources, income, parents’ education, and curriculum, and that these factors are responsible for the lower scores in the 10 non-contract states.” To which, Di Carlo replies, “Exactly.”⁷

Nonetheless, it is clear that, unions are not the problem. Nor, it seems, is tenure or the lengthy contracts the politicians and pundits so love to hate. In fact, the majority of claims by education reformers such as Arne Duncan, Michelle Rhee, not to mention Bill Gates and Eli Broad, quickly disintegrate in the face of actual research and evidence — not to mention actual experience in the classroom — an aversion to which all of these self-proclaimed reformers share.

Debunking the Myths on Teacher Quality, Merit Pay & Charter Schools

IN TERMS OF ESTABLISHED SCIENTIFIC STUDIES, the reforms that have shown the most significant improvement in learning are: significant class size reduction and the expansion of early childhood education, despite all claims to the contrary.

This is not, however, what you will read or hear in any mainstream media. Instead, we are told that “you can’t just throw money at the problem” (unless it’s tied to test scores) and that the biggest variable in a child’s learning is “teacher quality.” This has no basis at all in fact. The reality is that the biggest predictor of a child’s future is what their parents do which has everything to do with class and the growing economic inequalities in this country. Despite all the diversions in the media, the profound

inequality in funding that plagues our schools is still at the root of the problems we face in our schools today.

A new study examining projected graduation rates based on third grade reading levels and the impact of poverty proves in horrifying detail the terrible impact that economic inequality has on our schools. Overall, “22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6 percent of those who have never been poor. This rises to 32 percent for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty.”⁸ Even among third graders who were proficient in reading, living in poverty greatly decreased their chances of graduating from high school with 11 percent of poor children who were proficient in reading failing to graduate in contrast to only 2 percent of their counterparts who had never lived in poverty. In all, 70 percent of children who did not graduate from high school had lived in poverty for at least part of their childhood. Not surprisingly, black and Hispanic students are disproportionately impacted — as they are more likely to live in communities with high concentrations of poverty. Black and Hispanic students who have not reached reading proficiency by third grade are 11 to 12 times less likely to graduate from high school than their white counterparts.⁹

A study in New York City analyzing the demographics of schools targeted for closing found what activists have been arguing all along — that these schools have more homeless students, more special education students, more over age students and that these numbers have increased in the past few years. The report found that while the number of special education students citywide stayed “at 12 percent from 2007-08 to 2008-09, but the percentage of special education students in closing high schools rose to 18 percent from 16 percent.”¹⁰ Furthermore, “The number of students in temporary housing (...) quadrupled citywide during the economic downturn, from 1 percent of the total student enrollment in 2007-08 to 4

percent in 2008-09. But at closing high schools, 6 percent of students were in temporary housing in 2008-09. At four closing schools, 10 percent or more students were homeless."¹¹ The rate of students over age for their grade in closing high schools increased from the prior year, whereas citywide it had decreased in the same period and overall it was double the citywide average. What these numbers make clear is that it is not our schools which are failing, but rather it is the Department of Education which is failing our schools, by systematically creating the conditions for schools to fail and targeting them for closure when they inevitably do.

In the midst of these massive inequalities and every indication that poverty, not the teacher, is the key reason for the failure of our schools, the current obsession with "teacher quality" is hypocritical, fantastical, and almost comical — were it not so dangerous.

Even a report by the Department of Education on the use of test scores to evaluate teachers, argues that, "more than 90 percent of the variation in student gain scores is due to the variation in student-level factors that are not under control of the teacher."¹² Most studies cited in defense of the "teacher quality" argument which measure the "value added" by teachers — itself a disturbing way of thinking about learning -- do not isolate other factors outside of the school that might influence learning over the period of the study.

In addition, the results of these types of statistical models have proven to be extremely flawed and fluctuate widely from year to year. The report cited above notes that, "Studies from a wide set of districts and states have found that one-half to two-thirds of teachers in the top quintile or quartile of performance from a particular year drop below that category in the subsequent year." Even with three years of data for each individual teacher, there is an error rate of 26 percent — by any standard a capricious measure to make high stakes decisions about teachers and their "effectiveness" in

a classroom.¹³

While value added models hold little credibility among any serious education researchers, their impact on teachers can be devastating. The witch hunt launched by the *L.A. Times* who published a database of teachers and their "effectiveness" based on this flawed model, claimed its first victim: Rigoberto Ruelas, a 14-year teacher in Los Angeles, who committed suicide after the reports came out. As another teacher remarked, "I'm only surprised that this hasn't happened more. The issue here is that you have stripped people of their identities."¹⁴

If we really want to talk about "teacher quality," the questions we should be asking are: What makes a good teacher? And, how can we provide support to teachers to that end? Why is the turnover rate so high? How does stripping teachers of protections against harassment and retaliation help them become better teachers? And, can anyone be the best teacher that (s)he could be with 170 students a day?

The reality is that countless studies have demonstrated that teacher experience is one of the key factors influencing a teacher's effectiveness. Of note, a re-analysis of the Tennessee STAR Project showed that kindergarten students had higher achievement and earnings as adults, depending on how long their teachers had been in the profession. Notably, this same study found that smaller class sizes in the early education years had a notable impact in increasing student learning — despite all the pundits' claims to the contrary.¹⁵

Despite the media's contention that teaching in a public school is so easy that you can "breathe" and get tenure; almost 45 percent of teachers leave within the first 4 years in New York City. The problem is not that tenure is too easy; rather, the problem is the New York City Department of Education has failed when it comes to providing the support, space, and resources to retain teachers and help them become the best teachers they can be. Indeed, it is notable that in the United States, "Teacher

Evaluation” systems are designed almost exclusively to “get rid” of the so-called “bad” teachers — a concept anathema to countries like Finland whose educational system is so admired. Responding angrily to the question about Finland’s lack of teacher ratings, counselor to the Finnish Board of Education for three decades, explains, “Why should teachers be evaluated?” Instead, he “proudly declare[d] that Finland has no bad teachers, and that each teacher is highly disciplined and does not need to be subject to ratings.” The respect, support, training, and academic freedom afforded to teachers in Finland, would be welcome changes to the blame-the-teacher mentality that drives so many promising teachers out of our schools.

But, instead, we are told that charter schools are the panacea for all our educational system’s ills. Once again, this flies in the face of existing research, such as the largest comparative study of charter schools conducted by Stanford University, that demonstrated that most charter schools actually do worse than or are equal to public schools. In fact, only 17 percent of charter schools do better than public schools, while 37 percent perform worse.

Likewise, despite the popularity of merit pay among corporate reformers, it simply doesn’t work. The first scientific study of performance pay ever conducted in the United States by Vanderbilt University showed that merit pay alone in no way improved student outcomes.¹⁶ Other international studies have confirmed these results. In fact, as Alfie Kohn’s research has pointed out, such schemes often have negative effects on teaching and learning.¹⁷

Despite the total absence of research supporting the cure-all reforms of the corporate education reformers, they nonetheless perpetuate an ideology of education reform rooted in neoliberalism, not pedagogy.

In *The Global Assault on Education*, Lois Weiner and Mary Compton provide a thorough and compelling analysis of the international nature of the current attacks on education, as

well as their roots in neoliberal ideology.¹⁸

For the corporate world, education is a multibillion-dollar industry that has somehow escaped the grips of privatization and the market. As one report put out by Merrill Lynch, argues:

A new mindset is necessary, one that views families as customers, schools as “retail outlets” where educational services are received, and the school board as a customer service department that hears and addresses parental concerns. As a near monopoly, schools escape the strongest incentives to respond to their customers — the discipline of the market¹⁹

The problem is of course, that learning is not a product that can be sold to pliable consumers. Nor can it be turned into chunks of data to be easily measured on bubble tests.

The biggest problem with the anti-teacher rhetoric that dominates discussions of education today is that it relies on an image of teachers as self-sacrificing martyrs who singlehandedly can overcome the vast inequalities that plague our society and can nurture all students to their full potential even if they lack healthcare, housing, or food.

This conception of teaching is inherently unhealthy, unsustainable, and impossible. It is a recipe for a revolving door of teachers who are used up and spit up — and as such, it has disastrous consequences for our schools.

The blame-the-teacher rhetoric that is so popular in the media is ultimately a diversion from the real problems in education today: the systematic underfunding of our neediest schools, the continued (and increased) segregation of schools, and the mass inequality and growing gap between rich and poor which leaves all poor children behind.

Turning the Tide

DESPITE THE DISMAL NATIONAL SCENE for teachers, there are glimmers of hope. The recent ousting of Cathie Black in New York City is cause for celebration — no matter how little

impact it will have on actual educational policies. As Chancellor of New York City's Schools, Black quickly became the ultimate symbol of the gap between educators and the corporate elite policy makers who in Black's case had never spent a day in a public school and yet was deemed qualified to run the system. She was the insult added to years of injuries. Through her complete disdain for parents, students and teachers — from mocking parents at a Panel for Educational Policy to advocating birth control to reduce overcrowding, she became the Marie Antoinette of public education. Her stunning demise was a black eye for the corporate education deformers and a sign that there is a limit to the public's tolerance for the corporate education agenda.

But, it is Wisconsin above all that showed the way forward, making it clear that this is no longer a one-sided war. The mass protests, occupation of the Capitol, and sick-outs that swept Wisconsin were a first step in turning the tide against a one-sided war in which teachers and other public sector unions were being decimated. While teachers in Wisconsin did not succeed in preventing Walker's bill from passing, they fundamentally changed the terrain of public debate and public opinion in this country.

Clearly, we have a massive fight on our hands, but Wisconsin shows that resistance is possible, worthwhile, and necessary.

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More Democracy, Less Poverty

LARRY PATRIQUIN

AMONGST THE RICHEST COUNTRIES, the United States has some of the highest rates of indigence, especially for children; levels of poverty that are exorbitant for visible minorities and single mothers; a growing maldistribution of income and wealth; and seemingly never-ending increases in the use of soup kitchens and food pantries. As many have observed, a successfully prosecuted “War on the Poor” was launched in the last few decades, initiated by the Reagan administration and accelerated by Clinton, the Bushes, and their allies in Congress. The inability of successive American governments to address the “poverty question” is longstanding; it has been almost half a century since President Lyndon Johnson declared his “War on Poverty.” Clearly, something has gone terribly wrong.

We can pose the question as follows: Why does the U.S. welfare state continue to be minimalist and punitive compared to, say, almost all welfare states in continental Europe, notably those in Scandinavia? Most liberals who address the prevalence of poverty in America conclude their analyses with a series of policies that would be necessary to assist the poor, including higher benefits for the unemployed and those on welfare, universal child care and health care systems, and increases to minimum wages. However, following the “to do” list, the

question of why these improvements to social welfare have not yet been realized often meets with an embarrassed silence. When this silence is broken, and an explanation is offered, the absence of an effective anti-poverty policy is frequently ascribed to a couple of factors.

One factor, many analysts claim, is that unlike people in other nations, Americans have a hyper-individualist culture and value system that is wary of the state, and that this anti-government creed is a barrier to progressive social changes. For example, Katherine van Wormer, in her contrast of Americans and Norwegians, saw a different “sense of cultural style” between these two peoples: the former are overly competitive while the latter are typically cooperative. Eradicating poverty, then, involves altering beliefs. “Change will come in the United States when the values begin to change and emulate those in Norway.” We must emphasize the importance of collective goods and elect leaders who are willing to articulate a more publicly oriented consciousness. She is confident that once “a collective sense of urgency is established (such as a demand for national health care), the mobilization of forces to carry out the prerequisite tasks will follow.”¹

Another barrier to reducing poverty is the apparent “lack of education” on the part of elected representatives. For instance, William Julius Wilson maintains that “larger forces in society,” such as “segregation, discrimination, a lack of economic opportunity, [and] failing public schools,” play key roles in creating and maintaining poverty. But these forces are mostly the result of government decisions (or non-decisions), specifically “the absence of an effective labor market policy” which has meant, among other things, that “policymakers have

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tolerated industry practices that undermine worker security.” The response to this absence must be “to fashion a new agenda,” one which, unlike current policies, reflects “an awareness and appreciation of the devastating effects of recent systemic changes on poor urban populations and neighborhoods.”²

Compared to other nations,
there is an extremely narrow
ideological spectrum available
to Americans.

A related argument is made by Elizabeth A. Segal. She points to a number of perspectives that try to explain the entrenchment of poverty, concluding that the most pertinent of these is the increased social, economic, and cultural distance between rich and poor, which has produced on the part of the wealthy a lack of concern for people who struggle financially. Those who are well off are not distressed by poverty because they do not comprehend it. A positive transformation can unfold when those at the top of the income chart become more empathetic, specifically if they can gain “insights about the circumstances of [poor] peoples’ lives.” This need to develop empathy applies especially to policymakers who, due to their wealth, are often unaware of pressing social needs; “it is necessary to help them to understand what it means to live in poverty.”³

In sum, policymakers are supposedly out of touch with the realities of life for low-income Americans. Those responsible for governing also lack knowledge on how to end poverty. This lack is even more troublesome when it is combined with an absence of statesmanship from the same policymakers. As a consequence, leaders must undergo a process of re-education to bring them

to a point when they will finally address the horrible conditions of life for millions of Americans, when they will finally do the right thing. This may involve providing leaders with (new and improved?) policy briefs, lobbying members of Congress and their staff, and taking politicians on guided tours of areas that suffer from destitution. These proposals for action are grounded in the notion that most politicians are well intentioned but lack the information needed to make correct decisions, while ignoring the fact that many politicians are defenders of “business as usual” who are ideologically opposed to the reforms sought by anti-poverty advocates.

In contrast to these explanations, this article suggests that America has the advanced capitalist world’s weakest social policy because it has the advanced capitalist world’s weakest democracy. America’s political system was designed in the late eighteenth century with the intent of keeping the “rabble” at arm’s length from political power and that central feature of its system remains unaltered. Democracy in the U.S. today more closely resembles what the ancients called *timocracy*, “political power in proportion to property holdings,” which gives the small percentage of rich people an influence on public policy that is “completely disproportionate to their small numbers.”⁴

I will conclude that the institutions of U.S. government must be radically remodeled if common people are to gain access to power, a prerequisite for implementing progressive social policies. We need to change the way we do politics, the rules of the political game. This article will do no more than suggest the direction we need to move toward, drawing lessons from electoral systems based on proportional representation, the world’s first democracy in ancient Athens, as well as the attempt to implement a version of direct democracy at the local level in Porto Alegre, Brazil. But first, I will briefly draw out the characteristics of the United States’ “semi-welfare” state, following this with a sketch of the main features of American governance.

America's Semi-Welfare State

MICHAEL KATZ HAS PROPOSED that America has a “semi-welfare state,” because of its strict demarcation between means-tested public assistance, aimed almost exclusively at the poor, and social insurance, “purchased” through participation in the labor market; the huge disparities in the benefits provided to residents of the 50 states; the inordinately large part played by private, for-profit companies in the delivery of services; the relatively important role of occupational welfare, notably the health insurance which tens of millions receive from their employers; and the absence of programs that can be found in all other wealthy nations, specifically family allowances/child tax credits and a universal health care system. Katz concludes that while this system may be “incoherent and irrational,” it “resists fundamental change.”⁵

The U.S. welfare system is rooted in one of the most unequal of the rich countries. Each year, the top 20 percent of households earn almost 50 percent of income; wealth is divided even more inequitably. It has been estimated that “more than half of all U.S. families are living from paycheck to paycheck with little or nothing in the bank in case of a serious financial emergency.”⁶ This inequality produces poverty for many citizens regardless of race or gender, though the situation is bleakest for Blacks and Hispanics, with poverty rates around 30 percent; rates are in the 40 percent to 50 percent range for children in these two racial/ethnic groups. Poverty levels are also high for single mother families, at roughly 40 percent. For children under age five, poverty rates in some inner cities are obscene (60 percent in Detroit in 1996, for example).

This situation would be even worse if not for the existence of the semi-welfare state, put in place, for the most part, during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that average Americans squeeze out

of their government improvements to social welfare only when they are rioting in the streets. Even these gains are limited, though, as they tend to involve little redistribution of income. Programs like Social Security are forced savings plans which give back to individuals based on what they put in, while public assistance programs like Medicaid, welfare, and food stamps prevent the worst excesses of extreme poverty, but do little more. In important ways, American social policy has not advanced much beyond the poorhouse era of the nineteenth century, when a main objective of charitable institutions was to ensure that recipients were sufficiently intimidated so they would not return later, asking for more. There has been an attempt, stretching for almost two centuries, to alter the character of evidently flawed and morally degraded individuals, alongside an obsession with work incentives to prevent “dependence” among the “lazy.”

While programs for the poor have always been meager, they nevertheless were subject to a vicious attack, beginning in the late 1970s. Since that time, social welfare has been under almost constant assault, with occasional respites. Clients are portrayed as dishonest and undeserving. Programs are “reformed,” which means cutting people off assistance, restricting their eligibility so they do not get in (or get back in) the system, and reducing the amount of their benefits. This is true of not just those on welfare, but for recipients of worker’s compensation, disability insurance, and unemployment insurance. This aggressive stance against the poor culminated with the abolition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1996 and its replacement by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Welfare rolls were reduced by the millions. Many are now ineligible for assistance because they have gone over draconian lifetime limits (nobody seems to know the number permanently disqualified from welfare, since the government hasn’t bothered to count). This battering of America’s most fragile citizens is perhaps without historical precedent. It has,

no doubt, produced extreme hardship for those huddled at the bottom of society.

The most glaring omission of America's semi-welfare state is a universal, publicly run health care system that for citizens is free of charge at the point of use. About 20 percent of the population is covered by government Medicare and Medicaid; about 65 percent have insurance, usually employer-sponsored, that has been purchased from a private (often for-profit) company; while about 15 percent have no insurance (and millions will remain uninsured even after "Obamacare" is fully implemented). Moreover, having insurance is no guarantee of protection. Among those with access to health care, many are driven into poverty and occasionally bankruptcy by deductibles, co-payments, denied claims, and maximum limits on coverage. This system is also by far the most expensive in the world, yet it is a safety net with gaping holes, and on key indicators such as life spans, it does not perform as well as almost all rich nations (and at least a single poor one — Cuba).

The end product of the semi-welfare state is that, in order to survive, millions of Americans rely on the charity provided by the voluntary sector. Enormous effort is spent every year raising funds and collecting tins of food, day-old bread, and other leftovers common in wealthy and wasteful societies, and giving them to the "down and out" who, in accepting these "gifts," take their final step on the ladder of humiliation. The "culture of charity" in the United States means there is "a whole generation of young people who have grown up with food drives and soup kitchen lines, who think that destitution is a normal part of American life, and that handouts are the normal, and perhaps the only imaginable, response to it."⁷ In the twenty-first century, many conservative commentators still place an emphasis on the voluntary sector as a savior to the poor; however voluntarism is unable to cope with mass unemployment and capitalist-induced penury. And so the "poverty question" remains unanswered. This is mostly

the case, I maintain, because of the architecture of American governance.

American Democracy

THE UNITED STATES IS A PROFOUNDLY class-divided nation, and this plays a critical role in influencing who gets what. Social classes exist in societies where productive assets are owned by a few people; they in turn have a great deal of control in the world of work. Meanwhile, the vast majority are wage laborers who follow bosses' orders. Those who possess substantial economic resources tend to also have substantial power in politics, especially in a country like the United States where the rules of the political game are heavily stacked against those who hold little wealth.

This "stacking" process began with the founding fathers, who were well aware that they were creating a republic (a limited government) and not a democracy (rule by the people). They saw it as critical to their success to hold back the democratic demands that were being made by some segments of society. According to James Madison, the propertied and propertyless "have ever formed distinct interests"; hence the role of government is to protect the assets of those referred to by Alexander Hamilton as "the rich and the wellborn."⁸ This is precisely what the Constitution was designed to do. It established a state in which "the poor would have a voice and a share, but would not be able to outweigh or vote away the interests of the propertied and the wealthy."⁹

The House of Representatives is perhaps the only reasonably democratic component of U.S. governance, with each state having members in proportion to its population. The same cannot be said for the rest of the system, especially the Senate. This was a body supposed to represent "states' rights," and its members were chosen by state legislatures until 1913. While understandable given the historical context, the idea that states, as well as human beings, needed representation allowed for the construction of

a fundamentally undemocratic legislature with two senators from each state, no matter how big or small its population. Today, with 50 percent of the citizenry, the largest nine states have just 18 senators (two each). Small, conservative-oriented states are vastly over-represented. Senators are now elected directly by voters, but because most senators are wealthy lawyers, business owners, and so forth, they have little in common with the people whose interests they are meant to champion. Having both houses elected directly also complicates matters because the two bodies can claim legitimacy; they both represent “the people.” In contrast to the United States, most countries have abolished their “upper chambers” in the last century or so. In nations like Canada and Britain where they have survived, they remain sinecures for appointed party faithful, but they have no legitimacy, and would never dare to defeat a bill that has been passed in the House of Commons.

At the apex of this system is a president who can veto legislation which cannot get a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress. Presidents have powers that cannot, in important ways, be called to account, including the power to launch a military attack on another nation without a declaration of war from Congress. It is yet another violation of democratic principles to have so much power residing in the hands of one person. This is what we expect of a monarchy, a strong element of which is present in America, with the president virtually an elected king. Even then, the president is not chosen directly by the people, but rather through an intermediary body that has become known as the Electoral College. Some presidents, like George W. Bush, can “win” elections despite the fact they do not receive the most votes. Furthermore, the executive and legislative bodies are separated, often at odds with each other, whereas in British-styled systems the prime minister and the cabinet sit in the legislature and, holding a majority where members of parliament vote strictly on party lines, they can pass any legisla-

tion they choose, including legislation beneficial to the poor.

The upshot of America’s system of “checks and balances” is what many have referred to as a legislative “labyrinth.” It is extremely difficult to get a bill through both houses of Congress and have it signed by the president (or have a two-thirds overriding vote in Congress if it is vetoed). Compounding all this is the fact that individual members of Congress wield much power, unlike politicians in parliamentary systems, where a member is required to vote as ordered by his or her leader or risk expulsion from the party. In addition, there are hundreds of Congressional committees and sub-committees, headed by legislators most of whom are prepared to defend private profit-making in general, or more particularly the narrow concerns of their constituents, and/or the ambitions of those who fill the money machines that fund Congressional campaigns. The result is often “gridlock,” or a piece of legislation that, if finally passed, is filled with compromises, loopholes, and perks for special interests. Little support can be found in Congress for many of the demands continually expressed by Americans on issues such as health care.

Members from (mostly) the nation’s elite are elected to Congress in a system that has only two viable parties, both of which have similar views on major issues (for instance, both are pro-capitalist, pro-“free trade,” pro-military, and so on). When they differ, it tends to be on social issues such as abortion, gun control, and prayer in the schools. Compared to other nations, there is an extremely narrow ideological spectrum available to Americans, who have a shocking absence of choice when it comes to electing representatives. Choice is further narrowed because candidates sometimes spend up to tens of millions of dollars in campaigns, not unheard of, for instance, in races for Senate. Contributions raised by “political action committees” and “soft money” spent by (typically pro-business) supporters of candidates clearly

affect the outcome of elections. Rich people get taken seriously as candidates, even when by virtue of their experience they have few qualifications for public office (think of Ross Perot or Steve Forbes).

The wealthy receive the lion's share of benefits from this political arrangement. In the last few decades, trillions of dollars have been transferred to the rich in the form of corporate welfare, income tax reductions, and bank bailouts. Conversely, the middle class and especially the poor have been subjected to numerous program cutbacks. These outcomes occur because of the genius of a form of governance where the wealthy do not have to exert themselves much to get what they want. "There are no mass demonstrations demanding tax cuts for big business, more environmental devastation, more wars, more privileges for the rich, or more corporate devastation."¹⁰ Yet, with few exceptions, this is what "we, the people" get. The rich troll the halls of Congress vicariously, in the form of well-oiled lobbyists. It is true that popular struggles can make a difference, but progressive change requires Herculean efforts on the part of the populace who, year after year, throw their nickels and dimes into the Congressional wishing well.

Encouraging the non-elite to take a stand against government (not any particular government, but the *idea* of government itself) is much easier to do when the non-elite play almost no role in that government. It is especially easy when politics produces so few tangible gains for the middle class and the poor. For the average person, it matters little which party wins an election. No wonder Thomas Frank could conclude that America's pro-capitalist political system must "be the envy of every ruling class in the world."¹¹

[Athenian democracy] was direct because citizens *were* the government.

Different Democracies

EVEN WITHIN CAPITALISM, apparently small variations in democracy have important implications for social policies. There are some societ-

ies, like Sweden, that have virtually eliminated poverty. They are an example of how more democracy can produce less poverty. Sweden's socio-political life has two features that are radically distinct from the United States. First,

it tends to be dominated by influential political parties of the left and left-of-centre, which play a prominent role in government (specifically, the social democrats, greens, and socialists). Swedes elect these parties to govern, keeping them in office for lengthy periods. Sweden's Social Democratic Party has been the leader of governing coalitions for most of the last three-quarters of a century, since 1932. Sweden is a unique case in the Western world, where a pro-worker party has dominated office-holding for so long. Those who are not part of the economic elite have used their political power to build and expand the Swedish welfare state, considered the "Cadillac" of social welfare.¹² Second, having this type of government also leads to policies that support the self-organization of the working class in the form of trade unions. At least 80 percent of workers in Sweden are union members (the rate has gone as high as 90 percent). The comparable figure is about 12 percent for the United States. For the first time in America, as of 2009, there are more unionized workers in the public sector than the private sector, with the rate among private companies dropping to 7.2 percent, the lowest since 1900, more than a century ago.¹³ In contrast, in Sweden strong and effective unions allow everyone to share in the nation's prosperity. Wages are raised, especially for low-income workers, while employment that is poorly compensated (vis-à-vis median

incomes) is almost eliminated.

Any comparison of Sweden and the United States makes clear that, in the advanced capitalist nations, there are important differences in social welfare. America has no notable social democratic or socialist parties and few unions; it has very limited social welfare and no universal Medicare. Sweden has a powerful left-wing presence in its politics and governments alongside the unionization of almost the entire workforce; it has first-rate social welfare. In general, when labor is strong, social expenditures are high as is the quality of welfare. But the power of labor often depends on the kind of democracy that undergirds this power.

One clue as to how important democracy is in alleviating poverty can be seen when we consider how countries elect their representatives and what the consequences are of that for poverty reduction. The United States and a handful of other nations are among the last in the world to have profoundly unfair electoral systems, known as “first past the post” (FPTP). In each district/riding, electors vote for one candidate. In this system, there is little correlation between the votes obtained by a party and the percentage of seats it receives (though the correlation is closer in the U.S. because most races have candidates from only the two main parties). FPTP is another travesty of “democracy.” Sometimes, in countries like Canada, a party wins a “landslide” of seats even when a majority of citizens vote *against* it.

In contrast to FPTP, most European countries (except Britain) long ago adopted an electoral system based on proportional representation (PR). Sweden, for instance, has had PR for over 100 years, since 1909. In this system, the proportion of seats a party receives is roughly equal to its percentage of votes; hence if it earns 30 percent of the vote it earns 30 percent of the seats. This means that the wishes of the people are reflected in a fairly precise manner in their legislatures. In Europe, PR typically produces coalition governments, a situation of majority

government where the cabinet ministers are drawn from more than one party. The parties together have the most seats in parliament, accounting for at least 50 percent of the votes cast in the election. So for example a coalition might consist of the social democrats (with 40 percent of the votes – and seats), the greens (with 7 percent), and the socialists (with 5 percent) (with the three of them adding up to 52 percent). The parties acknowledge that the prime minister will be the leader of the largest party in the coalition. But then the parties negotiate over who will get which cabinet portfolios, the policies that will be prioritized, and so on. In proportional systems, the expectation is that you will end up with coalition governments, barring the unusual case of a single party receiving more than 50 percent of the vote. So-called “minority governments” rarely exist in Europe, as they sometimes do in countries with political systems based on the British model. In Europe, coalitions are “normal politics.”

The few countries that still use FPTP are not as democratic as continental European countries, which have proportional representation. It is no coincidence that it is nations like Canada, Britain, and especially the United States that have cut most deeply into social welfare in the last few decades, because they are polities where “ideological minorities” can gain control of the government. Current forms of democracy, especially those that utilize PR, give power to citizens which they in turn can use to reduce poverty, in some instances to very low levels, as is the case in Sweden. But when it comes to abolishing poverty, PR is not a magic bullet. PR is not enough.

Another clue as to what might be enough can be found in ancient Athenian democracy (c. 508/7–322/1 BC). The term “democracy” is formed by joining two words, *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* means “people”; *kratos* means “power.” The original Greek meaning of democracy was “rule by the people” or, more specifically, “rule by the *poor*.” Everyone in Athens understood that

democracy meant rule by a certain social class, namely the “lower orders,” those who toiled in “base and menial” occupations, like farmers and blacksmiths. This is why philosophers like Plato and Aristotle opposed the democracy. They argued that workers had little leisure, which meant they had no time to be educated; so they were unfit to rule.

The Assembly, the main decision-making body, was open to all citizens, that is, all free adult males (hence excluding women and slaves as well as foreigners, those born outside Athens). Ordinary men, the *demos*, had access to political power. Athens “came as near as any community ever has to achieving the democratic ideal of government by people themselves.”¹⁴ This is because the Athenians had direct democracy (or what some writers call “strong democracy”). It was direct because citizens *were* the government. In contrast, we have representative democracy (or “weak democracy”). We vote for people who are supposed to represent our views. They make promises, agreeing to do things on our behalf. Electing representatives does not involve “the exercise of political power but its *relinquishment*, its *transfer* to others.”¹⁵ We give away our voice, our strength.

Today, democracy is equated with voting. A country is deemed democratic if it has free and fair elections that involve two or more competing parties. But in Athens, elections were regarded as *undemocratic*. They were considered an “oligarchic” practice, equated with rule by the rich, rule by the few. The poor felt that if there were elections, the wealthy would likely monopolize political life (like the U.S. Senate, where 68 of the 100 senators are millionaires, with the average wealth for all senators coming in at just under \$14 million).¹⁶ Representation, seen by the Greeks as the opposite of democracy, is now regarded as democracy’s basic feature. But representative democracy is a stunted version of “real” democracy. We vote for politicians, and then we have little or no say in public life for the next two to six years. The act of voting

is the extent of our involvement. As a result, citizens become detached from the democratic process. Athenians, on the other hand, went to their Assembly almost once a week, so they were fully immersed in political life.

Representative democracy alienates citizens from politics. If politicians are unable to solve our problems, why bother casting a ballot? There has been a dramatic decline in voter turnout in the last few decades (reversed, though likely temporarily, with the 2008 election). Individuals are becoming depoliticized, especially those under age 30. If we are going to address social problems, including poverty, we need to bring back that *other* tradition of democracy, namely “popular power,” namely rule by the *demos*.

More Democracy, Less Poverty

HOW COULD ALTERATIONS TO DEMOCRACY improve the life of the poor? One experiment, which has gained much attention worldwide, is unfolding in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre (1.3 million people). In 1988, the Workers’ Party won the municipal election, and they soon initiated a process that, in some limited ways, attempts to return to the older, Athenian version of direct democracy. In the early 1990s, they implemented the practice of “participatory budgets.” The citizens of the city decide annually how to spend about 20 percent of the city budget, basically the capital expenditures (they do not deliberate on matters such as workers’ wages and benefits, which are negotiated between employees and the government via collective agreements). Recent European and North American “democratic” experiments have involved governments engaging in *consultation* with citizens. People are listened to then often ignored. They soon stop participating in consultation processes because nothing is at stake. In contrast, in Porto Alegre, *decision-making power* has been handed back to citizens.

The system is based on a “participatory pyramid.” It begins at the local level, which can be an apartment building or street, where meet-

ings are open to everyone in order to discuss issues that affect the neighborhood. Proposals are made and prioritized. Because these proposals have a greater chance of being implemented when more people participate, there is a material incentive for citizens to become involved in the democratic process. They “readily perceive the results of their mobilization.”¹⁷ Proposals then move up to one of the 16 district levels where plenary assemblies are held, with hundreds and occasionally thousands of participants. The district forums determine a list of high priority projects. Neighborhoods nominate delegates to the district forums and appoint councilors to the city’s Participatory Budget Council, which is at the top of the decision-making pyramid. The final budget is then handed over to the municipal assembly, which tends to accept, with few modifications, the budget created by the people.

Studies in the late 1990s showed that there is a strong relationship between how poor a district is and how much investment it receives. The most well off district, with more than 20 percent of the citizens, received just 4 percent of new investment, one-fifth what we might expect, given its population. The poorest district, with 2 percent of the population, received 5 percent of new investment, or more than twice as much as might be typical. Impoverished neighborhoods have used their newfound power to improve basic infrastructure. The percentage of city residents on the sewage system doubled within a decade to 84 percent, while almost every home now has running water. These are significant enhancements to people’s lives in a short space of time.

The participatory budget process “exerts a massive redistributive effect between the districts and favors investment in the poorest areas”; the objective is “to privilege the most underprivileged.”¹⁸ This is achieved partly because the greatest levels of involvement are in these districts. The per capita rate of participation is four times higher in the poorest areas, compared to the richest. Participation rates are high even

for the near penniless, the bottom 6 percent or so of the population, a group that is non-existent politically in the United States. Social justice is built into this type of democracy, with the poor rewarded for their activism, unlike America’s system of governance where the *demos* is rarely seen and seldom heard. At the same time, the Porto Alegre experiment is not a “miracle solution” to all problems. For instance, it cannot deal with issues that have to be handled at the national level, such as low incomes, unemployment, inadequate pensions, and so forth, nor can it manage global challenges, such as climate change and economic meltdowns. Still, its early results are impressive, to the point where, for Porto Alegre’s poor, direct democracy may have achieved more for them in a decade than representative democracy did in a century.

The experiments undertaken in Brazil and many other nations are facilitating a redefinition, a *radicalization*, of democracy. This entails a reversal of the standard view of democratic practice that has come to dominate in the last 150 years. Until the mid-19th century, democracy was seen as a dangerous idea. Universal suffrage, which many were advocating at this time, came in for special criticism. You could not give the vote to workers, the argument went, because they are stupid, uneducated, and apathetic. They are incapable of reasoned thought. Issues are too complicated for the multitude to understand. If the rabble are given decision-making power, we’ll end up with “rule by the mob.” And so on. But workers eventually obtained *some* decision-making power, which enabled them to improve their quality of life, when they secured the right to vote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Calls for stronger, direct democracy in the twenty-first century are often met with the same criticisms (ignorance, complexity, etc.) that were made against workers struggling for the franchise 100 years ago. Besides, the critics say, even if people were capable of governing themselves, how could we facilitate mass debate and mass voting? That might have been possible

in Athens, but could we replicate this today? Indeed we can — though not in precisely the same manner.

What set of institutions would facilitate “people power”? At the local, neighborhood level, as in Porto Alegre, this could entail full participation of the citizenry. But even with new technologies, this type of participation would not be feasible at higher levels of government (state and federal). One way to get around this is to make increased use of institutions like the “citizens assembly,” composed of a number of randomly chosen individuals. They could deliberate on a matter, hear testimony from experts and the general public, and render a verdict. This would produce “decisions close to what the people as a whole would have decided, had they been able to assemble and deliberate.”¹⁹ We could take this idea further and have the entire House and Senate selected on the basis of a representative sample.²⁰ Let’s say the 535 members of Congress are chosen at random. What would this produce? For one, Congress would perfectly reflect the ideological spectrum across the population. For instance, if 25 percent of people describe themselves as “conservative,” then 25 percent of members would be conservative. However, that’s not an improvement over electoral systems with proportional representation, which adequately articulate the various political views in society.

Random selection would be superior to proportional representation (that is, more democratic) in other important ways. For one, it would mean that 50 percent of members of Congress would be female, not 17 percent. As opposed to the current 92 women in Congress, random selection would increase this number *immediately* to 268. Random selection would automatically produce gender equality as well as proportionality based on race, religion, age, dis/ability, sexual orientation, and so forth. Furthermore, and most out of line with the current political system, it would properly represent all income groups/social classes. For example,

if 9 percent of the population is unemployed, that means 48 of the 535 members would be selected from those who are jobless. With 12 percent of adults making use of food stamps, 64 (!) members of Congress would be drawn from the ranks of the poorest Americans. If this were the case, we would have public policies *vastly different* from the ones we have now. Imagine someone proposing to restrict eligibility for food assistance programs and then having 60 or 70 members, one after another, go up to the microphone to describe what life is like for those subsisting on the margins of society. These members, all of whom have experienced the indignity of food stamps, could be outvoted by their colleagues, but a strong case would be made against the proposal, not by people appearing as witnesses before a Congressional committee but by *members of Congress themselves*. With this type of representation — a miniature reproduction of the body politic — it is highly unlikely that poverty could reproduce itself decade after monotonous decade.

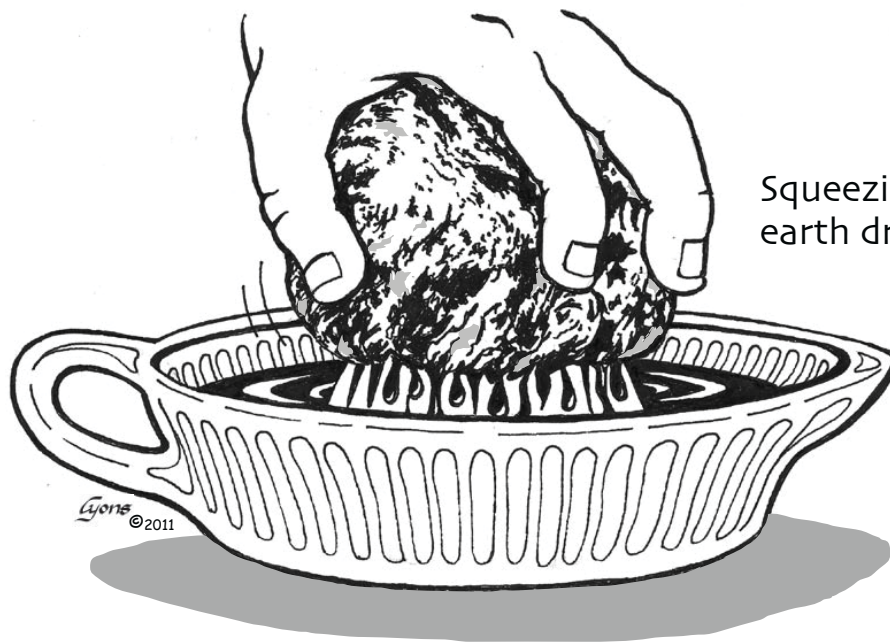
No country has direct democracy as its main form of governance. This is not because it is impractical but because it is radical. Direct democracy has the potential to realign power relations in society and contribute to the extension of social justice. Meanwhile, poverty is ensconced in the straightjacket of the current political system; political impoverishment produces economic impoverishment. Poverty will not be ended by a Christ-like president or a more liberal-oriented Congress (a virtual impossibility under status quo politics). It will not be ended by hopelessly naïve prescriptions to turn rich, obstructionist politicians into decent, caring humans. Positive changes for the poor will occur only in conjunction with changes to the republic’s rules, in the form of the full implementation of democracy. Until that fact is recognized — and acted upon — poverty in America will never be eradicated.

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Squeezing the
earth dry for profit

Towards an Independent Working-Class Climate Movement

DANIEL RANDALL AND PAUL HAMPTON

OUR POLITICS — working-class self-emancipation — are given a new urgency by the danger of catastrophic climate change. The need to move society to, at the least, a low-carbon economy, based on production for need rather than profit, is extremely urgent.

But one of the many tragic legacies of Stalinism has been the virtual disappearance from Marxism of the nuanced ecological politics and analyses that were once integral to it. Stalin's hyper-industrialization drives, for example, left little room for the subtle understanding of humanity's relationship to nature developed by Marx and others. As a result, many ecologists believe that the working class and the organized labor movement, the privileged agents in the Marxist world-view, are irrelevant to tackling environmental degradation — if not part of the problem.

But beneath the excrement generated by Stalinism runs a rich seam of independent working-class ecology, which we believe has a great deal to offer the fight to tackle climate change. We argue that class is central to the fight for a coherent ecological politics in the twenty-first century. A Marxist approach provides both the vital analysis of structures and causes, and the focus on working-class agency that is necessary to successfully revolutionize society to tackle climate change.

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Exploiting Workers, Subsuming the Planet

MARXISM HAS A SOPHISTICATED VIEW of the relationship between human society and nature, starting with the concept of metabolism (*stoffwechsel*). Burkett and Foster have explained how labor mediates the relationship between society and nature; how the metabolic rift conceptualizes the breakdown in humanity's broken relationship with nature under class society; and how socialism will reconstruct this metabolism in a more rational way.¹

Similarly, Smith's "production of nature" approach draws into sharp relief the impact of capitalism in reshaping, remaking and reworking nature all the way down. Smith argued that, "No part of the earth's surface, the atmosphere, the oceans, the geological substratum or the biological superstratum are immune from transformation by capital" and that "the alteration of climate by human activity" was an expression of this relatively new phenomenon of the social production of nature.² The chief virtue of this Marxist approach is the emphasis on changing social relations to tackle ecological problems. The idea of the production of nature implies an historical future that is still to be determined by political events and forces.³

Marxist political economy of class societies provides a wealth of insights into the drives that cause ecological damage. In particular Marx understood that the unlimited drive to amass profits for capital accumulation overrode other imperatives such as human need or environmental sustainability. Central is the Marxist conception of classes, defined under capitalism by the exploitation of waged labor by capital. The forms of ex-

ploitation — the creation of absolute surplus value, (or the formal subsumption of labor to capital) and relative surplus value (or the real subsumption of labor to capital) — explain the dynamism of the system but also simultaneously the enormous power of workers within it.

Some Marxists have extended these insights about exploitation to ecological degradation, and introduced the concepts of the formal and real subsumption of nature into capital. Under the formal subsumption of nature, “firms confront nature as an exogenous set of material properties and bio-/geophysical processes, but are unable to directly augment natural processes and use them as strategies for increasing productivity.” In contrast, “under the real subsumption of nature, limited to biologically based industries, firms are able to take hold of and transform natural production, and use this as a source of productivity increase.” In adapting these concepts, they “highlight some of the different ways in which biophysical systems are industrialized and, in some cases, can actually be made to operate as productive forces in and of themselves.” Under real subsumption “capital circulates through nature (albeit unevenly) as opposed to around it. Biological systems are made to act as actual forces of production.”⁴

The parallels between the real subsumption of labor and the real subsumption of nature should be clear. It is precisely the same mechanisms that give rise to worker exploitation (longer working day, the reorganization and mechanization of the labor process, etc.) that also give rise to ecological damage. These analogous, simultaneous processes have a common root in the drives of capital.

Workers as Strategic Ecological Actors

A FURTHER CONCLUSION from this political economy is to elevate the working class to a unique position as the essential progressive agent of social change under capitalism. Workers have the power and the interest to found a democratic collectivist alternative to capitalist

(and Stalinist) class society that is socially just and ecologically sustainable. Therefore workers, who have the historical incentive to mitigate and ultimately abolish their own exploitation, also have a significant and privileged stake in abolishing the processes that give rise to the degradation of the natural environment. The

Class is central to the fight for a coherent ecological politics in the twenty-first century.

working class is the agency capable of embracing the general, universal interest of ecology as its own special interest.

The specific impacts of ecological degradation on working-class communities also provide an immediate motivation for workers to resist climate change. Obach argued that “it has been established that lower-income groups suffer disproportionately from the effects of environmental degradation in terms of its negative health consequences and other quality of life issues.” He added that “research has demonstrated that, sometimes as a matter of policy, hazardous, environmentally undesirable facilities are sited in or near low-income communities. The health implications for communities surrounding such facilities are well established.” Similarly, “policies designed to protect the natural environment also tend to impose a greater economic burden on the working class.”⁵

Throughout the history of capitalism organized working-class movements across the globe have at times displayed a tremendous and inspiring willingness to tackle ecological questions. In the United States, that tradition includes the OCAW strike and boycott against Shell Oil in 1973 and the alliance of Teamsters and “Turtles” which disrupted the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. There are tremendous

examples from “water-wars” in South Africa and in Bolivia, as well as oil struggles in Nigeria, landless worker and peasant movements in Brazil and in countless other places, South and North, where workers have led progressive ecological struggles in their own interests.

Green Bans and Workers' Plans

THE MOVEMENT LED BY AUSTRALIAN building workers in the 1970s is perhaps the most inspiring example of workers organizing to take action in defense of the planet. In the first half of the 70s, the New South Wales Builders' Labourers Federation (NSW BLF) imposed around 50 green bans in and around Sydney. The term “green ban” — refusing to work on environmentally injurious constructions — was coined by NSW BLF secretary Jack Munday as a more appropriate description of a refusal to work, previously known as “blacking.”⁶

The first green ban was introduced at Kelly's Bush in June 1971. After a corporate developer attempted to re-zone the parkland, The “Battlers for Kelly's Bush” community group was formed to oppose it. The Battlers contacted the BLF, who agreed to impose a ban on redevelopment. The struggle to save the Rocks, Sydney's first area of European settlement, from proposed redevelopment was considered the most important green ban. The Rocks Residents Group developed a “People's Plan” for the area after the BLF introduced a ban.

Woolloomooloo, probably the most successful green ban, saw local residents establish an action group after the local state issued plans to demolish housing to build high-rise office blocks. The BLF imposed a green ban and, with pressure from the local residents, a satisfactory community solution was reached. Other green bans included Victoria Street, the Sydney Opera House car park, the Newcastle hotel, the fight to prevent the North West freeway cutting through the inner-city suburbs, and the struggle to save the Theatre Royal from demolition. Some green

bans were permanent, some achieved their aims, while others were lifted at the request of local resident action groups or the National Trust.

The struggle to transform the NSW BLF itself was crucial to its development of radical ecological politics. Most of the NSW BLF leadership at the time were dissident communists, receptive to new left ideas. The period before the “green bans” movement had seen a rank-and-file caucus oust corrupt, conservative bureaucrats and push the union to fight on the immediate day-to-day concerns of its members. It was through the process of resisting the ways in which capitalism exploits workers that BLF activists were able to develop an understanding of the ways in which capitalism exploits the planet, and of how that environmental exploitation is in turn underpinned by and premised on the exploitation of workers.

The BLF showed that a militant, political labor movement was well placed to achieve radical environmental ends. As Munday put it: “Trade unions must become involved with environmental issues, and environmentalists must become more concerned with the importance of promoting trade union struggles for socially useful production and consumption. Too few people question the products we make.” Munday also emphasized that ecology is a vital matter of working-class self-interest: “The myth that the environment movement is the preserve of the do-gooding middle class must be exploded. It is, in fact, the workers who are most affected by the deterioration of the environment and it is therefore up to the trade union movement to give it a higher priority to fighting to improve it.”⁷

During the same period in Britain, a large number of union branches and rank and file organizations — faced with employer-led restructuring and job losses — produced “workers' plans” for the reorganization of production in their workplace. These plans invariably questioned the logic of capitalist production for profit and asserted the need for “socially-useful

production,” often making explicit proposals for “green” production.

Probably the most famous was the Lucas Aerospace Corporate Plan, published by a cross-union combine committee in 1976. The document detailed plans for heat pumps, solar cells and fuel cells, windmills and flexible power packs, as well as a road-rail public transportation vehicle, a new hybrid power pack for motor vehicles and airships. It stated: “New, renewable, sources and more efficient methods of conversion must be developed. Solutions to the problem based on nuclear power give rise to new problems of health, safety, and even survival. Instead R&D should focus on new sources of energy and new types of energy conversion transmission and storage.”⁸

Organized workers in major military contracting firms such as Vickers and Rolls-Royce produced similar initiatives. Chrysler car workers also developed this approach, demanding diversification into public transport and agricultural vehicles. A statement from Chrysler stewards stated:

The widespread ecological and environmental criticism of the private petrol-driven car as a socially irresponsible form of transport suggests to us that we must explore the feasibility of new kinds of products of a socially useful kind to harness the skills of the existing plant and machinery, and direct it away from a commodity whose profitability and usefulness is rapidly declining.⁹

Other workers’ plans also emphasized renewable and environmentally friendly technologies. Workers at GEC Trafford advocated wave, wind, and nuclear power. Its report noted: “In the Severn Estuary, with its 40ft tidal range, Britain has one of the world’s best sites for tidal power.... Once built, this barrage would supply this energy almost free of charge. With no fuel costs to meet, the only major cost would be the maintenance and overseeing of the equipment.”

Although these plans were snuffed out by the employers’ offensive and the wave of

austerity imposed by Thatcher, they indicate the potential power of a militant working-class movement to relate constructively to pressing ecological issues.

Ecology Without Class

A CLASS-STRUGGLE RESPONSE to environmental destruction is still a minority idea within the environmental and labor movements. Even on the left, a response that puts workers’ agency, self-organization, and struggle at its center competes with models that look elsewhere for agents of change — states, NGOs or nebulous alliances of “social movements.”

The Green New Deal is one such approach. Writing in *New Politics*, Ashley Dawson argued for such a model — yet workers hardly get a look-in. While he calls for the creation of a “Green Corps, a millions-strong army of workers trained in environmental stewardship and the creation and deployment of green technology,” workers in currently-existing jobs (rather than jobs we might wish to see created in the future) are absent from the picture and presumably have no specific agency other than as one component part of a “broad variety of social movements” which can lobby governments to implement the emissions-restriction measures.¹⁰

In Britain, the Green New Deal report, authored by prominent Green politicians, NGO officials, media personalities, and business people, demanded the price of fossil fuels be driven up until they’re “high enough to tackle climate change effectively by creating the economic incentive to drive efficiency and bring alternative fuels to market.”¹¹ The authors appeared to have forgotten about fuel poverty, or that a dramatic rise in fuel prices will hit working-class people hardest. Higher prices are, of course, the classic market “solution” to almost any problem.

The listed agents for change identified in the British Green New Deal report speaks volumes about its project. It seeks to bring “diverse social and industrial forces together, leading to a new progressive movement,” and looks to the

“exciting possibility of a new political alliance: an alliance between the labor movement and the green movement, between those engaged in manufacturing and the public sector, between civil society and academia, industry, agriculture and those working productively in the service industries.”¹² This is the politics of the green popular front; while the climate crisis might pose a threat to the bulk of humanity, the crisis's roots in class exploitation mean that the resistance to it must have working-class leadership.

Undoubtedly, amongst this growing mass of supporters there will be more and less radical conceptions of what the Green New Deal means. But they share a common starting-point in that they all identify top-down measures implemented by existing states as the key weapon for combating climate change. The explicit affinity with Roosevelt is telling. His New Deal was a top-down, state-capitalist solution to an economic crisis that contemporary Marxist critics rightly identified as “aiming at the restoration of capitalist profits.” New Deal models are, fundamentally, about saving capitalism from itself.

A less explicit but similarly mistaken retreat from class is beaten by the Belem Declaration and the “ecosocialist” milieu around it. Although its authors and supporters are ostensibly revolutionary socialists, there is a lack of clarity about the role of the working class as an ecological actor. At least one of them, Joel Kovel, is quite explicit that there is “no privileged agent of ecosocialist transformation” or any “privileged role to be played by the international proletariat.”¹³

The Declaration contains a great deal of legitimate and useful criticism of “market solutions,” and is right to emphasize that a revolutionary anti-capitalism is the only ultimate al-

ternative to climate crisis. But the Declaration's anti-capitalism and “ecosocialism” lack a sharp focus on class. While it alludes to “the struggles

of labor,” the closest it gets to identifying a specific agency for anti-capitalist change is naming “the poor and indigenous peoples.”¹⁴ Without question, peasant and indigenous movements in places most immediately threatened by the consequences of climate change have a vital role to play. But in

a world in which capitalist labor relations predominate almost everywhere (even in those countries where the wage-working class is still a minority), it is only as part of an alliance led by organized workers that those movements can hope to have a significant impact.

To emphasize the necessity of working-class leadership is not to downplay, dismiss or de-legitimize the struggles of other oppressed or exploited groups; it is simply to acknowledge that we live in a capitalist world, where working-class struggles do have a privileged role and position, and certainly not only within the advanced-capitalist “global north.” For Chinese and Korean auto-workers, Bangladeshi garment workers, Nigerian, Iranian and Iraqi oil workers, and many others, the need to develop a working-class program for tackling climate change may very soon become a matter of life-and-death urgency.

The quote from Evo Morales which acts as the Belem Declaration's epigram betrays an incoherence on the question of agency. Morales may be a radical reformer, but he remains the head of a bourgeois government administering a capitalist state. In a book to promote the Declaration and its “ecosocialist” approach, edited by another of its authors, the contrast is clear. The book contains four contributions from members of the Cuban ruling bureaucracy

Is the state itself to be looked
to as the agent for change,
or is that agent to be the
working-class?

(a state in which independent trade unions and political parties are illegal), one from Morales, and another from a supporter of Hugo Chavez's government. Few entries point towards the ecological potential of workers' struggles. The emphasis is on top-down action by the leaders of states; the fact that the states in question spuriously pretend to some species of anti-capitalism is only evidence that the malign influence of Stalinism in the left and the labor movement still needs combating.¹⁵

None of this is to suggest that it is wrong to demand action from existing states or that state measures cannot produce progressive results. It is not to make a fetish of the "bottom-up" as against the "top-down." The question is one of agency: is the state itself to be looked to as the agent for change, or is that agent to be the working-class — which may well place demands and force concessions from capitalist states, but from within a framework of self-organization and class independence?

Working-Class Climate Action in UK

A MODEST CONTRIBUTION towards developing a working class-based ecology perspective has been made in Britain. The Workers' Climate Action (WCA) network was founded in 2007 by a group of class-struggle activists (including Trotskyists, anarchists and others) working in the climate and labor movements. It fights for working-class environmentalism and revolutionary ecology within both movements, and as a direct-action solidarity network to engage with and catalyze workers' struggle, with a particular focus on workers in high-emissions industries such as aviation and energy. When the 2008 Camp for Climate Action took place near the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station, WCA supporters participating in the Camp marched with a banner reading "Yes to Kingsnorth workers, No to E.on bosses." When British Airways workers struck against pay cuts and job freezes in 2010, WCA activists organized solidarity to connect the workers' immediate struggles

to questions of transition and conversion. The environmental profligacy of BA bosses was clear: they flew empty jets in order to diminish figures for the number of planes grounded by the workers, in an attempt to play down the strike's impact. By involving itself in the strike on the basis of working-class solidarity, WCA was able to begin to develop ecological politics around a dispute that had no ostensible "environmental" angle (and indeed could be seen as pro-emissions). WCA has also sought a close relationship with transport workers' unions, particularly the RMT (which represents workers on the London Underground and is arguably Britain's most industrially-militant union), in order to raise demands for the expansion of public transport.

Perhaps the most significant struggle in which WCA has played a leading role was at Vestas, on the Isle of Wight (a small island of less than 150,000 people off the southern coast of England). Vestas is the world's largest producer of wind turbines and was the single-biggest private sector employer on the island. Despite turning record profits, the firm announced the closure of its manufacturing plants in 2009. Although objective social conditions cried out for the factory to remain open to continue producing vitally needed renewable energy equipment, its bosses closed it due to a lack of sufficiently responsive markets. This came as the then-Labour government began making lofty promises about a "green energy revolution" and the creation of hundreds of thousands of green jobs.

The plant was not unionized, but following factory-gates agitation by WCA supporters and large public meetings, a group of workers developed sufficient confidence to occupy the main factory site, which lasted for nearly a month. Although workers were not strong enough to restart production under their own control or, ultimately, to save the plant from closure, they cohered an alliance of trade unionists, community campaigners, and radical environmentalists.

They exposed the disgusting hypocrisy of the Labour government and the callously anti-worker (and, necessarily, anti-planet) practices of even a so-called “green” employer like Vestas. They provided a living, breathing model of working-class ecology and turned a sleepy island into a flashpoint of class struggle.

Vestas was a tragic but chemically-pure demonstration of the specific ways in which wage-labor and the profit motive necessarily lead to environmental degradation, and of the way in which the environmental damage capitalism causes is inextricably bound up with its exploitation of workers. The Vestas struggle came in the same year as a number of other workplace occupations, including a particularly long-running one at the Visteon car plant in north London. There too, issues of sustainability and just transition were discussed. Across the UK, union reps in schools and colleges, central and local government, in the health service and in private industry, workers are taking action on ecological issues.

In the struggles ahead, activist networks like Workers' Climate Action will become even more important for developing a working-class response to the ecological and economic crises. Struggles like the green bans, Lucas, and Vestas developed battles over day-to-day conditions into struggles for workers' control. They posed, as Trotsky put it in Transitional Program, “the question of who is the boss in the factory: the capitalist or the workers?” They asked which interests should predominate — the interests of profit, or the interests of human need and environmental sustainability. And they asked why it was, if it was the workers who possessed the skills to develop plans run their workplaces sustainably, justly and democratically without bosses, why they could not in fact run them? And, if they could run their workplaces along such lines, why couldn't they similarly run a

whole industry? A whole city? The whole world? It is time for organized labor and its supporters in the ecology movement to ask, and answer, those questions again.

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Starting All Over from Scratch?

A Plea for “Radical Reform” of Our Own Movement

SHEILA COHEN

THE CURRENT GLOBAL CRISIS of capitalism makes the task set by the Daniel Singer Millennium Prize Foundation* look relatively straightforward. Immediate proposals for radical reform would clearly include the demand that Western governments everywhere take over the banks and use the resulting trillions to fund health care, re-establish truly “affordable” housing, rebuild education at every level, provide humane child- and elder-care, not to mention end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and repair the devastation to humanity represented in Haiti, Somalia, and other disasters of the “developing” world. Such proposals would certainly be radical, relevant to the vast majority of the human race and, if granted, enough of a blow to global capital to knock it off its pedestal more conclusively than Saddam Hussein.

But practical? The problems scarcely need spelling out. Governments, as currently constituted in the dominant capitalist countries, have shown pretty conclusively that they do not respond to proposals, demands, campaigns — even monster protests like the millions-strong anti-war marches in 2003. True, Thatcher yielded to the anti-poll tax riots in 1993. But, in ideological years, this happened centuries ago. As Daniel Singer himself noted in his final call to arms, “The ideological task is...immense,

because we have gone so far backwards that sometimes one has the impression of starting all over from scratch.”¹ And not only, of course, the ideological task — the political, strategic, and material task of toppling an immense, homogeneous, complacent colossus from its plinth. Capitalists and their governments learn constantly, ruthlessly, how to resist pressure for their demise. Socialists, it seems, do not.

Moral Trumpets?

SO PERHAPS, instead of trying to reach for the stars, or at least what one socialist group used to call the “commanding heights,” one should look to a more modest set of radical proposals. Many of these are united in what has been called a “Third Way,” offering an alternative to both red-in-the-claw capitalism and bureaucratized “state socialism.” Some aspects of this perspective center on forms of workers’ control, or perhaps the more modest expression “employee participation.” Others invoke the non-profit or “social enterprise” sector.

Enthusiastically endorsed by Tony Blair’s ideas guru Anthony Giddens, such proposals have in fact found ready acceptance among the powers-that-be. During the recent UK election campaign, all three major parties waxed lyrical over the “employee co-partnership” arrangements at John Lewis, a popular chain of department stores. Such unanimity among

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*WINNING ENTRY FOR THE DANIEL SINGER PRIZE. *This was the question posed for the prize:* “Given the devastating effects of the present crisis on working people, what proposals for radical reform can be raised which are both practical to the vast majority while moving us towards the goal of socialism?”

thieves is itself a bad sign, confirmed by the fact that the salary of basic John Lewis assistants is a paltry £6.30-7.00 an hour², despite their much-vaunted “profit-sharing” bonuses. In other words, the dynamics of profitability remain firmly in place, with ever-increasing intensification of labor — here enshrined in a performance-related pay scheme — a further dimension.

SINGER: “Alas, the walls of that Jericho will not be brought down by moral trumpets.”

From his perch on the cusp of the New Millennium, Daniel Singer himself confirms the skeptical perspective Marxists are forced to take on any “Third Way” between capitalism and socialism. One of the more radical exponents of this tendency, Andre Gorz, is criticized for “giv[ing] the impression that capitalism will just tiptoe off the stage,” while to Marcuse’s “outcasts and outsiders” who believed that their 1960s communes would multiply until they painlessly “submerged” the capitalist system, Singer snorts “Alas, the walls of that Jericho will not be brought down by moral trumpets.” Challenging arguments put forward by a keen advocate of the non-profit sector, our critic concludes “... the real puzzle is why should business, big or small, accept additional taxes and subsidize a sector much wider than what is needed to have a ‘reserve army of labor,’ thus boosting the general level of wages?”³

The issue lies in that succinct “why should.” Why should capital in fact do anything that threatens its profitability, since profitability is the lifeblood of even the most “socially conscious” entrepreneur? The current argument fully endorses such intelligent cynicism. But

where to look next?

Moving Us Towards Socialism

PERHAPS A WAY OUT can be sought through a historic perspective on the dynamic of pressing demands on capitalism; one which defines such demands as “transitional.” The author of the concept of transitional demands is, of course, Leon Trotsky, and Trotsky not in his passionate 1905 phase but late, tired, and not a little delusional, hectoring his troops with invocations of *The Death Agony of Capitalism*.⁴

Nevertheless, the concept of demands which not only involve opposition to capitalism but a mechanism of sorts for pushing forward the fight against that system is intriguing. Demands for what? Luckily, Trotsky provides a list. Calls for the construction of public works, full employment and “decent conditions for all” are more specifically posed through “the slogan of a sliding scale of working hours” and the related suggestion that “wages...would follow the movement of prices.”⁵ The two latter demands are specifically “transitional” because their internal logic and process itself advances the objective sought. Thus a shorter working week for employed workers would potentially, of course, create the need for more labor. A similar “sliding scale” of wages would ensure that workers did not suffer the effects of inflation and were therefore able to ensure comparatively “decent conditions” for themselves.

Yet despite their ultra-revolutionary origin, both these demands, particularly the former, have at certain points been “granted” under capitalism. Trade unions have long been critical of overtime, and particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, many organized workers in the industrialized countries went further and raised the demand for a 30- or 35-hour week. As shown below, the devil, so to speak, was in the detail; but the fact is that this transitional demand was “won” within capitalism without, as history gloomily indicates, realizing Trotsky’s conception of a kind of moving staircase to socialism.

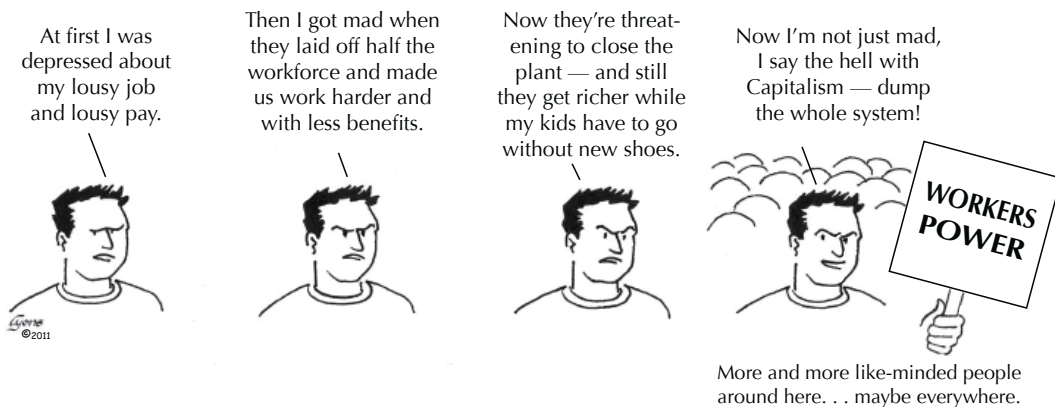
Somewhat more bizarrely, the notion of a sliding scale of wages has also been implemented under capitalism — by a staunch representative of capital in the form of “Grocer Heath” (as *Private Eye* nicknamed him), the toothy Tory who governed Britain from 1970 to early 1974. Heath introduced “Threshold Agreements,” described as “index-linked” by reference to the Retail Price Index, as part of his attempt at — pay restraint. During Parliamentary Questions in July 1973, Heath replied to the question “Will...the Government insist upon the trade unions accepting threshold agreements as a precedent to any further talks?” that “Threshold agreements should become part of Stage 3 [incomes policy].”

The apparent use of the identical principle embodied in Trotsky’s “sliding scale of wages” as a condition for entering into talks with trade union leaders, clearly with the hope that such talks would ensure pay restraint, can be explained only by the fact that inflation was then relatively low. Not surprisingly, threshold agreements were dropped like a brick under the Labour government of 1974 as prices soared into double digits. Nevertheless, the point stands that Conservative politicians have introduced policies advocated by a leading revolutionary as containing the dynamic potential for social transformation. On the evidence, transitional

demands per se are not guarantors of revolutionary struggle, let alone victory.

The case of the shorter working week is perhaps clearer. As indicated above, struggles for just such a demand were widespread in Western Europe during the last decades of the 20th century, when the kind of idealism contained in proposals for workers’ plans, workers’ co-ops, etc.⁶ had not yet been eliminated from the movement. Yet the fact that these struggles were actually successful in introducing a shorter working week should not blind us to the practical outcome. As one steward from a Ford plant in Germany described the successful outcome of their strike over the issue in 1985: “The working week will [now] be 38.5 hours in the engineering industry. The demand was for 35 hours, and this was the compromise after a six week strike...We have made a successful first step into reducing working time. The disadvantage of the new agreement is that we have had to make concessions to the employers as regards so-called flexibilization of working time...[and] management is exercising more and more pressure on workers....”⁷

In France and Britain, too, “flexibilization” was introduced to tighten the screw of reduced working time far enough to ensure that in fact the goal of increased employment need not, and has not, been met. As one British engineering



worker admitted, after triumphantly announcing the reduction of their working week to 37 hours, "...there must be a catch. And the catch, at least so far, lies in the words 'no-costs basis'... What [that] means, in practice, is increased productivity and flexibility."⁸

This Was Syndicalism

HERE, AGAIN, WE COME TO THE NUB of the problem. Without some form of sustained militancy, of ongoing struggle against capital's incessant demand for the extraction of ever-increasing surplus value, whatever demands can be wrung by an initial show of such resistance will be undermined, eroded, and finally made worthless by the capitalist juggernaut's inexorable movement "forward" in its own interests.

To point this out is not to criticize workers who, in the case of enlightened struggles like that for the 35-hour week, are probably some of the bravest fighters for their class and certainly in the vanguard of the ongoing struggle against capitalism. It is to identify a far more fundamental issue in the dynamics of such struggles: the dominance of reformist ideology and accommodation with capital within working-class activity. Linked to this question is a key distinction between relatively formal and institutionalized struggles like those described above and the far sharper, more subversive, labor-process-based forms of revolt⁹ which spark the real challenge to capitalism.

To explore this further, we return to Singer's meditation on the new millennium, in which he describes the 1995 strikes in France as an example of a "potential battleground" in Western Europe. While Singer is concerned mainly to draw a historical contrast with the May

events of 1968, he also, significantly, entitles his chapter "French Winter of Discontent."¹⁰ Whether intentionally or not, this title invokes a comparison with the 1978-9 strike wave in Britain which more famously generated that Shakespearian metaphor. Yet an exploration of the UK strike explosion reveals crucial differences between Singer's relatively moderate "winter" and the rather more riotous events of the late 1970s, which featured forms of dual power and soviet-style organization.

First and most significantly, the 1995 strikes involved only the public sector. Comparing them to 1968, Singer notes, "This time, the awakening was brought about by the stoppage of transport. The factories kept on producing."¹¹ Although the

Winter of Discontent is commonly thought of as a public sector dispute, it began as a wave of strikes in the private sector launched by a 9-week all-out stoppage throughout the Ford motor company in the UK which drove a "coach and horses" through the Labour government's 5 percent pay freeze. Bakers, British Oxygen workers, oil tanker drivers and truckers followed. Secondly, although much of the action in the UK was official, its extent and trajectory went well beyond conventional modes of industrial action.

The horrified reaction of the labor movement leadership to the strike wave was summed up in the Labour prime minister Callaghan's protest that "the industrial actions which left the dead unburied and the sick out of hospital were not...examples of trade union activity ... real trade unions should only be equated with officialdom." TUC leader Len Murray was "near to despair: this was not trade unionism, this was 'syndicalism.'" Yet stentorian condemnations

A revolutionary organization is
a grouping of class-conscious
socialists whose practice consists
not in building the party itself, but
in building the movement.

did nothing to stem the quasi-revolutionary dynamic. Not only “syndicalism,” but elements of “dual power” began to characterize the dispute: “Within a short time strike committees were deciding what moved in and out of many of the ports and factories. Passes were issued for essential materials ... but supplies for industry were halted ... In some cases strike committees controlled the public services of whole cities.”

Echoing the “dual power” theme, Thatcher records in her memoirs that “the Labour government had handed over the running of the country to local committees of trade unionists.” Her fellow Tory James Prior complained that Britain was now being run by “little Soviets” — local strike committees of lorry drivers, train drivers and public sector groups. Dennis Healey, Labour’s Chancellor, recorded that “Each night the television screens carried film of bearded men in duffel coats huddled around braziers. Nervous viewers thought the revolution had come.”¹²

A recent history of these events¹³ includes a fascinating account of one redoubt of struggle in the more obscure reaches of the north country, the East Yorkshire “flatlands” near Hull. Here, for five weeks in early 1979, as part of the national truck-drivers’ strike, “the economy of Hull was effectively run by a ‘dispensation committee’ of shop stewards...that commentators on the left and the right compared to the revolutionary Soviets of 1917.” This far from revolutionary historian comments: “Hull, in short, was the Winter of Discontent at its most all-encompassing and alarming; and also, perhaps, at its most exhilarating.”¹⁴

May 1968, with its mass strikes and occupations, also raised far more potently the spectre of revolution — the insurrectionary action which strikes real fear into the heart of the ruling class, as witnessed by de Gaulle’s hurried departure — than anything remotely suggested by the warm-hearted, generous, essentially moderate events of 1995. The point here is not that anarchy, ruthlessness, and violence are necessarily right

in themselves — although seizure of bourgeois property and sources of profit by the workers who create them must surely be applauded by any right-minded socialist. It is that only such actions can get anywhere near knocking the immensely powerful, complacent, and endlessly resourceful ruling class off its perch.

The World Turned Inside Out

IT MAY WELL BE ARGUED that the 1995 protests, and similar actions in Western Europe against the impact of neo-liberalism, are more “political,” and thus more promising, than the materially-motivated explosions of the late 1960s and 1970s. While the instrumental motivation behind the Winter of Discontent led of its own logic to organization and activity far more subversive of capitalism than the most “radical” of political demands, what lay behind these actions and forms of organization was indeed not revolutionary politics but the simple logic of class-based “economism.” As a leading activist in the Hull episode put it, “We’d had three years of pay restraint, and people had got fed up of it. You’d...see the gaffer go off home in his nice car, to his detached house in the country...And you said: ‘We want a bit of that.’” As Beckett comments, “Britain might have been at its most egalitarian in the late seventies, but for the discontented truck drivers...it was not nearly egalitarian enough.”¹⁵

Yet despite, in this activist’s words, “the political consciousness of the average lorry driver [being] zero”, he and his fellow-workers “became part of something that would have large political consequences...[their eventual strike] had an almost millenarian quality that went beyond politics — or at least beyond electoral and party politics.” As their shop steward recalled: “We stopped everything. The employers were so humiliated...It was the world turned inside out.”¹⁶

Have You Weighed the Consequences?

AND YET, AND YET... Despite the more class-

based and effective character of such at “economistic” struggles, they too failed in the end to vanquish the capitalist demon and, even given the widespread acceptance of that goal in the 1968 May events, achieve social transformation. What are the enemies of these processes? What prevents this victory of the many over the few, this inspiring festival of the oppressed, from leading to its logical destination, social transformation in the interests of the vast majority? A glance at one vivid history, that of the “Pentonville Five,” suggests an answer.

These five dockworker shop stewards were imprisoned in London’s Pentonville prison in July 1972 for transgressing the terms of the Heath government’s Industrial Relations Act. The stewards and their members had been picketing a container depot at Tilbury docks to prevent its trucks from entering the docks and undermining their employment. The Act had outlawed such “secondary” picketing, and after an initial skirmish in which the union hierarchy was blamed rather than its representatives, the five London stewards were arrested.

This event unleashed a massive convulsion within the British trade union movement. Between July 22, when the Pentonville Five were imprisoned, and August 1, when they were released, at least 170,000 workers came out in their support. Engineering workers, printers, bus drivers, autoworkers, construction workers, miners, workers in London’s wholesale markets, and, significantly, the container drivers, who only a few days before had been pitted against the striking longshoremen, joined the huge march of workers which surged towards the embattled castle of Pentonville. News images show turbaned Sikh workers grinning broadly on either side of a placard reading “Five Trade Unionists Are Inside: Why Aren’t You Out?”; marching workers shouting, “We are the working class”; the seething of the crowds around the freed longshoremen as each was lifted shoulder-high and the whole mass of workers exploded in victory. A previously unheard-of “Official

Solicitor” had miraculously appeared to secure the Pentonville Five’s release.

The pride and confidence of organized, united workers who had defeated a government in less time and with more force than any “constitutional” action could dream of still emanates from these now decades-old images. As one printing worker put it, “You felt it had proved something, you could do anything if you like. You could sense the power of the working class, you had seen it in action, and you felt you could only go forward from there...People began to think of how working class power can change things.”¹⁷

It is this incomparable power, based in the logical dominance of labor over capital once labor refuses to enter into the bargain, which is pinpointed here as the key component of working-class victories of this kind. To massively over-simplify Marx, there are two aspects to the power and potentially revolutionary role of the proletariat: its numbers and its social function. The question to be asked, therefore, in this as in the struggles examined above, is why “working class power” did not, in this example, go on to “change things.”

The sad end to this particular story can be summed up in a few significant sentences. Despite their stunning victory, the longshoremen of course had not won their war. The day after the release of the Pentonville Five, activists voted to strike again in resistance to a government report, accepted by the union leadership, which they saw as inadequate for preserving their jobs. Picketing and arrests continued. However, without support from the union’s “left-wing” general secretary, Jack Jones, who refused to call for still-legal solidarity action from lorry drivers or railway workers, the strikes lacked the power of Pentonville; despite the best efforts of the rank and file, they were called off after three weeks. Key to the snatching of this defeat from the jaws of victory was the role of the Communist Party, dominant in the National Port Shop Stewards’ Committee, which had now begun its policy of

enlisting support from left MPs and trade union leaders like Jones.¹⁸

Here, in a poignant nutshell, we have the history of how not to win the revolution. The equivalent and far more disastrous role of the CP in the May 1968 events is of course documented by Singer in his classic account of the period.¹⁹ The irony that crucial elements of working-class militancy and intransigence can be undermined by just those working-class “leaders” allegedly most committed to the overthrow of capitalism is only too evident; but this, of course, is just the political tip of the iceberg. In that supremely revolutionary year of 1919, British prime minister Lloyd George was able to undermine the potentially mighty Triple Alliance between rail, mining, and transport unions by pointing out the “constitutional” consequences of their proposed joint action:

Gentlemen, you have fashioned...a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that... we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon...If you carry out your strike, then you will defeat us. But...have you weighed the consequences? The strike... will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the State which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State itself...Gentlemen, have you considered, and...are you ready?

“From that moment on,” said one of the union leaders, “we were beaten and we knew we were.”²⁰

Expressive or Instrumental?

HOW TO UNDERMINE REFORMISM from left and right? This contribution argues that the essential perspective is one emphasizing not content but process; the crucial dynamic not that of “program” but of process. For much of its existence under the shadow of capitalism, the political left has been preoccupied with demands and programs, policies and proposals. What remains often unrecognized is that many of these proposals per se are more or less acceptable to

the mass of society, certainly in Western Europe and to a surprising extent in America.

To give an example from the latter realm of “false consciousness,” one comparative study of workers and radicals in the United States²¹ found that workers agreed with almost all the radicals’ demands on such issues as war, the environment, etc; the difference was that they did not see how these demands could be achieved. The study makes an important distinction between the “expressive” and “instrumental” orientations of these two groups. While radicals achieved solace from the experience of “movement” struggles per se, for workers the essential issue was not the demands, but how they would be achieved. Their reigning attitude was one of fatalism, a “Yes, but what can you do?” approach.

Interestingly, in the argument of another notable American writer, “demands” as such tend to shrink into the background when workers are most fully mobilized. As Brecher (1997) puts it, disputes spurred by specific material issues ...in “normal times” represent the tip of an “iceberg” of underlying class conflict which emerges as generalized class struggle gains momentum; in such circumstances, it can be said that often “the issue is not the issue.”²² In other words, workers’ underlying experience of exploitation and oppression engenders an ongoing resentment and class anger which rises to the surface and becomes generalized in situations of overt conflict. It is in this context of mobilization that workers are most open to radical ideas and revolutionary theories; and, fortuitously, their own class power renders them far more potent in fighting for these.

Movement Not Party

TO SUMMARIZE, what is being suggested here is a kind of turning on its head of the traditional radical approach to political advance. Rather than formulating radical demands and programs and raising them with an (unresponsive) ruling class, the process can begin with the already-existing “practical activity” of the working class.

However low the level of class struggle at any time — and 2010 has so far seen no repetition of the 1910-14 “Great Unrest” in Britain — it is undeniable that capitalism continually and inevitably generates conflict at the workplace via the very dynamics of the generation of surplus value. A focus on the current lackluster level of workplace resistance may seem a long way from any transformational process; yet the historic unpredictability of waves of working-class struggle makes the task of building a fully class-conscious leadership within the working class before the next upsurge all the more critical.

What is lacking at present is any sustained link between theoretically sophisticated, committed leftists and the vital dynamic of already-existing resistance which, however “economistic” its immediate motives, contains the seeds and indeed often the immediate realization of crucial socialist principles such as equity and direct democracy. Over the history of working-class struggle, such sustained workplace-based activity has created a key layer of class-conscious activists whose commitment is sustained even in “thin times” like the present. Here, at last, is a role for mainstream intellectuals, as Gramsci called class-oriented revolutionaries by contrast to these “organic” worker intellectuals embedded in the class itself: to build from the ground up a consciousness of the full political and transformational potential of everyday resistance.

How to go about linking theory with practice, Marxists with intellectuals? Clearly, according to Leninist conceptions of the vanguard, the answer would be “the revolutionary party.” Yet, while Bolshevism was undeniably a vital factor in organizing for the Russian revolution, today’s circumstances make the simple concept of “the party” moribund, especially given the spread of increasingly destructive forms of sectarianism in that party’s name.

The way forward suggested here is not one that has been clearly articulated on the left, but it can be glimpsed by studying some

previous formations such as the early Minority Movement and Trade Union Education League, the *Muste-ites* during the 1930s U.S. upheavals, and non-party groupings such as the International Socialists between the late 1960s and early 1970s, when “The role of the revolutionary organization was to initiate and service activity, to help develop the sort of program that would help the workers concerned to build their own strategy for advance. It would be transitional...”²³ Within this perspective, a revolutionary organization is a grouping of class-conscious socialists whose practice consists not in building the party itself, but in building the movement.

From Radical to Revolutionary

IN THIS SENSE, the most radical proposal Singer’s audience can make is to itself. Rather than urging capitalism to look to its laurels, the left should perhaps look to its own — and not in the direction of formulating ever more comprehensive and indeed radical lists of proposals, but, simply and far more radically, in the direction of the working class.

Most of those inspired by the writings of Daniel Singer would think of themselves as some variety of Marxist. It is all the more curious, then, that amongst the intellectual and political left the issue of working class resistance and organization is placed so far down the list of priorities. As Draper²⁴ points out, in their own time Marx and Engels were almost completely isolated in paying any attention to trade unionism. While socialists of today have been obliged to recognize the importance of trade unions through their established role in capitalist society, it remains generally the case that action by workplace-based trade unionists is either overlooked or dismissed as “non-political.” Yet, whatever the original intentions of its participants, working-class resistance can be, as indicated in the examples above, profoundly political in its potential for rocking capitalism on its heels — even when it involves the most

ideologically colonized of working-class strata. When police and prison officers, for example, took strike action in 1919, “The country was nearer to Bolshevism that day than at any time since,” to quote the ever-wily Lloyd George.

So what is the problem? The problem, of course, is that the impulse to resist is constantly subverted, fragmented, undermined, and overthrown by just the absence of an overarching socialist consciousness of which so many socialists complain. But the answer to the problem is not to ignore or condemn workers’ economic struggles. It is, instead, to fuse the insights of Marxism with the self-activity of the working class in a process of theoretical practice which can sustain, develop, and build on these struggles.

Ironically, this is not a difficult task. My own experiences as the editor of a rank and file newspaper in Britain (*Trade Union News*), and the success in the United States of the *Labor Notes* and Teamsters for a Democratic Union projects²⁵ are concrete examples of the political significance — and relative ease — of building non-aligned activist-based networks with the potential of creating an in-class rank and file leadership ready, as argued previously, for the next upsurge.

This essay has tilted dangerously from the “radical” to the revolutionary, perhaps not in accord with the direction intended by the Singer Foundation. But it is difficult to imagine how any of the colossal problems facing humanity in the 21st century can be overcome by anything other than an overthrow of the economic and political system which creates them. To argue this may seem utopian. But, as suggested above, the method of activating this process is the reverse of utopianism; it is to base socialist activity and praxis firmly at the root of the struggles against capital which take place, daily and ineradicably, within the existing, and potentially immensely powerful, working class movement.

NOTES

1. Daniel Singer, *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* (NY, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1999), p264.
2. Figures from the XpertHR database show basic pay outside London as low as £5.80 an hour.
3. Singer, pp 173-4.
4. Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (NY, NY: Pioneer Publishers, 1964).
5. Trotsky, pp 11-12, emphasis in original.
6. Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making?* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982).
7. Ford UK Convenors’ Committee Report, 1985.
8. Dave Gollop, “The Drive for Thirty-Five . . . And Further?” *Trade Union News*, 1990.
9. Maurizio Atzeni, *Workplace Conflict: Mobilization and Solidarity in Argentina* (NY, NY: Palgrave, 2010).
10. Singer, pp 129-149.
11. *ibid.*, p 139.
12. Sheila Cohen, *Ramparts of Resistance: Why Workers Lost Their Power and How To Get It Back* (London: Pluto Press, 2006, p 50).
13. Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (Faber and Faber, 2009).
14. *ibid.*, p 485.
15. *ibid.*, p 486.
16. *ibid.*, pp 488-9.
17. Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain* (London: Bookmarks, 1972, p 174), emphasis in original.
18. *ibid.*, pp 176-7.
19. Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May* (NY, NY: South End Press, 1968).
20. Chanie Rosenberg, *1919: Britain on the Brink of Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1985).
21. David Croteau, *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle-Class Left* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995).
22. Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (NY, NY: South End Press, 1997), pp 278, 282.
23. Jim Higgins, *More Years for the Locust: The origins of the SWP* (IS Group, 1997, p 88).
24. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution: The Politics of Social Classes* (NY, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979).
25. Kim Moody, *U.S. Labor in Trouble and Transition* (London: Verso, 1997).

How Socialist Is the Chinese Party State?

AU LOONG YU

THE PUBLISHER OF WANG HUI'S BOOK described it as follows: "arguing that China's revolutionary history and its current liberalization are part of the same discourse of modernity, Wang Hui calls for alternatives to both its capitalist trajectory and its authoritarian past."

What follows is our review of the book in the light of this description: how far this assessment is correct, and how relevant it is for those social activists who are pursuing just such an alternative in China.

We must bear in mind that Wang Hui is first and foremost a cultural and philosophy scholar who specializes in China's intellectual history. Therefore even though the book's name suggests a highly politicized debate, much of the content of the book is concerned with cultural and intellectual history in contemporary China, more so than political aspects. For practical reasons we would like to focus our comment on Wang's political writings. This basically includes the first three chapters, and accounts for half of

the length of the book.

After defeating the 1989 democratic movement, the Chinese Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping pushed forward an agenda of full scale capitalist restoration combined with rapid industrialization, which was made

possible only because of the opening up of its market to foreign capital. The huge size of China and the gradual process of the opening up gave enough space and time to domestic capital to grow fast enough to fend off

foreign capital in becoming dominant in the commanding height of the economy, which laid the base for the rise of China. This came at a price, though, and it was the workers in the state and collective sectors who paid for it with the loss of their jobs and the accompanying free medical care and accessible education for their children. Most intellectuals went along with this great tide of neoliberal attacks on the old welfare state. Most liberals enthusiastically embraced the downsizing of the workforce in the state sector, seeing it as part of the retreat of the all powerful state and the growth of an autonomous market which would lay the base for a democratic society in the future. The only complaint they had was that privatization was not accompanied by moderate constitutional reform.

The End of Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity

WANG HUI

London: Verso, 2010, 272 pp., \$26.95

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The Relevance of Social Movements

WANG HUI WAS AMONG OTHER LEFTISTS who argued against the liberal or neo-liberal discourse. His earlier articles were published in English under the title *China's New Order* by Harvard in 2003. It carries a 1997 article "Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity" in which he mocks the liberal idea that the logic of the market is a free exchange of individual rights and therefore capable "to put certain restrictions on the excessive expansion of state power." Echoing Karl Polanyi's distinction of market and market society, he says:

Within the dichotomy of planning/market, the notion of the "market" has been assumed to be the source of "freedom." This notion, however, blurs the distinction between markets and a market society. If we can say that markets are transparent and function in accordance with the price mechanisms of the marketplace, then a market society would use market mechanism to govern the realms of politics, culture, and all other aspects of life — the working of market society cannot be distinguished from a monopolistic superstructure. It is in just this way that the notion of markets obscures the inequalities of modern society and its unequal structures of power.¹

In this turn of the century debate, the liberals tried to defend market reform by disconnecting from it all the social ills which people commonly related to the reform: increasing social inequality, rampant corruption, open contempt for labor and environmental laws, etc. They argued that neither the market, nor capitalism should be held responsible for these social ills; rather it was socialism and the party state which should be held responsible. Wang Hui responded that they were

unable to come to an understanding of the fact that China's problems are also the problems of the world capitalist market and that any diagnosis of those problems must come to terms with the steadily increasing problems produced by the globalization of capitalism...

Even the state behavior that was the primary target of New Enlightenment thinking has been constrained by this huge market.²

In China where the memory of Mao still looms large among the people, any attack on the capitalist reform from the left often results in referring to Chairman Mao and his version of socialism to justify its attack and looks to the party state as the only salvation from the savageness of capitalist reform. They, like the neoliberals, rarely see movements from below as positive

The party state has undergone a qualitative change in its class role and now is in the service of the bourgeoisie.

things. This was how a current of nationalist and statist discourses began to emerge among the so called New Left intellectuals — a label which Wang Hui himself finds problematic. Wang Hui may not be critical of the nationalist discourse, but he is one of the very few intellectuals who acknowledges the importance of social movements in the winning of social justice, be it under capitalism or socialism. Although he himself is not an activist, it seems he pays attention to the birth of social movements in China. This is one of the threads running from *China's New Order* to *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*. He reminds the liberals that when they hold Western capitalism as a reference point for its respect for individual rights and its parliamentary democracy, they should not forget that these were the results of prolonged social movements. Not surprisingly, he is one of the few leftist intellectuals who highly value the 1989 democratic movement and direct participation in public affairs in general. Blinded by the false dichotomy of market/

state and each seeking salvation from one end of the dichotomy, both neoliberals and nationalists are equally negative in their evaluation of the 1989 democratic movement and social movements in general, seeing the 1989 movement as either “counter reform” or an “anti-socialist revolt incited by imperialism.” In the second chapter of *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* Wang Hui came to defend the movement by pointing out that there were socialist leanings deeply inherent in the movement³:

Students, intellectuals, and other movement participants all supported reform (including political and economic reform) and demands for democracy...What people were demanding was to proceed with economic reform, albeit upon the basis of democracy and justice; they were not demanding so-called absolute egalitarianism or moral idealism. These demands were in fundamental conflict with those put forward by the special interest groups demanding more radical privatization, even though the full extent of this conflict was not understood at the time.⁴

Having presented Wang Hui’s idea on market reform, social movements and democracy we think it is true to say that Wang Hui calls for alternatives to both capitalist trajectory and authoritarian collectivism.

Socialist Tradition: How Much Is Left Anyway?

ONE MUST ALSO BE AWARE of the limitations of such a call though. Wang Hui’s contribution lies in his attack on neo-liberalism and the myth built around the market in the midst of a sharp turn to the right in government policy since mid 1990s. However, he rarely carries his attack further to target the regime which is precisely the force which has pushed through two waves of privatization, first in state and collective enterprises, then second on urban land. Although Wang Hui is troubled by the rampant corruption of the party, he nevertheless only targets a force which he terms “special interest group”:

Among those strata participating in the 1989 social movement were those special interest groups that had massively benefited from the decentralization of power and benefits in the 1980s, and who were now dissatisfied with the impending adjustment policies.⁵

The present issue of corruption not only involves individual corrupted officials but also the question of the relationship between social policy, economic policy and special interests. The development of the hydrocarbon industry and energy projects, for instance, are often impeded or led by individual special interest groups...Domestic and international special interest relations have now seeped into state mechanisms and even the process of legislation to an unprecedented degree. Under these conditions, the question of how the state can represent the so-called “universal interest” has already become extremely tenuous.⁶

While the liberals put the blame of most social ills on the party state alone, many left nationalists act in just the opposite way and blame the market economy alone so as to save the honor of the party. For the latter, if the party has a problem it is either from outside forces (the market or imperialism) or from some mysterious “special interest group.” So logically it means that it is this “special interest group,” not the party, which should be responsible for the capitalist restoration and the imposing of an intensively anti-labor regime. It is problematic to make such an argument, however, because it is precisely the party which made the decision to crush the 1989 movement, to adopt full capitalist restoration since 1992 and to switch from being anti-bourgeoisie to deeply pro-bourgeoisie and anti-labor, to the extent that it sacked 60 million state-owned and collective enterprise workers. It is only in this context that this mysterious “special interest group” can reap its own benefit at the expense of the people.

Wang Hui may not have gone as far as the left nationalists, but his uncritical usage of the left nationalist’s discourses may not enable him to distance himself from the latter either.

Maybe it is because Wang Hui cannot speak freely. Anyone who is more or less informed about China knows very well the heavy censorship there. Any writer who questions the official characterization of the party or the state as the bearer of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is risking punishment from above. Indeed Wang Hui has already received punishment by being sacked from the editorship of the well known journal *dushu*. To avoid censorship it is common for Chinese writers to use all sorts of code to represent sensitive terms or critical ideas, and one of these terms is “special interest group.” While this practice may enable writers to get around the censorship it also means sacrificing political clarity – people can have very different interpretations of what a “special interest group” is. In fact, the rampant corruption in the party and the moral decay in society are increasingly compelling people to be more explicit in speaking out. Even the very mainstream and well known economist Wu Jinglian now openly attacks the present system as “crony capitalism” without fearing retaliation.

While we must take into account the factor of censorship, we suspect that the inner logic of Wang Hui’s writings may carry enough weakness to obstruct him from further developing his call for a real alternative. The crux of the problem lies in the questions: What is the class role of the party state since 1989 anyway? Which class interest does it serve since then? For us the answers are clear: the party state has undergone a qualitative change in its class role and now is in the service of the bourgeoisie. If Wang Hui acknowledges the importance of providing answers to these questions but fears the consequences of speaking out, he can choose silence. However, he, like many left nationalists, continues to give credit to the party state which it does not deserve. He has done this by over-stressing the supposed living tradition of socialism amongst the party state:

The Chinese Communist Party, while thoroughly repudiating the Cultural Revolution,

did not repudiate either the Chinese Revolution or socialist values... This has created a twofold effect. First, the socialist tradition has functioned to a certain extent as an internal restraint on state reforms... Secondly, the socialist tradition gave workers, peasants and other social collectivities some legitimate means to contest or negotiate the state’s corrupt or inequalitarian marketization procedures.⁷

The CCP had not repudiated either the Chinese Revolution or socialist values? Can one really take the CCP’s rhetoric of socialism at face value? Can one really argue this, considering the two great waves of privatization and the great wave of dismissals of 60 million workers? We do not deny that occasionally common people may win partial victories when they invoke the socialist principle enshrined in the constitution, but one must not also lose sight of the other side of the story, namely that much, much more has been lost, gone with the wind; that the party has betrayed the revolution and has transformed itself into a party of the propertied class, that the labor power of hundreds of millions of workers and farmers are once again reduced to a mere commodity, freely bought and sold at miserable prices, and that no socialist tradition in China has ever been able to stop this from taking place. No qualified accountant can draw up a balance sheet for a company just by entering the small sum of assets left over without also entering the huge losses and mountains of debt it has incurred as well. If Wang Hui has made that mistake, it also means that he is making a theoretical concession to the left nationalists, who have been trying to whitewash the Communist Party by arguing that although there was a break between Mao’s China and Deng’s China, fortunately it has only taken place in the economy, while at the political level there is more continuity because the ruling Communist Party still rules and the “socialist tradition” is still alive (how much?) in the party state,⁸ and what is left to do is to persuade this party state to once again turn to the left. For instance, this is what Giovanni Arrighi argues in his book *Adam Smith*

in Beijing.⁹ His idea was later echoed by a Taiwan scholar Huang Debei, who looks favorably at Mao's socialism and who argues that up until now the state of China has been an autonomous Bonapartist state, therefore not yet submitted to the class interest of the bourgeoisie; hence it can turn either to the right or to the left (how far?).¹⁰ In contrast, we will argue that although in appearance the party state stands above all classes, it does not imply that it has no class character at all, or that it is entirely "neutral" or "autonomous" of all classes. Rather, it is crystal clear that since 1989 the party state has betrayed its own founding principle to the full and has been in the service of the bourgeoisie, hence a bourgeoisie party state.

Sources of Corruption: Within or Outside of the Party?

THIS NOTION OF "SOCIALIST TRADITION" happily forgets that it is the party state bureaucracy which constitutes the hard core of the new born bourgeoisie at the expense of workers. In the course of making a U turn in its class policy from anti-bourgeoisie to pro-bourgeoisie the bureaucracy has first and foremost enriched itself. So when Wang Hui should look within the CCP for the source of capitalist restoration he looks elsewhere. The truth, however, is that it does not require some exogenous "special interests" to "seep" into the state machinery to corrupt it; it is the source of its own degeneration. For Marxists, the state is always an alienated force from society, and the bureaucracy always serves its own interest, and this is doubly the case when the state bureaucracy, the supposed "public servants," have taken all political power from the hands of the "masters of the house" very early on. They did this not just out of supposed necessity due to a state of siege during the cold war, but also due to their own needs to monopolize the right to distribute social surplus and to benefit from it. Thus the degeneration of the party into a fully restoration party is more the result of endogenous than exogenous

forces. Therefore leftists, including Wang Hui, erred when they thought that it was a wrong policy choice when the CCP embarked on the market reform; they forgot that what drove the CCP to take this decision had less to do with political correctness but more to do with the material interests of this hardened bureaucracy. If there is any continuity between Mao's China and Deng's/post-Deng's China, it is less the continuity of a "socialist tradition" but more the privileges of the bureaucracy as represented by the CCP: what "ism" it believes is always of secondary importance; what is paramount is its monopoly of political power. And as time went by the party became more and more conscious of the fact that without the introduction of the right to private property there was always the risk that its monopoly on political power to distribute social surplus would not pass down to its children. Therefore what characterizes the 60 year history of the PRC is not just a break between an authoritarian collectivist past and an equally authoritarian capitalist present, but also continuity incarnated in the monopoly of power by this party of the bureaucracy. The break occurs precisely because it was the only way to allow the party's rule to continue indefinitely. Therefore an alternative to both a capitalist trajectory and authoritarian collectivism can only be conceivable by opposing the party, not by giving it credit by saying that this party state still carries certain aspects of "socialist tradition," and is hence capable of self reform, and what is left to do is to try persuading the CCP to make policy changes. To argue for the second option is bound to sow illusions among a rising new working class.

Where is the Place of Class Struggles?

WANG HUI HAS NOT GONE THAT FAR, but his characterization of the class nature of the party state, or the lack of it, and his acceptance of the persistence of "socialist tradition" theory, may act as a bridge to a position which simply accepts the role of lobbying the ruling party, while a

revolt from below is both necessary and urgent. Indeed it is striking that in Wang Hui's writings the issues of classes, state and bureaucracy and their relation to contemporary China are always brief and abstract, if not largely missing. Nor is there any account of class struggle as one of the forces in moving contemporary Chinese history forward. In fact, Wang Hui treats the subject of the dramatic transformation of the role of the party state so lightly that he just summarizes his observation in a few sentences in his first English book:

The modern socialist movement was brought about by an analysis of the internal contradictions of capitalism and by the aspiration to overcome these contradictions, but the practice of socialism not only failed to complete the task of this aspiration, but it ended by being absorbed into global capitalism. At the same time, capitalism derived from socialism and from various movements for the protection of social rights opportunities for reform and self-critique, to the point where today, it is impossible to define socialism or capitalism in their original senses on the basis of the autonomous unit of the nation-state.¹¹

It seems that there is a dose of fatalism in this description of the failure of socialism; that the defeat is just a natural evolution of socialism. This kind of proposition makes too much of a concession to the neoliberal's discourse of "transitional economy," according to which the socialist movement in the 20th century was just a momentary departure from the market economy, and its centrally planned economy was fated to abdicate its position to market economy once again as this is the only viable way of organizing an effective production and distribution system. Such a discourse is too ahistorical, however, because it leaves out altogether the element of class struggle. Wang Hui's own account does not fare much better. Although Wang Hui highly values the 1989 democratic movement, he was not able to see this as a massive revolt against the CCP's agenda of capitalist restoration, that the aspiration of the majority of

the participants was precisely an aspiration for "alternatives to both its capitalist trajectory and its authoritarian past," that the intensity of the movement had for a time made the top leaders of the CCP so nervous that the latter feared that if they did not act fast to crush the movement

The bureaucracy turned China
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the army might split. Although Deng Xiaoping eventually succeeded in his dirty work, after the crackdown most top leaders were probably still haunted by the scene of the biggest, boldest and direct challenge to the CCP ever seen in the history of the PRC. It left such a deep mark in the memory of the bureaucracy that it became paranoid about a movement from below that in the ensuing 20 years it turned China into a perfect police state by contributing a budget for internal security even larger than its budget for defense.¹² Therefore neither was there anything natural about the metamorphosis of the class role of the CCP, nor was the capitalist restoration entirely fated by some mysterious ahistorical forces. Any suggestion of this sort is in fact depoliticizing a very political subject.

Yes, we are bringing back the old fashioned debate of capitalism and socialism, of classes, class struggles and the state. But this is not the same kind of squabbles as among little sects which are more interested in abstract political formula as they understand it, than real struggles in the real world. On the contrary, we bring it back precisely because many former state owned or collective enterprise workers have asked these

sorts of questions many times over: why did the one apparently most “revolutionary” party end up becoming a party of restoration? Why was the CCP under Deng Xiaoping able to make this turn? Why was there no serious opposition to this turn? What is the nature of the CCP and the state it controls anyway? Isn’t it true that it has now entirely become protectors of the exploiting classes?

What is most unfortunate is that few leftist intellectuals ask the same questions. Hence even when some of them argue against the market and capitalism either they do so in the most abstract and academic way (for instance reaffirming the priority of “equality” over “efficiency”), or if they ever argue in a more political way it is always trapped in the false dichotomy of state and market, and they end up supporting the party state’s continuous monopoly of power as a means to fight off capitalism. In this way they have written off the working class and socialism altogether.

Wang Hui is one of the few who performs better than most of the other leftists, and part of his writing can act as a starting point to an alternative, but since he also makes so much of an intellectual concession to the official ideology his writings can also lead in the opposite direction.

While writing this comment the author here has tried his best not to misunderstand Wang Hui. It has also proved to be a difficult task, however, because his writing, as usual, tends to be abstract and so densely loaded with so many references to schools of ideas in one single essay that it sometimes makes one doubtful of its usefulness. What is more, his Chinese essays can be very different from his English ones even if they bear the same title. For instance the essay “Depoliticized Politics: From East to West” is not a full translation of the Chinese original, rather, it is heavily abridged to just 15 percent of the original. We are not sure of the reasons for making such a short summary of the original but frankly in my view the Chinese

original is not quite so successful in bringing out clearly his train of thought. Another leftist writer Li Tuo complained in a recent interview about how he thought Wang Hui’s style damaged the effective expression of his ideas.¹³

Wang Hui on National Minorities

WESTERN READERS ARE ALSO WARNED that it is difficult to make full and fair comment on Wang Hui by reading English translations alone. For instance, the English translation of *The Year 1989 and the Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China* deletes altogether from the Chinese original Wang Hui’s wholly negative evaluation of the right to self-determination for national minorities.¹⁴ His critique is merely based on associating the right to self-determination with the imperialist agenda in Yugoslavia, forgetting that it was Marxists, like Lenin, who were major proponents of the right to self-determination. By arguing in such a way he is not doing enough justice both to the principle of self-determination and to all the oppressed minorities in the world, including China. Indeed, Wang Hui, in another Chinese essay which was later published in book form along with other essays, denies the right to self-determination to Tibetan people by quoting approvingly Zhou Enlai, who rejected the right to self-determination. According to Zhou, in order for self-determination to work without creating conflicts among minorities, there must be a situation where these minorities each occupies a distinctive territory, as was allegedly the case in Tsarist Russia. That was why the Russian revolution could allow minorities the right to self-determination and secession and reunited them into a federation of soviet states. Since China, unlike the Soviet Union, — so the argument goes — had a Han majority and the minorities all mixed geographically, China should hence not adopt federalism; rather, there was no choice but to choose a unitary state. The second reason given by Zhou was that a federalist state solution (with the

right to self determination as its prerequisite) might invite intervention from Imperialism.¹⁵ Anyone with a fair amount of knowledge of the Russian revolution and its position on minorities knows very well that Zhou's remark was factually wrong and theoretically invalid. For Lenin, self-determination should never automatically imply secession or the founding of a new state or federalism. It is disappointing to see that Wang Hui quotes Zhou approvingly.

But let us not be too harsh on Wang Hui. If we have to look somewhere else in the search of an alternative it is less because of Wang Hui's personal failure, but more because of the general failure among the intellectuals in thinking independently in relation to both the official ideology and to Western liberalism, or to the false dichotomy of state versus market. If the party state, despite its betrayal of its founding principle, still maintains a spiritual hold on left intellectuals, this hold comes less from the party's supposed "greatest popular legitimacy than at any time since the fifties," resulting from "economic growth and diplomatic success," as suggested by Perry Anderson¹⁶, but more from its stunning success in combining capitalist restoration with rapid industrialization, which in class terms means success in its apparent independence to all classes and its ability to make classes disappear and appear at will: first exterminating the landlord class and the bourgeoisie in 1950s, and then promoting the re-birth of the bourgeoisie (with itself standing at its core) since 1980s; first granting the honor of "master of the house" to the working class and then decades later reducing it to pauperization and in its place drawing 250 million peasants from the rural and turning them into a new working class, not only as cheap labor but also to counterbalance the threat of a possible rebellion from the state sector workers. It is the great success of this 21st century Leviathan which has stunned all classes and keeps them in submission. Anyone who seriously looks for a left alternative is,

therefore, required to first look at the history of the PRC in terms of class, bureaucracy, and the state. It is precisely this aspect which few left intellectuals are able to provide in a satisfactory way.

NOTES

1. *China's New Order*, (Cambridge, MA: 2003), 176
2. *Ibid.*, 180
3. *The End of the Revolution*, p. 22
4. *Ibid.*, 32-33
5. *Ibid.*, 31
6. Preface to *Ibid.*, xxviii.
7. *Ibid.*, 18
8. This is echoed in Perry Anderson's essay *Two Revolutions* in which he argues that the "PRC ... is the combination of what is now a predominantly capitalist economy with what is still unquestionably a communist state — each the most dynamic of its type to date." Note that he is not saying that it is a Chinese Communist Party led state, but a "communist state." *New Left Review*, Jan Feb 2010, p. 95.
9. See p. 332 and 369.
10. *Dangdai zhoingguo guyong gongren zhi yanjiu* (Research on Contemporary Chinese Workers), Weber Publication International Ltd., 2008, Taipei, p. 18
11. *New order*, 183
12. www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/trad/china/2011/03/110307_china_securityspending.shtml
13. *Jiushi niandai de fengqi daodi zai nail* What were the differences of opinions in the 1990s?, Interview with Li Tuo, 17 Aug, 2007, Southern Metropolitan Weekly, abridged version. The full version was published in the *Utopia Electronic Monthly*, Sept 2007.
14. *Qu zhengzhibhua de zhengzhi*, (*The Politics of De-Politicization*), Joint Publishing Company, 2008, p. 150.
15. Quoted from Wang Hui's essay *Dongxi zhijian de 'xizang wenti'* ("The Tibet Issue in the East and in the West"), in *Yazhou Shiye: zhongguo lishi de xushu* (Asia Perspective: the Narrative on China's History), Oxford, Hong Kong, 2010, p. 140-141.
16. *Two Revolutions*, p. 95. The problem is, how is one going to justify such claims when even conducting a social survey in China requires permission from the authority? Interestingly, the Pew Research Center released its Global Attitude Survey 2010 where it stated that "China is clearly the most self-satisfied country in the survey. Nine in ten Chinese are happy with the direction of their country (87%), feel good about the current state of their economy (91%) and are optimistic about China's economic future (87%)." What general

readers may not know is that the Research Center was forbidden by the Chinese authorities to include questions concerning human rights and democracy. For a summary of the Survey please visit <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1630/obama-more-popular-abroad-global-american-image-benefit-22-nation-global-survey>.

For the report on the survey not including questions on human rights and democracy, please see report in the Hong Kong Economic Journal, *Zhongguo Renmin Manyi Ma?* ("Are Chinese People Really Satisfied?"), by Dai Yao Ting, April 13, 2011.

Reading People's Mail Should Be Fun — Not This Time

MICHAEL WRESZIN

I FOUND THIS VOLUME of edited letters disappointing, particularly so since I agree with the critics, that Saul Bellow was a great writer, one of very best in the second half of the 20th century. Alfred Kazin compared him to Melville, and Norman Podhoretz declared that Bellow was "a stylist of the first order, perhaps the greatest virtuoso of language the novel has seen since Joyce."

There are brilliant moments in this volume of well over 500 pages. Despite these highlights, I found the letters often tedious. I am the editor of *A Moral Temper: The Letters of Dwight Macdonald* and must admit to finding it better edited, more interesting and entertaining than this collection. Interested readers will, of course, make their own judgments.

Bellow was the fourth child of Russian immigrants who fled to America, then Canada. Saul was born in 1915 and lived in Montreal

until the family emigrated to Chicago in 1924 when Saul was 9 years old. He was a brilliant student but had to drop out of the University

of Chicago when his father's business suffered during the depression. He transferred to Northwestern to study English literature. Bellow wrote and edited the student newspapers. He

was awarded a B.A in Anthropology and soon taught both anthropology and English at a local teachers college. He wrote and read continually as he worked on a first novel. In 1941 the *Partisan Review* published a short story. After he abandoned two other attempted novels, *The Dangling Man* was published in 1944. His writing career was launched as he became known as a brilliantly articulate recorder of the devastating loss of confidence of liberal intellectuals in the postwar years. Edmund Wilson found it "one of the most honest pieces of testimony on the psychology of a whole generation who have grown up during the Depression and war." His next novel was *The Victim*, published in 1947. It also received laudatory reviews. *The Victim* is the story of a man awakening to his need to take more care and responsibility for others.

Saul Bellow's Letters

EDITED BY BENJAMIN TAYLOR
New York: Viking Penguin
2010, 571 pp., \$35

MICHAEL WRESZIN is Professor Emeritus from Queens College and the City University of New York. He is the biographer of Dwight Macdonald and other intellectual journalists.

He is driven by a sense of guilt which is finally overcome by an active commitment to a better world. It is a story of internal growth and maturity away from a life of self-absorption. It was the first of much complex metaphysical writing dealing with the darker side of human nature.

Bellow pursued his writing and teaching at the University of Minnesota. There he made a life long friend of Robert Penn Warren who gave him much support and inspiration. A constant reader of the classics and of much contemporary literature, Bellow developed into an erudite scholar, an intellectual respected by his colleagues and by a growing body of critics. He won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1946 and traveled to Paris where he often met with Mary McCarthy, William Phillips of the *Partisan Review*, Arthur Koestler, Czeslaw Milosz, Albert Camus and Nicola Chiaromonte among other writers and intellectuals. He was now writing in several magazines including the *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*.

In September 1953 Bellow published *The Adventures of Augie March*, which was greeted with tremendous critical acclaim. He was invited to lecture throughout the country and to submit articles and stories to several publications. When rereading marvelous passages from *Augie*, *Herzog*, and *Seize the Day*, one is overwhelmed by his wildly fertile imagination and instinctual ability to come up with just the right word. Here from *Augie* is an obviously autobiographical account of a Chicago errand boy working for a fraudulent florist:

And then it was an undertaker I was bound for, swinging my package overhead like a bass fiddler and making slow way through the beeping, grinding . . . Once in a while I'd strike on a wake where there was a jar of bootleg red-eye passing round, in one of those offside green bungalows. . . . When you came upon one of those whisky-smelling mourning rooms with your flowers, why, nobody was so absorbed that you were ignored, as in other sorts of grieving I've seen and you were sure to come out with a buck or so in your cap. But

anyway I preferred to be in the shop—in that Elysian Fields drift of flowers.

One is tempted to go on. Philip Roth remarked that Bellow's prose closed "the gap between Thomas Mann and Damon Runyon." Especially vivid were his detailed portraits of the characters he created. But most of this writerly

Bellow's whining self-pity, his blatant prejudices, his rampant misogyny (I have failed to deal with his five marriages but Bellow makes it very clear why four of them failed) can't help but diminish one's respect for his character.

excitement is often missing in this collection. His fervent admirers don't think so because they approach the volume with a preconceived demand that the letters reflect the mastery of his literature. They don't! He constantly complains about writing letters and dreads the obligation to respond. "I've never enjoyed writing letters. . . . I can write a small book more easily than a letter—why is that? . . . When I am writing fiction I am geared up or fully mobilized. . . . Still I find letter writing difficult."

Many of these letters reveal broken friendships with David Bazelon, Isaac Rosenfeld, Alfred Kazin, Lionel Trilling — all for what he felt was unjust criticism. In most cases the targets were admirers of Bellow who found some faults in one of his novels or stories.

The put down of other writers is endless: "I loathe snobs," he writes to a publisher, and [Evelyn] "Waugh is one of the worst sorts." There is a strange and mostly incomprehensible put down of F. Scott Fitzgerald whom he met in

Europe. The editor notes that Bellow's account is pure fantasy since Fitzgerald had been dead for nearly a decade. Bellow had little use for Norman Mailer, whom he saw as little more than an "ideologist." As for William Phillips, with some justification, he saw him as "always a devious rat" because he planned to publish Isaac Rosenfeld's journals, which contained some criticism of Bellow. Graham Greene is seen as an anti-Semite because he did not appreciate Bellow's total support of the State of Israel. He had nothing but contempt for Gore Vidal, also seen as an anti-Semite and worse. Vidal wrote for *The Nation*, a journal Bellow detested. It published Christopher Hitchens and Edward Said, both of whom Bellow saw as "Fourth Estate playboys thriving on agitation and Jews are so easy to agitate." It was impossible to learn anything from "these *Nation*-type gnomes . . . they drink, drug, lie, cheat, chase, seduce, gossip, libel, borrow money, never pay child support etc." Hitchens and his ilk represent "the silliest left-wing form" of political nihilism. The editor obligingly informs the reader that Bellow subsequently had cordial relations with Hitchens but doesn't explain that it was Hitchens' turn to the right and support of the Iraq war that changed Bellow's view. Bellow saw himself only as an artist and not an ideologue. He complained to Cynthia Ozick (a writer he did admire) that he got no pleasure being listed in PEN with the "Styrons, Vonneguts, Mailers, to say nothing of the academic specialists." These comments on his writer rivals are revealing but certainly not of any particular literary insights.

Bellow had become a fervent neoconservative by the 80s and his pet hatred was the youth of the 60s. His novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) was, as Alfred Kazin accurately remarked, "an autobiographical polemic." This outraged Bellow and ended their friendship. The novel brilliantly focused on the 60s and its youthful know-nothings. There is the famous scene in which, while giving a lecture at a Uni-

versity Bellow is verbally assaulted by a young instructor. Bellow insisted that there had been "something like a literary life in this country but the mad ferocious Sixties tore it all to bits." However, there is very little in this selection of letters that indicates any respect for the literary life in America prior to the 60s. In 1955 in a letter recommending a Guggenheim Fellowship for Bernard Malamud, whom Bellow thought was a *real* writer, he remarked that "Imagination has been steadily losing prestige in American life, it seems to me for a long time. I am speaking of the poetic imagination. . . . It is upon writers like Mr. Malamud that the future of literature depends." He then denounced the writing community for bowing down to the demands of conformity during the postwar years. .

There were several writers in addition to Malamud that Bellow admired and he was always generous in his praise and support of them. In a memory of Bernard Malamud Bellow wrote:

We were cats of the same breed. The sons of Eastern European immigrant Jews, we had gone early into the streets of our respective cities, were Americanized by schools, newspapers, subways streetcars, sandlots. Melting Pot children, we had assumed the American program to be the real thing: no barriers to the freest and fullest American choices. Of course we knew that it was no simple civics-course matter. We knew too much about the slums, we had assimilated too much dark history in our mothers' kitchens to be radiant optimists.

Phillip Roth was viewed as a first rank creative writer as was John Cheever, and he was particularly sensitive to the work and life of John Berryman. He could be warm and generous with those he admired like Cynthia Ozick and the philosopher Owen Barfield. With the latter he was downright humble, not to say obsequious.

There are some acute passages on writing.

I think this is a fault of all American books, including my own. They pant so after meaning. They are earnestly moral, didactic; they build them ever more stately mansions, and

they exhort and plead and refine, and they are insofar, books of error. A work of art should rest on perception. 'Here' in other words 'is my vision, be meaning what it may.'

But of course he admired all those who expressed admiration for his work.

Bellow won the Nobel Prize in 1976 "for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work." He was awarded the Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and a Pulitzer in 1976 for his novel *Humboldt's Gift* and three National Book Awards. He called the winning of the Nobel "a mixture of glory and horror" because becoming an international celebrity invaded his time as a writer. He had only recently written a speech he gave at Purdue University entitled "Culture Now: Some animadversions, some Laughs." The obsession with politics in the country had driven out the writer of fiction. He unloaded his scorn on all of the New York intellectuals — Susan Sontag, William Phillips, and many more. There was, as his biographer James Atlas noted, "a deep tone of personal bitterness behind his animus." Despite all the awards and the praise for his work, Bellow was extremely sensitive to criticism. When Louis Simpson in *the New York Times* accused *Humboldt's Gift* of slandering the poet, Delmore Schwartz, Bellow complained to Ruth Miller, one of his many lady friends:

I don't ask myself why the *Times* prints such miserable stuff, why I must be called an ingrate, a mental tyrant, a thief, a philistine enemy of poetry, a narcissist incapable of feeling for others, a failed artist. . . . Such things are not written about industrialists, or spies, or bankers, or trade union leaders, or Idi Amin, or

Palestinian terrorists only about the author of a novel who wanted principally to be truthful and to give delight.

One can't expect an artist of great talent to be constantly amiable or to necessarily have a stellar character, but Bellow's whining self-pity, his blatant prejudices, his rampant misogyny (I have failed to deal with his five marriages but Bellow makes it very clear why four of them failed) can't help but diminish one's respect for his character. He also shows clear signs of racial prejudice in his repeated denunciations of black radicals as evidence of the decline of American civilization. This is also clear in *Mr. Sammler*, where the symbol of the cultural decline is the portrait of a black pickpocket who exposes himself to intimidate Sammler. It may not be fair to employ such criticism of a work of fiction but the right wing stance of Bellow in his maturity cannot help but leave an unpleasant impression.

The editing of this volume is skimpy. Frequently there is no explanation or context given to the details so that only a reader well versed in Bellow's life would have the faintest notion of what he is talking about. I resorted to James Atlas's biography to get the context of many of the letters. Often recipients are not identified and the same goes for organizations mentioned. I have been looking at the letters of Elizabeth Bishop for example and find them more compelling. Robert Giroux's explanatory notes make the context clear and understandable. And one can't help but think of the letters of Twain. For such a brilliant writer as Bellow, it is disappointing that most of the letters collected here do not do justice to his literary reputation.

The Inner Lives of the Conquerors

SAM KRADEL

THE UNITED STATES' STATUS as some form of imperial power is scarcely disputed on the Left. Richard Immerman's *Empire for Liberty: A History of America from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* is not a book written particularly for or from the Left, yet in some respects it goes further in defense of this idea than many leftists have allowed.

For Immerman, the United States not only is an empire, but *has always been* one, from its foundation exercising "effective control" over one or another peripheral population "in such a way that it molds the population's politics." The American empire has rarely set forth its purpose as barefaced domination. Instead, Immerman argues, it has propped itself up rhetorically and ideologically by "inextricably" linking itself "to establishing and promoting liberty in the contemporary context."

Both the means by which American power has been asserted and the conceptions of liberty that have been used to justify it have varied considerably. Immerman therefore seeks to trace their evolution, collective biography serving as his tool. Each of six chapters examines the life and career of a pivotal figure in the development of U.S. foreign policy, their collective life spans encompassing the country's whole history. "[T]he likelihood that America would grow in size and power was great from

the start," he writes. "Because certain individuals made choices, nevertheless, it grew in a certain manner and with certain consequences."

IMMERMAN ANTICIPATES, probably correctly, that readers will "quarrel with the selection" of individuals included in his book. They are, however, well suited to his purposes, each having occupied positions which compelled them to articulate fairly weighty

schemes concerning American dominance at various stages of its growth and consolidation.

The first such stage that can be discerned in Immerman's account is that of territorial

expansion, examined in chapters on Benjamin Franklin and John Quincy Adams. Both men thought it destiny that the young nation should embrace all of North America. But while Franklin, however much he talked about liberty, "was more concerned with power and relationships among the powerful," Adams valued what Immerman calls "political liberties that transcended vocational and even financial interests." Immerman sees this latter sentiment as having animated Adams' eventual turn against expansion.

The period of extraterritorial expansion is typified by William Seward and Henry Cabot Lodge. Immerman shows that Seward, while genuinely repulsed by slavery, positively identified liberty with trade, quickly moving after the Slave Power's defeat to lay the groundwork for the United States' commercial supremacy. Lodge defended imperialism — he embraced the label, then gaining currency (not least among

Empire for Liberty: A History of America from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz

RICHARD IMMERMAN
Princeton, NJ, Princeton U. Press
2020, 286 pp., \$24.95.

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socialists) — essentially in terms of its modernizing influence, a view occasionally in tension with the biological racism to which he vocally adhered.

Finally, Immerman moves on to the exponents of American superpowerdom, John Foster Dulles and Paul Wolfowitz. Dulles “did not concern himself with the liberty of those subject to U.S. rules.” Rather, “the absence of liberty in the Soviet empire was what mattered,” justifying all the intrigues he and his brother could imagine. Immerman paints Wolfowitz as an incorrigible idealist, his belief that the U.S. should “spread the American dream by exporting democracy” undeterred by the doubts of peers, or indeed by any evidence suggesting the contrary.

Empire for Liberty’s major strength is its account of diplomatic history, the author’s specialty. Immerman’s blow-by-blow depictions of Franklin’s postwar negotiations with France and Adams’ maneuvers to acquire Florida are especially compelling, providing keen insights into the talents and personal fixations of each as much as the political forces at work. It must be noted, though, that this strength shows somewhat in spite of Immerman’s style, which is at times dry and often repetitive.

THE APPROACH OF COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY might give rise to the temptation to dismiss *Empire for Liberty* as promulgating some Great Man Theory of American empire. Yet this would be unfair: “The individuals on whom this books focuses were (or are) exceptional in who they were and what they achieved,” states Immerman. “But they were not unique. They represent attitudes toward, and visions of, the empire that were grounded in a specific time and environment.”

At points, he does an admirable job of laying these attitudes bare. He demonstrates clearly, for example, that none of the first four figures examined, despite their various differences, embraced anything approaching racial egalitarianism. Likewise, by way of Wolfowitz,

he is able to subtly illustrate American neoconservatism’s peculiar reading of the Shoah as a pro-American fable.

Yet Immerman also writes that “when one sifts through the multiple influences that are the stuff of history, one ends up with individuals who choose to do one thing and not another.” Here his justification becomes problematic. The kinds of happenings that *Empire for Lib-*

The American empire has rarely
set forth its purpose as barefaced
domination.

erty seeks to document, whether running an electoral campaign, publishing a manifesto, or starting a war, are not the acts of individuals as such, but of acts of parties, think tanks, faculties, social clubs and states, and of individuals taking part in them. Individual choice thus becomes relevant chiefly as the means by which the individual identifies with and organize one’s activity through social institutions. If the latter are treated as mere “influences,” as scenery to be set aside, their integral character is obscured.

Perhaps due to this blind spot, the book suffers from some puzzling omissions. The chapter on Adams makes much, as it should, of his break with Federalist opposition to the Louisiana Purchase. But it includes nothing on the role concerns about slavery’s expansion played in that opposition, or how Adams justified downplaying them, quite in distinction to his later attitudes. Along the same lines, though Lodge’s biography focuses extensively on the Spanish-American War, it contains no mention of the depression that preceded the war. Lodge’s resentment against the “bankers and capitalists” opposed to his designs is noted, presenting an

opportunity to explore the conflict between fractions of capital in transition to a new phase of development. But the author misses his chance.

Questions of proper emphasis and interpretation naturally arise, most obviously the case of Wolfowitz, whose carefully cultivated reputation as an exponent of civil and political rights is given too much credence by Immerman. For example, he portrays Wolfowitz as a longtime skeptic of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, with its infamous distinction between “totalitarian” (Communist) and favored “authoritarian” (anticommunist) regimes, a doctrine that simply became “progressively more outspoken,” particularly after the fall of Marcos in Indonesia. But as James Mann documents in his incisive *Rise of the Vulcans*, Wolfowitz actually continued to defend Kirkpatrick’s ideas many years later. Their eventual (unacknowledged) abandonment in Indonesia is more easily explained as a concession granted in light of an altered balance of forces.

Empire for Liberty does succeed on its own terms. These portraits, however partial, leave no doubt that the American state has always sought to rule non-Americans, and that this rule has always been portrayed by its advocates, whether wholly sincerely or not, as a means of defending or extending one or another form of liberty. And Immerman performs a valuable service in casting a critical light on these “juxtapositions” (a term to which he frequently returns), providing some view of the inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and tragedies (many would say atrocities) latent in each.

Still, a more powerful case could be made.

Immerman is chiefly concerned to show discontinuities — between territorial or extraterritorial expansion, and between concepts of liberty so diverse that “about the only things Americans agree on is that it is good.” But continuities also deserve recognition. And certainly, it is a constant that any aspiring empire-builder must build in broad accord with the needs of those who own, resource, or control the institutions through which he acts.

Armed with such an approach, the structural and ideological flux of empire is more readily explained. The shared land hunger of the planters and small farmers created a bloc for territorial conquest that Northern capitalists were long unable to resist. And to smooth over the contradictions in this bloc, planters from Jefferson onward were keen to emphasize a shared interest in the liberty to work the land. When this alliance was finally fractured, the emboldened bourgeoisie strove to keep up with its competitors abroad. Because so many of these competitors’ colonial holdings were unequivocally territorial, it was possible to present their snatching away as their liberation. And because this newly assertive class soon encountered its own opposition — revealed particularly in the Pullman Strike of 1894 — it had every interest in doing so.

Immerman does not altogether ignore class. There are passing references, for instance, to Franklin’s “sympathy with Jefferson’s agrarian ideal” and to Dulles’ career as a corporate lawyer. But it is absent as a focal point, lending his view of the past an impressionistic coloration.

Vicissitudes of a Theory

DAN LA BOTZ

DURING THE 1970S, Michael Löwy, a leading intellectual of the Trotskyist Fourth International, attempted to generalize Leon Trotsky's "theory of permanent revolution" into a general theory that could explain not only the Russian, but also the Yugoslavian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions. He believed his version of the theory could explain recent and still unfolding events in the colonies and developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His theory suggested that revolutionary movements, sometimes influenced by Stalin's Communism and with only indirect and vague connections to the working class, could nevertheless carry out revolutions which created new, if profoundly distorted, socialist states. While Löwy's attempt now seems rather dated and convoluted, and riven by contradictions, the ideas and values it wrestles with remain important, and the reissue of this book, originally published in 1981, will be of interest to those on the revolutionary left.

Löwy argued that Trotsky's theory could be used to explain the twentieth century revolutions in developing countries, revolutions which, he believed, had given indirect expression to workers' power, creating new if imperfect socialist societies. This edition excises Löwy's various

case studies of the twentieth century revolutions, leaving the bare bones of his theory. It also adds

a new chapter which is a 2010 interview in which Löwy suggests ways that Trotsky's theory, if no longer applicable to contemporary events, might still illuminate them. Löwy seems now to be less enthusiastic about the direct application of his version of

Trotsky's theory. But the ideas of substitutes for the working class and alternatives to democracy upon which it is predicated remain fundamentally wrong and need to be contested.

The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution

MICHAEL LÖWY

Chicago: Haymarket Books, n.d. [2010],
162 pp., \$15

The Origins of the Theory

IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY socialist ideas spread from Western Europe to Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Americas, raising questions about the applicability of Marxist theory to countries where capitalism or at least industrialization had only recently begun. Czarist Russia, bestriding Europe and Asia, the "land of the knout" and "prison house of nations" as it was known, particularly preoccupied socialist intellectuals. What were the possibilities of revolution and of socialism in Russia?

While Russia had undergone a series of capitalist reforms in the mid-nineteenth century, it remained Europe's most backward major power. The Czarist monarchy ruled through an aristocracy which had been largely transformed into a bureaucracy; much of industry was owned by foreign investors; most working people were peasants; and the industrial working class represented a very small percentage of the population.

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What, Marxists wondered, would happen in the event of a revolution in Russia — and what would be the role of the working class and the socialists?

Trotsky's Theory

LEON TROTSKY, a young Russian socialist revolutionary, leader of the 1905 Petrograd Soviet, and an outstanding journalist and intellectual of the time, believed that these conditions would necessarily lead to something he called the “permanent revolution.” Karl Marx had used the term back in the 1850s, but now Trotsky gave it an economic underpinning. Trotsky argued that the “combined and uneven development” of capitalism could sometimes thrust backward states forward as they adopted the most advanced industrial systems, thus creating a modern industrial working class in the midst of a backward peasant nation. When the Russian state invited foreign capitalists or employed foreign engineers to build modern plants in Petersburg and Moscow it created the working class that, Trotsky argued, would be its gravedigger.

At the same time, Trotsky suggested that, given the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie, workers in Russia would be forced to carry out the usual tasks of the bourgeois revolution — overthrowing the monarchy and establishing a republic — but then once ensconced in power would find it imperative to begin to carry out a working class agenda. The industrial proletariat would thus transform the struggle for democracy into socialist revolution. However, because of the backwardness of Russia, revolution there would have to take on an international character and become linked to the more economically developed nations of Europe, above all Germany. The small Russian working class could be successful only when united with the large and powerful German working class.

Trotsky's theory thus unified three fundamental Marxist ideas: 1) the working class as the agent of revolution; 2) working class revolution

as based fundamentally on an expansion of democracy as it proceeded from the republic to socialism; and 3) the internationalist character of

Such a “theory of permanent revolution,” even with Löwy's caveats, seems to me to have little to do with Trotsky's ideas of working class agency, democracy, and internationalism.

a working class revolution faced with the threat of capitalist encirclement and strangulation if it did not find allies in other nations. These three ideas — the centrality of the working class, the democratic essence of socialism, and proletarian internationalism — represent the core values of revolutionary socialism from Trotsky's time to our own.

October 1917: The Theory Vindicated

WHEN IN FACT the Russian revolution occurred, Trotsky's prediction was by-and-large proven correct. After a popular rebellion among the troops, the peasantry and the working class overthrew the Czarist government. Then the liberal Kadet party and the reformist socialists who headed the capitalist government failed to carry out the tasks facing them, above all ending the war and overseeing an agrarian reform. The working class, led by Lenin's Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, then proceeded to lead an insurrection, overthrow the capitalist government, and tackle those problems.

At once workers — contrary to the desires of the Bolshevik party — began to seize factories and demand that the government take them over. Revolution, civil war, and foreign intervention led the government to adopt a

policy of “war communism,” that is, government direction of all available resources to defend the revolution. So, in a sense, the revolution became “permanent” as the working class carried out first the overthrow of czarism and then began the construction of a workers’ state with some socialist characteristics.

The Experiment Fails: The Theory in Question

THE EXPERIMENT SOON FAILED, throwing into question the idea that workers could successfully carry out a permanent revolution in a backward nation. Russia’s economic underdevelopment was exacerbated by the civil war and the foreign military intervention that caused enormous destruction and diverted resources from the development to the mere defense of the incipient socialist state. Famine followed. Lenin’s party attempted to revive the society through the New Economic Policy which gave encouragement to petty capitalism and commerce within the context of what had become a state-run economy. That attempt led to some economic improvement but by itself and on that scale clearly could not resolve the country’s problems.

With Lenin’s death in 1924, his successors differed on the way forward. Bukharin and the right looked toward a continuation of the NEP and a rapprochement with European socialism. Trotsky and the left proposed a combination of rapid industrialization with a revolutionary international perspective. Stalin, however, succeeded in gaining control of the party and uniting it around a nationalist program — socialism in one country, he called it — adapting Trotsky’s industrialization program for his own end. Above all, Stalin adopted the notion that the one-party state would take charge of this massive experiment in social engineering.

Stalin’s Counter-Revolution

BETWEEN 1929 AND 1939, Stalin succeeded in carrying out a counter-revolution in which all of the institutions of workers’ power in Soviet

Russia were transformed into state-controlled apparatuses: the Communist Party, the labor unions, and the Soviets or workers’ councils which formed the basis of the state. Hundreds of thousands were imprisoned or killed in the process and eventually millions died in the struggles with the Russian peasantry which followed. Counter-revolution, however, took a unique form. Capitalism was not restored, but rather a new bureaucratic ruling group emerged which controlled the state and the means of production. What was one to make of it? Thus permanent revolution was interrupted by the emergence from within the socialist workers’ movement of a new force committed to neither democracy nor socialism.

Trotsky, however, did not understand the nature of the process taking place. While he believed that Stalin and his group were absolutely counter-revolutionary, Trotsky could only envision counter-revolution as capitalist restoration. And clearly Stalin was not promoting private property, the market, or any of the other elements of capitalism. So Trotsky argued that Soviet Russia remained a “workers’ state” ruled by a counter-revolutionary bureaucratic “caste.” Others, however, argued that counter-revolution had come in an unforeseen form. They called Stalin’s Soviet Union “industrial feudalism,” or a highly centralized “state capitalism” or a new “bureaucratic collectivist” ruling class. During the prelude leading up to World War II, Trotsky would argue for the defense of the bureaucratized workers’ state, though both he and those revolutionaries who differed with him on the question of the class character of the Soviet Union argued that workers would have to make or remake a democratic socialist revolution and recreate the institutions of workers’ power.

Permanent Revolution — Or Permanent Counter-Revolution?

TROTSKY, ASSASSINATED BY STALIN’S AGENTS in 1940, did not live to see the expansion of the Soviet Union’s power into Eastern Europe

through the occupation of the Red Army at the end of World War II, nor the spread of the Soviet Union's model in quite different ways to China, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia by way of Communist-led national revolutions. His followers, however, seeing the process of the virtual structural assimilation of the Eastern European states — Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc. — to the political and economic system of the Soviet Union, drew what seemed to them the logical conclusion that, if the Soviet Union was a workers' state with bureaucratic problems, then so too were the Eastern European states. Apparently then it did not take workers to create a workers' state; the Communists and the Red Army could carry out the revolution on their behalf.

Somehow, the orthodox Trotskyists argued, the original workers' revolution of 1917 found a distorted expression in the totalitarian Eastern European states where in fact workers had no power. Thus Trotsky's initial mistake — failing to understand the radical character of Stalin's counter-revolution — was compounded by his followers. Eastern Europe, they argued, had been "revolutionized" and transformed into proto-socialist workers' states without a workers' revolution, without democracy, and without an international revolutionary movement. What then was the purpose of a socialist movement and what the role of socialists?

Löwy's Theory: Revolution Without Workers or Socialist Ideals

THE REVOLUTIONS IN CHINA in 1949, in Vietnam from 1945 through 1974, the Algerian Revolution from 1954 to 1962, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 posed new problems for Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. While it was true that in most of these countries the national bourgeoisie was weak, so too was the working class — and, almost everywhere, because of the spread of Stalinism, devoid of democratic socialist ideals. With the capitalists and the workers unable to lead a democratic

socialist, permanent revolution — the Communists, or sometimes the radical petty bourgeoisie, stepped up and took charge.

In China, Mao Tse Tung transformed the Communist Party into a bureaucratic Communist military organization on the march, leading a vast peasant army to conquer first the countryside and then to seize the cities. Workers, told to remain in their factories and await orders, clearly had no role, much less the leading role, in this revolution. The Chinese Communist-led national revolution revealed that the new bureaucratic communist class could place itself at head of a national revolution when both the capitalist and the working class failed to do so. In fact, similar developments had already taken place: Tito in Yugoslavia and Enver Hoxa in Albania and their Communist parties had led popular forces in national revolutions that created new Communist states. Vietnam's long revolutionary struggle against France and the United States represented another example, though it would only finally succeed in the mid-1970s.

Combined and Uneven Bureaucratic Revolution

WITHOUT A DOUBT, all of these revolutions shared some progressive tendencies: national liberation from imperialism, agrarian reform, economic development, and the creation of systems of social welfare. Yet, these revolutions were hostile not only to capitalism but also to democratic socialism.

These new regimes demonstrated that national liberation from imperialist domination could be carried out by a bureaucratic Communist party-army, though the cost was in some cases enormous. In China in particular, the ruling Communist elite's various development programs — from the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of the early 1960s — wasted tremendous material resources as well as labor and eventually took millions of lives.

Cuba and the Third World: Permanent Involution

CUBA REPRESENTS A DIFFERENT CASE in many ways more similar to the revolutionary developments in a number of other Latin American, Asian, and African nations. A radical, petty bourgeois leadership — Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement — succeeded by 1959 in inspiring and leading a national revolutionary movement that encompassed radical students, peasants, and urban workers to overthrow the hated government of Fulgencio Batista. By 1961 Castro had declared his government's goal to be socialism, by which he meant his program of nationalization of industry, agrarian reform, and social welfare programs in health, education, and housing. At no point did the idea of workers' power enter into the group's real program, however, even though it formed part of their rhetoric.

Embargoed and threatened by the United States, by the 1970s Castro soon turned to the Soviet Union for support, and Cuba too subsequently underwent a process of structural assimilation similar to the process in Eastern Europe. Castro borrowed from the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist states models everything from industrial organization to internal security. Castro's Cuba was not Stalin's Russia or Mao's China — while there were kangaroo courts and a number of executions of Batista's henchmen early on, there was no mass murder in Cuba. As in Asia, there was no denying the initial progressive strands of the anti-imperialist revolution — and also no denying the bureaucratic and authoritarian character of the revolutionary government. The theoretical problem was that the two aspects — national liberation and Communist totalitarianism — were completely enmeshed and the former subordinated to the latter.

In various African states from Algeria to Southern Africa, petty bourgeois groups, sometimes with Communist politics and sometimes

not, led national revolutions, though without the sort of support that the Soviet Union had given Cuba they proved unstable. Some became bizarre and macabre caricatures of the Communist state while others degenerated into capitalist dictatorships, often manipulated by the former colonial powers or transnational corporate interests. The revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s could not navigate the straights of the political Scylla and Charybdis — capitalism and Communism — and were either dashed upon the rocks of imperialism or dragged down into the maelstrom of Communist revolution. Nowhere was there the revolutionary breakthrough that might have provided both a model and real leadership.

Löwy's Theory and Its Contradictions

DURING THE 1960S AND 1970S as the revolutions discussed here broke out in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the Fourth International rushed to embrace them, but often all too uncritically. Some of its factions combined Trotskyism with varying currents of Third World revolutionary theory and practice. Che Guevara with his theory of the guerrilla foco as a substitute for working class revolution was particularly influential. It was in this context that Löwy's *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* originally appeared in 1981. In that earlier edition, Löwy gushed over the various Communist revolutionary movements in Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and Cuba. Even in the current revised edition he writes in the book's conclusion: "What occurred in Russia, Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, and Cuba corresponded closely to Trotsky's central thesis: the possibility of an uninterrupted and combined (democratic/socialist) revolution in a 'backward,' dependent or colonial country."

To his credit, Löwy recognized from the beginning the deep contradictions in his theory as revealed by his conclusion's tortuous explanation of the character of these states and societ-

ies. There he writes, "... these parties were not directly proletarian in the sense of the Bolshevik Party, but only through certain political and ideological mediations. They are proletarian in an indirect sense not merely because of the predominance of non-proletarian layers (peasants, intellectuals, etc.), but especially because of the presence of a bureaucracy which, whatever its specific social origins, constitutes a 'separate body' with characteristics and interests distinct from the proletariat." They are for Löwy "proletarian' only indirectly" and he calls them "bureaucratic states of proletarian origin." The contradictions in his own theory become only too clear when he writes: "...while they are the products of socialist revolutions under the leadership of proletarian-socialist parties, the real power in these states is monopolized by the bureaucratic layer with specific social and economic interest." So much for "democratic/socialist revolution."

Such a "theory of permanent revolution," even with Löwy's caveats, seems to me to have little to do with Trotsky's ideas of working class agency, democracy, and internationalism. Little in the experience of these countries has anything to do with democratic or socialist revolution, at least if we mean by that Marx's idea of the conscious and humanistic transformation of capitalism into socialism by the working class's continuous expansion of democratic spaces. The overthrow of capitalism by the Red Army, by Communist party-armies, or by petty bourgeois radicals who became bureaucratic Communists brought virtually no democratic institutions or rights to the countries that underwent those experiences.

What Then of This Theory?

TROTSKY'S THEORY OF PERMANENT revolution fit remarkably the conditions of Russia in the early twentieth century and could no doubt have been relevant for the entire era, had it not

been for the rise of Stalinism. The presence of an alternative revolutionary leadership — anti-capitalist but also anti-socialist — changed the entire outlook.

Since then a series of developments — the end of formal colonialism in most of the world, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the transformation of China and Vietnam into Communist capitalist states, followed by the growing industrialization of much of the former Third World — have changed radically the picture. Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution will not directly explain contemporary developments.

What remains useful about the theory is the attempt to understand the dynamic interplay between world economic developments, the changes in national class relations, and politics, that is, the struggle for power. The notion of combined and uneven development and the theory of permanent revolution might be used fruitfully today to think about the impact of the world crisis on the national and international dynamics of the upheavals taking place in Europe. We might see how Trotsky's theory applies today to the revolutionary wave sweeping over Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, and perhaps some other Arab nations as well. We should do so not by attempting to press the theory like a knife into the dough of events, but rather by watching the dough rise and attempting to understand the interactions between the water, the flour, and the yeast. We should return to Trotsky's own method, which was to bring a critical intelligence to bear upon a profound command of the economic, social, and political life of the region and its peoples. No doubt it will be an Arab Trotsky or Luxemburg who will create the theory to explain these events.

Whatever we do with these theories, we should keep in the forefront of our minds Trotsky's original triad: working class agency, democracy, and internationalism. There is no substitute.

Left Pitted Against Left in “Labor’s Civil Wars”

HERMAN BENSON

THE “CIVIL WARS” that Steve Early mentions in his new book are not about the class war between labor and capital, nor any war between a conservative right and a radical left in unions. It is the war that split labor’s progressive left, and Early is an apt author to tell us about it. He was one of those sixties radicals who became, as he tells it in an earlier book, “embedded in the labor movement.” Later, while in law school, he wrote briefly for the *United Mine Workers Journal* just after the victory of the insurgent Miners for Democracy. He campaigned for Ed Sadlowski in his insurgent run for Steelworkers president; then took over the Professional Drivers Council and led it into the insurgent Teamsters for a Democratic Union. For the next 27 years he was employed on the international staff of the Communications Workers of America. But even while performing his official duties for the CWA, he moonlighted on his own time, reporting voluminously on insurgents, rank and filers, and assorted social radicals in and around the labor movement.

The war he writes about was triggered by the swift celebrity rise of Andy Stern, touted as the labor leader of the future, the champion of a newly invigorated and enlightened union movement. Many of those once-young radicals, like Early, had oriented to the labor movement;

but in the civil wars that followed, they divided into bitterly opposed camps.

The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor

STEVE EARLY

Chicago, IL: Haymarket
Books, 2010, 322 pp, \$17

IN 1995, JOHN SWEENEY, in a rare palace revolt, took over as AFL-CIO president. In distancing himself from the conservative legacy of former AFL-CIO presidents George Meany and Lane Kirkland, Sweeney proposed to energize labor into a crusading movement for social justice in America. When nothing much happened, Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, seized the spotlight that Sweeney had briefly occupied.

Armed with the resources of his million-member union of health care, building maintenance, and public workers, a union immune from the ravages of global competition, President Stern vowed to turn his union, and the labor movement, into an organizing colossus that would reverse labor’s decline, enroll millions of unorganized workers, especially the oppressed and super exploited unskilled minorities and immigrants, into a powerful workers’ army so numerous, so influential that the nation’s political leaders, Democratic and Republicans alike, would be forced to respond to their mighty social pressure.

To free his hand from what he saw as the stodgy AFL-CIO — too male and too stale — Stern led a consortium of unions out of the AFL-CIO. Justice for All! Revive the spirit of the CIO! Change the labor movement! Change the nation! Change the world! Change To Win!. Hedy stuff!

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(Who remembers now, after the outpouring of labor money in the election of 2010, that Change to Win saw part of the solution in shifting money from political action to union organizing? If you scrutinized Stern's coalition, it didn't seem so new or so inspiring — Teamsters, Carpenters, Laborers, Hotel Workers, the disintegrating Needle Trades — but who was looking too closely?)

Meanwhile as America seemed to be drifting to the right, student radicals out of the sixties, civil rights workers, community organizers, farm worker campaigners, immigrant advocates, and a younger generation of academics and educators were looking to the labor movement to provide a social counterforce. Stern won their acclaim. Some cheered him on from the outside. On the left in and around unions, there was near unanimity: Stern's road was the true road. He recruited them into his staff.

But Something Went Wrong

AFTER A YEAR OR SO, the unity broke, the left divided into warring camps, some rallied to Stern's team as ardent defenders, others turned into passionate critics. This is the story that Early tells so well in this book in fascinating, meticulous detail chapter by chapter with profiles on all the characters, major and minor and who did what, why, when, where, and to whom.

As Early explains it, the mighty crusade to organize the oppressed often degenerated into sweetheart agreements with management as the “high road unionism turns into collusion with union-busting employers.” Stern's monopoly claim to jurisdiction over all health care turns into a bitter war with the California Nurses Association. His reaching for new fields to conquer turns into a destructive attempt to destroy the teachers union in Puerto Rico.

In the name of rebuilding the union with twenty-first century technology, Stern undercuts the traditional union system under which stewards, close to members on the job, process their grievances, and replaces it with a remote call-

in center where disembodied telephone voices discuss a member's problems. Stern's stirring call for “justice for all” becomes a facade for neglecting the union's fundamental responsibility to its own members' daily needs on the job.

Stern hoped to convince hedge fund op-

The mighty crusade to organize the oppressed often degenerated into sweetheart agreements with management as the “high road unionism turns into collusion with union-busting employers.”

erators and the heads of big corporations that unionization is in their interests. At the same time, on the pretext of unifying the union for a mighty battle against monopoly capital, he moved to transform the whole union leadership cadre, top to bottom, elected and appointed, local and international, into one disciplined monolithic bloc dependent upon an authoritarian top leadership. From partners in the battle for social justice, he would transform them into voiceless, obedient, quasi-militarized subordinates.

The “civil war” reached its climactic and culminating moment with what Early calls: “The Mother of All Trusteeships,” the trusteeship imposed by Stern on United Healthcare Workers-West, the 150,000-member SEIU local in California. Sal Rosselli, the local president who is prominent in labor and political circles in California and was a top SEIU officer, had sharply criticized a collective bargaining agreement reached by Stern. In retaliation, Stern, unleashing his authoritative powers as SEIU president, embarked on a relentless drive against Rosselli, ending with his removal of the whole Rosselli

team from office in UHW-W and a Stern trusteeship takeover. The civil war escalated when the Rosselli's supporters refused to capitulate. They withdrew from the SEIU, established a new independent union, National Union of Healthcare Workers, and challenged the SEIU in a series of NLRB collective bargaining elections. The SEIU assigned an army of paid staff employees to the drive; by one estimate it spent \$40,000,000; its own claim is \$4,000,000. In any event, SEIU resources dwarfed the insurgent NUHW. Their local treasury impounded by Stern, deprived of office and salaries, the NUHW's champions entered the battle dependent upon donations and volunteer labor.

A decisive battle was played out in October when the SEIU and the NUHW competed in an NLRB collective bargaining election over representing 43,500 workers at various Kaiser facilities in California. At the time, SEIU's United Healthcare Workers was still their legal representative. But their democratically elected leadership — the Rosselli team — had been removed and replaced by Stern's appointed trustees. The NLRB offered unionists an opportunity to restore leaders they had once elected. But the SEIU held on; in voting 18,290 for the SEIU and 11,364 for the NUHW; the majority chose to submit to an officialdom selected for them.

With that, the war, at least on its main front, ended. But inconclusively. For the SEIU, it was a Pyrrhic victory: it emerged seriously damaged. For Rosselli's NUHW team, it was a serious setback; it was defeated but not destroyed.

The favorable bonds in and around the labor movement that the SEIU forged in the early days of its rise in public esteem have been shattered. Some two hundred or more labor oriented labor intellectuals, academics, political and community leaders in California and around the country criticized or condemned Stern's heavy-handed attack on Rosselli. With that, the SEIU glow of progressive virtue was extinguished.

Change to Win, the coalition that Stern led out of the AFL-CIO and that promised to revive the glory days of the old CIO, turned out to be a momentary aberration already crumbling. The Carpenters Union, which left the AFL-CIO before Stern, has already seceded from CTW. Who knows why it ever joined CTW in the first place? Perhaps because Carpenters President McCarron thought it might promote his imperial ambitions in the construction trades. The Laborers Union has left to rejoin the AFL-CIO. The Teamsters union remains, but why? President Hoffa never had any intention of adjusting to the Stern rhetoric. Unite/Here, the abortive merger of the Hotel union with UNITE, the disintegrating needle trades union, broke apart in its own private civil war. When Stern financed a war against Unite/Here, it too left CTW and rejoined the AFL-CIO. Anna Burger, CEO of Change to Win, resigned when the SEIU executive board refused to anoint her as Stern's successor as SEIU president. There no longer seems any justification for the continued pointless existence of a Change to Win which is already self-destructing.

Stern's stock in labor's upper echelons collapsed deeper than the Dow Jones average. In rejoining the AFL-CIO, Unite/Here President John Wilhelm, once Stern's chief collaborator in CTW, said to the federation's executive council, "We cannot let the SEIU speak for the labor movement.... if one of the final chapters in my career is to help stop this attempted takeover of the American labor movement by SEIU, I will be content...." John Sweeney, now AFL-CIO president emeritus, said he agreed with Wilhelm and characterized Stern's behavior as "despicable."

Stern himself abruptly walked away. At 59 this spring, still young for a labor leader, he retired as SEIU president. He left abruptly in the middle of his term of office, only two years after his reelection at the union's convention where he had orchestrated a dizzying reorganization of the SEIU and proposed to lead a great surge for

American labor. But he obviously decided not to hang around to see how it would work out. But he did stay long enough to trustee Rosselli's local. Once Stern retired, his own international executive board repudiated his leadership by rejecting Anna Burger, his chosen successor, and selecting Mary Kay Henry instead. (Taking the hint, Burger resigned as head of CTW. Having lost his power as a union leader, Stern retained his talents as a PR personality. Just when his labor influence and reputation had begun its roller coaster drop, President Obama appointed him to the 18-person Commission on Fiscal Responsibility, presumably as its one, and only, labor representative.)

By failing to pick up those 43,500 Kaiser workers, the SEIU's menacing rival, the National Union of Healthcare Workers, was seriously weakened but not eliminated. Before the October referendum, it had already won over a few units from the SEIU. In the month after, it wrested three bargaining units away from the SEIU (two were at Kaiser) totaling some 2,300 workers. As the months go by, additional NLRB elections will come. NUHW is likely to emerge as a California-based health care union of 6,000-10,000 members, not enough to offer an immediate threat to the SEIU in health care, but strong enough to force it to reconsider its authoritarian ways. In the future, any health care workers who find an SEIU regime intolerable will know that the NUHW is there with an alternative.

If the rejection of Stern's choice as successor is an accurate indicator of what is to come, the SEIU international executive board may shift course by emphasizing the positive, by concentrating on organizing the unorganized, and pursuing a progressive role in politics. The post-Stern leadership may be wise enough to pull back from the super authoritarianism that led to the ruinous war with Rosselli. Free of Stern's domination, the board may be more flexible in reacting to independent-minded critics in the locals.

Stern's monopoly claim on all health care workers which led to his war with the California Nurses' Association over organizing registered nurses, has been replaced by an SEIU-CNA peace pact. The bitter conflict between John Wilhelm's Unite/Here and Bruce Raynor's SEIU-backed Workers United has been peacefully resolved. As part of their peace treaties with the SEIU, both the CNA and Unite agree to abandon their financial support for Rosselli's independent NUHW.

Early's book comes at an apt moment. The civil war he describes so vividly and so fully seems to have run its course. Tensions may remain but the hot war is over. And so his account is definitive in the sense that it covers its whole course from start to finish.

With peace breaking out, where does that leave the partisans of the "left"? It seems that they are back where they began shortly after Stern sounded the uncertain trumpet, but with this difference: issues of union democracy have been posed more clearly than before.

SEIU critics, leftists and not so leftist, may have been repelled by Stern's bull-in-the-china-shop rhetoric and by the disruptive effects of his too overtly and overly repressive methods. Still, in other unions there are officers who pursue the even tenor of less obtrusive but authoritarian ways. (For details, subscribe to *Union Democracy Review*.) Construction unions, especially the Carpenters, have been creating the kind of undemocratic structures that exceed Stern's and go beyond anything before in the American labor movement in their erosion of members' rights.

At the heart of Stern's guiding philosophy was the notion that in order to advance labor's cause it was necessary to centralize power in the hands of an authoritarian — and progressive — leadership. Meanwhile, democracy in unions (or as his ideologists put it derogatorily: "democracy") had to await that happy day when democracy would finally prevail in industry. Labor's civil wars tested out that philosophy in practice. The question remains posed today

as uncertainly as before. Is it to be Stern's way, or shall we count on unleashing the power of the membership by refurbishing the practice of union democracy? The dampening of the "civil wars" described by Early and now a return to normality leaves that issue unresolved as before.

In all this, Early aims to write accurately and objectively even while making full disclosure of his own partisan sympathies. He is for all the good progressive policies and causes; he accepts the idea that unions must organize sometimes from top down and sometimes from bottom up as long as it emerges as a movement that vests power in a rank and file endowed with democratic rights.

While still working for the Communication Workers, Early just managed to escape deep trouble. In his moonlighting essays he was an outspoken critic of Stern's SEIU policies and practices at a time when Stern was at the height of popularity. Stern was outraged. (In fact, to this day Early triggers special allergic

reactions in the SEIU body.) Stern wrote to Morty Bahr, then CWA president and Early's boss, demanding that he silence this irritating gadfly. Stern was still in the AFL-CIO and his fellow big labor leaders were anxious to keep him there. A high commandment in the labor canon orders union leaders: Thou shall not speak ill of a fellow labor leader. In this case, a mere underling had the audacity to speak against a top ruler. Intolerable! How would Bahr react? For Early, it was a dangerous moment.

It turned out to be a Perils of Pauline cliffhanger. In the nick of time, Stern split away from the AFL-CIO, taking away a few million members. Luckily for Steve, it was now open season for attacking Stern.

Retired from remunerative employment and free to write as he pleases without looking over his shoulder, Early is embarked upon a new career as a labor journalist. It's a fitting time. Dissenting union democrats can use a good writer to tell their story.

Sky Without Light

A Vietnamese Tragedy

MANFRED McDOWELL

NGO VAN'S MEMOIR of "those other movements and revolts caught in the crossfire between the French and the Stalinists" in the years before the American commitment in Vietnam reminded me, painfully, of an "editorial" I wrote on the fall of Saigon. Drawing largely on an excoriation of Vietnamese Communism

In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary

NGO VAN

Edited by Kenn Knabb and Hélène Fleury
Oakland CA: AK Press, 2010
264 pp., \$19.95

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(the betrayal of the 1945 "Saigon Commune," the cynicism and brutality of collectivization in the North) produced by Solidarity (a London conduit for the councilist ideas of *Socialisme ou*

Barbarie), I had taken aim at the already battered target of “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh!” identification with the regime in Hanoi. “Not Our War” was my unfortunate title. But if I was thankful that scarcely anyone read our group’s “paper,” it was

It is no longer possible for
nationalism to masquerade
as the language of
progressive social change.

not simply because, a 19-year-old, I had been disclaiming on wars we might, or might not, “own.” What I had recoiled from was precisely what Ken Knabb in his introduction identifies as the real value of Ngo Van’s “hidden history”: the implication that “there were other currents and other strategies that might have led to different results.” A hazard of age, I had at some point ceased to question the “judgment of history.” In the anti-imperialist struggles of the past century, “socialism” was never going to be more than a more or less ruthless strategy of national mobilization. Testaments to the ideals and sacrifices of those “caught in the crossfire” could be read only as unrelieved tragedy.

Like Voline’s *The Unknown Revolution* or Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, the publishers suggest that *In the Crossfire* is “one of those rare books that almost single-handedly unveil moments” in history “when people break through the bounds of the ‘possible’ and strive to create a life worthy of their deepest dreams and aspirations.” The appearance of popular councils and of an independent workers’ militia in the September 1945 uprising in Saigon may have amazed and appalled the Communist-led Viet Minh as much (or more) than it did the French. But whether, and how far, their audacity enlarged the realm of the possible we can scarcely

calculate. What is certain is that, as in Russia and in Spain, the resourcefulness, discipline, and violence of the Communist Party stood in the path of an alternative history. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how “other currents” could have coexisted with a nationwide movement willing and able, where betrayal to the French Sûreté failed to eliminate its rivals, to engage in systematic assassination and terror—a policy that was to drive Ngo Van into exile in 1948.

Tellingly, the recollections of a “resolutely independent individual” reveal little about the origins and gathering strength of the party that, despite its bewildering twists and reverses, was able to secure absolute direction of the anti-colonial struggle.

In his history of the years in which, at the price of imprisonment and torture, he engaged with workers in protests and insurgency, *Vietnam 1920-1945: Revolution et contre-révolution sous la domination coloniale*, reviewed here by Loren Goldner (*New Politics* Vol. VI, No. 3), Van underscores what was surely a condition for the triumph of what he decried as “Bolshevik nationalism.” For those of us whose impression of the colonial Vietnam might be colored by vignettes of what remained of “Parisian Saigon” during the American years, it is as well to be reminded by Van of the sheer savagery of French rule. The greater part of the population was ensnared by the theft of communal land and by the imposition of crushing taxes, with many displaced on large cotton and rubber estates where conditions resembled nothing so much as the plantations of Saint-Domingue.

But Van has no inside perspective on the party of Ho. Even as a founder member of the League of International Communists for the Construction of a Fourth International, it is not clear that he ever participated in the cult of a revolutionary vanguard. His early identification with Trotsky he explains as a “natural” reaction to policy whose “full horror was glaringly evident with the Moscow Trials” (on which, “with a sense of urgency,” he wrote a pamphlet in

Vietnamese). Once in France, where he found “new allies in the factories and elsewhere” including anarchist and Poumist refugees from Spain “who had gone through parallel experiences,” Van “permanently distanced” himself “from Bolshevism-Leninism-Trotskyism,” and from “anything,” he believed, “that might turn into a machine,” anything that could be seen as “embryonic forms of the state,” or “the nucleus of a new ruling class.”

At the same time, while in Vietnam, Van had only limited access to developments in the Viet-Minh/Communist heartlands to the north. This is painfully clear when in August 1945 he and his comrades find they have “no way of finding out what was happening” following reports that in the Hongai-Campha coal region north of Haiphong 30,000 workers (under the indifferent gaze of the defeated Japanese) had elected councils to run mines, public services and transport, and were applying the principle of equal pay. (For this revolutionary commune, Van remains the only source of reference I can find on the web, whether in English or in French).

Confronting an Elephant

IN VIETNAM Van’s activism was confined to the far-south region of his peasant birth, encompassing Saigon and the Delta. In “Cochinchina” French rule had the distinction of being direct and, sensitive to political shifts in Paris, of being punctuated by periods of relative liberalization. It was a circumstance that allowed Van’s comrades to secure, if briefly, what was denied the Communists in the north: an independent electoral mandate. In April 1939, in a poll for the Colonial Council, the whole “united workers and peasants” slate was elected, trouncing both the Stalinists and bourgeois Constitutionalists alike.

In “Annam” and, in the far north, “Tonkin,” the French governed under the nominal authority of the Emperor Bao Dai, and through the traditional agency of Confucian scholar-gentry. Noting an “irresistible and persuasive” compari-

son with China, this is the distinction critical to William Duiker’s understanding of *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (1996). As in Vietnam, in China the early Communist leadership drew heavily on intellectuals descended from the rural scholar gentry of the interior, while the pioneers of constitutional nationalism (and Duiker might have added, of the labor, and other democratic, movements later suppressed by the nationalist Kuomintang) tended to be from the more commercial, more “Westernized,” coastal south.

In Vietnam, as in China, Communism presented itself as a root and branch rejection of Confucianism, condemned for its ritualism, inherent conservatism and resistance to change. Yet Duiker argues many were to find the new ideology “congenial” precisely because of its similarities with the teachings of the old Master: “the belief in one truth, embodied in quasi-sacred texts”; in “an anointed elite, trained in an all-embracing doctrine and responsible for leading the broad masses and indoctrinating them in proper thought and behavior”; in “the subordination of the individual to the community”; and in the perfectibility, through corrective action, of human nature (all of which, he suggests, were in some manner present in the aura of the new Master, Chi Minh, “the bringer of light,” “Uncle Ho”). Vietnamese Marxism developed, in effect, as a kind of “reformed Confucianism” revised to meet “the challenges of the modern era” and, not least among these, of total mobilization in the struggle for national independence and state power.

Against a revolutionary movement that could redeploy these elements traditional to the exercise of control and authority in Vietnamese society, it hard to see how Van was to make headway with polemics against a “judicial farce” in Moscow, or the intrigues of the Laval-Stalin pact. Van broke with comrades who for four years to 1937 (when most of the leadership of the then Communist Party of Indochina was either abroad, with Ho, or in prison) cooper-

ated with Stalinists on a French-language paper, *La Lutte*, and in elections to the Saigon City Council. Yet Van and his internationalist League seemed powerless to respond to an organization that, clearly, drew on exceptional reserves in sustaining its “line”—committing workers to “national salvation” and suppressing, where it failed to preempt, an independent awakening of the peasantry. While convinced of the need to eliminate the Trotskyites (survivors of the *La Lutte* group were among the first victims of Viet Minh terror in 1945), we can imagine Ho and his command dismissing them in the spirit of Prosecutor Vishinsky’s condemnation of the Old Bolsheviks, as “little dogs yapping at an elephant.”

Internationalism in an Anti-Colonial Struggle

FOR VAN, the call to “permanent revolution” was above all a refusal to accord precedence to the demands of national unity, in deference to which the Vietminh denounced as “treason” “premature” challenges to the property and rights of landlords and employers. It was the same principle, elevating class over nation that he was to see reversed again in exile — in May ’68. Van objected to the Communists unfurling the tricolor next to the red banner his co-workers had raised over their factory gate: “the flag of the Communards should not be associated with the flag of Versailles,” with the colors under which “the bourgeoisie has exploited the workers” and “enslaved the peoples of Africa and Asia.” Yet Van seems to have had few illusions about the immediate appeal of proletarian internationalism, whether in France or in Vietnam.

Goldner accounts the spectacular results of the ’39 Cochinchina Council elections “the only instance prior to 1945 in which the politics of ‘permanent revolution’ oriented to worker and peasant opposition to colonialism won out, however ephemerally, against the Stalinist ‘stage theory’ in a public arena.” Van is less convinced.

The “Workers and Peasants” slate had

triumphed at a point when, placed by the Comintern under the tutelage of the French Communist Party (of which Ho, in Paris, had been a founding member), the party in Vietnam had dropped out of, and behind, the broad front of nationalist opinion. In deference to Stalin’s continuing courtship of a French alliance, its “Democratic Front” candidates had to support the colonial government’s campaign for the defense of French Indochina against the Japanese. Hence, Van suggests, the “the paradox” of revolutionaries being elected “by a suffrage based on income tax”: as the Stalinist organization in Saigon split, his comrades rode a wave of protest against the new “war taxes.”

Van’s account also invites us to reevaluate the significance of the so-called “Saigon Commune.” Following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Trotskyists paraded the streets under the banner “Land to the Peasants! Factories to the Workers!” and responded to nationalist anthems with the Internationale. According to Van it was in this “internationalist spirit” that sixty workers at Go Vap streetcar workshop formed an independent “Workers’ Militia,” a name inspired by the Spanish Civil War.

Again, we do not know what “dreams or aspirations” might have been served by the militia, or by the various improvised district “people’s committees,” had they not been “caught in a crossfire.” But in the militia, Van found himself attached to the much larger, nationalist, forces of the so-called Third Division and about their purpose there was little doubt. It was to save the Fatherland from the Vietminh’s “anti-fascist allies.” A policy of cooperating with the Allied Control Commissions, successful in the north in persuading the (Kuomintang) Chinese to withdraw on terms consistent with the sovereignty of the newly proclaimed Democratic Republic of Vietnam, in the south allowing the British, employing the Japanese as auxiliaries, to clear a path for the vengeful return of the French. (For Ho, who remarked that he would “rather smell French shit for five years than eat Chinese shit

for [another] thousand,” the policy must have appeared a cruel, but necessary, bargain).

Tell Me about Your Agrarian Program

THE TROTSKYISTS WERE ABLE TO CHALLENGE the Stalinists in the city, in its factories and on the waterfront: one reason, perhaps, that the unprecedented cooperation around *La Lutte* was tolerated. The crucial weakness was out in the provinces where, in contrast to the Trotskyists, the Stalinists had real organization, albeit one they employed entirely in accord with their own high-political agenda. After the Hitler-Stalin pact reversed their policy of defense collaboration with the French, they had led peasants in Cochinchina in a disastrous insurrection (one in which, having been exiled to the Delta, Van found himself caught).

In the south, however, the Party had to contend with powerful and, from the last year of Japanese occupation armed, indigenous movements. Reflecting the greater colonial dislocation of the region, these presented a heady patriotic-religious mix: the syncretistic Cao Dai church (with a pantheon that, alongside Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, elevated Jules Verne) and, among the poorer peasants, the Hoa Hao, followers of “the Mad Monk,” the prophet of a liberating Buddha king (who astonishingly, in a brief courtship with the Vietminh, put themselves forward as Social Democrats).

These movements (which today, after decades of repression, between them still command 4 to 5 million adherents) were in spirit and organization as alien to partisans of the Fourth International as they were to those of the Third. But Van, undeterred, found himself drawn to an extraordinary figure whose name he heard “whispered with respect” when he first moved to Saigon in 1926: a combative journalist who seemed able, as no other, to bridge the gulf between the radical politics of the city and the restive millenarianism of the countryside.

Educated in France, on his return to Vietnam in 1923, Nguyen An Ninh had rejected

a government offer of land and position, to champion the cause not only of independence but also of the debt-oppressed land-hungry peasantry with whom, in Gandhi-like wanderings through the countryside (head shaved like a monk), he seems to have developed a profound relationship.

In 1929 more than a hundred peasants and day laborers were convicted in Saigon for membership of “Nguyen An Ninh Secret Society,” according the Sûreté, an insurrectionist conspiracy that promised the initiated “some kind of agrarian socialism.” Whether, as Van believed, the “Society” was a figment of “denunciations and torture-induced confessions,” or whether Ninh had any organizational legacy, even one, as Van suggests in his history, “far removed from a disciplined and structured organization,” is unclear. The French cut short his career and ultimately his life, casting him into the penal system, which is where Van (arrested at a clandestine factory meeting) was finally to encounter him in 1936.

“Burning with naïve curiosity,” Van approached Ninh (“alone and silent, leaning against the bars,” and seeming to contemplate “the tops of the tamarind tree that rose above the prison walls”) and “blurted out: ‘Brother Ninh, could you tell me about your agrarian program?’” Ninh turned his head in surprise, looked at Van for a few seconds, then “raised his eyes again toward the tamarind trees and began to sing:

*Dans les jardins de mon père les lilas sont fleuris,
Tous les oiseaux du monde viennent y faire leur nid:
Auprès de ma blonde, qu’il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,
Auprès de ma blonde, qu’il fait bon dormir.*

[In my father’s gardens the lilacs are in flower,
all the birds of world come there to nest. Lying beside my darling is sweet, so sweet, lying beside my darling, that’s the sweetest sleep.]

A few days after this “wretched encounter,” perhaps noticing that Van was reading Malraux’s *Le Temps du mépris* [*Days of Wrath*], Ninh hands him Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit* [*Journey to the End of the Night*—“read this!”

For Van, Céline “exploded like lightning,” a “formidable howl of rage” against “all deadly hypocrisies of the prevailing society.” He drinks in the words that “so splendidly debunked patriotism and religion.” They are words that his friend (and English translator) Hélène Fleury recalls returned to him some sixty years later when on his first visit to Hanoi they kept running into Ho Chi Minh’s huge mausoleum. At “the top his lungs” Van sang Céline’s “Le Règlement” [Payback]:

*Mais la question qui me tracasse
En te regardant:
Est-ce que tu seras plus dégueulasse
Mort que vivant?*

[But looking at you, I can’t help asking myself:
Will you be any more rotten dead than alive?]

But, of course, with Céline, Ninh was offering Van anything but a “program”:

*Notre vie est un voyage
Dans l’Hiver et dans la Nuit,
Nous cherchons notre passage
Dans le Ciel où rien ne luit*

[Our life is a journey through winter and night,
we seek our passage in a sky without light]

—the epitaph on the first page
of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*.

History of an Unfinished Struggle

THE PASSAGE DOWN WHICH HO, the “bringer of light,” led Vietnam, Van regarded as a dark tunnel and he disowned the war that gouged it with none of my subsequent embarrassment. The “Socialist” republic, for which millions had sacrificed, was “a criminal and barren travesty” (*The Internationalist* 17, 1996). With their “cultivated middle-class” background, the “mandarins” of a hyper-bureaucratic regime (more functionaries to be found in one province

than the whole of the Indochinese colonial apparatus) “rule over producers who still do not enjoy collective ownership of the means of production, nor time for reflection, nor the possibility of making their own decisions, nor means of expression, nor the right to strike.”

On his visit in 1997, Fleury reports that Van got close to “the daily lives and working conditions of present-day Vietnamese people thrust by the ‘new’ economy into development projects funded by South Korean, European, American and Japanese capital”—foreign owners “pleased at how easily the exploited workers can be kept in line by the police-state machinery.”

Had he survived but another year (Van died in 2005), events might have reminded him of the Saigon working class of his youth. In 2006, export plants were hit by a wave of strikes involving tens of thousands of workers, emboldening calls for the dissolution of the Party/state controlled unions and workplace Party cells. Beginning in Korean-owned shoe factories, a further strike wave rolled north across the country from Saigon in 2007.

After more than three decades of unity and independence much, of course, has changed. Made the exclusive preserve of the Party and State, it is no longer possible for nationalism to masquerade as the language of progressive social change. On the contrary, even as the Party and State embrace globalization, its narrative thread of continuity is being reinforced (as in China) by a rehabilitated Political Confucianism that abjures reforms that “deviate from the mainstream of the national cultural heritage.”

The stage is reset, and a new generation may yet discover, in the work of Ngo Van, the history and recollection of an unfinished struggle.

Neither Masks nor Gloves

LAURIE CALHOUN

IN 1961, DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER warned about the dangers of capitalized war, how the military-industrial complex was already taking on a life all its own, and the single-minded quest for profit—a virtue under capitalism—would continue to drive weapons companies to exert an untold influence upon politicians. Since that time, the war-making apparatus has expanded both in size and in kind, with ever more partners joining in on the enterprise. In the

twenty-first century, we have reached what is arguably the final stage of the capitalization of war, as what were formerly anonymous, covert operators—privately contracted by governments to carry out special missions—have now stepped out from the shadows and into the bright light of day.

In two recently published books, *Soldiers of Fortune: A History of the Mercenary in Modern Warfare* (2009), and *Black Ops: The Rise of Special Forces in the C.I.A., the S.A.S., and Mossad* (2010), Tony Geraghty traces the gripping history of “guns for hire” and covert operations in modern times. Mercenary soldiers and black ops existed even in the earliest days of recorded military history, but until recently their use was hidden from

view by the administrators of democratic governments, who attempted to present and maintain a moral—and legal—image to the taxpayers funding war. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, strat-

egists pursued their own Realpolitik policies, justified in their minds as exigencies of national defense. Throughout the Cold War, the perpetrators of “black ops”—discretionary and often illegal interventions in the affairs of other nations—were disguised through complex machinations

devised so as to render “plausibly deniable” their connections to the governments for which they were contracted privately to work. Black operators were paid “under the table” from “black budgets” and wielded equally untraceable weapons. Although such contractees did not exist according to the official documents of formal governments, their deeds had tangible and sometimes dire consequences for the people of many lands, including Angola, the Congo, Nicaragua, and Sierra Leone, to name but a few. In *Soldiers of Fortune* and *Black Ops*, Geraghty telescopes in on a small but colorful selection of the hundreds of secret operations perpetrated in the name of national security by the CIA, the SAS (Britain's Special Air Service), and Mossad (Israel's primary intelligence agency).

The blackest of black ops, targeted assassination used as a political tool in shaping foreign policy, has a long history. Geraghty identifies Michael Collins and Sinn Fein's Irish

Soldiers of Fortune: A History of the Mercenary in Modern Warfare

TONY GERAGHTY

New York: Pegasus, 2009, 400 pages, \$27.95

Black Ops: The Rise of Special Forces in the C.I.A., the S.A.S., and Mossad

TONY GERAGHTY

New York: Pegasus, 2010, 446 pages, \$28.95

LAURIE CALHOUN is currently completing work on a book tentatively titled *Lethal Obsession: What War Has Become*.

Republican Army (IRA) as mentors of sorts to the resistance fighters of World War II and many other liberation groups. Collins and his comrades ultimately succeeded in securing some of their demands by assassinating intelligence agents and thus provoking the British government to overreact. The Black and Tans went out on a shooting spree, which ultimately backfired when they massacred entirely innocent people, causing public support for the IRA to swell. The use of black ops by formal governments, too, appears to have drawn inspiration from Collins, for example, in Mossad's retaliation against the Munich massacre of 1972, what Geraghty regards as Israel's "Everything changed" moment.

During the 1972 Olympics, what started as an abduction of about a dozen Israeli athletes by the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) for use as a bargaining chip in securing the release of prisoners culminated in the deaths of all of the hostages, along with most of the hostage-takers. What happened in Munich, suggests Geraghty, catalyzed a radical transformation in Mossad's approach, just as 9/11 was pivotal to the United States, whose Guantánamo Bay prison facility Geraghty likens to and suggests was created in the image of Israel's own Facility 1391, supposedly nonexistent.* Mossad enlisted some of its own personnel to renounce their official positions and all traceable ties to the organization only to work for them unofficially, under pseudonyms and in plausibly deniable operations to assassinate the presumed architects of the Munich ploy. That black ops depend on highly fallible intelligence appears to be cursorily brushed aside by many of the people who agree to carry them out, some of whom may convince themselves that their missions were somehow divinely ordained. Others in

this motley group are empirically indistinguishable from garden-variety hit men, who will kill anyone at the request of anyone else, provided that the price is right. A third group includes

President Reagan, undeterred by such a nicety as the Constitution of the United States, insisted that his inner circle figure out some way to support the Contras, which North and friends did — until their cover was blown on October 5, 1986

men (whom Geraghty frankly characterizes as "psychos") who seize upon such contracts as an opportunity to do some target practice, as did a group sent by the SAS to Angola in 1975 — and elsewhere as well, including, some have alleged, Afghanistan and Iraq.

One of the most spectacular of U.S. black ops ever brought to light was Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North's "neat idea" (as he referred to it) to sell weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages, and then funnel the money received into the coffers of the Nicaraguan Contras to support an initiative which the U.S. congress had explicitly refused to do in the Boland amendment. According to U.S. law, that should have been the end of the matter, but President Reagan, undeterred by such a nicety as the Constitution of the United States, insisted that his inner circle figure out some way to support the Contras, which North and friends did — until their cover was blown on October 5, 1986, by the downing of a cargo plane carrying some of the illicit weapons to the rebels.

There were many other such initiatives — by Geraghty's count, about 900 — during the

*According to Tim Weiner's history of the CIA, *Legacy of Ashes* (2007), the CIA used such facilities in the late 1940s. The modern state of Israel was established in 1948, which suggests that the order of influence was reversed.

Cold War, up to and including the assassination (whether explicitly planned or encouraged) of U.S.-installed puppet leaders such as South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem who had proven to be refractory or ineffective. The assassination of democratically elected Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, too, Geraghty reminds us, was on the CIA's secret list of things to do. Although decades later such events have been analyzed by scholars, at the time when they transpired, strategists scrupulously kept all of these activities below the radar of public scrutiny in the name of national security.

“EVERYTHING CHANGED” on September 11, 2001, when George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Condoleezza Rice and company saw fit to “take off the gloves” in dealing with the elusive global terrorist threat and to do so without artifice or guile. With the George W. Bush administration, a new level of transparency was thus achieved, not because foreign affairs suddenly came to reflect the lofty moral rhetoric and carefully cleansed official stories mouthed by public relations spokesmen for the Pentagon, but, ironically enough, because the president himself, with the support of the U.S. congress, came overtly and unabashedly to espouse as official policy practices that had been regarded by many up until that time as unthinkable. Offensive military action—formerly known as “naked aggression” — was reconceptualized by strategists as just war through the explicit conflation of offense and defense, which during the Cold War had always been implicit but was never an officially espoused policy.

The Bush administration also initiated an era of targeted assassination, what under previous presidents was carried out (or attempted) but never freely admitted, much less vaunted. In his January 2003 State of the Union Address, Bush proclaimed that thousands of suspected terrorists had been taken prisoner and that many others had “met a different fate,” exultantly add-

ing, “Let’s put it this way: they are no longer a problem to the United States and our friends and allies.” Targeted assassination — formerly known as “extra-judicial killing” and denounced as illegal — was added to the military’s toolbox by the Bush administration as yet another standard operating procedure, a means by which to defeat the evil enemy.

Other previously clear-cut divisions have become blurred in twenty-first century war as well, including, Geraghty explains, the distinction between regular and mercenary soldiers or private contractees. The private operators working in collaboration with the military today have faces and names and are paid by U.S. citizens through funds accounted for in officially approved contracts. Today private military companies (PMCs) provide security and logistical services up to and including officially undeniable, Pentagon-contracted surrogate soldiers who, although dressed as civilians and sometimes camouflaged as locals, tote and wield weapons on the ground no less than do regular soldiers in uniform. As a result of enormous “cost-plus” government contracts awarded to firms such as Halliburton, virtually overnight PMCs were cropping up everywhere, their chairmen and board members (often war veterans) endeavoring to grab their slice of the fat pie—the seemingly limitless funds being flung at the 2003 occupation.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, Special Forces, no less than civilian contractees, sometimes camouflaged their allegiance and status by donning local garb and growing beards. In effect, these soldiers were playing the very game that the “insidious and evil terrorists” did by blending in with the civilian community and making it difficult to target them without endangering innocent bystanders. The less fortunate of these plain-clothed soldiers found out the hard way what it really meant to live in a society subject to an occupying power whose rules of engagement were perhaps only half-facetiously summed up by some grunts on the ground (in the many

documentaries which have appeared since 2003) as “Shoot first; ask questions later” or “If it looks like the enemy, shoot.” The use of armed private contractors as “force multipliers” also elicited on the part of locals who had witnessed some of their more dubious actions a general antipathy toward foreign civilians, including unarmed humanitarian aid workers and camera-toting journalists.

Geraghty analyzes at length the unique ethical problem that arises in a war theater where some among the soldiers are not really soldiers at all but rather civilian contractees obliged only to carry out their employer’s assignments, not to follow the protocol of the military itself. Such private soldiers essentially inhabit a law-free realm, as they are protected from prosecution on the one side by their civilian status (they cannot be court martialed) and on the other side by the fact that they are operating in a postwar, chaotic environment beyond the jurisdiction of their own country’s laws.

Alienated and disgruntled former soldiers — who might have suffered the plight of the jobless and homeless veterans of Vietnam — are prime candidates for employment by PMCs, which peddle precisely the skills that troops have been forced to hone in order to survive but which have no obvious application within civil society. The contracts are lucrative because most civilians without military backgrounds are both ill-qualified and ill-inclined to undertake such missions, given the grave dangers which they entail. One result of these dynamics has been the phenomenon of regular forces drain. PMCs command huge contracts for their specialized services, and because regular soldiers earn much lower salaries than their civilian contractee counterparts, it has become quite common for new veterans (both American and British) to accept private employment rather than reenlist. In addition to seeing their salaries skyrocket, private contractees operating abroad enjoy effective immunity from prosecution in the event of their own disobedience or poor judgment — or even intentional malfeasance. The upshot of

all of this seems quite clear: men with violent or criminal tendencies have every reason in the world to complete the minimum terms of their regular military service and subsequently sign up with a private company. When such employees are found to have misbehaved, they risk no more than losing their current position. But with the large number of PMCs that sprang up in the “grave train”-contracting era, they may encounter little difficulty landing another position with another company, since transgressions within these firms are downplayed and even whitewashed by the management in order to maintain and secure future lucrative contracts.

The worst consequences of this law-free zone were borne out in Iraq, where private contractees were further protected by Paul Bremer’s Coalition Provisional Authority Order 17, which explicitly provided civilian contractees with legal immunity in their use of lethal force, glossed by Geraghty as “a license to kill.” One incident, captured in a widely disseminated YouTube video, shows a private contractee in the back of an Aegis company vehicle shooting — apparently at random — Iraqis standing outside in the street. An official investigation into allegations of wrongdoing concluded that no malfeasance was involved.

One result of gun-slinging, civilian-clad private soldiers operating with impunity side-by-side regular forces has been that the lines between what may and may not be done have grown fainter and fainter, certainly from the perspective of the troops themselves. This sort of “moral compass” breakdown among regular forces was witnessed at Abu Ghraib prison, where enlisted soldiers serving as guards took seriously their directives from private contractee interrogators to “be creative” in taking prisoners “out of their comfort zones.” Geraghty compares the case of Abu Ghraib to the French soldiers in Algeria who were told to use “all means necessary” in combating the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) and then made into scapegoats upon the revelation of the army’s use of torture.

Geraghty's charitable assessments of the grunts in Afghanistan and Iraq, in spite of his sometimes bristling critiques of especially the latter war, become comprehensible in the light of the fact that he himself is a former soldier. He blames the failure to capture Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora upon the risk-averse top brass, insisting that the soldiers themselves were prepared even to die in pursuing the ostensible *raison d'être* of the Afghanistan war. This pro-grunt perspective is very much in line with the classical just war paradigm's concept of invincible ignorance, according to which soldiers are to be judged within the context of war by appeal to *jus in bello* principles such as whether they intentionally kill only combatants.

What is not questioned by Geraghty, nor by the many even more pro-military (often American — Geraghty is British) commentators on any of the many controversial episodes in Afghanistan and Iraq, is the hierarchical military framework which generates such conflicts. U.S. soldiers occupying a foreign land and wielding force to the detriment of the local population is frequently depicted, without apparent irony, as justified self-defense. Strikingly, the people whose homeland has been invaded are denied the very right to self-defense by the occupiers, who, far from protecting them, instead greatly increase their risk of death. Civilians are summarily slaughtered the moment they are spotted carrying even what might possibly be a weapon,* or when they fail to heed either the written instructions posted at checkpoints (incomprehensible to those who are illiterate) or the orders of U.S. troops speaking in English.

Still, despite these problems, most U.S. citizens and legislators do not appear to find at all objectionable the policy of "taking the battle

to the enemy." Geraghty explains how, in order to sustain this perspective — that "we are at war" — the victims of targeted assassination are officially characterized as combatants on the battlefield, categories which recently expanded to include Afghan drug lords, said to be fair game for execution as a result of their economic complicity with terrorists. Similarly, rather than acknowledging that they have abandoned all pretense to the so-called rule of war according to which enemy combatants must be provided with the opportunity to surrender, those who direct operations simply reject what they evidently regard as this "quaint" notion.

At the end of the text proper of *Black Ops* (published in 2010), Geraghty expresses skepticism about U.S. policy in Afghanistan, what has spilled over the border into Pakistan to become, in a classic case of mission creep, "Af-Pak." He cites approvingly opinions according to which it might actually be better simply to let the Taliban rule their country, since at the very least they were able to provide the populace with security. Geraghty's perspective on both Afghanistan and Iraq evinces a realism (sorely lacking in Washington) about what can reasonably be expected of such societies, with long histories devoid of anything even vaguely resembling the ethos of modern democracies. Rather than pressing his points, however, Geraghty appends to his own *Black Ops* text a hefty chunk (166 pages) of documents from 2009 supportive of his position. The most persuasive of these texts is the highly repetitive "McChrystal Report on Afghanistan" — replete with platitudinous "new" policy prescriptions such as "gain the initiative," "improve effectiveness," and "build relationships" — which lays out the former commander's concerns about the ongoing mission and what he diagnoses as the need for a major change in strategy, in addition, predictably enough, to increased allocation of both troops and funds.

Although this was not McChrystal's intention, his Report provides ample reasons for

*See www.collateralmurder.com for video footage which documents a disturbing example of the assassination of a group of civilians whose cameras were mistaken by their killers (U.S. soldiers) for AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).

thinking that the mission in Afghanistan is truly hopeless. How to “build relationships” with a populace jaded by eight years of an occupation in which their interests were not put first, an occupation “Pre-occupied with our own forces,” as McChrystal puts it, is not at all obvious. He warns:

“[P]rogress is hindered by the dual threat of a resilient insurgency and a crisis of confidence in the government and the international coalition. To win their support, we must protect the people from both of these threats.” (“The McChrystal Report,” August 30, 2009, 1-3, reproduced in *Black Ops*, p. 260)

Thus a fundamental plank of the “new” strategy is to save the Afghan people from the U.S.-installed government and the occupiers — by increasing the presence of the latter!

THROUGHOUT *Soldiers of Fortune* and *Black Ops*, Geraghty vacillates between wanting to take to task administrations that operate according to “Might makes right,” and those who do not. He suggests, for example, that the Carter administration was ineffective as a result of its insistence upon holding the ethical torch high. At the same time, many of Geraghty’s critiques are grounded in what he himself appears to regard as the importance of regulated warfare, what is essential, he seems to believe, to maintaining the moral high ground. To wish nostalgically for “the good old days,” back when international affairs and war were supposedly rule governed, is an entirely natural response to the transformation of black to gray ops on the part of military supporters critical of the Bush administration.

However, *Soldiers of Fortune* and *Black Ops* offer every reason for believing that the “moral high ground” about which just war theorists may wistfully dream is but a chimera. Throughout the twentieth century, whenever strategists felt that black ops would be effective, they opted for them, simply ignoring questions of morality and legality, in the manner of full-fledged political realists. Accordingly, this historical

moment of frightening transparency affords us an opportunity to look honestly at the narratives of the past, the crimes against human beings committed in the name of defense and claimed to be necessary, and to see at last that the fairytale of categorically good and evil allies and adversaries was always and only just that. In reality, the impunity of governments in initiating and funding black ops is mirrored by their impunity in executing modern war — provided that they are the victors. But in war democratic principles are not merely set aside in a few isolated cases (as in small-scale black ops) but systematically discarded. Military supporters such as Geraghty fail to recognize that the characterization of the victims of wars fought abroad as either “legitimate targets” or permissible “collateral damage” (those categories assumed to be exhaustive in any action officially ordained by the government) is tantamount to stripping all of the people of those lands of all rights, even the most fundamental: the right to life. Thus even opting for war is already to cede the moral high ground.

War, like black ops, offers the tyrant’s solution to conflict: homicide substitutes for criminal investigation and due process, and all of this is rationalized in the name of defense. War, like black ops, has always promoted the view that a small number of human beings possess the right to decide who may live and who must die, according to their own interpretations of what needs to be done and what would be an acceptable price to pay — in other people’s lives. But there is no sense in which the slaughter of hundreds of thousands or even millions of innocent people (as in Vietnam) is necessary. Having lost the war in Vietnam, the United States certainly did not cease to exist, which in and of itself demonstrates that the war was not necessary to the nation’s survival. A huge chunk of treasure and the lives of 58,000 U.S. soldiers were sacrificed in that conflict, but by far the greatest price paid for the many covert wars between the two superpowers were the lives

and well-being of millions of the inhabitants of lands selected as battlegrounds by strategists in secret meetings behind closed doors. When U.S. troops did not themselves slaughter the victims (as in Vietnam), U.S. initiatives nonetheless created the conditions that ultimately led to the victims' demise, for example, in neighboring Cambodia.

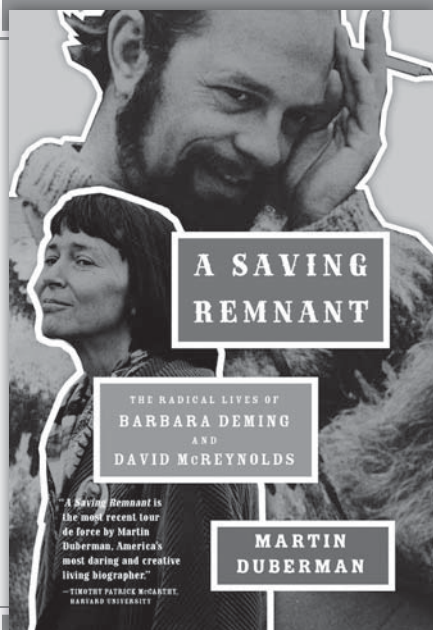
It is time to reexamine the archaic and delusive assumption of just war theorists that good intentions alone suffice to exculpate agents for the devastation that they wreak. This presumption has given rise to a wholesale diffusion of responsibility for the consequences of war and is precisely what perpetuates the practice. U.S. interventions abroad — both black and gray — certainly confirm the age-old adage that “The road to hell is paved with good intentions,” but Americans are either unfazed by or unaware of

the hells on earth that their money has been used to create. Ultimately, all of the tragic and needless suffering, death and destruction that results from U.S. interventions is made possible by those who pay, the citizens of the United States, who in the age of the internet have the unprecedented opportunity to see what it is that U.S. soldiers are doing in their name. Abu Ghraib was widely decried, but what U.S. taxpayers need to reassess is the wisdom of even “regular” missions of soldiers acting under order today. While the military-industrial-congressional-media-pharmaceutical complex continues to generate new millionaires, the corrupt system does not support but corrodes morality and deepens the rifts of injustice through sacrificing less powerful people, civilians and soldiers alike, for the “neat ideas,” essentially mercenary schemes, of war entrepreneurs.

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Red Rosa: An Intimate Self-Portrait

GEORGE FISH

THE LETTERS OF ROSA LUXEMBURG is the first volume in a projected 14-volume set, *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*, of all the extant writings of this great revolutionary socialist in English—all available newspaper articles and speeches, significant polemical and Marxist theoretical writings, and her letters and telegrams, prepared collaboratively by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Karl Dietz Veralg, and Verso Books. *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* contains 230 letters by Luxemburg to 46 different people, and is an English translation by George Shriver of the original German text of 1990, *Herzlichst, Ihre Rosa* (literal translation, *Warmly from the Heart, Yours, Rosa*). The first letter is to her friends in Zurich, Nadina and Boris Krichevsky, in Zurich, dated July 17, 1891 (when Luxemburg was only 20 years old, yet already active in the socialist movement); and the last letter, dated January 11, 1919, is to her friend and comrade Clara Zetkin in Stuttgart, four days before her murder by the proto-fascist Freikorps in collusion with the right-wing Social-Democratic government of Germany headed by Philip Scheidemann and Friedrich Ebert, two leaders of the Social-Democratic

The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg
Edited by Georg Adler, Peter Hudis, and
Annalies Laschitzka. Translated by George Shriver
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Party of Germany (SPD) who had supported World War I. The significance of Rosa Luxemburg's quite extensive and active correspondence over these years is emphasized well by one of the general editors of the editorial board preparing the *Complete Works*, Peter Hudis. He writes at the beginning of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, in his "Introduction: Rediscovering Rosa Luxemburg" (pp. VII-XI):

To get to know Rosa Luxemburg's thought is to get to know a way of seeing the world, and it is not truly possible to grasp that if one lacks access to what is found in her correspondence. (p. XI)

Just before this, Hudis writes appropriately of Luxemburg:

[F]ew personalities are as engaging and unique as Luxemburg's.... She was a deeply analytical thinker who mastered the language and literature of economic theory, perhaps unsurpassed for the Marxists of her generation; yet at the same time she was in many respects an *idealist* in raising questions about the ultimate aims of the struggle for freedom that went beyond the immediate political or economic problems that preoccupied many of her colleagues. As she once put it, "I do not agree with the view that it is foolish to be an idealist in the German movement." She was a thinker deeply committed to a historical *materialist* explanation of social relations; yet at the same time she insisted, "I cannot separate the physical from the spiritual." She was a thoroughly political individual who immersed herself in an array of political debates and controversies throughout her life; yet at the same time she took an

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intense interest in the natural world, to the point of writing in one letter, “my innermost self belongs more to my titmice than to the ‘comrades.’” These statements do not reflect some internal inconsistency in Luxemburg’s approach to the world, nor are they opposing determinations resting side by side. They, rather, express Luxemburg’s multidimensionality as a thinker and a person—a person and thinker who cannot be neatly sliced and diced into the conventional political or psychoanalytical categories. (pp. IX-X. Emphases in original. Citations from Luxemburg’s correspondence omitted.)

In addition, Annalies Laschitz’s “Introduction by the Editor of the German Edition” (XIII-XLII) gives detailed information on the correspondence contained in this volume of *Letters*, the history of its preservation during the Nazi occupation of Europe, and the important role played by publication of some of her letters in the renewed appreciation and positive evaluation of Luxemburg, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. (Stalin had put her under a cloud for decades by labeling her a “semi-Menshevik” and calling for a “struggle against Luxemburgism.”) Lastly, George Shriver’s “Translator’s Note” (XLII-XLIII) provides useful information on some of the difficulties encountered in rendering Luxemburg’s correspondence into understandable English. At the end of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* are the highly useful references, “A Glossary of Personal Names” (495-570), “Selected List of Publications (Newspapers and Magazines)” (571-579), and “Abbreviations” (581-582), which will ably guide the reader through the referents given in Luxemburg’s letters; and lastly, and I’m sure of considerable interest to the scholar, the “Archive Locations of the Letters” (583-589) listing the archives that house the letters in this volume, which are arranged chronologically. A reasonably thorough “Index” (591-609), along with a total of 802 numbered footnotes, completes the necessary annotation that would be demanded by the serious reader and scholar; Verso is to be con-

gratulated for producing such a scholarly work.

The only things lacking in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* that would be useful to the reader (especially one not familiar with Rosa Luxemburg’s personal history) is an outline chronology of her life, which would aid the

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reader by providing the circumstances under which Luxemburg wrote her letters, and a table of contents listing each letter. Without these, but especially without the outline chronology, the tyro reader (and that would include even persons generally well-versed in socialist history such as myself) can be lost in understanding under what specific circumstances and from what locations these letters were written. (After all, and which becomes immediately apparent to the reader, these are personal, often intimate and casual, letters to friends, comrades and lovers, not political letters as such, or chronologies of events.) It will certainly not be apparent from immediate reading, given the letters’ sprightly prose and cheerful disposition throughout, that many of these letters were written from prison, and that Luxemburg spent a significant part of her adult life incarcerated because of her political activities. Even though the dates of her incarceration, as much else that is useful background, are amply contained in the numerous footnotes, it is easy to forget or overlook footnote citations as one is absorbed in reading the text—and the text of Luxemburg’s letters is absorbing indeed; she is fascinating as a person, a thinker, and as a gifted writer.

ALTHOUGH ROSA LUXEMBURG WAS a highly political person, her letters are often

anything but narrow political commentaries, and this is where her “multidimensionality as a thinker and a person” noted by Hudis comes fully into play: for the vast majority of the correspondence in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* are personal letters to friends and lovers, where the political commentary (which is quite extensive) enters casually, as the shared discussion and understanding among intimates. In this, it is not surprising that she would have active friendships with Sophie Liebknecht, wife of left-winger Karl Liebknecht; Henriette Roland Holst, left-wing socialist in Holland; and Clara Zetkin, leading left-wing German socialist; but Luxemburg is also close personal friends with Louise Kautsky, wife of Karl Kautsky, even though she had broken with him politically in 1910; and with Mathilde Wurm, wife of Emmanuel Wurm, both social-democratic centrists in the USPD. Not that Luxemburg pulls her political punches—for indeed there is much direct criticism of Karl Kautsky and other leading members of the SPD, of the SPD’s deadly routinism and lack of imagination, and also an honest assessment of the enthusiastic revolutionary youth who are attracted to the Spartacus League, yet are untried by experience (in this way much like the enthusiastic but untried 1960s New Left youth in the U.S. and elsewhere).¹ And she is highly critical of Lenin in several of these letters. Yet there always remains a civility even in her sharpest criticisms of leading personalities, a determination on her part to separate the ideas that she opposes from the actual persona of the person expressing them.²

Further, by certain standards that have been much in vogue for decades on what it means to be “left political,” Luxemburg is positively “bourgeois”! She has not only an active interest in politics, she has also an active interest in botany; she takes up drawing and painting, and pursues them eagerly; she loves walking in the gardens of her residence, and in the woods of the Black Forest and in Switzerland; she

enjoys without condescension the daily life she observes during her stays in Genoa and Levanto, Italy, and writes of them at length in two letters to Louise Kautsky, dated May 14 (275–279) and June 13, 1909 (279–86). She greatly appreciates Goethe and Mozart, and expresses that appreciation several times in her letters; she expresses regret that while she was at the International Socialist Conference in Paris, September 23–27, 1900, her father died and she was not there;³ she is an avid reader of the novels of her day and the recent past; she is very fond of her cat Mimi, and often ends her letters with notes of love from both Mimi and herself; and while imprisoned in the Wronke fortress, she befriends and feeds the titmice that come to her window ledge, and she eagerly observes the flowers that grow and the small animals that scurry beneath her cell window.

On “literature and revolution” Luxemburg writes critically of a book she finds “thoroughly dilettantish” in its conception of history, yet says of it,

It refreshes me tremendously with its lively activity of thought, as well as the enjoyment felt in depicting human fates[.] But for me it’s not the person or the book that forms my opinion but the fundamental material of which the book and the person are made. Opinions that are quite wrong don’t bother me at all as long as I find an inner integrity, a lively intelligence, and the joy of an artist in painting a picture of the world and of life. (394)

On the other hand, she writes of Romain Rolland’s antiwar novel: “Romain Rolland is not an unknown to me, Hanschen. He is certainly one of the white ravens [i.e., a rarity] *intra ex extra muros*⁴, one who, confronted by the war, did not fall back into the psychology of Neanderthal times. I have read a German translation of his *Jean-Christophe in Paris*. I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but as always I want to be quite honest: I found the book to be very brave and congenial, but more of a pamphlet than a novel, not a true work of art. I am so unmercifully sensitive about such things that for me

even the most beautifully written tendentious work is no substitute for the simple and divine quality of genius." (437-438. Bracketed phrase in original.)

Of course there's much that's directly political in the usual left-wing sense in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, much that is insightful, and much that is revealing about the inner life of the socialist parties of Luxemburg's time. But these are scattered throughout the correspondence as *bon mots*, and while integral to each letter in which they are contained, are not a systematic attempt by Luxemburg to formulate her personal letters as political documents and polemics. These letters are, as emphasized before, intensely personal communications for the most part to friends and lovers, and are written as such; the political enters into it because her friends and lovers are themselves also political, so naturally they share in Luxemburg's conversation. But these are personal, not public, documents. And they are also extremely well written, elegant in their use of language as well as exciting in their expression of ideas. The letters within this thick volume show indeed how much we have lost our ability to communicate with the decline of letter-writing; e-mails may be more timely and direct as means of communication, but taking the time to actually correspond (as Luxemburg did throughout her life; she was a devoted letter-writer), to actually compose a letter, produces art as well as communication. And that is at the heart of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, that is precisely what makes this book so absorbing and so pleasurable to read.

But before we depart, it's only appropriate to discuss a few of the political remarks contained within *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, conceding from the start that there's so much here in political content that we can only scratch the surface and point out some things that will be of most interest to readers of this review. First, these letters give us an intimate glimpse into the life of professional revolutionary socialists and the mundane concerns that are part and

parcel of a revolutionary's daily life: providing addresses to which to send mail while one is incarcerated or away, as one example; making arrangements for the care of Mimi the cat while Luxemburg is imprisoned, as another; and as the letters to Leo Jogiches show at the beginning of this volume, from March 20, 1893 to July 20, 1898 (3-83), the constant need to provide money to finance the underground Polish socialist newspapers and provide for Luxemburg's living expenses, a need finally attenuated in May 1898, when Luxemburg receives a stipend for writing for the SPD press. This same mundane but necessary concern for money to live on in order to do revolutionary work and writing is also a subject raised in the last letter here, to Clara Zetkin on January 11, 1919 (490-493), where Luxemburg implores Zetkin to move from Stuttgart to Berlin because she's needed for political work, and is promised a stipend on which to live. More proof of how right Engels was when he said at Marx's graveside, "Marx proved that man must first of all eat before he can do philosophy, the arts, etc." Or do socialist work and writing. Same as being an autoworker, or even pushing a broom or serving a cup of coffee: all workers, even intellectual ones, must be able to eat before they can produce.

The correspondence also gives us an interesting look into the personality of Leo Jogiches. He seems to be a quite diffident young man, and in her letter to him of March 25, 1894 (pp. 9-16) she reproaches him for his coldness and preoccupation with politics because she loves him (pp. 9-10); then in the same letter reproaches herself for being so blunt with him, saying, "I am not writing all this as a reproach to you. I cannot demand that you be different from what you are. I am writing partly because I still have the stupid habit of saying what I feel, and partly because I want you to be *au courant* with how things are between us." (12)

When Luxemburg broke off her affair with Jogiches and took up with Kostya Zetkin in 1907, as the letters show, Jogiches became

extremely jealous and even threatened to kill Zetkin and Luxemburg. (241; 250-252; 253-54.) There's poignancy in her letters to Kostya Zetkin when their love affair ends in 1909 (285-286). But with both Leo Jogiches and Kostya Zetkin, even though their romances had ended, Luxemburg still corresponded with them

The letters are extremely well written, elegant in their use of language as well as exciting in their expression of ideas.

civilly and worked with them in the socialist movement. Which is but a demonstration that revolutionaries are human too — or should be.

Rosa Luxemburg was not a feminist in the way it's generally understood now; rather, she was a socialist who viewed women's emancipation as part and parcel of the liberation of the working class as a whole through socialism, and certainly was so actively pro-woman she is justly admired by many feminists today. Her own life can be viewed as a successful feminist vindication of women's power and ability — after all, she climbed to the top echelons of the SPD despite being a woman and a left-winger who early on made enemies within the party; and a Jewish one at that! She writes interestingly on women in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* in two places. In her letter to Hans Diefenbach of April 5, 1917, she writes, "Because either a woman is a true personality — by this I don't mean a so-called 'intimidating woman' but a heart full of inner goodness and firmness, which one can find in a peasant hut as well as in a bourgeois family — because she establishes herself completely and remains a moral victor even when she gives in on small matters. Or else she is inwardly a

nonentity — and then once again there is no problem..." (388) Luxemburg writes also this lengthy passage on women in her August 2, 1917 letter to Sophie Liebknecht:

Thus I have already discovered a young woman working here in the [Breslau] prison yard whose slender form and concise gestures, with her head wrapped in a kerchief and the austerity of her profile, is a direct embodiment of a figure painted by Millet; it is a pleasure to see the nobility of movement with which she carries her loads, and her gaunt face with the unvarying chalk-white complexion reminds one of a tragic Pierrot mask. However, made wiser by sad experience, I try to give a wide berth to such highly promising manifestations. The thing is that at Barnim Street I came across a woman prisoner of truly queenly appearance and bearing, and I thought to myself that there must be a corresponding "interior." Then she came to my part of the prison as an odd-job worker [*Kalfaktrice*], and after two days it became evident that beneath the beautiful mask there lay such a mass of stupidity, such a base mentality, that from then on I always averted my gaze when she crossed my path. It occurred to me then that, ultimately, Venus de Milo could...have earned her reputation over thousands of years as the most beautiful of women only because she was silent. Had she opened her mouth, it might perhaps have come to light that at bottom she was like some women of limited mentality who take in washing or sewing, and the entire charm of her person would have gone to the devil. (p. 430)

In another letter to Sophie Liebknecht from Breslau prison, dated before December 24, 1917, Luxemburg remarks on how the horses that pull the overloaded supply wagons are brutalized by men who are themselves brutalized.

Although Rosa Luxemburg was a sharp polemicist with clearly-defined left-wing views that she wished to freely express within the socialist movement, and chafed when the right-wing bureaucrats within the SDP silenced her, nonetheless, she was not for splitting and fragmenting the socialist movement along ideological fault lines. In her letter to Henriette Roland

Holst in August 1911, she wrote on socialist unity and socialist work within the less-than perfect social-democratic mass parties:

Now I hear: things are going well with you personally and with your health, but you want to leave the SDAP [Social Democratic Workers' Party of Holland]. The first things make me truly happy, but the last one — no! You certainly know I was strongly opposed to your staying in the party at the time when the others left it. I was and am of the opinion that you should all stay together — inside or outside. Fragmentation of the Marxists (not to be confused with having differences of opinion) is fatal. But now, when you want to leave the party, I would like with all my might to prevent you from doing that. You do not want to join the SDP [Sociaal-Democratische Partij of Holland, which later became the Communist Party of Holland], or so I hear. I'm not able to judge whether that is correct or not. If you want to join the SDP but can't, enough said. But then by leaving the SDAP you are leaving the Social Democratic movement! You can't do that, none of us can! We can't be outside the organizations of the **masses**, out of contact with them. The worst working-class party is better than none. And times can change. If a few years a stormy period could sweep away the opportunist muck in Hol[land] or even in all of Europe. But a person can not wait for such times, from the outside, one must carry on the fight within, no matter how sterile or fruitless the effort may seem—to the very end. If you stay outside, you are finished, dead for the political movement. Don't do that! You also have responsibilities toward the International. Stay with the rank and file, that is our duty, we are all soldiers. (310-311. Bold emphases in original.)

But political animal though she was, Rosa Luxemburg could also write as she did to Leo Jogiches on October 20, 1905:

Yesterday I was very close to deciding, at once, to let it all go fly and *thumb my nose at the whole world*—this whole *goddamned politics*, or rather this bloody parody of “a political life” that we are leading. It's such an idiotic form of *Baal worship*, and nothing else, in which one's entire

human existence is offered as a sacrifice to one's own ruin, a kind of illness of swollen mental glands. If I believed in God, I'd be convinced that God would punish us harshly for [choosing] this *torment* [*Qual*].” (207)

As noted above, while broadly supportive of Bolshevik positions on politics, she was also critical of the Bolsheviks, and of Lenin specifically. Two examples are cited above. A third, expressed in a letter to the *Social-Demokraten* [publication of the Danish Social Democratic Party] on October 13, 1913, accuses Lenin of interfering in the internal affairs of the SDKPiL by sectarian, splitting activity. She tells the editors of *Social-Demokraten* that they are wrongly getting their information on Polish party relations from the

representative of a Russian Social Democratic faction, Lenin. This faction which for years in Russia itself has systematically sought to split the workers' party and recklessly engaged in faction fighting...has stubbornly blocked all efforts toward unification and thereby has brought the Russian party movement to the verge of ruin....The Lenin faction and its representatives...blindly support those who cause disruption and disorganization in the Polish Social Democratic Party and thus, with all their might, they cause difficulties for our party—as revenge for the fact that Polish Social Democracy fights with all **its** might against the splitting policy in Russia.” (327-328. Bold emphasis in original.)

Rosa Luxemburg warmly greeted the news of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 from her prison cell, although from early on she recognized the difficulties that lay ahead for a revolution in which, “caught in the pincers of the imperialist powers from all sides, neither soc[ialism] nor the dictatorship of the proletariat can become a reality, but at the most [what will come about is] a caricature of both.” (473) On the other hand she vigorously opposed Kautsky's opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution on the grounds that conditions were not ripe in Russia for socialism. (440-441) Further, while firmly opposed to the Bolsheviks' indis-

criminate use of terror and the suppression of democracy (466-477; and September 30, 1918, (473-4), she argues that "The use of terror indicates great weakness, certainly, but it is directed against internal enemies who base their hopes on the existence of capitalism outside of Russia, receiving support and encouragement from it.... Thus the Bolshevik use of terror is above all an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat" (484-485) In the same letter, Luxemburg offers this optimistic assessment: "This sore spot also can only be healed by the European revolution. And it is coming!" (p. 485) However, perhaps she was more realistic earlier when she acidly noted, "the Social Democracy in the highly developed West consists of miserable, cowardly dogs, who, while looking on calmly, will let the Russians bleed to death." (452) Yet, despite these misgivings on the course of the Russian Revolution,⁵ she went on to become a founding leader of the Communist Party of Germany, a revolutionary socialist party dedicated to achieving an October in Germany and Western Europe.

It would be unfair to both Luxemburg and to the reader of this review to end without noting a few salient features of her personal philosophy and outlook, which are amply peppered throughout *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. To Leo Jogiches she wrote circa July 3, 1900: "One must constantly carry out anew an inner review, or inventory, of oneself, in order to reestablish order and harmony. Thus one must constantly deal with oneself in order not to lose sight, at any moment, of the overall proportion of things, and in my opinion what this means is the following: to accomplish what is useful in life, to bring positive actions and **creative activity** to the outside world." (138. Bold emphasis in original.) To Louise Kautsky she wrote on April 15, 1917: "[O]nce again you experience something that I believe in firmly: one can only understand people correctly when one feels love for them." (395) And to Sophie Liebknecht she wrote on May 23, 1917:

My dear little bird, the whole history of human civilization, which according to moderate estimates has lasted some twenty thousand years, is based on 'some human beings deciding about the lives of others'; the practice is deeply rooted in the material conditions of existence. Nothing but further development, an agonizing process, can change such things, and at this very time we are witnesses to one such agonizing transition, and you ask, "What's the meaning of it all?" Your question is not a reasonable one to ask concerning the totality of life and its forms. Why are there blue titmice in the world? I don't really know, but I'm glad there are, and I experience it as a sweet consolation when a hasty *tsee-tsee-bay* sounds suddenly from the distance. (413)

Lastly, word must be given about the 16 pages of photographs contained in *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. These are a fascinating addition, photographs of Luxemburg and many of her close associates; she speaking at Stuttgart in 1907, attending the SPD Congress in 1905, and with her students at the Party School; photocopies of her drawings and her letters graced with her original artwork; her prison "mug shot," and her cell at Wronke fortress and the harsh anonymity of the outside edifice of the women's prison on Barnim Street.⁶ This book, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, has been prepared by Verso Books with care, scholarship and love, a care, scholarship and love that enables us to discover Red Rosa as she herself had limned her revealing self-portrait through words to others over the decades of her all too short life.

One of the tantalizing "What if?" questions of socialist history is "What if Lenin had lived?" With the publication of *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg* we can posit a possibly more tantalizing question: "What if Rosa Luxemburg had lived?" Red Rosa, fierce champion of both the working class and democracy, the only one in the world socialist movement who could truly be called a peer of Lenin and Trotsky. Had she lived, might not the history of socialism have been much different? Perhaps; and perhaps infused with loftier, more sublime, less repressive and

terroristic ideals. But as Rosa Luxemburg herself would've objected, "Yes, by all means hold on to your ideals; but turn them into reality in the world as it presently, imperfectly, exists."

NOTES

1. In her letter to Clara Zetkin, January 11, 1919, p. 491.
2. This civility even toward Kautsky stands interestingly in contrast to the creatively vilifying ad hominem hurled by Lenin and Trotsky against him: e.g., Lenin's referring to Kautsky and his adherents as "philistines in nightcaps" in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*; and Trotsky, in *Terrorism and Communism*, saying of those socialists critical of the Bolshevik regime that "In order to succeed it is sufficient, as we see, for our stormy history to draw a nightcap over its head, and take a pinch of wisdom out of Kautsky's snuffbox." Earlier, he says that the "formula" advocated by "Kautsky and his present school . . . inevitably appears as a justification of indecision, stagnation, cowardice and treachery."
3. See her letter to Hans Diefenbach, August 27, 1917, p. 437.
4. Latin for "inside and outside the walls."
5. Luxemburg's last several letters, from her letter to Louise Kautsky, November 24, 1917, to her letter to Lenin, December 20, 1918, frequently reference the Russian Revolution, its circumstances, its problems, and its prognosis.
6. Especially at Wronke, Rosa Luxemburg's incarcerations contrasts sharply with what she would've endured in a U.S. prison today. In prison she was allowed to freely read and write, receive visitors with notification, take walks in the prison courtyards and gardens, and even feed the birds and small animals that came to her cell's window ledge. The same punitive mentality found in U.S. prisons pervades U.S. psychiatric hospitals today as well, and in both cases the proper antidote was expressed by a Cuban psychiatrist: "If you treat people like human beings, they will act like human beings."

The Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde of 20th Century Intellectual History

MICHAEL WRESZIN

ANYONE INTERESTED in intellectual history from the great depression of the thirties to the post war 1980s will be familiar with the impact of Arthur Koestler, whose famous assault on Stalinism and the Soviet Union in his novel *Darkness at Noon* was a widely praised international bestseller. There was a vehemently critical biography written by David Cesurani, *Arthur Koestler—The Homeless Mind* published in London in 1998. It was an opinionated attack on Koestler's personality and moral stature. It also portrayed him as a brutal womanizer and a self-loathing Jew. A more scholarly biography

Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth Century Skeptic

MICHAEL SCAMMELL

New York: RandomHouse
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has now appeared written by Michael Scammell, the well-known biographer of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Scammell's work does not have the polemical, hyperbolic prose of Cesurani but it too is a strongly opinionated defense of Koestler, seeing him as one of the greatest intellectual journalists and writers of the 20th century. Scammell describes Koestler as a Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde, both intellectually brilliant

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and often mean-spirited, a bourgeois in domestic habits, bohemian in public, both idealistic and cynical, generous and kind on the one hand and brutal and even violent on the other. Books about Koestler are not likely to be written with a detached scholarly disinterest.

Scammell's biography is nearly 700 pages long. It has been acclaimed as a masterpiece of intellectual history. Koestler had an extraordinarily full life participating in nearly every intellectual, cultural, and scholarly debate and controversy of his time as well as being an actual participant in many major events including the Spanish Civil War, World War II and as a dissident voice throughout the post war years. Putting Koestler in the historical context demanded a full-scale history of the period. Scammell has delivered.

His book, however, poses the problem of so many post-computerized biographies: They become doorstep tombs. Everything is included; nothing of any import is left out. Koestler in addition to being a prolific author (he wrote 30 books and hundreds of articles and essays) was a promiscuous satyr who made an effort to have sex with nearly every woman he encountered. He manipulated an endless string of often talented and attractive women into his bedroom and anywhere else where sex might occur. Scammell leaves little out. Page after page is devoted to these seemingly endless encounters, which were often accompanied by drunken debauchery. This becomes more than tedious due to the repetitiveness of these episodes. They also distract from the ostensible reason the book is being written: a study of Koestler's intellectual achievements, his love of ideas, his magnificent conversational ability, his probing and inventive mind and imagination.

Ignazio Silone once observed that "The last struggle will be between the Communists and the anti-Communists." Koestler, having been both, made a lifelong career as a knowledgeable critic of Communism, Stalinism, and ultimately the entire Soviet Union. He became a major

spokesman for the Cold War West. Scammell is an enthusiastic admirer of this Cold War warrior and often uncritical of that history.

At the very start of the narrative Scammell quotes George Steiner, another Eastern European intellectual and friend of Koestler:

There are men and women who in addition to having special gifts, seem to embody the times in which they live. Somehow their biographies take on and make more visible to the rest of us the shape and meaning of the age. Even if Arthur Koestler had not been a significant writer and publicist, future historians would be fascinated by his career. It touches with uncanny precision on the hopes and nightmares, on the places and events, which have given the 20th century its flavor.

Arthur Koestler was born in Budapest, Hungary on September 5, 1904. His Jewish parents did not identify themselves ethnically. His mother came from a very wealthy family and was an avid socialite and partygoer. She often neglected her son, leaving him in the care of several nannies while she traipsed around Budapest and then Vienna. He had little love for his mother and later blamed her for his mental instability and lack of self-confidence. His father, a struggling businessman, was often away traveling and seldom had time for his son. With the death of a grandfather when he was just five and the only person he was close to, he grew up a sullen and lonely boy mostly on his own. He did prove to be an exceptional student. While still in high school he was an avid reader of Shakespeare, Rilke, Goethe, Heine, and Byron, and an indiscriminating reader of novels. But his major interest was in science and he excelled in that field. He was admitted to the *Technisch Hochschule*, the equivalent of MIT, in Vienna where his parents had moved to escape the results of the Hungarian Revolution of 1919.

Koestler began publishing articles and stories, which were printed in several magazines, but he was forced to leave school when his father's business collapsed and he could no longer

pay tuition. Having become involved in Zionist organizations while in school, he managed to find his way to Palestine, hoping to find some kind of utopian existence. After a disappointing stint in a Kibbutz, he went to Haifa and began his career as a journalist. He traveled extensively throughout the Middle East as a correspondent and then went to Paris, and finally, Berlin where he became the science editor of a classy newspaper, *Alte Tante Voss*. He turned out an article a week for the *Voss* and its sister papers. He interviewed Einstein, rode on the maiden flight of the Graf Zeppelin to the North Pole, and wrote flamboyant accounts of his adventures. He became a celebrity in Berlin and was promoted to greater editorial responsibilities.

In addition to his heavy work routine he began to live the life of a flamboyantly promiscuous man about town, and according to his own diary “managed to sneak into the beds of desirable women, or to seduce all the women in a harem in a single night and then brag about it.” His brilliant and aggressive conversational argumentation became his signature mark but it was often undermined by drunkenness, which developed into a serious problem.

Because of Koestler’s continued and “obsessive search for nirvana” he became interested in Communism at the beginning of the Great Depression and was persuaded by a friend to join the Communist Party in 1932. This led to an extensive trip through much of the Soviet Union. Initially enamored, he wrote of his experience in the language of Communist propaganda, but it proved to be, like his other searches for nirvana, a disillusioning experience.

It took his extraordinary trip to Spain during the civil war to crystallize Koestler’s hatred of oppression and totalitarian control. He was jailed by the Franco forces as a spying foreign correspondent for a British paper, the *News Chronicle*, in February of 1937. He spent a horrendous time in a Spanish jail, convinced that he would lose his life as did so many of his prison comrades. He was released after an

international effort sparked in England where 56 members of the British Parliament signed a letter of support.

Koestler’s accounts of the Spanish experience in his book *The Spanish Testament* and

Koestler ridiculed those in
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especially its second part, *Dialogue with Death*, published by the Left Book Club in 1937, launched his career. His account of the very real and constant nearness of death prompted Sartre to praise it as an “early example of existentialism.” Koestler’s months in the Spanish jail, Scammell writes, were “crucial to his intellectual and spiritual development.” All of the major themes of his writing appear there: the problem of means and ends, free will, predestination, morality versus ideology.

It was not long after the publication of his Spanish book that Koestler left the Communist Party in April of 1938. He had encounters with party colleagues that angered him with their defense of violence and insistence that the ends justify any means. Scammell claims that Koestler had “grasped the corruption and degradation of the party far ahead of his comrades on the left.” With *Darkness at Noon* (1940), Koestler’s most famous work, he had launched all out war with Communism, Stalinism, and the Soviet Union. *Darkness at Noon* was a worldwide bestseller. Its tremendous success guaranteed his financial security for the rest of his life. Selling over a half million copies in two years was, accord-

ing to Scammell, “a record for a serious novel and Koestler’s greatest publishing triumph.” It was declared the “most devastating exposure of Stalinist methods ever written” and “one of the few books of this epoch which will survive it.” Koestler stated in a later interview that “Perhaps the truth is that real leftism today can only be anti-Communism. . . . Communism isn’t what sprang from our little student brains. Communism is the Soviet Union. They are building the most cruel dictatorship ever seen.” He went on to assert that Bolshevism had created fanatics ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of the party . . . Stalinism wasn’t Marxism. It ignored the teachings of Marx in *Das Kapital*, and its biggest crime was that it had substituted rule by decree for laws of society.” He quickly equated Stalinist Russia with Nazi Germany under the rubric of Totalitarianism.

Enormously prolific, he produced novelistic autobiographies and nonfiction accounts of his own life in such works as *The Scum of the Earth*, memoir (1941), *Arrival and Departure*, novel (1943), *The Yogi and the Commissar*, collected essays (1945), *Thieves in the Night*, novel (1946), and *The God that Failed: Six Studies in Communism*, a memoir with others edited by Richard Crossman (1950). All of these works and several others became classic statements of post World War II Cold War antiCommunism. Koestler had become a staunch defender of American foreign policy. He ridiculed those in France and other European and American leftists who wanted an independent third force to counter the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Koestler presided at the Berlin Conference in 1951, where the Congress for Cultural Freedom was established and its publication financed by the American government through fronts established by the CIA. He attended their first major meeting and celebration in Paris. When not on wild nighttime bashes at bars and strip clubs, he met with some very conservative types. When he came to America, Erika Mann (actress, daughter of

Thomas Mann) was appalled by the “right wing company he kept.”

Scammell approves of Koestler’s role here and informs us that in his dispute with Sartre over the promotion of a more vigorous opposition to the Soviet Union, Koestler was “absolutely right and Sartre wrong.” He does concede that many on the left in Europe and America did not accept the belligerent stance of Koestler. Scammell is eloquent in his defense of Koestler, but his explanation of the French left’s opposition is biased and inadequate. He has no criticism of such unsavory characters as Mel Lasky, who ultimately became a CIA operative. He defends the argument that the covert funding of an association that allegedly stood for cultural freedom and professed to be independent was legitimate during the cold war. At one point he suggests that Lasky and Ruth Fisher were not aware of the secret funding. That has been clearly proved in the works of several writers dealing with these cold war affairs. Scammell calls Trevor Roper “irresponsible” for his critique of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the nefarious influence of Sidney Hook, Koestler, and Franz Borkenau who he assumed were supported by the American government. A recent English study by Frances Stoner Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War* (1999) hardly supports the views of Scammell. Scammell does not note her study in his bibliography despite the fact that she devotes many pages to Koestler and his relationship with United States government officials.

Neglected in my review is the second life of Koestler when he abandoned politics and became a scientific searcher for an understanding of the “unitary source of mystical and scientific modes of experience and the disastrous results of their separation.” He developed a strong belief in mind over matter, which led him to an interest in ESP (extra sensory perception), levitation, and parapsychology. In Britain he was ridiculed by scientists and described by one as “the freakiest of our sages.” He toyed with the

idea of communication through séances, took a serious interest in UFOs (unidentified flying objects) and all forms of transcendental mediation.

I also neglect a detailed account of his incredible womanizing, the charges of coercive sex and on one alleged occasion rape (which Scammell nearly dismisses), the endless inebriation and outrageous public conduct, his frequent cruelty to the women he dominated, and his occasional resort to physical violence.

But it's all here in this extensive volume. There is more than ample evidence of Koestler's brilliance, his inventive imagination, his abil-

ity to ask the right questions, his fight against capital punishment, and his early exposure of the horrors of the holocaust, his personal awards to convict artists. Along with his extraordinary personal strengths, flaws, failings, and serious mental instability.

Arthur Koestler and his wife, Cynthia, carried out a suicide pact on February 29, 1983. It was very carefully planned and skillfully carried out. There have been charges that Koestler domineeringly coerced Cynthia, but Scammell convincingly argues that it was a mutual agreement and that Cynthia had said she did not want to live without him.

Sartre and the Idea of Freedom in the Anti-Colonial Struggle

DAN LA BOTZ

IN THE LATE 1960S it seemed to many almost certain that Jean-Paul Sartre would be remembered as the most important philosopher of the twentieth century and the most important public intellectual on the left of that era. Certainly it seemed so to me at the time. Sartre had in the 1930s taken Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and its reactionary and religious version of phenomenology and transformed them in *Being*

and *Nothingness* into his new humanist philosophy of existentialism, a leftwing philosophy of freedom. Sartre lived out that freedom with his personal commitment to the French resistance to Nazism during World War II and then amplified its meaning in a massive literary output of essays, plays, and novels during the post-war period.

Throughout the 1950s, driven by a desire to put himself on the side of the working class and revolution, Sartre wrestled with the question of Stalin, the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party, became for a while their defender, and then eventually broke free of their hold on him. As the editor, together with his companion Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, of *Les Temps Modernes* during this period, he

Unfinished Projects:
Decolonization and the
Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre
Paige Arthur
New York: Verso, 2010, 233 pp., \$24.95

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became the intellectual spokesman of the left, excoriating the establishment and rallying the intellectuals. Then in the 1960s and 1970s, turning his analysis to French imperialism, Sartre emerged as perhaps the leading French intellectual supporting colonial struggles against the French and then the American empires, the man often seen at the time as the voice in the metropolis of the struggles in the Third world as well as of the immigrant in French society. Yet, in the span from the 1970s to the 1990s, a systematic attack on Sartre and other leftwing French intellectuals and “totalitarian” thinkers succeeded in demolishing Sartre’s reputation and that of many of his contemporaries.

Paige Arthur, the Deputy Director of Research at the International Center for Transitional Justice, invites us to reconsider Sartre, his reputation, and his contribution to political philosophy and to human liberation. She suggests that focusing on the often neglected subject of his writings on colonial peoples, Third World struggles, and immigrants in Europe will lead us to a new appreciation of Sartre. Her book, based on and still bearing the marks of her U.C. Berkeley dissertation in intellectual history written several years ago, locates Sartre’s thinking and writing between the 1940s and the 1970s within the context of French intellectual, social, and political history. By doing so, she successfully demonstrates that his relationship with the colonial and Third World liberation movements made a unique contribution to his thinking, and that his thinking also made a unique contribution to French and world intellectual currents concerned with freedom struggles.

For many of us of the generation of the late 1960 and early 1970s, Sartre was a hero. Reading this book inevitably led me back to my own engagement with Sartre’s ideas as a student in those years. I had a brushing acquaintance with Sartre and de Beauvoir during my undergraduate years in the early 1960s, having read on my own pieces of *Being and Nothingness* and some of their popular essays on existentialism.

Later in 1969, while studying literature at the University of California at San Diego, in my first graduate seminar, a course taught by Fred Jameson on *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, I was suddenly plunged into Sartre’s thought. That massive 750-page book in tiny print and difficult French, written in the 1950s and published in 1960, attempted to reconcile Marxism with its emphasis on the determining role in history of economic and social structures with Sartre’s own existentialism and its stress on individual human freedom in the face of death. The encounter would leave me an existentialist Marxist, convinced by Sartre that Marxism and existentialism—together with the Freudian psychoanalysis—provide a more complete understanding of the dynamics of human life than any one of them alone. (Herbert Marcuse, author of *Eros and Civilization*, was also at UCSD when I was there, and all of us were reading Wilhelm Reich’s books and his Sex-Pol Essays.)

Arthur places at the center of her book *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* which I had read back in 1969 with its account of the contest between, on the one hand, the “practico-inert” of inherited social structures and, on the other, the “group-in-fusion,” representing movements for social change attempting to overcome those structures. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre had developed a philosophy which revolved around the dynamic relationship between self and Other, and which consequently could not adequately address social and historical issues. Then, later, in order to account for society and history, Sartre in *The Critique* developed a theory of social groups and historical change. Clearly influenced by Marxism, *The Critique* argued that social reality, particularly social institutions, provided the parameters of human choices, choice about actions that were taken by groups, but as a result of decisions ultimately made by individuals.

At the same time, *The Critique* provided a bridge between Sartre’s early writings on race issues, such as *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1945), and

his later writing on colonialism. While Sartre addressed the social problem of anti-Semitism in his powerful and famous little book, arguing the inert rocklike character of the anti-Semite's beliefs, he had not yet created his own philosophical structure to account for society, group attitudes and behavior, or social change. His companion, Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), preceded Sartre in the development of a more historical and complex account of group attitudes and actions as she attempted to account for the historical oppression of women. Sartre struggled with these questions and others during the 1940s in his *Notebooks for an Ethics* but, disappointed with the inconclusive results, left the book unpublished; it was published posthumously in 1980. He did not finally get these things clear in his mind until the end of the 1950s. *The Critique* then represented a synthesis of Sartre's thought on both the nature of society and social change and also on colonialism and resistance to it, though the latter has often be overlooked and Arthur is to be thanked for bringing it to our attention. At the same time, *The Critique*, can be read as an analysis of Stalinism and the Soviet Union which was the beginning of the end of Sartre's flirtation with Soviet Communism and with the French Communist Party.

SARTRE WROTE A GREAT DEAL on the French wars in Algeria, which became the turning point in twentieth century French history. Placing himself squarely on the side of the Algerians, Sartre argued that European colonialism arose from racism, the search for low-wage labor, and the imperial armies' violence. In doing so, Sartre and a whole generation of French intellectuals and students moved to the left of the French Communist Party. Sartre, beginning in 1957, accused the Communists of following the Socialists who in turn were following the lead of the French imperial state. When by the early 1960s the Algerian War had led to a deep political crisis with French colonists, French military

units, and the French right driven to engage in armed attacks in France itself, de Gaulle's government recognized Algeria's independence in 1962. Ironically, de Gaulle's recognition of Algerian independence removed the principal issue around which the far left had emerged. With the end of the war in Algeria, however, Sartre and other leftwing intellectuals turned

Sartre ultimately became,
Arthur writes, the French and
international spokesman
for Third Worldism.

to the critique of the role of the United States in Vietnam, opposing America's global ambitions. Above all Sartre became the intellectual defender of armed struggle against imperialism.

Arthur discusses the way that during the 1960s and 1970s Sartre developed a defense of guerrilla warfare in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while he drew a rather blurry line between guerrilla warfare which he supported and terrorism which he suggested he didn't. Sartre ultimately became, Arthur writes, the French and international spokesman for Third Worldism, or for a version of it, one which attempted to link the struggle for socialism in the Third World to fights for democracy and socialism at home. Eventually this led Sartre, in his way, to Maoism, largely, Arthur suggests, because of his analysis of the situation of French immigrants as victims of a kind of colonialism or neocolonialism within France itself, a position the Maoists shared. In 1970 Sartre became the editor of the Maoist *La Cause du peuple*. Sartre's indictment and conviction in November 1973 for defamation, making death threats, and justifying the use of explosives to cause destruction resulted in nothing more than a 400 franc fine, but it

represented the end of an era.

A new group of intellectuals arose, some on the far right and some linked to the Socialist Party, who began to attack Sartre, the Communists, and the Marxist revolutionary left, accusing them all rather indiscriminately of “totalitarianism.” All of the issues sound very contemporary. The attack on Sartre came in large measure from his defense of immigrants whose very presence challenged the traditional French definition of terms such as the people, democracy, fraternity and equality. Sartre’s essay “The Third World Begins in the Banlieu” brought home his analysis of colonialism and neocolonialism, once again arguing that immigrants faced racism, low wages, and violence at home as they had in the colonies. When a young Arab was shot in France, Sartre wrote an essay, in a country that believed it was free from racism, entitled “The New Racism,” signed by himself and 137 other intellectuals.

The Biafra War in Nigeria in 1970 proved to be a turning point in France for thinking about the Third World just as Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s novel *The Gulag Archipelago* (French edition 1974) led many to a rethinking of Soviet Communism. “Totalitarianism” within this political context came to refer to Soviet Communism, Maoism, and Third World governments, all of them grouped together without distinction and counterpoised to the international agencies and NGOs which represented the humanitarian

alternative—backed up by the United Nations, NATO, and various national armies. Francois Mitterand’s leadership in the French Socialist Party and its alliance with the Communists in 1972 led to the consolidation of a new reformist left in France, and to the marginalization of Sartre’s sort of radical leftism. While the new right of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front organized against immigrants, the new reformist left tended to support France’s reassertion of its role in its former colonies, rejected Third World governments as inevitably corrupt dictatorships, and supported the notion of international humanitarian interventionism.

The defeat and collapse of much of the far left, the barrage from the right, and the consolidation of Socialist Party reformism spelled the end of Sartre’s 40 years as France’s leading left intellectual. As Paige Arthur suggests, there are good reasons to go back and reexamine his career. One might only wish that she had in her book spent more time on thinking about Sartre’s struggle with Stalinism and ultimate rejection of it, and the relationship of that to his turn to the Third World. In any case, this book, written in an academic style and leaving no intellectual stone on the beach of French thought unturned, does an excellent job of examining Sartre’s intellectual and political development through the lens of his involvement in the anti-colonial movement.

Superhero Politics

KENT WORCESTER

ONE OF THE MOST ENJOYABLE graphic novels published in recent years is *The Adventures of Unemployed Man*, which uses classic superhero imagery to tell a resolutely social-

The Adventures of Unemployed Man

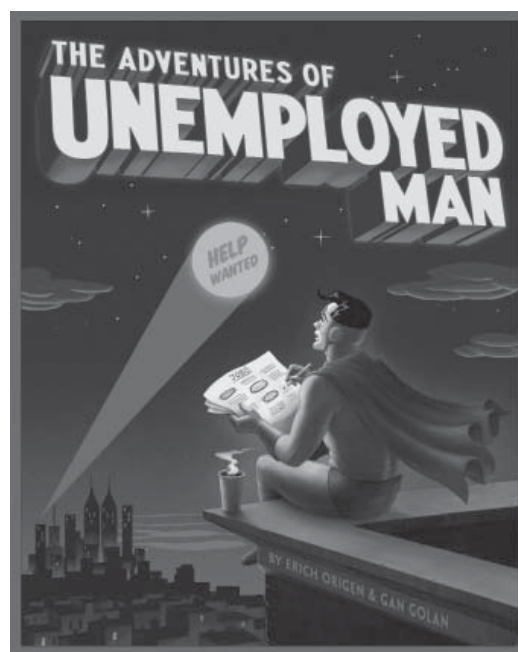
ERICH ORIGEN AND GAN GOLAN

New York: Little, Brown and Company

2010, 80 pp., \$14.99



KENT WORCESTER is the coeditor (with Jeet Heer) of *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (2004) and *A Comics Studies Reader* (2009).



and Tom Orzechowski. While it's a little obvious in places, *The Adventures of Unemployed Man* mostly strikes the right balance between superhero fisticuffs, socioeconomic analysis, and goofy wordplay. It's been widely reviewed in the mainstream media, and may help some readers appreciate just how stacked the life-chances deck has become.

As the book opens, millionaire Bruce Paine is wearing the costume of his "motivational vigilante" alter ego, The Ultimatum. As he tells his youthful ward, A-Plus, "The dark forces of destitution will not resist our message...if you can believe it, you can achieve it!" He uses his battle van to spread the gospel of positivity, but gets a lesson in real-world economics when he learns that the workers who make his own action figures don't earn enough to live on. When he tries to convince the Painecorp board to raise their wages, "The Man" tells him that he's "little more than a mascot for Painecorp," and promptly ejects him from the corporate headquarters. "Look!" shouts one bystander. "Up in the sky!" says another. "It's a bird!" No, "it's a plane!" "Nah, it's just some dude getting fired."



Needless to say, The Ultimatum finds his new lifestyle a little challenging. He puts on weight, plays solitaire, and mopes around his

underground lair. He scans the classified section, but the right job never materializes. He finally ends up in "Cape Town, U.S.A.," a kind



of tent city for unemployed superheroes. There he meets Master of Degrees, who was taught to believe that "education was the key to the

good life," Wonder Mother, who found out that "female heroes, especially mothers, faced obstacles others did not," and White Rage, who

was “bombarded by an accidental overdose of Fox News rays” and began to smash “things I needed” (such as bank regulation, public transit, union wages, and unemployment insurance) “just to be sure they wouldn’t be shared with

“They all worked hard and played by the rules. The problem is the game was rigged.”

those I was told to hate.” As *The Ultimatum* listens to their stories, he soon realizes that “not a single one of them has an attitude problem. They all worked hard and played by the rules. The problem is the game was rigged.”

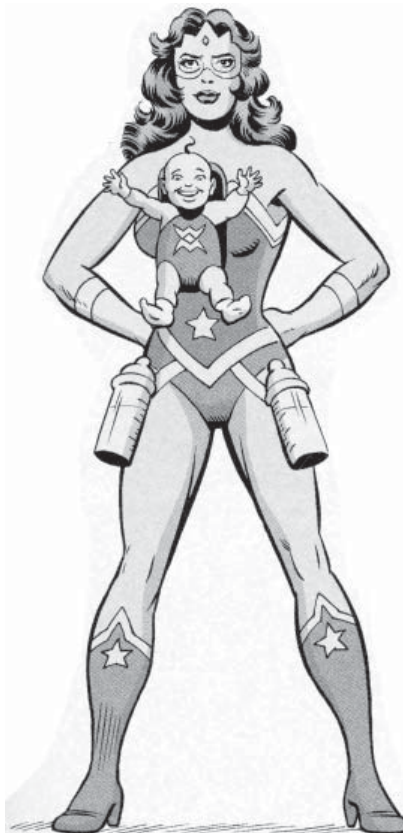
Even as Bruce Paine begins to reexamine his deepest-held beliefs, the nefarious bad guys, including Stern Bear, Stanley Morgan, and the Lemur Brothers, are busy trying to crack open the Glass Steagall Containment Device, which the “economalien” Alien Greenspan promised would yield untold riches. Naturally, once the device is broken, a flood of red ink bursts out and threatens to engulf entire cities. As the “renegade economalien” Reich explains, the country is under attack from a “toxic debt blob” that was “engineered to be the ultimate creative financial services product. Unregulatable. Unstoppable. Once free, it mutated. Now nobody

knows what the hell it’s made out of, or who even owns it.” Or, as the aging sidekick Plan B intones, “Holy Hopelessness, Unemployed Man!” The book’s superhero artists are particularly good at capturing the B-movie drama of city residents under siege. As ordinary folks are swept under the tide of red ink, The Thumb and other Wall Street tycoons call on Washington to “send the solid gold chopper.” “Whew! That was close,” exclaims one banker. “Good thing no one got hurt!”

At this point, however, the tide turns. The underutilized superheroes decide it’s time to fight back. “Repair the safety net! Give people a lifeline!” And so on. They even reawaken the Golden Age superhero Everyman, who once shared a comic book cover with FDR. The long-suppressed social-democratic spirit of the American people rematerializes. And the conspiracy of villainy, the “Just Us League,” is

defeated, or at least scattered, by the power of mass action. “I almost forgot what it was like to be a hero,” confesses Everyman. “It’s like flying,” he says. “Maybe even better,” responds *The Ultimatum*.

The Adventures of Unemployed Man does a great job of fusing superhero iconography with political polemics. As *USA Today* noted in its review, the book “exposes, with laugh-out-loud yet sophisticated wit, the desperate situation many Americans find themselves in today.” If the book’s third act is a bit glib, and obvious, most readers may nevertheless feel the need for a happy ending.





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IN THIS ISSUE

Liberals tried to defend market reform by disconnecting from it all the social ills which people commonly related to the reform: increasing social inequality, rampant corruption, open contempt for labor and environmental laws, etc.

Au Loong Yu

Review, Wang Hui, *THE END OF REVOLUTION:
CHINA AND THE LIMITS OF MODERNITY*

Torture and associated practices of state violence have continued uninterrupted in the United States from colonial times through the present.

Robert Pallitto

TORTURE AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

Without some form of sustained militancy, of ongoing struggle against capital's incessant demand for the extraction of ever-increasing surplus value, whatever demands can be wrung by an initial show of such resistance will be undermined, eroded, and finally made worthless by the capitalist juggernaut's inexorable movement "forward" in its own interests.

Sheila Cohen

STARTING ALL OVER FROM SCRATCH?
A PLEA FOR "RADICAL REFORM" OF OUR OWN MOVEMENT

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