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a journal of socialist thought

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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 between April 9 and May 31, 2012, or during September, 2012. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, March 1, 2012. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500.

MARVIN AND BETTY

BAHRAIN UPDATE

from the Campaign for Peace and Democracy

C PD'S STATEMENT "End U.S. Support for Bahrain's Repressive Government" was signed by more than 1900 people, including several hundred Bahrainis, and was widely circulated in this country and Bahrain.

Tragically, the horrible repression in Bahrain continues, with very little publicity in the U.S. media and no more than an occasional pro forma rebuke from the Obama administration. Last May, when Washington's muted response to the Bahraini situation had become embarrassingly obvious, President Obama famously said about Bahrain, "you can't have a real dialogue when parts of the peaceful opposition are in jail." But since that time the U.S. government has issued no high profile condemnation of Bahrain's government, despite its continuing violent repression:

More than 1600 people have been detained in Bahrain since pro-reform protests began in February and four have died in custody in suspicious circumstances. More than 2500 people have been dismissed or suspended from work. Thirty-five or more have been killed in anti-government protests.

Medical workers who treated wounded protesters were given sentences as long as 15 years by a special security court. After vociferous international condemnation, on October 5th Bahrain's Public Prosecutor ordered a new trial, before a civilian court, of 20 doctors and other health workers. Their fate remains uncertain.

Harsh prison sentences have been imposed on 21 prominent political leaders, ranging from life sentences to 15 years and 5 years imprisonment.

The president of the Bahrain teachers association Mahdi Abudeeb was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and the association's vice president Jalila Alsalman was sentenced

to three years.

Bahrainis live under de facto martial law. According to *Al Wasat*, the only independent Bahrain daily, police still raid houses, arbitrarily arrest civilians and protesters, and smash cars. The government TV stations show pictures of protesters and ask the public to identify them so they can be punished. Yet Washington continues to soft-pedal its criticisms of Bahrain's government, calling on "both sides" to seek reconciliation and applauding the Al Khalifa regime for its purported reforms. For example, in his September 20, 2011, speech to the United Nations, President Obama said:

In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability, but more are required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc, the Wifaq, to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people.

In fact, however, the government's proposed reforms have proven quite empty, prompting *Al Wifaq* and other opposition groups to boycott last month's elections.

Protests have continued in Bahrain since the pro-democracy movement took to the streets in February 2011, but for many months they have been mostly modest in size because of the intense repression that followed the initial courageous demonstrations. Larger protests have at times erupted — most recently with the funeral of Ahmed al-Jaber al-Qatan, age 16, who was shot earlier this month while observing or participating in an anti-government protest near the capital Manama. The teenager died soon after being taken to the hospital, and after his funeral on October 7th thousands clashed with security forces in the largest demonstra-

tion since the government crackdown began in March.

Meanwhile, Washington continues to mute its criticisms of Bahrain's government and the Saudi forces it brought into the country. The U.S. Fifth Fleet remains stationed in Bahrain, military aid to Bahrain continues, and the Obama administration has announced plans for an arms sale to Bahrain worth \$53 million. The sale, unless it is successfully blocked in Congress, includes more than 44 armored Humvees and 300 missiles, 50 of which have bunker busting capability.

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has sent a protest to President Obama and key members of Congress to end this shameful support of Bahraini repression, a letter of condemnation to the Bahraini government, and a message of solidarity to Bahrainis struggling for their democratic rights.

Here are some things you can do if you would like to stay updated on developments in

Bahrain:

- Regularly visit the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights website
- Follow Bahraini human rights activist Maryam Alkhawaja on Twitter
- Follow Bahrain on the Physicians for Human Rights Facebook page and on their website
- See Amnesty International's ongoing coverage of Bahrain
- See Human Rights Watch's website for its Bahrain coverage
- Check the Campaign for Peace and Democracy Facebook page for regular news about Bahrain

October 10, 2011

Campaign for Peace and Democracy

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Derrick Bell: Fighting Losing Battles

STEPHEN STEINBERG

WHEN DERRICK BELL PUBLISHED *Gospel Choirs* in 1996, he sent me a copy with this inscription: “Our job is to turn out the truth. God’s help is needed to get the truth accepted.” This epigrammatic note — principled resolve, on the one hand, and pessimism born of despair, on the other — encapsulated the two sides of Bell’s world view.

Derrick Bell was a man of many facets, no doubt reflecting the contradictions in his own life. He was born black in a white supremacist nation. He grew up during the Depression, the son of an Alabama farm worker who had a sixth grade education and migrated to Pittsburgh in the 1920s where he worked as a porter at Kaufman’s Department Store. By Bell’s own account, his mother had a stiff backbone and personified the theme of another of his books, *Confronting Authority*. He found sustenance and inspiration in the black church, leading him to write *Gospel Choirs*, a medley of parables and essays that invoke the irrepressible spirit of the gospels. As a young boy with a paper route in a segregated black neighborhood, he encountered educated blacks who had “a worldliness that I envied and longed to emulate” and who urged him to become a lawyer. After two years in the military, he enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh Law School, the only black in a class of 140 students. His first lawyering job was in the U.S. Department of Justice, until he was told by supervisors that he would have to resign from the NAACP because it was deemed a conflict

of interest. Instead he resigned from the Justice Department.

All of this, of course, was only a prelude to the Derrick Bell we all came to know as a public figure: the young lawyer who worked at the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund on desegregation cases with four other lawyers, including Thurgood Marshall. Bell went on to

The various strands of his life
came together in one overriding
mission: the uncompromising
pursuit of racial and class justice.

become the first black on the faculty of Harvard Law School in 1969, thanks to the demands of student protesters to hire a black. In 1973 he wrote his landmark casebook, *Race, Racism, and American Law*. This volume, now in its 8th edition, became the bible of the emergent field of Civil Rights Law. Furthermore, Bell helped to inspire and nurture two generations of civil rights lawyers. Through his scholarship and his inspiration, Bell emerged as one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, which transformed knowledge and learning in ways that extended far beyond the world of law. As is well known, in 1990 he resigned from Harvard University Law School to protest the school’s refusal to appoint a female of color to the faculty, and took a visiting position at New York Law School where he taught courses on constitutional law and critical race theory. During this period Bell became a Sponsor of *New Politics*, and we list him on our

STEPHEN STEINBERG is Distinguished Professor of Urban Studies at Queens College. He is author of *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* and *Race Relations: A Critique*.

masthead with pride.

Despite his achievements and celebrity status, Bell was free of conceit and incapable of pomposity. The various strands of his life all came together in one overriding mission: the uncompromising pursuit of racial and class justice. Nor did Bell surrender to false optimism. On the contrary, he was often criticized for his stubborn belief that “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society,” and that blacks could only extract concessions that converged with white interests. His detractors would counter that such pessimism could be debilitating and self-defeating. But citing Albert Camus, Bell contended that struggle was a moral imperative even in the face of certain defeat. And in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, he wrote of

Martin Luther King:

In an essay, “A Testament of Hope,” published after his death, he [King] wrote of his setbacks, the time spent in jails, his frustrations and sorrows, and the dangerous character of his adversaries. He said those adversaries expected him to harden into a grim and desperate man. But: “They fail, however, to perceive the sense of affirmation generated by the challenge of embracing struggle and surmounting obstacles.” So, while Dr. King led a struggle toward a goal — racial equality — that seemed possible, if not quite feasible, in the 1960s, there was a deeper message of commitment to courageous struggle whatever the circumstances or the odds.

“Courageous struggle whatever the circumstances or the odds.” Indeed, this was Derrick Bell’s testament as well.

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Occupy Wall Street Declaration

AS WE GATHER TOGETHER in solidarity to express a feeling of mass injustice, we must not lose sight of what brought us together. We write so that all people who feel wronged by the corporate forces of the world can know that we are your allies.

As one people, united, we acknowledge the reality: that the future of the human race requires the cooperation of its members; that our system must protect our rights, and upon corruption of that system, it is up to the individuals to protect their own rights, and those of their neighbors; that a democratic government derives its just power from the people, but corporations do not seek consent to extract wealth from the people and the Earth; and that no true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power. We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments. We have peaceably assembled here, as is our right, to let these facts be known.

- They have taken our houses through an illegal foreclosure process, despite not having the original mortgage.
- They have taken bailouts from taxpayers with impunity, and continue to give Executives exorbitant bonuses.
- They have perpetuated inequality and discrimination in the workplace based on age, the color of one's skin, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

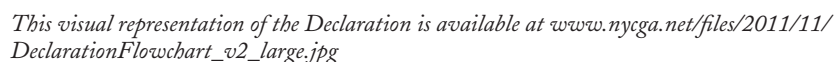
- They have poisoned the food supply through negligence, and undermined the farming system through monopolization.
- They have profited off of the torture, confinement, and cruel treatment of countless animals, and actively hide these practices.
- They have continuously sought to strip employees of the right to negotiate for better pay and safer working conditions.
- They have held students hostage with tens of thousands of dollars of debt on education, which is itself a human right.
- They have consistently outsourced labor and used that outsourcing as leverage to cut workers' healthcare and pay.
- They have influenced the courts to achieve the same rights as people, with none of the culpability or responsibility.
- They have spent millions of dollars on legal teams that look for ways to get them out of contracts in regards to health insurance.
- They have sold our privacy as a commodity.
- They have used the military and police force to prevent freedom of the press.
- They have deliberately declined to recall faulty products endangering lives in pursuit of profit.
- They determine economic policy, despite the catastrophic failures their policies have produced and continue to produce.
- They have donated large sums of money to politicians, who are responsible for regulating them.
- They continue to block alternate forms of energy to keep us dependent on oil.
- They continue to block generic forms of medicine that could save people's lives or provide relief in order to protect investments that have already turned a substantial profit.
- They have purposely covered up oil spills,

This document was accepted by the NYC General Assembly on September 29, 2011

- We, the New York City General Assembly
occupying Wall Street in Liberty Square,
urge you to assert your power.

To all communities that take action and form groups in the spirit of direct democracy, we offer support, documentation, and all of the resources at our disposal.

**These grievances are not all-inclusive.*



From Occupy Wall Street to Occupy the World The Emergence of a Mass Movement

DAN LA BOTZ

THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT has changed the American political landscape. We are at the opening of a new mass movement and a radicalization that presage an era of coming social upheaval and class conflict that require the left to both analyze these developments and to develop a strategy to intervene. The left today, small, divided, and weak, must develop an approach that will make it possible for it to grow and unite so that it can influence events. The developments taking place are somewhat episodic and uneven, but they have a common character, that of a mass, populist, leftward moving force. Our task is to help that force to grow and to help its inherently radical character to fully emerge and to become self-consciously anti-capitalist and an eventually socialist movement. To do so we must respect both the movement's character and the convictions of its participants. We must share the work of the movement and enter its conversation prepared not only to share our view, but also to learn from others.

A handful of young people started Occupy Wall Street in mid-September, as a protest against the banks and corporations that have grown rich while most Americans have grown poorer. Responding to the call to occupy Wall Street by *Adbusters*, the Canadian anti-consumerism magazine, they took Zuccotti

Park on September 17 and began a permanent encampment. Within weeks they had attracted hundreds and then thousands to marches and demonstration in New York City — one of them leading to the arrest of hundreds on the Brooklyn Bridge. The movement's chant "We are the 99 percent" rang out not only in the Wall Street canyon but also across the country. Soon there were scores of Occupy groups across the United States camping out in public places, marching and rallying in cities and towns against corporate greed. By mid-October the Occupy movement had spread to every continent, to dozens of countries, and to hundreds of cities.

The movement and its repression are having profound ramifications in the working class. State and local governments responded to the movement with police repression resulting in the arrest of 3,000 activists in a dozen cities in the first weeks. The police, on foot and mounted, sometimes formed in phalanxes, and wearing riot gear, have raided the Occupy encampments using pepper spray, clubs, tear gas, and stun grenades. The assault on the Oakland camp led to the shooting of Iraqi war veteran Scott Olsen. In response an Occupy Oakland meeting of 3,000 called for a general strike, a call that led to mass demonstrations, the closing of the Port of Oakland and of many schools. While many of us, myself included, had believed that a new union movement would arise from struggles in the plants and in the unions themselves, the impact of Occupy suggests that many union officials see Occupy as a social force that can strengthen the union movement and that workers responding to Occupy may be emboldened to break the stranglehold of bureaucracy as they

DAN LA BOTZ is a Cincinnati-based teacher, writer and activist. He has been participating in Occupy Cincinnati and is one of the 3,000 some activists who have gone to jail for the right to assemble and speak out against the way things are today. A much shorter, earlier version of this article was first published in the Swiss socialist newspaper *SolidariteS*.

respond to external developments.

We are witnessing the birth of the first major mass movement on the left in the United States since the decline of the leftist upsurge of the 1960s and early 1970s. While the new movement has not yet reached the proportions of the upheaval of forty years ago, when at times there were millions in the streets and hundreds

What is perhaps best and most exciting about the movement is the confluence of the many social movements with middle class and working class people who have come down to Wall Street or in some other town or city down to Main Street to say, "We've had it."

of thousands of workers on strike, still it is clear that Occupy represents both a mass movement and a new radicalization. The Occupy Wall Street Declaration published on September 30 is a remarkable catalog of the grievances of the American people, touching on every issue from the economic crisis to the wars abroad, to the looming environmental catastrophe. While the movement cannot now be called anti-capitalist, not in the way that the anti-globalization protests of the 1990s and 2000s were, nevertheless, Occupy's populist, anti-corporate politics are infused with a profound radicalism expressed in its intense moral repugnance toward the existing system.

While some of the young people have been inspired by the occupation of Tahrir Square and by the *indignados* of Spain, this is an essentially American movement about American issues.

The Occupy folks are furious at the corporations and many are angry at government as well; they are generally hostile to the Republicans and disappointed in the Democrats. Occupy is not anti-capitalist, but neither is it liberal. The Occupy activists have shown little interest in liberal organizations, the Democratic Party, political candidates, or liberal nostrums. Frustrated with the economic and political situation, they want to tax the rich, they want to stop the foreclosures, they want jobs for themselves and all the other unemployed. They demand an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They want justice, not quite sure what that would look like or how to get there, but they are committed to the goal.

While most of those down at Zuccotti Park where the occupation is taking place are from New York, others have come in ones and twos from around the country to take a stand against corporate greed. Visitors are impressed with the organization: the kitchen, the medical center, the media center, the library, the daily lectures and appearances by intellectual luminaries such as Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank; Jeffrey Sachs, Harvard professor and special advisor to the United Nations' secretary general; Barbara Ehrenreich, feminist and author; and philosopher and Princeton professor Cornell West. There is now also a newspaper, *The Occupied Wall Street Journal*, which is going national. Tens of thousands of dollars have been raised through small contributions by both Occupy Wall Street and the newspaper. While they may not have all of these structures, occupations in other cities have the kitchen or the library, or did until the police ran them out of the park, and most have some sort of educational program with classes on the banks, corporations and capitalism, but also on the history of social movements, and the arts and the movement.

The idealist youth who launched the movement soon found that they were occupying parks that had been occupied by the homeless for years. The encounter of professionals, workers,

and students with the jobless and the homeless has given those who are somewhat better off an insight into poverty, alcoholism, and mental illness, allowed them to put a face on social misery, and it has brought about greater compassion. The movement has generally embraced the homeless. While their addictions or mental illness prevent some from participating in the Occupy movement and may even lead them to disrupt it, other homeless folk have been uplifted by the experience, joining in the debates and discussions and bringing the perspective of those who stand at the very bottom of the social heap.

“We the people...have found our voice.” So begin many of the general assemblies throughout the country. The general assembly is the life of the occupations, scores or hundreds of participants in the movement (not all directly engaged in the encampment) meeting to discuss the group’s vision, principles, strategy, and tactics. The rotation of facilitators, the open discussion, the generally amicable debate, the consensus model of decision making all reflect the movement’s commitment to direct democracy. The hand signals with the wiggling fingers — up for yes, out in front for on the fence, down for no, crossed arms and fists for a moral rejection of the proposal — draw everyone into participation in the discussion. The human mic, that is, the repetition of a speaker’s words because the law forbids electric amplification equipment in the parks, is a powerful tool and a striking symbol of the idea of the collective voice. People listen more carefully, and, repeating the speakers’ words, really hear them, hear them twice, hear them magnified by themselves as they spread over the crowd. If the discussions are sometimes tedious, frustrating, or silly, they are at other times inspiring, and no assembly passes without some person, new to activism, standing up and giving a testimonial that reaffirms the significance of the movement.

The occupation’s work is done through face-to-face and virtual committee meetings.

The leaders of the leaderless movement, as it sees itself, are in most places a constantly changing constellation of activists of all ages and often of great diversity in other respects as well. Important decisions generally come back to the general assembly for approval, but autonomous actions take place initiated by small bands of occupiers.

Occupy is both a real movement of thousands on the street and a virtual movement of millions on the social media. The movement’s voice and its images are posted on local Occupy websites, on Facebook pages, on YouTube, shared on Twitter. Thousands “like” the posts, or comment on them, or add their own photo or video. The activists participating in the occupations, demonstrations, and marches follow the development of their local movement and of the national movement on their smart phones or other electronic devices even as they occupy. Text messages summon up flash-mobs for quickie actions, and photos taken with cell phones immediately tell the world what happened.

Occupy Wall Street and its offspring, nearly all of which began with white youth, have grown not only larger, but also more diverse, attracting people from all walks of life and every segment of the society. They are making real their chant, “This is what democracy looks like.” In Atlanta and some other cities, African Americans and Latinos have taken up the occupation. In Albuquerque — where Indians and Mexicans feel they have been occupied by imperial powers for so long — they call it (Un)occupy. But the sentiment is the same: the country’s on the wrong track. Even where the participation of people of color in the occupation is not proportional and may be small, still bonds of solidarity are established that cross the lines of ethnicity, race, religion, language and culture. On the borders north and south, people cross the line to join the occupation on the other side.

Utopian and Inspiring

OCCUPY IS IN PART a coming together of activ-

ists from other movements. Watching any of the demonstrations in any city on any day one sees pass by on the t-shirts and jackets all the logos of every movement that has touched the country in the last decade: anti-war, LGBTQ, foreclosures, and civil rights activists. Walking among them are others new to the movement, blue collar and white collar workers, so far without their logos, carrying their own hand painted signs with slogans like “Create Jobs, Reform Wall Street, Tax the Wealthy More,” and “The People are Too Big to Fail.” One sign down at Wall Street read, “This is the First Time I’ve Felt Hopeful in a Very Long Time.”

The movement has a utopian character. Many of those involved in it want not only to overcome the immediate effects of the economic crisis — they want a better life, a better country, a better world. The movement as such has no ideology. This is populism of a left wing sort: the people versus big business and bad government. Though there are anarchists in it and they have given it some of their style, it is not an anarchist movement. Though there are some socialists in it, the movement as a whole is by no means socialist. And while the movement is anti-corporate, it would be going too far to claim that it is anti-capitalist, at least not yet. All over the country one sees three flags flying — the American flag, the anarchist black flag, and the socialist red flag — a phenomenon expressing not so much confusion or competition as the interaction of the people who hold the various political philosophies suggested by these banners. Occupy is an endless discussion, a continuous conversation, a generally good-willed political debate. What is perhaps best and most exciting about the movement is the confluence of the many social movements with middle class and working class people and poor people who have come down to Wall Street or in some other town or city down to Main Street to say, “We’ve had it.” The utopianism of the movement has inspired ordinary people to say, “We can live differently, we must, and we will.”

The movement has imposed its own ethos and sense of decorum on the group. We see a rebirth of civility. Mutual respect is highly valued. Egotistical behavior, the pushing of personal agendas and what are perceived as inappropriate invasions of the space are frowned upon. The group’s norms have inhibited leftist organizations and activists who generally do not identify themselves as members of this or that organization and generally do not sell their newspapers and magazines at the occupations. The longstanding practice of some socialist missionaries who stood and announced that they came from a particular party that published such and such a newspaper has disappeared, except among the most hardened and irrelevant sects.

To some extent, the implicit strictures against propagandizing for socialism reflect both the anarchist and liberal strains in politics. This raises the question of how socialists should express their views, distribute their literature, and recruit to their organizations. Most socialists have found themselves principally joining in the discussion, trying to show how the ideals of Occupy find their fulfillment in an anti-capitalist and pro-socialist position. But it isn’t easy. The general assembly and the human mic don’t really facilitate the presentation of complex ideas and analysis, or the development of program and strategy. Leftist newspapers are distributed discreetly and potential recruits are invited off-site to talk. Virtually all the socialist organizations see Occupy as the beginning of something big, though none of us has a full-developed strategy for the movement. Nor should we; this is a movement in the making and it is as important to join in and learn from it as it is to attempt to help provide leadership for it.

The Occupy movement has done what in other countries at other times has been done by the labor unions or by labor or socialist parties: it has expressed the grievances of the people and attempted to speak for them, for the 99 percent. Occupy is a kind of a party, not a party with a formal structure, but potential peoples party

in formation, the party of working people, the party of the poor, the party of the dispossessed, the oppressed, and the exploited. The Occupy movement excoriates the banks, the corporations, the economic elite, the 1 percent with their greed, and it criticizes the government for its complicity and its corruption. Occupy is the moralizing party of the people, asking the people to recognize themselves in it, to join it, and to make real its claim to represent the 99 percent.

A month or so into the Occupy movement, the labor unions began to take an interest. In New York the unions turned out thousands of their members for a major march in October. At about the same time, Richard Trumka, head of the AFL-CIO, spoke out in favor of the movement, as did leaders of various national and local unions. Yet the AFL-CIO and the Occupy movement remain wary of each other. The AFL-CIO's principal goal in the next year is to help Obama and the Democrats win the November 2012 elections, and both the AFL-CIO and the Democrats would love to figure out how to harness Occupy for their political and electoral goals. Many in the Occupy movement would love to have more workers involved, the unions involved, but they fear the labor bureaucracy's heavy hand. And, more important for some, they fear losing their political independence to union officials and Democrats.

The labor movement's formal endorsement of Occupy has made it possible for union activists in New York and some other cities to use the rise of the new movement as a way to engage with their unions and to encourage their fellow union members to take action. For example, activists from Occupy Wall Street joined Teamster Local 814 members in protesting at a Sotheby's auction because of the company lockout of 43 workers. In many cities, at least some of the labor unions and their members have come down to the occupations and marched in the demonstrations; some have lent space to the movement, made financial donations, given

food. While we have no real evidence, it's hard to imagine that the Occupy movement isn't having an impact on workers' consciousness. As with the civil rights movement of the 1960s which after the long dark night of McCarthyism once again legitimated protest, so too Occupy today is legitimating social protest on the left. Once again it is okay to say that you don't like the system and disagree with the government. If the movement grows, it will become almost a moral obligation to be a dissenter.

Occupy Wall Street and Politics

OCCUPY, OF COURSE, PREOCCUPIES the politicians. The Republican Party, naturally, loathes the politics of Occupy. House Majority leader Eric Cantor referred to the Occupiers as "mobs." Alluding to President Barack Obama he said, "Some in this town condone pitting Americans against Americans." Mitt Romney, the leading contender for the Republican presidential nomination said, "I think it's dangerous, this class warfare." Whatever they may say to the media, the Republicans' real fear is that Occupy Wall Street could buoy up the Democrats, while their hope that the movement's radicalism will blow their opponents to the left, costing them votes in the center. No doubt the Republicans sense the radical character of the movement and fear it.

One of the impacts of Occupy is that it has displaced the Tea Party, at least for now. Where just a few months ago the Tea Party dominated the news, now it is Occupy Wall Street that captures the headlines and the imagination of the public. While the Tea Party had already gone into decline before Occupy emerged, it has now all but disappeared from the media and the public mind. A CBS/*New York Times* poll conducted in late October found that 43 percent of the population agrees with the Occupy Wall Street movement. At the same time, a Congressional Budget Office study confirmed Occupy's claim that the 1 percent was enriching itself at the expense of the 99 percent.

The Democratic Party Congressional Cam-

paigned Committee and the think-tank Center for American Program are trying to find a way to use Occupy Wall Street, believing that the movement could put wind in the party's sails for 2012. Other party leaders fear that the identification with the movement would move the party toward the left and away from the center where they believe the voters are. Even more important, some Democratic Party leaders sense that opposing Wall Street implicitly challenges the whole *raison d'être* of the Democrats as a party that binds the middle class, the working class and the poor to the corporate order. And more practically speaking, some Democratic Party leaders have argued that such an attack on Wall Street could result in fewer donations from the banks and corporations that fund the Democrats. Bernie Sanders, the only independent in the Senate who calls himself a socialist (though he caucuses with the Democrats) spoke to the Occupy movement with an op-ed piece calling upon the government to break up the banks, support small business, and stop speculation in the oil industry. That was the Progressive Party program of 1912, the traditional program of American populism, but it misses completely the radical spirit of this movement.

Some Democrats would like to see Occupy Wall Street become their Tea Party, the right wing group that brought new vitality to the Republicans. But Occupy Wall Street activists have kept their distance from the Democrats, generally declining to provide a platform for the politicians or party candidates. At the moment

there seems little chance of this as the Occupy movement jealously guards its independence.

Once again, after forty years of relative political and social stagnation, we have a mass movement with a radicalizing tendency. It faces the common problem of such suddenly emerging movements, that there are not enough leaders, that there is not enough organization, there is not enough yet of a strongly held radical political ideology. The notion of the "99 percent" and the idea that "We are what democracy looks like" and declaration of the Occupy Wall Street movement are good starting points. Still, we need to have a clearer notion of what we stand for in this movement. This is not a call for a political program or a formal set of demands. At present, the movement draws its strength precisely from its moral rejection of the system and projection that another sort of society, another world is possible.

Our job on the left is to work with others on the left and in the various social movements as well as within Occupy to help develop the leadership, organizational strength, and clear ideology that can both help to take Occupy forward toward the assertion of political independence, beyond the confining structures of the Republican and Democratic parties, so that down the road the movement can stimulate the birth of a party that actually represents the radical aspiration of the occupiers in the face of the coming crises and the even more expansive upheavals that lie ahead.

On War Tax Resistance

LAWRENCE ROSENWALD

DOING TAX RESISTANCE has for me been connected with thinking about Thoreau, whose works I often teach in my classes. I used not to teach “Civil Disobedience,” but only *Walden* I admired “Civil Disobedience” very much, but couldn’t bring myself to teach it. It is an essay intended as an argument; I knew that if I taught it I would present it as an argument, as an argument I found reasonable and compelling, and then, I thought, some alert and nervy student would ask, “if you think it’s such a good argument then why are you paying your taxes?” And then I’d either mutter something about how times *have* changed, or say I was a coward, and I knew I wouldn’t like myself in either case. But when my wife and I began doing tax resistance, I began to teach “Civil Disobedience,” and in fact teaching it — not proselytizing with it, but teaching it on a footing of equality — is among the rewards doing tax resistance has brought me.

So I want to talk about Thoreau, first, and about the ideas his tax resistance came from; and then about myself, as someone who finds Thoreau’s stance attractive but who knows that, after all, times have changed, and that doing tax resistance now is different from doing it then, and grimmer; and generally about why so many people with political views similar to mine don’t

find Thoreau attractive or at any rate don’t do tax resistance, and how this can perhaps be changed.

I

UNDERSTANDING THOREAU’S POLITICS means first understanding that politics wasn’t what he wanted to do. He was, as he saw himself, trying to be an individual in a radical democracy; he was trying to cultivate himself, and he found that difficult. Lots of other people found it difficult also; the difficulty of being one’s own person is one of the things Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, has in mind when he complains about the tyranny of the majority, and it’s what Emerson has in mind when in “Self-Reliance” he tells the philanthropist to go away and not bother him:

your miscellaneous popular charities; the education at college of fools; the building of meetinghouses to the vain end to which many now stand; alms to sots ... though I confess with shame I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold.

Emerson and Thoreau both know, of course, that what the majority wants you to do often sounds noble — working for abolition, contributing to your local church or school, fighting for your country. They know, too, that maybe such things *are* noble. But they want to figure the matter out for themselves; they want to read, to think, to write, to determine who they are — from scratch and with no presuppositions, presuppositions about the value of good works and causes included. So by and large doing politics becomes for them a temptation to be resisted, because in politics they see the abolition of the individual, and the cultivation of the individual is what chiefly matters.

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Emerson does frighteningly well at abstaining from politics; he keeps political concerns from bothering him by not bothering about them. He doesn't go to Brook Farm, and refuses to speak out on slavery: "I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts, far back in the brain of man." (He is induced when young to

Like Thoreau, I judge the state to be no just receiver of my taxes on the basis both of general beliefs and specific assessments: an absolute belief in the sanctity of human life and a general hatred of weapons of mass destruction.

write to President Van Buren in protest of the forced migration of the Cherokees, but soon repents having done so.) Thoreau, however, gets involved earlier, because he sees what Emerson doesn't see until later — until the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, which obliges citizens of free states either to aid slaveholders or to break the law — namely, that in certain situations you cannot keep out of politics. Thoreau doesn't see, or doesn't believe, that generally you're part of the problem unless you're part of the solution, or that to avoid doing politics is in general to leave the status quo in place; rather he notices specifically, with a kind of microscopic genius, that in paying taxes abstinence just isn't a choice, because you either pay them and collaborate with the state or refuse to pay them and defy the state, but in any case you do politics.

Between collaboration and defiance he has to choose defiance, has to defy the state and

refuse taxes, because he judges that the state in tolerating slavery is violating his moral code, and he therefore cannot collaborate with it. So he refuses the taxes, gets put in jail, and writes the essay that eventually exercises so much influence on modern political life. That influence is the result of his actions. But again, it is not what he was aiming at; when he himself talks about his actions, his focus is on the evil avoided rather than the good accomplished. The point of his refusing his taxes is to avoid collaborating with slavery and imperialism, and to return as soon as possible to his real work — not politics but huckleberrying, or getting his shoes mended, or writing. Politics isn't what he wants to do, it's what he can't avoid doing, and it results not from volition but from necessity.

II

TOO MANY EXHORTATIONS to political action give only a scanty account of who it is that's doing the exhorting. So I want to speak concretely about my own situation, and about the relation between that situation and the political action I've been able to take. As I said, I find Thoreau's stance attractive, and in some ways my temperament is like his; politics isn't what I like doing, not at any rate as much as I like doing music, or translating, or teaching, or being with friends. But no one living in the United States now can be placed as Thoreau was placed, or think as he thought; the state is stronger, the individual is weaker, and the relation between the state and the individual resister is murkier and trickier.

To begin with, Thoreau had a choice about paying taxes. To him and to every other Concord taxpayer came the tax-collector, who did not yet have the money and had to ask for it, and who therefore could be obeyed or disobeyed. Many of us don't have that choice; the government collects the taxes before we ever see the money the taxes have been collected from. I wonder sometimes how we let ourselves be deprived of so important a choice, and wonder also how we would choose if we could. So the first thing

for me to explain is the unusual circumstance of having tax payments to refuse in the first place. My wife, the pianist Cynthia Schwan, resumed teaching piano in 1985, the year our twin daughters started kindergarten and also the year that she and I began to consider doing tax resistance, and not having tax withheld from her income left us owing taxes and thus able to refuse paying them — ninety dollars at first, then gradually up to about two thousand dollars as Cynthia attracted more students. Each year we would prepare our returns, or have them prepared for us by H.R. Block; then, taking from the War Resisters League an assessment of what percent of the federal budget went to the military, we would subtract that percent of what we owed from the total, send the remainder to the IRS with a note explaining our action, and deposit the refused taxes in an alternative fund, where the interest would be used for good causes and the principal would remain available to us should the IRS put a lien on our property.

It's an equally unusual circumstance that I can refuse taxes publicly without jeopardizing my job. Thoreau's security in his community was partly the security of the spirit, partly that of the familiar eccentric whom his neighbors would not turn away; mine is at least partly the security of academic tenure. We refused our first ninety dollars in April of 1986; by the end of that year I had been granted tenure in the English Department at Wellesley College, and most of my public activity as a tax resister (presenting talks, writing essays, giving interviews) came after that — deliberately after that, since I was afraid to do public tax resistance while untenured. Probably I wouldn't have incurred much of a risk; the College administration has since said that it considers my tax resistance a legitimate form of political expression — though not so legitimate that it refrained from executing a federal levy on my salary. An executive, a letter carrier, an aspiring lawyer, indeed anyone who works for the government or has a job requiring the persona of a law-abiding or patriotic

citizen: all these people would run greater risks than I have run, and probably greater risks than I would have felt able to run.

So someone might ask here, "isn't tax resistance as you describe it, then, something that most people aren't in a position to do without running much more risk than you have?" There are two ways of answering that question. One is to say, yes, that's the truth, but not the whole truth. There are other ways of refusing taxes. Some resisters choose to keep their income below the taxable level. Some choose to alter their W-4 form so as to have less tax withheld by their employer, though the stated financial penalties for resisting taxes in this way are severe, and I don't know that I would have had the courage to risk them. Many resisters, myself included, begin trying out tax resistance by refusing to pay the federal phone tax (a tax instituted for the benefit of the military), and incur little danger except that of the phone company's mistakenly counting the refused tax as unpaid phone service. And by ingenuity and persistence, tax resisters have found a good many employers at least as sympathetic as the academy. The other answer, however, goes like this. Suppose that none of what I have just described is the case; suppose that every employer is hostile, suppose that everyone prudently declines to commit W-4 fraud, suppose that no one wants to go through the rigmarole of refusing the monthly phone tax of thirty-nine or seventy-one cents. Still there are many situated as I am, who are deeply opposed to the policies of the federal government, who have taxes to pay, and who would not jeopardize their jobs by refusing to pay them; and though I hope not to speak only to such people, I would gladly accept that limitation if by doing so I could better understand how they, who do not have to, work for peace and pay for war.

Like Thoreau, I judge the state to be no just receiver of my taxes on the basis both of general beliefs and specific assessments: an absolute belief in the sanctity of human life and a general

hatred of weapons of mass destruction, plus a lot of sharp, specific, horrified disagreements with United States action in, say, Ni caragua, Grenada, Panama, and Iraq. As a Jew, I have a deep fear of being a docile citizen, meekly acquiescent in state violence, and think often of the Nuremberg principles as warrant for my civil disobedience; as a timid pacifist during the war in Vietnam, having watched friends act more bravely than I did in resisting the war I joined with them in opposing, I feel I owe them (and myself) a debt of honor. But as Thoreau in his essay doesn't argue for his condemnation of slavery and of the state's acquiescence in it, probably because he thinks most of his readers share in that condemnation, so I consider these beliefs and assessments of mine unremarkable. There's little that's uncommon in them, and much that's shared by many of my friends and colleagues; so for me to name them is only to wonder again how my friends and colleagues and I proceed from common belief to differing conduct.

Thoreau resisted once, was put in prison, and then wrote his essay, which reflects his righteous satisfaction with that single triumphant encounter. An earlier version of my own essay, published in November 1989, had something of Thoreau's tone; the IRS had not then collected on us, only sent numerous threatening letters, and I was cheerfully feeling that the IRS was, as tax resisters like to say, ninety per cent bluff. Since then the IRS has instituted an Automatic Collection Service, and we have been collected on three times, once by a levy on my salary and twice by levies on our bank accounts; each time the levy took not only the original refused tax but also penalties and interest. Even now the IRS occasionally fumbles; before levying my salary it attempted to levy a bank account I had closed out fifteen years previously, and between the first bank levy and the second it refunded the levied money with interest. But this clumsy, capricious power frets me more than a more efficient and so more predictable

bureaucracy might have done; I have felt dully, heavily oppressed by it. I have not experienced great suffering, any more than I have run great risks; but anyone contemplating doing tax resistance ought to know what it feels like to have tax resistance punished.

We knew, of course, that we might be levied, and as noted had deposited the refused taxes in an alternative fund. There is also a fund set up to reimburse the fines and penalties of tax-resisters, though we have not as yet applied to it. One colleague of mine, in response to my argument in the college paper that the Wellesley accounting manager and her superiors had a choice whether or not to execute the IRS levy on my salary, wrote to the paper that

it seems rather cowardly on [Mr. Rosenwald's] part to push the onus from his shoulders onto [other persons'], implying that they are the ones who are at fault, not he. Mr. Rosenwald would be much more appealing in his martyrdom if he went bravely off to prison.

This hurt, however much I found it mistaken. But for the most part no one denounced us for what we were doing, and lots of people surprised us with their support. So the levies did only small harm to our finances and to our public social lives. But they felt oppressive nonetheless, for several reasons. My own temperament was among them: an odd mixture of outlaw and good citizen. The outlaw refuses the taxes; the good citizen calculates the refused taxes honestly, proclaims to the IRS that the refusal has been made, and then, irrationally enough, feels humiliated by the consequences of the outlaw's behavior. (Many tax resisters, I should say, are less split in this regard than I am, resist authority more boldly and systematically than I do, and also do better than I do at keeping their money from the IRS — not filing returns, tailoring their W-4 forms to their tax resistance, moving their money from bank to bank or out of banks altogether, choosing employers sympathetic to their politics. "Wait for my brother," said the littlest billygoat Gruff;

“he’s far bigger and stronger than I am.”) I like obeying authority, and fear punishment; and here was disobeyed authority executing punishment, and punishment being carried out by acquaintances and neighbors, who politely took the money away and sent it to the IRS. Also, I had looked forward to some encounter, some Hollywood confrontation — forthright James Stewart standing up to corrupt Claude Rains in *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*. But the dull pressure of the levies only blurred the moral passion. No IRS agent called, or wrote, or came to my door; there was no sneering Controller at Wellesley College, no smug and vindictive banker — no enemy, no villain, no interruption in my amiable relations with the College staff or the bank treasurer, only the bland, awkward, numbing workings of the system as a whole. Thoreau writes, “I meet this American government... directly, and face to face, once a year, nor more, in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it.” Usually when I read that sentence I think, “today we meet the government everywhere”; in another sense, though, today we meet it nowhere.

I have, then, felt the great power of government exercised effectively against me. That power blurred my certainty; also, obviously, it took away the refused taxes, and in fact the IRS has through interest and penalties collected more from us than we refused in the first place. So I have had to wonder, as Thoreau did not, what happens when tax resistance fails? What happens when it becomes routine? Because it is simply not true now, if it ever was, that “if one HONEST man ... *ceasing to hold slaves* [or to pay taxes], were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery [or state violence] in America.” Against Thoreau’s serene evening in the Concord jail, and his certainty that his truth would prevail, I have had to set the fretting, unsettling experience of resisting repeatedly, being levied repeatedly, and

not bringing about the millennium. I have had to ask, in the Quaker phrase, how to keep on keeping on.

III

PARTLY I’VE KEPT ON by taking over Thoreau’s habit of scrutinizing ordinary behavior, his insistent reminder that we pay too little attention to any behavior we categorize as normal. Much, that is, can be said against refusing war taxes; but not as much as can be said against paying them. (Making this shift of attention is the goal of Thoreau’s apocryphal remark when Emerson came to see him in prison: “Henry, what are you doing in there?” “Waldo, what are you doing out there?”) We were last and most heavily levied in the fall of 1990, as the United States government pushed towards the Gulf War. I found this levy especially hurtful because it recovered the taxes the IRS had anomalously refunded to us, as if withdrawing a spontaneously offered gift; but each day’s events turned my attention from the hazards of refusing taxes to the visible consequences of paying them: not some distant “war machine” but this enterprise, this propaganda, these weapons. To pay war taxes is to acquiesce in building weapons of mass destruction, i.e., in what international law as derived from the Nuremberg principles arguably defines as a crime; it is also to acquiesce in whatever state violence an administration may manage to commit. It is, simply, a wrong act for any pacifist, any adherent of international law, any person fundamentally opposed to American policy; and I do not understand what keeps such people from refusing taxes, especially since with more resisters the IRS would have a harder time collecting, and the charge that tax resistance is ineffective could be practically refuted. Someone might say, “I do not acquiesce, even though I pay taxes; I protest.” I honor such protest, but clearly it is not enough, and maybe it isn’t even what should come first; “let them protest all they like,” said Alexander Haig, “as long as they pay their taxes.”

But though comforting, this shift in per-

spective is not enough, not enough of a response to doubt and the experience of futility; in fact I have kept equilibrium, and hope to keep it still, not through any mental exercise but through tasks of political activity. I should say that this is precisely the opposite of what I expected. To begin with, I had when starting to do tax resistance shunned political activity, and in a sense hoped through resisting taxes to avoid it. Thoreau's words, again: "I meet this American government... once a year, no more, in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it." As I had to learn, however, no one can say that now; we meet the government far more often than Thoreau did, and I found that by starting with tax resistance I had unknowingly committed myself to a fair amount of doing politics. (Maybe, in fact, tax resistance is unpopular in part precisely because people contemplating it rightly calculate that its consequences are likely to occupy a good part of their lives.) So I was wrong in thinking that doing tax resistance could meet all my political obligations. But I was also wrong in my understanding of how political obligations functioned. I had shunned doing politics because I thought it would disorient and decenter me. In fact, however, I have in accepting the consequences of tax resistance found them not a threat to equilibrium but a source of it, have found that what makes it possible for me to continue doing tax resistance are precisely the tasks that doing tax resistance lay upon me.

All this has of course taken up a lot of time; tax resistance for me has not turned out to be a way to get back with a clear conscience to huckleberrying. It has meant meetings and actions, conversations and letters and essays, talks and interviews. But in fact these activities have not encumbered my life but ordered and simplified it. For one thing, they have seemed necessary, arising like the original act of tax resistance from the narrowing of choice to a single action; and to find necessary work is a great blessing. They have

provided a standpoint from which to speak about politics from the authority of experience rather than on the basis of opinion. Most importantly: though doing tax resistance revealed my anonymous relation to my unhearing government, my merely polite relation to some of my institutions, it also helped me find a previously hidden part of my real community. Emerson after dismissing the philanthropist admits, "there is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold"; doing tax resistance has helped me in the difficult task of finding out who some of these persons are. To sit on the Grants and Loans Committee of New England War Tax Resistance, and to dispense the interest on refused taxes to a youth group in Chelsea, a video for cable television on United States involvement in Central America, and a people's garden in Roxbury is to be reminded of the ideal community, however blurred and fragmented, that war tax resistance is done on behalf of, in the hope of helping to make it clear and whole.

Thoreau concludes, "I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men." I prefer to conclude not in the utopian end but in the difficult beginning, here and now, by saying simply that tax resistance seems to me a good start. It has been a good start for me; but I believe it would also be a good start generally, a way for those opposed to American weapons and American policies to begin saying no, and then to see what happened later.

I wrote this essay in 1992. I stand by the argument. But things have changed in the world, not for the better: in governmental practice, the role of conscience, in citizens' views of their own power. For my reflections on these changes, see "On Being a Very Public War Tax Resister" (www.nwtrcc.org/mtap00/mtap0400.htm), and "War Tax Resistance and Power," forthcoming at www.nwtrcc.org/mtap.php.

A fully footnoted version of this article will appear online at www.newpol.org.

Obama, Austerity, and Change We Really Can Believe In

JACK GERSON

BARACK OBAMA TOOK OFFICE three years ago on a euphoric wave of aspirations. Tens of millions in the United States and around the world pinned their hopes on this brilliant campaigner who promised “Change we can believe in” and proclaimed, “Yes we can!” In “Where Will Obama Go?” (*New Politics*, January 2009), I argued that a cursory look at Obama’s economic and foreign policy transition teams should have been sufficient to dampen the euphoria, since he was relying on the same individuals who had presided over the neoliberal policies of the preceding three decades, policies designed to increase profitability at the expense of the standard of living and institutions of the working class.

In the United States, these policies were jump-started in 1979 by Jimmy Carter’s Federal Reserve chair, Paul Volcker. In 1979 Volcker pronounced, “The American standard of living must decline” as he ordered the “Volcker shock,” monetary policy designed to reduce inflation and restore corporate profitability. The result was a worldwide recession in the early 1980s, which did indeed hurt American workers, but had a far harsher effect on Mexico (where it led to the 1982 collapse of the peso) and elsewhere in the Third World. Life-long Democrat Volcker praised Ronald Reagan’s union-busting

as key to restoring profitability: After Reagan broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers union (PATCO) in 1981, Volcker said “The most important single action of the administration in helping the anti-inflation fight was defeating the air traffic controllers’ strike”.

In 2008, shortly after his election, Obama named Paul Volcker to his economic transition team. Leading that team were Bill Clinton’s two Treasury Secretaries, Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers. This pair, along with then-Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan, were architects of the deregulation that eventually blew up the financial markets in fall, 2008. They supported the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act and pushed through the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, which included a blanket ban on government regulation of derivatives (in the process they conspired to destroy the career of Commodities Futures Trading Commission head Brooksley Bourne for warning that unregulated derivatives speculation would blow up the world financial system).

If there is anything remarkable about Obama’s economic policy of the past three years, it is how much in line it has been with his Democratic presidential predecessors of the past thirty years. Obama’s prioritization of the financial industry and corporate profitability did not break new ground, but rather was continuing on the path of Carter, Clinton, and the New Democratic Coalition.

However, when he first took office, Obama promised to make good on his campaign pledges for sweeping change. In his inaugural address, Obama proclaimed, “The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. And we will act

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not only to create new jobs but also to lay a foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together.”

But Obama’s administration followed a far different path.

Not long after taking office, he appointed a bipartisan deficit commission (the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility) packed

Ominously, in several states
the Democrats initiated union-
busting legislation — just slightly
less onerous than the Republican
proposals.

with deficit hawks and co-chaired by Social Security “reformers” Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles. [This commission predictably issued a report in December 2010 calling for increasing the Social Security eligibility age, scaling back Social Security cost of living increases, and — less predictably but outrageously — reducing personal and corporate tax rates for the highest brackets.]

Still more ominously, Obama appointed a protégé of Rubin and Summers, Timothy Geithner, to be Secretary of the Treasury. Geithner, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, had done the bidding of the big Wall Street banks during the subprime crisis and financial market panic of 2008. As detailed in recent books by Robert Scheer¹ and on Ron Suskind², he has faithfully transmitted and lobbied for the financial industry’s directives inside the Obama Administration. And, with his help, the financial services industry has committed highway robbery.

Three years ago, amid the near-meltdown

of the world financial system following the collapse of the housing bubble, it was evident that the big banks and Wall Street brokerages were responsible for the crisis. Yet now, Wall Street, politicians, and the media insist that public workers and public services caused this debt, and that there’s just no alternative to harsh austerity cuts to public programs and to the jobs, wages, and benefits of public workers.

Overall, the global financial services industry was handed a bailout exceeding \$20 trillion.³ The U.S. government alone disbursed \$16 trillion of that amount.⁴ Nearly \$2 trillion has not been repaid. Two trillion dollars just happens to be the estimated cumulative total of all U.S. state and municipal debts.⁵ No wonder York University political economist David McNally says that Wall Street has taken its private debt and transformed it into public debt:

In short, the bad bank debt that triggered the crisis in 2008 never went away — it was simply shifted on to governments. Private debt became public debt. And as the dimensions of that metamorphosis became apparent in 2010, the bank crisis morphed into a sovereign debt crisis. Put differently, the economic crisis of 2008-9 did not really end. It simply changed form. It mutated.

With that mutation, the focus of ruling classes shifted toward a war against public services. Concerned to rein in government debts, they announced an age of austerity — of huge cuts to pensions, education budgets, social welfare programs, public sector wages, and jobs. In doing so, they effectively declared that working people and the poor would pay the cost of the global bank bailout.⁶

[Greece is an extreme example of this process. The deal being shoved down the throats of the Greek working class is sacrificing the well being of current and future generations of Greek workers and youth to shore up the holdings of French, Belgian, and German banks. Italy is next in line in this process. The more austere the cuts imposed on a country, the more the country’s economy contracts, and therefore

the larger the deficit grows. Greece has already gone through several rounds of austerity, and each one has merely increased the deficit it was supposed to reduce.]

The United States is farther from the precipice than the southern European nations. Even so, austerity has exacted a grim toll:

- The prioritization of protecting “too big to fail” banks and their shareholders has turned the collapse of the subprime mortgage bubble into an epic crisis, putting working class home ownership in jeopardy, and it has created a student loan bubble that places millions of new and future college graduates into indentured servitude to the banks for decades to come;
- The focus on slashing budgets at the expense of public jobs and essential services has had a devastating effect on state and municipal budgets, which were already under severe stress from the Iraq and Afghan wars’ siphoning of federal money away from public services⁷ and from changes to federal and state tax policies since the late 1970s that have sharply decreased taxes on corporations, capital gains, and the highest incomes.⁸ State budget deficits now total in excess of \$200 billion (excluding pension liabilities), and states have responded by making across-the-board cuts to public programs. County and city programs can’t compensate for the cuts to state programs, because cuts in state funding and decreased tax revenue have triggered sweeping cuts in local programs. The pressure for more punishing cuts to local programs continues to increase: nationally, more than 100 cities are on the verge of declaring bankruptcy.

Shared Sacrifice

WE ARE TOLD, “there is no alternative” to “shared sacrifice”. Thus, Democrats and Republicans alike, in states across the country, insist that there is no alternative to the shared sacrifice of cuts to public programs and concessions on pensions, health benefits, and (often) compensation. They differ on the extent and the pace of the cuts. But for three years — or, at least until the 2012 elections appeared on the horizon —

they agreed on the need for austerity.

This is Barack Obama’s justification for a multi-year wage freeze for federal workers. It is the rationale of New York Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo and of California Democratic governor Jerry Brown for budgets that cut back on medical care and welfare for the poor, home services for the disabled, assistance for seniors, and funding for education. It is the excuse given by Wisconsin Republican governor Scott Walker for program cuts, for economic concessions from state workers, and for effectively eliminating collective bargaining for state worker unions (and it’s also the excuse given by Wisconsin Democrats for agreeing that the program cuts and economic concessions are essential.) It is the reason given by Michigan Democrat and then-governor Jennifer Grantholm for giving Robert Bobb dictatorial power over Detroit schools, the reason given by Bobb for closing down more than half of the city’s schools and increasing class size to over 60, and by Michigan’s Republican governor Rick Snyder for pushing through legislation allowing the state to put cities in receivership and thus disenfranchise the public from control of their community (this has happened to the city of Benton Harbor).

In fact, the Democrats have a dual slogan: “there is no alternative to deep program cuts and economic concessions from public workers, unions, and pensions — but the Republicans’ proposal is even worse than ours.” Thus, in California, Jerry Brown’s budget called for \$12.5 billion in cuts and an equal amount from extending for another five years a “temporary” package of regressive taxes adopted under his predecessor (Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger), while the state’s Republicans proposed to get the entire \$25 billion from cuts. Along these same lines, Wisconsin Democrats went along with Republican Walker’s proposals for economic cuts and concessions, but balked at his outright union-busting proposals. In state after state, variants of this scenario are being played out (Indiana, Ohio,

Tennessee, Idaho, and Oklahoma) played out, as Democrats advocated program cuts and wage and benefit concessions while Republicans pushed for more onerous cuts and for stripping unions of collective bargaining and job protections.

Ominously, in several states the Democrats initiated union-busting legislation—just slightly less onerous than the Republican proposals. In liberal Massachusetts, the Democratic majority in the state assembly voted to restrict health care bargaining rights for public workers. In Connecticut Democratic leaders in the state legislature supported a bill that would strip college faculty of bargaining rights by reclassifying them as managers. In Illinois the Democratic-dominated state legislature proposed and adopted legislation restricting teachers' bargaining rights, seniority and job security, and right to strike.

We Are Not Broke

DESPITE THE UBIQUITOUS CALLS for shared sacrifice, it is hardly a secret that not everyone is sacrificing. Certainly not the "financial services industry" (aka Wall Street and the big banks) whose pre-tax profits are now 60 percent higher than they were before the onset of the 2008-9 Great Recession (which hasn't stopped them from holding onto \$2 trillion of the bailout loans). Not the rich, as Obama and Congress extended the Bush tax cuts that lower taxes for the wealthiest 2 percent and exempt estates worth as much as \$5 million from inheritance tax.

Indeed, by 3rd quarter 2010 corporate profits soared to an all-time high of \$1.7 trillion. Corporations are virtually choking on the dough that's rolling in at record rates. "There is a cash crisis in America" Jason Zweig observes in the May 29, 2011 *Wall Street Journal*, "although it comes not from a shortage of the stuff, but from a surplus." Zweig explains:

In the first quarter, the five companies with the greatest cash hoards — Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Google, Apple, and Johnson & Johnson — added \$15 billion in cash and marketable

securities to their balance sheets. Microsoft alone packed away roughly \$9 billion, or \$100 million a day. All told, the companies in the Standard & Poor's 500-stock index are sitting on more than \$960 billion in cash, a record... Cash is piling up faster than most industrial giants can possibly find a prudent use for it."

Likewise, the banks are sitting on nearly \$2 trillion in cash, \$1.4 trillion of which were zero-interest loans from the Federal Reserve as part of the 2008 — 2009 bailout. The banks have parked this \$1.4 trillion in Treasury bills paying 2.5 percent interest. So we the taxpayers loaned the banks \$1.4 trillion interest-free, and we are paying them \$35 billion per year in interest to hold onto that money. Meanwhile, the infrastructure erodes as state and municipalities fall deeper into debt and cut more jobs, pensions, and essential services.

Even before the 2008-9 recession, public workers' real wages were falling. Thus, between 2000 and 2006 teachers' salaries fell 3 percent behind inflation.⁹ Indeed, as Lawrence Mishel shows in an Economic Policy Institute briefing paper, the sacrifices have been borne entirely by working and poor people:

Business income [profits] is now 21.7 percent above the level reached before the recession. Yet the total compensation paid to workers in the corporate sector remains 5.7 percent below pre-recession levels, reflecting the reduced employment levels and hours worked in the sector.¹⁰

So although profits are up, wages are down and unemployment is higher. And still, we are told that more "shared sacrifice" by working and poor people is mandatory:

Quite remarkably, the category of spending that has received the most attention (and been targeted for cuts) has been non-security, appropriated domestic funding—frequently called discretionary spending. These programs include all federal spending on transportation, education, health research, the environment, parks, energy, and other domestic matters ... The current spending in these areas is historically low... Between 1980 and 2010, the per

person spending on domestic discretionary programs actually fell by \$195... *This is not an area of spending that has been breaking the budget.* (Emphasis in the original)¹¹

The implication should be obvious: The austerity cuts are not inevitable. They result from priorities and policies that favor corporate profit and personal wealth at the expense of essential public services, jobs, and income for the working class. Mishel concludes:

There is an old joke about the Lone Ranger, who turned to Tonto and said, "We're surrounded by Indians," and Tonto responds, "What do you mean by 'we,' *kimosabe*?" The same logic applies to policymakers who claim that "we're broke." It matters who is included in "we". . . . So are we broke? Only if we choose to be.¹²

Governments are broke because of the priorities they have pursued: the \$16 trillion Wall Street bailout and consequent transformation of trillions of dollars of private debt into public debt, the huge and wasteful war budget, and the inverted tax policies that over the past 30 years have grossly lowered taxes on corporate and private wealth.

A New Obama?

BUT RECENTLY, BEGINNING IN FALL 2011, Obama has been singing a somewhat different tune. He has introduced proposals that are purported to tackle unemployment, facilitate refinancing of home mortgages, and restructure student loans. These are critical areas, and substantive programs for genuine relief would be a welcome shift from the Obama administration. But that is not what these proposals represent. Let us examine each of these areas:

Home mortgages: When the housing bubble burst and the financial markets teetered, the Bush and Obama administrations rushed to the aid of the "too big to fail" banks. But apparently, more than ten million working-class families were (and are) considered just the right size to fail. 10.4 million families owe more on their mortgages than the market value

of their homes — that is, one out of every five families with mortgages. This is on top of the more than one million homes that were seized by banks in 2010, the 918,000 foreclosures in 2009, and the 850,000 seizures in 2008. Adding

The Occupy Wall Street
phenomenon, and the Occupy
movements it has inspired around
the nation and around the world,
is an elemental rising up against
the social system and its political
representatives.

in homes seized in 2011 that makes more than one in every four family homes either seized or underwater since the subprime mortgage crisis broke in 2007.

In contrast to the \$16 trillion bank bailout, the Obama Administration has done next to nothing about resolving this crisis. The simplest solution to the housing crisis would be to reduce outstanding mortgage principal of a home loan to be no greater than that home's market value. This could have and should have been done at the onset of the subprime crisis. It would have dramatically reduced the number of foreclosures by making homes affordable. By doing so, it would have alleviated the excess supply of unsold homes that exert a downward pressure on home prices, driving home prices down further and leaving more homeowners with mortgages that are underwater. This deepens the downward spiral: more underwater mortgages leads to still more defaults and foreclosures, which further increases the excess supply of unsold homes, etc.

For nearly three years, the Obama Administration did next to nothing about the depressed

housing market and the plight of millions of foreclosed and nearing-foreclosure families. Then in October 2011, with a presidential election year beckoning, Obama announced modifications to his policies. The new policies will only apply to homeowners with federally guaranteed home loans who are current on their mortgage payments — which eliminates those who have already lost their homes and those who are struggling the most. Furthermore, it will facilitate refinancing at a lower interest rate, but will not reduce the principal owed.

This policy allows — indeed encourages — the banks to retain the inflated and fictitious valuation of their home loans. This enables banks to value such assets at two to three times their actual market value. Rather than resolving the toxic asset bubble, it perpetuates it. Rather than resolving the housing crisis, it extends it. And, judging on the execution of previous administration housing programs, the program is likely to remain largely on paper.

Student loans: Total student loan debt is now over \$1 trillion, and has surpassed total credit card debt. This is emerging as the next bubble: total student debt has increased by 511 percent since 1999, while average student income has only increased by 73 percent. Millions of students are graduating into unemployment or low-paying jobs burdened with five and six-figure outstanding student loans, which will effectively make them indentured servants of the banks for years to come. And continued high loan burdens and high unemployment spell high loan delinquency rates, which will sooner or later cause the student loan bubble to burst.

The simplest solution to this crisis would be debt forgiveness. That would provide an orderly deflation of the student loan bubble, and it would be a big step in the direction of universal free higher education and away from the current direction of college only for the affluent or those willing to live much of their lives in hock to the banks.

Instead, for nearly three years the Obama

Administration did next to nothing. As with home mortgages, the Obama Administration waited until October 2011 to announce, with much fanfare, a student loan modification plan that does little to resolve the crisis or even alleviate the pain. Without going into details, suffice it to say that on average it will reduce student loan payments by an average of about \$10 per month.

Jobs: In September 2011, as part of his preparation for the 2012 election campaign, Obama finally admitted that the persistently high (9 percent) official unemployment rate reflects a jobs crisis. Amid much fanfare, he announced a jobs program that, again characteristically, does little to reverse “shared sacrifice.” The proposed \$447 billion is hardly adequate — it pales in comparison with the trillions dished out to the banks — but if that were its only problem, it would be better than nothing. But its real problems have received little or no attention in the media or from left-liberal pundits.

- Obama proposes funding the program in part from extending and increasing cuts to “the payroll tax,” i.e., the Social Security tax. This from a president who has warned that Social Security faces a future funding shortfall. Decreasing social security funding may turn a minor funding shortfall into a major problem, which will be used to insist that Social Security must be reformed.
- Indeed, in this very same package Obama proposes “reforms” (read: cuts) to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Creating jobs at the expense of the income and health care of elderly and poor people is not a plan worthy of support, but it is characteristic of Obama’s overall austerity policy and a good illustration of what he means by “shared sacrifice”. That this “jobs bill” proposal was greeted with near unanimous praise by left-liberal pundits (and economists, for example Paul Krugman and Robert Reich) — even heralded as the return of the “real” Obama — shows just how low expectations (and standards) have sunk.

Now, in light of all of the above, let us

consider the agreement arrived at last August between Obama and Republican Congressional leaders to make \$3 trillion in deficit reductions, with the cuts to be determined by a bipartisan Congressional super committee. Was this the product of Republicans battering down a reluctant but weak or outgunned President? Or was it an arrangement between two sides that — as Barack Obama has said on numerous occasions — agree on the need for austerity but disagree on its extent, its pace, whether to require even minimally higher taxes on the wealthy, and just how much to squeeze out of working and unemployed people? Our answer should be obvious.

Sure, the Republicans are “worse,” in the sense that they demand deeper cuts, bigger tax breaks for corporate and individual wealth, and harsher attacks on labor. And of course, as mass movements emerge against austerity and for providing the basics that all people need to live decently and with dignity, Obama will move left in rhetoric and, perhaps, adapt his policies modestly. But will he break with the priorities of finance capital and place human needs ahead of “shared sacrifice” austerity? Not likely. And certainly, the engine for change will not come from within the White House or Capitol Hill.

But recently, a source of change has appeared on the horizon. After decades of gross increase in the share of the wealthiest at the expense of the rest, after years of prioritizing profits before basic needs, and after the decimation of public education, home ownership and housing in general, health care and public health, roads and bridges and the rest of the infrastructure — after hope appeared extinguished, it has burst back on the scene. The Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, and the Occupy movements it has inspired around the nation and around the world, is an elemental rising up against the social system and its political representatives. There is widespread and growing sentiment that the system must be changed, but cannot be changed by reforming the system from within or by relying on the Democratic and

Republican politicians who, in the movement’s idiom, serve the 1 percent against the interests of the 99 percent.

In any event, Barack Obama has not brought “Change we can believe in.” He has been the man who stole the hope that so many invested in him. Fortunately, today that hope is back. As I marched with thousands of others in the November 2 Strike and Day of Mass Action organized by Occupy Oakland, I could feel the return of a mass movement and, moreover, one that is global in scope and that insists that we can and will create a society that puts the needs of the overwhelming majority before the priorities of finance and corporations. That is the source of authentic hope for real change that we can believe in.

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Music of Change

Politics and Meaning in the Age of Obama

JOHN HALLE

IN A CLASSIC ESSAY George Orwell describes himself as “amazed when I hear people saying that sport creates goodwill between the nations.” Rather it leads to “orgies of hatred” as “young men . . . kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators.”

With the possible exception of certain Wagner operas, musical performances do seem less likely than sports to foment actual physical violence. Even so, Orwell’s characterization applies pretty well. In particular, even if it doesn’t provoke race riots or ethnic bloodletting, contrary to what is frequently claimed, music does not “bring people together” at least in the sense of bringing people of differing class, racial, and ethnic lines together. In fact, it does the opposite: it tends to divide people into tribes. The musical community in which I am involved is perhaps the most tribal in this respect. Audiences of classical orchestral and chamber music, whether new or traditional, have roughly the racial and class composition of a Tea Party convention.

Those not belonging to the tribe seem to implicitly understand that a message of exclusion is being conveyed when they are confronted with it. Administrators of public spaces have by now long since recognized that classical music can be weaponized to function within the ever growing arsenal of crowd management techniques, a highly effective mechanism to dislodge the poor, black, and unwashed from New York’s

Penn Station, among numerous other locations to which the legions of homeless cannot be legally denied access.

Of course, the converse also applies: an ex-urban, middle aged academic like myself will certainly derive a message from a late model SUV blasting Lil Wayne, and it’s not a comforting one. We might like it when we hear it in the right context, in a random encounter on iTunes, or when a student sends us a YouTube link, but the element of menace, specifically of expropriative street violence is undeniable — just as Mozart connotes menace in the form of a cop’s night stick to a homeless man.

I make these observations as an introduction to some general thoughts on an overlapping subject. The waning years of the second Bush administration brought with them a wave of what was called at the time political music. Much of this came from younger composers around New York and was of extremely high quality. I’ll recommend three pieces of this type as exemplary: David Little’s moving and widely performed *Soldier Songs*, Judd Greenstein’s riveting and impressive *Free Speech Zone* composed for the excellent new chamber music group the Now Ensemble, and Ted Hearne’s poignant alt-oratorio *Katrina Ballads*.

These works and others like them were often performed in events specifically organized as protest concerts. Greenstein’s *Free Speech Zone* was included in a four-city tour of the same name programmed along with other “politically charged” works. Another event along similar lines was *Republic in Ruins* a concert series featuring a cross section of new music composers and improvisers as well as Emerson String Quartet violinist Eugene Drucker, with musical

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performances interspersed among speeches by *Nation* magazine columnists Patricia Williams and Jonathan Schell. A third, *Breaking the Silence: An Evening of Music and Discourse for Peace and Democracy*, brought together a different group of musicians to “voice their concerns over the actions and policies of this administration.”

Now, only a few years later the political music genre and the protests associated with it are virtually extinct. The groups and individuals who participated in the above mentioned events continue to perform frequently and impressively, but so far as I know, not in contexts which express any particular concern or anger with the direction the nation has taken. The three composers mentioned, and others of their generation continue to produce work of astonishing invention, craft, and commitment. But there has not been much indication that these works have been anything other than non-referentially “pure,” in the tradition of works such as Bach’s *Art of the Fugue*, Strauss’s 1940 opera *Die Liebe der Danae*, or Milton Babbitt’s *Partitions* largely shorn of any reference to the world, outside of that which the music itself evokes.

MOST NOTABLY, there is a complete absence of protest or even recognition within new works of atrocities and outrages of recent years. There is no cantata commemorating the Obama administration’s proposals for cuts in Social Security or Medicare. There is no song cycle for Bradley Manning’s torture at the hands of the military justice system, drone attacks in Pakistan, or the administration’s hounding of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Nor is there any mention, except in the most abstract terms of the near certainty of planetary catastrophe due to global warming and the complete failure of our political system to address it.

I’m not going to pretend that I find this asymmetry anything other than disappointing: the same policies which were denounced and ridiculed when undertaken by a malaprop prone, frat boy dunce are applauded or at least ignored

when undertaken by a smooth talking, neo-liberal technocrat, who, phenotypical appearances notwithstanding, (or, more likely, because of these), we see as representing the best of who we are and what we aspire to. The underlying conclusion seems to be that tribal loyalty, not

Music does not “bring people together” at least in the sense of bringing people of differing class, racial, and ethnic lines together.

commitment to any set of defensible political principles or ethical code is what defines us as artists, professionals, and individuals. Based on the functional tendency of music to divide us into tribes noted at the beginning, this shouldn’t come as a surprise. But even so, insofar as the description I’m offering here is an accurate portrayal of who we are, it is not an attractive one.

I am not alone in having a rather jaundiced view of the general class milieu which I am, for better or worse, included within. In the political sphere, Glenn Greenwald has consistently pointed out the tendency of Obama supporters to mount tortured apologetics for the same policies which they deplored under the Bush regime. More broadly, Chris Hedges has written of a liberal class which, over the past decades, has shown itself incapable of exercising critical judgment and which by now has altogether sacrificed even its most minimal claim to moral or intellectual authority.

These are harsh judgments and possibly somewhat unfair when applied to music and those of us who try to create it, so I will mitigate them slightly. I’ll do so by noting that music, perhaps to a greater degree than other art forms,

consists of the creation and reinforcement of communicative bonds within groups and between individuals. A few examples will suffice to give some idea of the relevant categories: we know from the work of cognitive psychologists Laurel Trainor and Sandra Trehub that a form of musicalized speech known as motherese or infant directed speech (IDS) is crucial in establishing affective bonds between mothers and infant children. Also, as discussed in Steven Mithen's *The Singing Neanderthals* and elsewhere, there is evidence to suggest that the earliest humans made use of music to coordinate group activities whether these were necessary work routines or drills instilling discipline within a martial class, a topic discussed in historian William McNeill's *Keeping Together in Time*.

All of these instances have at their core music functioning as a communicative system to establish and enhance social bonds. It would therefore seem that deliberately addressing subjects which expose fissures within the communities to which it is addressed is not just uncomfortable but arguably violative of music's most fundamental purposes — insofar as these can be inferred.

At the same time, any honest contemporary artistic statement must necessarily involve the recognition of some highly unpleasant truths about ourselves. And if subverting what are functionally sacrosanct rituals of the concert hall is what is necessary to convey this message to those who need to hear it, one might hope that a few composers would be willing to transgress these boundaries.

THAT THIS IS THE WAY which I see these matters should be apparent to those who have heard what I have composed in the last few years and which I won't discuss except to note the obvious, namely that there is no recipe for producing works that anyone will care about now, much less a year or a decade from now; a political recipe is no better than any other and maybe even worse.

Furthermore, when it comes to political music, it is reasonable to argue, contrary to the position I'm taking above, that not only is the notion of political music fundamentally self-negating, but even insofar as it is not, that is, insofar as political content has been conveyed through music, those works which succeed most powerfully in doing so are themselves non-political in the sense in which I am assuming above. For in these cases, rather than embodying or articulating an explicit political position, whatever referential content a work contains is not immanent but projected onto it by listeners either contemporaneously or post hoc.

As an indication of how politically meanings are constructed and conferred, I'll mention a notoriously problematic instance, Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony*, a work which functioned as a Cold War cultural front battleground since its premier in 1937.

That the work is political, more specifically that it conveys a statement with respect to a political system, namely, Soviet Communism, is undisputed. Also indisputable is that there is no consensus as to the content of Shostakovich's political statement, either contemporaneously or now seven decades after its first performance. In a series of important essays, Richard Taruskin has shown how the *Fifth Symphony* managed to be, at different times, and even concurrently, all things to all ideological persuasions. Thus, among those sympathetic to the work included some elements of Soviet officialdom who accepted a triumphalist reading of the work with the concluding D major tonality taken to represent, in the words of the unlikely commissar Count Alexei Tolstoy, "all that is bright, optimistic, life-affirming." Other sympathizers included the polemicist and author of *Testimony*, the fraudulent Shostakovich memoir, Solomon Volkov, who confidently asserted that "you have to be an oaf" to hear the finale as "a celebration of anything," least of all Socialist collectivism. Among the oafs accepting this view was Igor Stravinsky, who claimed to hear the work as a

"Symphony of Socialism" in which the finale represents "the image of the gratitude and the enthusiasm of the masses." Finally, Taruskin has unearthed conclusive evidence that within the Soviet nomenklatura some were sophisticated enough to accept the possibility of a less than triumphalist reading with what one characterized as "the numb, torpid Largo" casting ominously renewed suspicion on Shostakovich's commitment to the Stalinist variant of state socialism.

It might seem that the ultimate verdict as to meaning of the *Fifth* would derive from Shostakovich himself, and for this we at least have the subtitle, "A composer's response to just criticism." But any attempt to take the words at face value needs to be accompanied by the awareness that they were written with a gun pointed at Shostakovich's head and that the gun in question was not altogether metaphorical: Stalin's notorious remark that the composer's previous experiments in bourgeois formalism were "sure to end badly" could be reasonably interpreted as an invitation to the Gulag at best and the gallows at worst, a fate visited on several of Shostakovich's friends and acquaintances. Whatever "meaning" Shostakovich was projecting on his work in these circumstances was nothing more than the pro forma, terrified utterances which a humble shopkeeper delivers in the presence of the local mafia don.

As Taruskin observes, this remark, and, its expansion within a possibly ghostwritten explanatory essay constitutes the totality of what Shostakovich had to say about the *Fifth* in the three decades which remained to him after having completed it. Given the absence of a definitive statement from the composer, and the contradictory attributes assigned to it, we are left with a labyrinth of multivalence from which it is hard to see any way out.

BUT IF THE SEMANTIC LEVEL OF description yields nothing more than a morass, the syntactic level, which is to say, the organization of musical materials which is at the core of

Shostakovich's compositional technique, offers more promise. Due to the relative neglect of formal studies of composers of Shostakovich's general stylistic orientation, the requisite taxonomy is only now being developed by music theorists. While by no means easy, questions of this sort — how Shostakovich fashioned and organized his musical materials — do seem to allow for certain kinds of real answers. This state of affairs contrasts sharply with questions with respect to meaning which are, it would seem, ultimately mysterious — a hall of mirrors in which the orientation of the observer is implicated in what appears.

It is these purely formal elements of the work which not so much enable but compel us to seek answers about its ultimate content, even if, as Taruskin notes, very few are forthcoming. That we would find it necessary to provide such answers is not a testimony to the inherent and pervasively ambiguous content of the work. Many, if not all, musical works are necessarily exactly that. Rather it is a testimony to the inherent sophistication and appeal of the musical syntax that listeners feel compelled to search for these meanings and feel required to attach their preferred ideological perspective onto the work.

What is political about the work, then, is (paradoxically) what is least political about it: namely its unmistakable and demonstrable commitment to traditional, timeless principles of musical craftsmanship, those which have existed under all socio-political systems ranging from the most benignly libertarian to the most repressively authoritarian. In this sense, every piece of music demanding attention is inherently apolitical.

This background provides a more sympathetic perspective through which to view the quick evaporation of the protest music wave discussed (and deplored) earlier. According to this view, composers now, as was Shostakovich then, are negotiating the same ideological currents as the society in which they are attempting to survive. If the political climate is favorable for

a dissident statement, then it will be projected onto even a nominally apolitical work. In the absence of a broader movement providing a lexicon through which a critique of state and corporate power can be conveyed, whatever political content injected into music will come across as preachy, self-righteous, and hectoring. Conversely, in a climate of political ferment,

There is a complete absence of protest or even recognition within new works of atrocities and outrages of recent years.

whatever qualities which force us to attend to music, to feel that it is speaking to us, can allow us to contextualize the work as in the service of political content. Under these circumstances, the fundamental bases of our relationship to the world and to each other generally, and to works of art in particular will be understood as political or at least politicized.

Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* is not the only work which projects highly contradictory images when refracted through the lens of conflicting political ideologies. Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, also widely performed within the Soviet Union, would be understood in stark, Marxian terms its "fate" motive embodying the "final conflict" between the proletarian mass and counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, a reading contrasting with the predominant liberal Western narrative which tends to view the victory motive as pertaining to the struggle of the heroic individual against impersonal forces and social conformity associated with the Leviathan state. Less problematically, the "Va, pensiero" chorus from *Nabucco* was a natural choice as the unof-

ficial anthem for the *resorgimento*, though a more revealing indication of the predisposition to project political content was the reinterpretation of earlier Verdi operas as premature exponents of a liberatory narrative. Finally, a contemporary example is provided by the sphinx-like character and works of Bob Dylan, which continue to be championed by leftists as definitive classics of the civil rights and anti-war protest movements despite the routine denial of this content by Dylan himself and his sullen denigration of the entire genre as "music for fat people."

As mentioned before, all of this casts a more sympathetic light on composers' apparent failure to directly engage political subjects. The explanation I'm proposing, it should be noted, relies on an implicit comparison between the political climate which prevails here now and the Stalinist police state with which Shostakovich had to contend. Many will, of course, find it hard to see any similarities. But while the differences, needless to say, are stark, it is, at the same time necessary to recognize that what Noam Chomsky has famously described as "thought control in democratic societies" is exercised here in a manner notable both for being comparatively mild and also for its effectiveness.

It also needs to be recognized that any comparison between the climate of Soviet Russia and our own is flawed in a very different respect: it has now been nearly a half century since what can be even loosely classified as contemporary classical music has had the capacity to communicate its message to a broad public. This status contrasts not only with canonic composers such as Shostakovich but also with pop music icons like Bob Dylan who, like Shostakovich, command not only huge followings but also significant cultural authority. The verdict reached by musicologist Robert Fink a decade ago that classical music is "merely one style among many and by no means the most prestigious" while a bit shocking at the time, now seems fairly uncontroversial.

While granting the niche status to which

it has been consigned, contemporary classical music does still in some fashion continue to function as a “high” art form as it has traditionally: works having comparatively tiny audiences, performed in small performance spaces by obscure artists in and around downtown New York receive respectful and sometimes enthusiastic coverage in remaining organs of the artistic and political establishment, most notably the *New York Times*. And some composers including those mentioned, while not addressing a broad public with the same degree of cultural authority which Shostakovich took for granted three generations ago, manage on rare occasions to produce work which transcends its now compressed boundaries.

Of the composers mentioned above, one can take credit for what the industry would call a “breakout” piece of this type: Judd Greenstein’s *Change* released in March of this year would become an NPR classical music pick of the month, subsequently reaching high positions on the Amazon, i-Tunes and Billboard classical charts. In its video incarnation as the musical component of *Plan of the City*, *Change* has now acquired upwards of 90,000 hearings after having been posted to the website www.vimeo.com in June.

While still small in comparison to commercially viable genres, these figures begin to approach levels at which it becomes reasonable to discuss a work not just in terms of its form but also in terms of its content, that is, as indicative of broader social and political attitudes which it embodies and communicates to its audience. Just as Shostakovich demands, and still provokes, exegesis of its political content and reception, so too can Greenstein’s *Change* be approached along similar lines.

Moreover, *Change* invites these sorts of questions for several reasons. First, while *Change* has not provoked much political controversy, thanks to the internet we do have access to a substantial number of reactions in the form of online reviews, facebook postings,

and comments attached to blogs and websites where it has been discussed. Secondly, whereas Shostakovich’s political sympathies, insofar as they were in any way unconventional, are, for obvious reasons, unknown, Greenstein has written perceptively and at considerable length on political subjects, his Williams College thesis on *Plan Colombia* having been published in a prestigious undergraduate journal. Finally, the basic musical materials of the work itself allow for a similar multiplicity of interpretations as does the Shostakovich, and for many of the same reasons.

What listeners report hearing in *Change* won’t come as a surprise to those familiar with it. The major tonalities, the Rossiniesque motoric energy, the consistently rising gestures, the syncopated vamps introducing elaborately wrought passages of what turn out to be, on closer examination, highly refined and brilliantly controlled traditional counterpoint, all these add up to a musical statement of (in the words of one critic) thoroughgoing “cheerfulness.” Another critic is impressed by the “openness and optimism in the music ... very far from the hyper-intense anxiety, hysteria, and despair that are almost to be expected in much new concert music.”

Here comparisons to Shostakovich’s *Fifth*, in particular to the finale, seem unavoidable. The fortississimo D major brass fanfare which closes the piece is optimistic in much the same way as *Change*. Or is it? Similarly optimistic are the soliloquys of Ophelia in *Hamlet*. “Only a total oaf” would fail to recognize the underlying current of denialist hysteria which Shakespeare dramatized as Ophelia’s response to Hamlet’s betrayals and which Shostakovich communicates through the *Fifth* — according to the dissident perspective of the work. Volkov’s description of the Shostakovich’s *Fifth* as rendering a celebration “forced” by “someone beating you with a stick . . . saying ‘your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing’” seems equally applicable to the almost unrelieved succession of upbeat proclamations

conveyed through *Change*.

I should say that I don't know of anyone else who has raised the possibility of the dissident hearing of *Change* I'm suggesting here, and I will admit that my own political sympathies no doubt play some role in my willingness to do so. That said, many aspects of the piece and its composition come into focus if one hears the

The hijacking of our political discourse and institutions by corporations and the wealthy and with it the careening of our civilization toward unparalleled economic and environmental catastrophe makes escapism not only predictable but maybe even defensible.

piece as providing insight into the interior landscape prevalent among those in their twenties — one encapsulated in their self-administered description “generation last”: a generation which has not only stopped hoping for change but has banished the concept of hope from their mental lexicon.

In support of this interpretation, it should be noted that Greenstein, like many other artists in and around New York, was an active participant in the Obama campaign. Another beautiful work for the Now Ensemble, *Folk Music*, was donated to Obama for America for which it functioned with considerable success as the accompanying music for a fundraising video. Greenstein's blog contains entries on both musical and political subjects, the latter staking out positions consistent with the prevailing climate

in denouncing crimes of the Bush regime, and celebrating Obama's rise, albeit voicing considerable skepticism as troubling signs began to emerge.

As for Greenstein's subsequent political trajectory there is less to go on, though what there is seems significant. In particular, Greenstein was among the few musicians joining with Noam Chomsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Cornel West among others in signing an open letter calling for intensified protest directed against Wall Street bailouts, civil rights abridgements, environmental pillage, perpetual war, and other policies of the administration. Greenstein has not made any direct statements as to whether he has re-evaluated his political commitments either in various interviews he has given recently or on his blog which has fallen silent, with only a few postings since 2009, these limited to musical topics. While silence can usually be reasonably equated to consent, here it seems more appropriate to see it as stunned disbelief at the havoc which an administration, widely seen as the repository of the hopes of a generation, is visiting on the nation and the world.

Finally there is the matter of the title, which, under a dissident reading constitutes the amputated hindquarters of the now notorious sales pitch accompanying the roll-out of the Obama campaign. “Hope” having been extinguished, what remains is late capitalist Change understood as it was by Marx: a society under the heel of perpetual revolutions in production and marketing and through which “all which is holy becomes profaned.”

In examining possible hearings of *Change*, it is worth bearing in mind Taruskin's insistent exhortation that “no one owns the meaning of (Shostakovich's) music.” The Soviet commissars who found much to celebrate in the “optimism” of Shostakovich's *Fifth* were within their rights to do so. And no doubt many of the 80,000 downloads of *Change* were experienced as a nostalgic, albeit infinitely higher quality reprise of the kinds of emotions elicited by the insipid

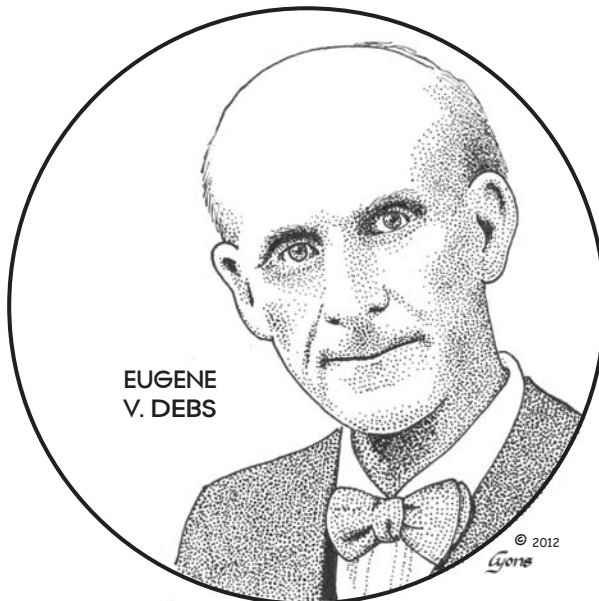
Will I Am youtube video which would become the unofficial anthem of the Obama campaign, in all its preeningly cynical, celebrity driven vacuity. For them, the comment of one critic comparing the effects of the music to that of Prozac would seem to be applicable, though the allusion to a pharmacologically induced sense of well being is perhaps revealing of something deeper. For probably a more common response is to experience the work as “transformative” of one’s surroundings, which is to say as escapism. Indeed, the video *Plan of the City* embodies exactly this narrative as the musicians take flight in a space ship and embarking on an interplanetary exodus welcomed at their destination by throngs of admirers.

The hijacking of our political discourse and institutions by corporations and the wealthy and with it the careening of our civilization

toward unparalleled economic and environmental catastrophe makes such escapism not only predictable but maybe even defensible. Under such circumstances it may be that, in the words of poet Martin Espada, “music is all we have,” all other forms of artistic experience necessarily being by their nature too referential to support the all-pervasive denialism which we have been required to adopt out of self-defense, or self-regard. If so, Walter Pater’s often cited reference to all arts aspiring to the condition of music assumes an ominous connotation. Classical music may have begun to regain its status as queen of the arts, as it had in Soviet Russia, but now, as then, at a cost which no sane person would be willing to bear.

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

CRUSADERS FOR JUSTICE



“I am opposed to a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all the days of their lives secure barely enough for a wretched existence..”

—Statement to the Federal Court, Cleveland, Ohio, upon being convicted of violating the Sedition Act, 1918

“The Republican and Democratic parties are alike capitalist parties — differing only in being committed to different sets of capitalist interests — they have the same principles under varying colors, are equally corrupt and are one in their subservience to capital and their hostility to labor.”

—Opening speech delivered as Presidential candidate of the Socialist Party, Sept. 1904

— Eugene Debs

Labor leader, Socialist Party of America presidential candidate, prisoner, activist, writer

Wrestling on Shaky Ground

Israel, Palestine, and the Decline of a Superpower

ADAM KELLER

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2011, Israeli politicians, generals, and diplomats displayed a growing nervousness in anticipation of “September,” i.e., the proclaimed Palestinian intention to seek a full United Nations Membership for the State of Palestine.

Netanyahu called in every debt in the American political arena to make sure that the United States would veto the Palestinian bid, and went on to a massive international lobbying campaign to mobilize as many UN member states as possible to cast a “no” vote in the General Assembly where the U.S. has no veto power. The diplomatic campaign was focused especially on European and other Western democracies, but not even the smallest and most godforsaken of Third World countries was neglected, if there seemed any chance to influence, convince, pressure, or buy off its government.

At the same time, there was much talk of massive riots taking place on the ground,

amounting to a Third Intifada, and Nethayhu’s hardliner Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman ominously predicted “a vast bloodbath.” Military commanders on the West Bank mobilized forces and made detailed plans for confronting the predicted upsurge of the Palestinian masses.

A new crowd-control device of original Israeli manufacture was unveiled — “The Flying Stinker,” capable of being sprayed from a helicopter and instantly dousing a crowd of thousands with an extremely stinking and extremely hard to remove liquid.

For their part, Israeli police commissioners spoke with alarm of possible mass sympathy demonstration by Arab citizens of Israel, and asked the Ministry of Justice to draw up Emergency Regulations authorizing the mass internment of thousands.

The army provided West Bank settlers with additional arms and training towards the eventuality of thousands of Palestinians attempting to storm their perimeter fences. Each and every settlement was mapped out and a “red line” defined, whose crossing by a Palestinian crowd — even an unarmed crowd — would be considered as “a life danger” and justify the use of live ammunition.

Some radical settler groups, not content with these preparations, embarked on “preemptive strikes” in the form of torching mosques and desecrating Muslim (and Christian) cemeteries. For its part, the French section of the Kahanist “Jewish Defense League” — with a long record of violent acts in Paris and other French cities — announced a “mobilization of Jews with European military experience” to “fly in and help out our brothers in Judea and Samaria.”

As of the time of writing (mid-October),

ADAM KELLER, born 1955 in Tel-Aviv, is at present the spokesperson of Gush Shalom, a grassroots movement against the occupation advocating for decades the creation of an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders. Founding editor of *The Other Israel* newsletter since 1983. He wrote the book *Terrible Days—Social Divisions and Political Paradoxes in Israel*. His political involvement started as a history student at Tel-Aviv University. From 1980-1983 he acted as spokesperson of the Shelly Peace Party and later of the Jewish-Arab Progressive List for Peace (1984-1988). In 1984 he was jailed for refusing to do military reserve service in Lebanon; in 1988 — for writing anti-occupation slogans on 117 army tanks; and in 1990 — for altogether refusing further military service in protest of the violation of Palestinian human rights. In 2002 his son Uri refused to become a soldier, and spent seven prison terms before being exempted.

nothing happened even remotely resembling these dire predictions and doom scenarios. Palestinian Authority officials announced in advance that they would organize mass rallies in Ramallah and other Palestinian cities to support the statehood bid, with President Abbas' address to the United Nations General Assembly, broadcast directly from New York, shown on giant screens. But at the same time, they also reiterated that there was no intention of having the masses march towards any Israeli military checkpoint or settlement. Indeed, Palestinian security forces were instructed to themselves block any such confrontational march (even this was not needed).

And such is more or less what actually happened. Tens of thousands did stream into Ramallah's main square and raised loud cheers when Abbas spoke on such issues as decades of oppression, the experience of becoming and of being a refugee, life under occupation, military checkpoints, settlements and land confiscations, the firm demand for independence in the here and now, and the willingness to make peace in the 1967 borders — and nothing less than the 1967 borders. Never a charismatic leader, Mahmud Abbas gained considerable popularity from standing up to the Americans and rejecting the enormous pressure from Washington to shelve his statehood bid.

But afterwards — as Abbas got a stirring and prolonged standing ovation from the UN delegates and departed the podium, and the statehood bid went into a prolonged exhausting sojourn in the Security Council bureaucracy — the crowds in Ramallah dispersed quietly and there was no strong tendency to march en masse and tangle with the Israeli soldiers and settlers. Since no Palestinian seriously expected the UN bid to make an immediate change in his or her actual life, no one was so disappointed as to burst out in anger.

Some clashes with the army did happen on that day, mostly at accustomed "hot spots" throughout the West Bank. But they were not

much bigger than those which ensue every Friday — when Israeli soldiers always disperse Palestinian villagers, accompanied by Israeli and international activists, who march to protest land confiscation and settler encroachments and the Separation Wall. At the village of Qusra, the 35-year-old Essam Kamal Badran had been shot

Settler youths greeted Kissinger in Jerusalem with the anti-Semitic epithet "Jewboy."

to death, during a confrontation with roving settlers and the soldiers defending them — just two hours before Abbas mounted the podium in New York. There have been cases in history where the killing of a single person was enough to set off a great conflagration — but Essam Kamal Badran was not one of these.

And so, Israeli right-wing politicians and commentators basked in a flurry of self-congratulation: "Tsunami? What Tsunami? It was hardly a tropical storm!" Military commanders did warn that "September" is not necessarily a chronological designation and that the Palestinian mass upsurge might still break out in full force, exactly when no one expects it — but there was little public attention to such alarmists. Nor did Israeli public opinion show great interest in the fact that the Palestinian bid would still eventually get to a Security Council vote; that on being blocked there the Palestinians would go to the General Assembly where they could be sure of being recognized as a state (though not a full UN Member State); that then they could start war crimes proceedings against Israeli military officers at the International Criminal Court in the Hague; and that international law provides all kinds of other creative ways in which a recognized Palestinian statehood could be made

into a big Israeli headache.

As far as the average Israeli is concerned, the threatening cloud of “September” had dissipated harmlessly, with credit for this achievement granted to Prime Minister Netanyahu. What swayed Israeli public opinion was not so much Netanyahu’s own speech at the UN — a well-delivered piece of polemics, clearly not intended to convince anyone who was not convinced already — as the speech delivered a day earlier on the same podium by the President of the United States, described as “the most Zionist speech in Obama’s career” as well as his “most cynical one” (in Hebrew, “Zionism” and “cynicism” sound very much alike—*tzionut* and *tziniyut* respectively).

Obama waxed emotional about Israeli children threatened by Arab aggression, while sparing not a single word for Palestinian suffering, ongoing occupation, settlement construction, 1967 borders, and other issues whose conspicuous mention in previous Obama speeches caused major confrontations with Netanyahu in the past three years. Obama had evidently been “tamed” and brought to heel, intimidated by his low showing in the polls and in particular by the loss to the Republicans of a traditionally Democrat New York City Congressional District with numerous Jewish voters.

Clearly, at least until the polls close in November 2012, Netanyahu has nothing to fear from the White House — and the Palestinians and the cause of Middle East peace, absolutely nothing to hope from that direction. In token of which, Netanyahu brazenly embarked on several large-scale settlement construction projects in East Jerusalem, brushing aside the ineffective verbal protests from Washington.

However, Netanyahu’s short-term victory was bought at a price — a price that in the long term might prove prohibitive. A highly visible demonstration and exhibition was given, in the glare of worldwide publicity, of a massive involvement and interference in U.S. internal politics, to the extent of being able to bend Con-

gress and President alike to directives issuing from the Prime Minister’s office in Jerusalem. As never before, the United States was exposed as a biased and dishonest broker, completely unfit for the role of sole mediator between Israelis and Arabs which it had arrogated to itself over several decades.

In thus forcing Israel’s main international ally into a highly exposed and humiliating position, Netanyahu considerably helped to erode the United States’ position as the dominant global power — a position whose preservation is clearly in Israel’s most vital and existential interest.

Contrary to hasty predictions, Israel did not face a “tsunami” in September. But another metaphor might not be out of place. As a result of the Palestinian appeal to the UN — and even more, as a result of the blatant action taken by Netanyahu to counter that bid — a widening fissure was opened in the rock on which American policy in the Middle East had been painstakingly built.

The House that Kissinger Built

IN THE WAKE OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR, a conference was convened in Geneva on December 21, 1973, with the proclaimed aim of achieving peace in the Middle East — co-chaired by the United States and the Soviet Union.

At the time, the choice of this format seemed self-evident. The Americans had been arming Israel while it was the Soviets who supplied Egypt and Syria — making Israeli-Arab wars into wars by proxy between the global blocks, one of the places where the Cold War was again and again turning hot. The natural corollary was that a peaceful resolution must involve both superpower sponsors of the regional contending powers.

But though few realized it at the time, it was the end of an era. After the ceremonial opening, the Geneva Conference was never convened again — though for years thereafter the Soviets stridently demanded it, and both Israeli

and Arab Communists took care to include the slogan “Reconvene the Geneva Conference!” in every statement and on the banners of every demonstration. In vain, for Henry Kissinger, who dominated U.S. foreign policy, managed to cut the Soviets completely out, and establish the United States as the sole mediator between Israel and its Arab neighbors — a role which would go unchallenged for decades.

The principles of this American policy were laid down during Kissinger’s trademark “Shuttle Diplomacy,” when he dazzled the world media with his flights back and forth between Israel and the Arab capitals — and would profoundly affect the policies of many later administrations in Washington, though with much variation of detail under various Presidents and Secretaries of State.

Arab leaders were made to understand that the United States was the only power capable of inducing Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967 (or at least, from portions of these territories); and that the United States was willing to exert this influence on behalf of Arabs — but for a price, namely a shift of their allegiance in global politics. Those amenable to such proposals stood not only to regain territory lost in 1967 but also to get economic bounties in Washington’s gift.

The Kissinger doctrine came down to dividing the process into as many steps as possible. First, to separate the various Arab parties to the conflict and deal separately with each. Then, to cut each specific occupied territory due to be returned to each of these Arab parties into as many slices as possible — with the return of each slice requiring a new “Interim Agreement” of its own, to be once again negotiated by the American mediator who would exact a broker’s fee all over again.

Israeli right-wingers railed against the Americans “paying the Arabs in Israeli coin,” and on one notorious occasion settler youths greeted Kissinger in Jerusalem with the anti-Semitic epithet “Jewboy.” But successive Israeli

governments increasingly discovered the advantages for themselves in this kind of U.S. policy. For each new partial withdrawal, the Americans had to court and wheedle — as well as pressure — the Israeli government of the day, and provide all kinds of gifts and inducements: increased financial aid; the most sophisticated of American weaponry; a reaffirmation of the tacit U.S. acquiescence in Israel’s possession of nuclear arms (and in the strong Israeli intolerance of anyone else in the Middle East attempting to gain the same).

Moreover, dividing the process of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories into very many intermediate stages held out to Israeli hawks the hope that Israel could avoid the later stages and keep permanently at least part of its 1967 conquests. Indeed, it has become common for successive governments of Israel to follow a withdrawal from some part of the Occupied Territories with a redoubled campaign of creating settlement facts in the territories still retained under its control.

Of all Arab countries, Egypt was the showcase success of American Middle East peace making. The most populous country and generally acknowledged leader of the Arab world, Egypt shifted from being the Soviet Union’s main ally in the Middle East to being an equally firm and crucial ally for the Americans. In return, Egypt got back in four stages (1974, 1975, 1979 and 1982) all of the Egyptian territory captured by Israel.

In addition, a hefty annual U.S. aid to Egypt was fixed at two thirds of the sum given to Israel, amounting to about two billion dollars per year. Having no significant lobby of its own on Capitol Hill, Egypt could never have hoped for anything of the kind under any other circumstances. However, providing such aid also gave the United States an enormous leverage and power over Egypt’s policies — a price which Egyptians would more and more come to consider onerous.

The Egyptian-Israeli process did involve

one very notable moment when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat attempted to avoid the American tutelage and proceed on his own, with the dramatic gesture of coming to Israel and speaking at the Knesset — an entirely independent initiative which took the Americans (and everybody else) completely by surprise.

Sadat's addressing the Israeli public directly did produce some concrete results, such as the

Would things have been significantly different by now, had Yitzchak Rabin not been assassinated, had he been re-elected in 1996 and made a sincere effort to complete what he started and meet the deadline ("A Definite Agreement no later than May 1999")? It is very difficult to answer.

birth of the Peace Now movement, which during the 1980s and 1990s was capable of bringing tens or even hundreds of thousands into the streets of Tel-Aviv. But it was not enough to bring about an Israeli-Egyptian peace deal, especially considering the Begin Government's last-moment effort to establish new settlement facts in Sinai.

Direct American involvement and pressure proved indispensable. President Carter had to summon Begin and Sadat for an intensive week in Camp David — and half a year later to come in person to the Middle East and engage in a presidential shuttle tour, in order to hammer out some pesky "final details" — before the peace deal and Israeli withdrawal from all of Sinai were finally agreed.

Moreover, Sadat's aspiration — to achieve a deal for the Palestinians as well as for his own country — came to naught. It was diverted by Begin into a years-long and completely futile round of negotiations, in which the Americans showed no special interest or effort and which was given the coup de grace by Israel's bloody invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The same tactic would be used, again and again, by Begin's successors.

Back in 1974, Kissinger aspired to make with Syria the same kind of deal as with Egypt. In the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, he arranged for the Syrians an appetizer — the return of the city of Quneitra, which had been the capital of the Syrian Golan until 1967 and which was depopulated and largely destroyed under Israeli rule. On numerous occasions during the following three decades, the possibility of Syria making an agreement similar to that made by Egypt was raised — but never followed through to a successful conclusion.

President Hafez al Assad and his son and heir Bashar were willing enough to flirt with the Americans, and on various occasions entered into rounds of U.S.-sponsored negotiations with Israel — but they were never quite ready to sever all ties with the Soviet Union (or, after its demise, with Iran) and become unequivocal followers of the United States. And for their part, Israeli settlers on the Golan — far less controversial among the general Israeli public than those on the West Bank — were able to mount a formidable public campaign and threaten to exact a heavy political price from any Prime Minister contemplating withdrawal from the Golan (Rabin in 1994, Barak in 2000).

Thus, American diplomacy marked no success on this front: Israel remained on the Golan up to the present (and has paid for it with two bloody wars in Lebanon which were to a considerable degree wars by proxy with Syria). With the outbreak of the popular uprising in Syria in early 2011, Israelis noted (doves with regret, hawks in satisfaction) that any idea of a

deal with Syria must wait until that country's internal crisis is resolved, one way or another.

AT SOME TIMES DURING THE 1970s, the idea was floated of an "Interim Agreement" between Israel and Jordan in which Israel would hand over to Jordanian rule some portions of the West Bank — but it was never pursued with any energy, being opposed by hard-liners in the Israeli cabinet and viewed with suspicion by Palestinians who did not like the idea of restored Jordanian rule. Moreover, it was made clear to King Hussein of Jordan that while some parts of the West Bank might be handed back, Israeli rule in "United Jerusalem" was non-negotiable. The king is known to have remarked at the time that he was being punished for not having attacked Israel in 1973, and for having always been pro-Western.

In 1988, under the impact of the First Intifada, Jordan relinquished to the Palestinians its claim over the West Bank, and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty of 1994 involved virtually no territorial issues. It was the Palestinian issue which emerged as the main field for American Middle Eastern peace making and for incremental territorial agreements à la Kissinger — which, after what seemed a promising start, got hopelessly muddled.

Palestinians had never been very fond of the United States — for which the U.S. had given them many good reasons. Still, in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union and of the Gulf War, they saw few diplomatic options other than trying to squeeze into whatever openings the Americans left them — first as "The Palestinian part of the Jordanian-Palestinian Delegation" at the 1991 Madrid Conference, and after the 1993 Oslo Agreements as an openly declared delegation of the PLO. The sudden transformation of Yasser Arafat, from a "notorious terrorist" who was denied even a visa to enter the United States into a honored and frequent visitor to the White House, seemed to herald a major turn in Palestinian-American relations

as well as Israeli-Palestinian ones — which was not entirely the case.

It is noteworthy that, as with Sadat's Knesset speech in 1977, Israel-Palestinian negotiations had known a short interval of an effort to bypass American mediation and tutelage. Norway, a small country with no significant means of pressuring or rewarding either side, took up the role of mediator and facilitator. For some months, the "Beilin Boys" — well-meaning Israeli intellectuals with rather fuzzy credentials from the Rabin Government — met with well-meaning Palestinian intellectuals, who had a more definite mandate from Arafat, under the auspices of well-meaning Norwegian diplomatic intellectuals. In the seclusion of the countryside outside the Norwegian capital, they talked and listened to each other and tried to find creative solutions, in a manner which would nowadays be entirely inconceivable.

The Israelis who were there did not, however, have any authority to conclude a full-fledged peace agreement, involving a complete Israeli withdrawal or the creation of an independent Palestinian state. They could go no further than an interim agreement, giving Palestinians a limited amount of autonomy and leaving the most crucial issues as blanks to be filled in later.

Had the filling in of the blanks been left to people as well meaning as those who originally drafted the documents, the results might have been different. But once the agreement drafted in Oslo was officially signed in Washington, the task of filling in these blanks came to involve Israeli generals, security operatives, and settlers, as well as various armed Palestinian militias — and the fairly impartial Norwegian mediators were replaced by Americans all too susceptible to considerations of American power interests abroad and vulnerable to pressures issuing from America's own political system.

The "Interim" division of the West Bank in 1994 into "A" areas under complete (more or less) control of the Palestinian Authority, "B" under its partial control, and "C" (most of the

West Bank) under remaining Israeli rule had a distinct Kissingeresque flavor. It might have been a rough equivalent of the 1975 Interim Agreement whereby Israel handed back to Egypt a slice of Western Sinai while still retaining the bulk of the peninsula's territory.

In retrospect, however, such a comparison would clearly be false: no more than three years after that Interim Agreement, Israel signed a definite peace agreement with Egypt, including a binding obligation to relinquish the whole of Sinai and evacuate all settlements there — and eventually carried it out to the letter. Which, needless to say, was not the case with the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement of 1994.

Would things have been significantly different by now, had Yitzchak Rabin not been assassinated, had he been re-elected in 1996 and made a sincere effort to complete what he started and meet the deadline (“A Definite Agreement no later than May 1999”)? It is very difficult to answer, especially since Rabin has become so much the stuff of myth, the Hero and Martyr of the Israeli Left, that it is sometimes difficult to recall the all too imperfect living Rabin.

All we can say is that in history as it happened — with Rabin assassinated, and Netanyahu elected in his place, and Barak posing as Rabin's heir and proving to be nothing of the kind, and being replaced by Sharon, and so on — the target date set out in the Oslo Agreement had come and gone with no Definite Agreement and no State of Palestine. So did the timetable later set out in “The Road Map for Peace” (A Palestinian state in 2005).

The division of the West Bank turned from “Interim” to semi-permanent — a situation completely intolerable to Palestinians, leaving them with a collection of isolated enclaves completely surrounded by Israeli-ruled territory. All the more intolerable as this status quo includes constant settlement extension and land-grab, as well as raids each night by Israeli soldiers and security operatives, detaining at their con-

venience any Palestinian deemed (by Israel) to be “a terrorist” even at the heart of the areas supposedly “under full Palestinian control.”

Among all the factors and considerations involved in this situation, a salient one stands out and yet is hardly ever mentioned: the United States did not keep its part in the kind of deal set out by Kissinger and his successors. The Palestinian leadership did considerably change its international allegiance; the United States failed to pressure Israel into giving up the bulk of the West Bank territory. Which could be attributed to some presidents plainly not wanting to do it, and others possibly wanting but coming up against the constraints of domestic U.S. politics.

The Camp David fiasco of August 2000 is a case in point. While much of what happened there is the subject of ongoing debate and controversy, there is no question about the fact that Arafat was reluctant to go to Camp David; that he agreed only after being explicitly promised that in case of failure the United States would not assign blame to anyone; and that in spite of this promise, when the summit did fail, President Clinton appeared on prime-time Israeli TV and placed the blame squarely on Arafat, who had “rejected Barak's generous offers.”

It is also an undoubted fact that Bill Clinton is married to Hilary Clinton and — whatever problems might occur in their married life — that he is involved in and committed to the success of her political career; that the Camp David summit took place just a few months before the elections in which Hilary Clinton was seeking a Senate seat in the state of New York; that New York is, of all U.S. states, the one where the Jewish vote counts most in elections; and that the government of Israel has well-trying methods and mechanisms for manipulating the Jewish vote in U.S. elections.

A direct link between the above two sets of facts is admittedly a matter of conjecture — but a reasonable one.

The Camp David failure was followed by the outbreak of the Second Intifada, and the

replacement of Ehud Barak by Ariel Sharon in Israel — and of Bill Clinton by George W. Bush in the U.S.. It was soon clear that Palestinians (or for that matter, peace-minded Israelis) had little to expect of the Bush Administration. Arafat was swiftly re-demonized, once again a “notorious terrorist” who was decidedly not welcome in Washington — and though Bush did utter the words “A Palestinian State” he failed to take any step to make them a reality.

True, Arafat was offered one real chance to get into the Bush Administration’s good books: In March 2002, Vice President Cheney was touring the Middle East, in a (not very successful) effort to drum up support for the impending war on Iraq — and he invited Arafat to meet him in Cairo. Had Arafat provided what Cheney wanted — i.e. the blessing and moral support of the Palestinian People’s leader for the American assault on Saddam Hussein — the Bush Administration might or might not have reciprocated suitably, one more of history’s unanswerable might-have-beens.

A few weeks after Arafat turned down Cheney’s generous offer, the full might of the Israeli armed forces was launched against the Palestinian Authority (Bush did say — repeatedly — that the Israeli troops should turn back, and even added “And I do mean it!” but Sharon did not seem particularly impressed). Arafat spent the years remaining to him under close Israeli siege of his Ramallah headquarters, except for the last weeks of dying at the Paris hospital from whatever it was which caused his death.

Arafat was replaced by Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) whom the Americans had already been grooming for years for the role of “Good Guy,” as against “Bad Guys” ranging from Arafat to Hamas. Abbas unequivocally opposed the use of violence in the Palestinians’ struggle to gain independence, instructed his security forces to actively pursue and imprison members of Hamas and prevent armed attacks on Israelis, and he entrusted the restructuring and training

of these security forces to Lieutenant General Keith W. Dayton of the United States Army. The Palestinian economy was given into the charge of Salam Fayyad, Finance Minister and later Prime Minister, whose previous career included graduation from the University of Texas and a stint at the International Monetary Fund.

If the United States were to reward any Palestinian leadership for staunch adherence to the West, Abbas and Fayyad should have been the obvious candidates. Yet they actually achieved very little. No more than Bush’s trumpeted Annapolis Conference, which observers predicted would be a meaningless photo opportunity (and were proven completely right). And also an exhausting and futile round of negotiations with PM Ehud Olmert and his Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, whose proclaimed aim was to produce a “Shelf Agreement,” which would be duly signed and whose implementation would take place once the Palestinian Authority is deemed (by Israel) ready to take up the task. Washington contented itself with asking for occasional progress report on these talks, until they were definitely cut off by the heavy Israeli bombing of Gaza.

Palestinians (like a great many other people) eagerly awaited the U.S. Presidential elections of 2008, in the hope of a new President substantially changing the Bush policies. The election of Obama seemed at first to fulfill these hopes, especially in the wake of Obama’s Cairo speech, where the issue of Israeli settlement activity on the West Bank — and the demand for its cessation or “freeze” — was put to the front.

To begin with, Obama may have sincerely considered the settlement issue as a preliminary, which should be quickly dealt with, clearing the way to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on substantive issues. In fact, it became a wrestling bout continuing, on and off, for the whole of Obama’s first two years. Its main lasting outcome was to demonstrate that — despite the enormous disparity in size between Israel and the United States — the Prime Minister

of Israel wields enough influence in American politics to contend on equal terms with the President of the United States.

At one moment Netanyahu did reluctantly agree to a ten-month settlement freeze, but took care to exclude settlement in East Jerusalem — which made the freeze insufficient in Palestinian eyes. The approach of the 2010 mid-term elections forced Obama to place the entire issue

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on the back burner, pressured by Congressional Democrats apprehensive for their seats. For his part Netanyahu, timing the freeze to end just ahead of the American elections, refused outrightly to renew it. Obama then proved unable to bring significant pressure or offer significant inducements, which would make Netanyahu change his mind.

In May of this year — with the Arab Spring already convulsing the Middle East, and with a tough Presidential re-election campaign just ahead — Obama made a last serious Middle East effort: to side-step the settlement issue and approach the substantive issues, defining a framework around which negotiations could proceed to a concrete conclusion. Specifically, that the borders between Israel and Palestine be based on the 1967 lines, with possible mutual

exchanges of territory to be worked out between the two parties.

Had Netanyahu agreed to base negotiations on this principle, the Palestinians might have been seriously tempted to come to the table — even without a completely satisfactory settlement freeze. But Netanyahu had no such intention. On the contrary, he launched an all-out attack on the President, in the White House itself, condemning the 1967 borders as “a danger to Israel's security” and reiterating instead his support for “a Palestinian State” in the abstract, carefully avoiding any reference to exactly where such a state might be located. Two days later, he convincingly demonstrated that the United States Congress — Senate and House, Democrats and Republicans alike — was ready to back him up, with a most enthusiastic multitude of standing ovations.

Half a year later, with Obama already in the thick of a hard-fought elections campaign and his standing in the polls none too good, the President's above-mentioned UN speech placed a sad epitaph on these wasted years. No mention of settlements, of the 1967 borders, of Palestinian suffering or of anything which might in any way anger Netanyahu and Netanyahu's backers in the U.S. electoral scene.

In effect, it was a speech of abdication by the decades-long Sole Middle East Mediator. Netanyahu was set free to grab Palestinian land and otherwise do his worst, and expect no more than ineffective verbal protests from Washington. Mahmoud Abbas, in sheer self-preservation, was pushed into an obdurate defiance of the Americans, going ahead with his UN move—though in his case there was a very concrete possibility of the United States retaliating with dire financial sanctions.

All in all, the foreign policy house erected by Kissinger and buttressed by Kissinger's successors lay in ruins. Its cornerstone — the assumption that it is the dog that wags the tail, and that the United States could at need call its Middle East ally to heel — had been knocked out.

Protégé of a Sinking Empire

THE ABOVE IS, OF COURSE, part of a much larger, continuing process — the United States losing ground in the international arena. A process proceeding from many causes unconnected to the Middle East, and in which economics clearly plays a major role. Still, Netanyahu's Israel is doing its fair share in hastening the process along — again and humiliating the United States and its President, blatantly interfering in American politics and demonstrating for all to see how well the tail can and does wag the dog. Pushing the United States to adopt and actively pursue questionable policies on an issue which is highly sensitive to a great many people in very many countries around the world — so as to lose the Americans friends and make them new enemies.

When examined dispassionately, all of this would seem little short of madness — as, of all countries in the world, Israel stands to lose the most from the fall of the United States. Having in effect tied its fortunes to a ship which seems to be foundering, Israel proceeds to impose a heavy burden dragging that mother ship down.

Nowadays, the possibility of the American Empire going the way of the British Empire is no longer the stuff of fantasy or wild fancy. Even if not completely inevitable, it has certainly become a real possibility which must be taken seriously, which might become a concrete reality during the lifetime of many living in the world today.

Should China, for example, become the new dominant global power, the arbiter of the fortunes of countries in the Middle East as in other regions of the world, Israel would stand very exposed and vulnerable indeed. There would be no Israeli lobby in Beijing, no Israeli leverage in internal Chinese politics. Cynical Chinese policy-makers might, if it suits an ephemeral interest, ally themselves with Israel — and then drop that alliance at the drop of a hat. In which case Israel might find that a peace based on the 1967 borders is no longer on offer.

Thus, an urgent new reason has emerged for Israel to make haste, end the occupation and make peace with the Palestinians — in addition to the host of well-known moral and practical reasons for so doing. Much better to let Israel get its definite, internationally recognized borders while the United States is still a dominant world power.

Israel's leverage in the American political system should be treated as a precious, non-renewable resource, which must not be irresponsibly frittered away in blocking and humiliating a President and holding Congress hostage and putting off the end of the occupation and "gaining time" when time works against Israel. Instead, this precious resource should be used — while still available — to help build up a solid and enduring structure of peace with the Palestinians and of legitimacy for Israel in its Middle Eastern environment.

If it is not too late already.

Postscript (Nov. 3, 2011)

SINCE THE ABOVE WAS WRITTEN, quite a few more things have happened (as could always be expected in this country and region). In general, they tend to confirm the impression of the United States loosing and losing its grip on Middle East events.

- Taking everybody by surprise, Netanyahu announced a prisoner exchange deal whereby Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, held by Hamas for more than five years, was set free in exchange for the release of 1027 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons. Shalit's family had conducted a highly successful campaign, gaining wide public sympathy for the plight of their son — but Netanyahu seemed dead set against the proposed deal, having long gone on record in opposition to any such "surrender to terrorism." Various explanations were offered for his volte-face — from seeking to weaken Abu Mazen's standing in the Palestinian public (in which Israel's PM ironically found a common interest with Hamas) to trying to distract attention

from the Social Protest Movement which had burst into the streets of Israeli cities in recent months. Whatever his considerations, the move proved highly popular in the Israeli public, immediately pushing Netanyahu's ratings in the polls sharply up. The deal had been brokered by Egyptian and German mediators, with some Turkish involvement in the last part — and certainly no American involvement whatsoever. In fact, the Americans indicated their clear displeasure, both because they saw no reason to strengthen Hamas and because the deal was in a clear and rather embarrassing contradiction to their own policy: the United States would not release prisoners from Guantanamo (not even far fewer than a thousand) in order to get back an American soldier captured in Afghanistan.

- Once again the Gaza Strip's border with Israel flared up, with the shooting of Palestinian missiles answered with bombing runs by Israeli planes, and more missiles and more planes. It was once again the Egyptians, who have reasonably good relations with Israel as well as with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, who worked feverishly to prevent a big conflagration and achieve a cease-fire. The Americans, who do not deal with those deemed to be terrorists, had no role to play.
- President Mahmud Abbas went ahead with plans to get Palestine accepted as a full-fledged Member State in UNESCO — a kind of dress rehearsal towards the similar vote in the UN Assembly General. He rebuffed considerable American pressures, threats of financial re-

taliations and various inducements and offers of a "compromise" falling short of the status of a full-fledged state. On the day after the UNESCO vote, where the Palestinian position was endorsed by a huge majority of the International Community, Netanyahu announced in retaliation the accelerated building of 2000 new settlement housing units — he, too, feeling that he could act with impunity.

- Just as this is being written, a high-profile public debate has burst out in the Israeli media and political system on the previously taboo question of a "preemptive strike" against the Iranian nuclear program. From some of the articles published, it seems Netanyahu and his Defense Minister Barak seriously consider launching an Israeli attack on Iran even without an American approval — though such an attack would have a deep impact on America.
- Should the UN ploy fail to get them concrete results, an increasing number of Palestinians support the option of declaring the Palestinian Authority disbanded — a stillborn effort to get independence which had become the mask and tool of continued occupation — and to symbolically "hand back the keys to Israel". Such an act, which might throw the West Bank into complete chaos, would carry considerable risks for the Palestinians themselves — but would have the potential of causing great headache to both Israel and the United States.

To quote a well-known Chinese proverb, we certainly live in interesting times.

The Greek and the European Crisis in Context

BY C.J. POLYCHRONIOU

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW millennium, Greece, a weak, peripheral nation in the European economy, was still licking its wounds from the greatest politico-financial scandal in its post-war history — the collapse of the Athens stock exchange. The wild stock market speculation had been fuelled by often-repeated statements from various government officials (with Finance Minister Yiannos Papantoniou leading the chorus) that the upward trend was an accurate reflection of the robust state of the real economy. Millions of Greeks, with no prior experience in stock market investing, rushed to take advantage of the apparently golden opportunity to strike it rich overnight. The result was an estimated loss of approximately one hundred billion euros, mostly from small investors, and the largest redistribution of private wealth ever in the country's history. It was a scam of grand proportions, equal in conception to Albania's 1996-97 Ponzi scheme frenzy, even if the latter had far greater economic, political, and social consequences.

The socialist government of then prime minister Costas Simitis was indeed directly responsible for the dramatic rise and collapse of the Athens stock exchange but this development was not an aberration: under the reign of Costas Simitis, Greece's prime minister between 1996-2004, the socialist party (*Pasok*) had been radically converted from a populist but kleptocratic political organization into a neoliberal party of

political thugs who practiced systemic political corruption but preached the virtues of untamed markets. A prime example of eye-popping political corruption involved the bribery of socialist party and government officials by the German industrial multinational Siemens — and the passing (1997) and amending of laws (2001) which makes it impossible to prosecute ministers for crimes committed while in office.

Yet, in spite of all this, an optimistic view of the future of Greece prevailed among the general public. Though wildly unqualified, the country had been accepted into Europe's economic and monetary union on June 19, 2000 and Athens had been chosen as the host city for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. In both instances, the nation's politico-economic and media elite played key roles in spreading a strong sense of national pride among the population while conveniently concealing the huge problems and inefficiencies of the Greek economy. With regard to hosting the Olympic Games, only the Left had expressed reservations and even objections, wondering aloud whether the country could sustain the cost for this extravaganza event, which was going to carry a prize tag of several billion euros.

In many and no non-essential ways, the organizing of the 2004 Summer Olympic Games was just the prelude to the solvency crisis that erupted a few years later and which has forced so far the EU to extend two rescue packages of unprecedented size in order to avoid a contagion effect into the rest of the eurozone. Typical of the way the corrupt Greek state authorities are accustomed to conducting public affairs, the actual cost of the Olympic Games has yet to be made public; however, estimates range anywhere

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from 10 to 20 billion euros. Moreover, the return benefits have been insignificant while most of the sports venues built (Greek authorities refused to build temporary ones, probably aware that the kickbacks would have been far smaller in size) remain idle, and nearly all facilities around the Olympic Village are abandoned.

Spending money on public sector investment of dubious value, total absence of accountability, and sheer administrative incompetence

Spending money on public sector investment of dubious value, total absence of accountability, and sheer administrative incompetence are all hallmarks of the Greek state.

are all hallmarks of the Greek state and striking characteristic features of the way the nation's two main political parties have been ruling the country since the reestablishment of parliamentary democracy 37 years ago. While the alleged bloated public sector (which is no bigger than the average public sector in Europe) draws the media's ire for the fiscal woes of the Greek state and its employees have become a political punch bag even for government officials themselves, the Greek capitalist class has been thoroughly dependent on the state and, like any parasitic capitalist class, has lived largely off the state budget. The plundering of the public wealth for the benefit of the domestic economic elite has been done largely in the form of huge public work contracts (always with a hefty kickback to the politicians involved) and massive tax evasion. State protection is also provided to the domestic business/industrial/financial class for labor law violations, environmental pollution,

illegal construction, etc.

The corrupt "exchange system" is so entrenched in every aspect of the public administration system, but also quite prevalent throughout civil society and the private business sector, that a disillusioned and cynical citizenry has been formed, often enough incapable of exhibiting social and political responsibility or for standing up for what might be loosely called the "common good." By the same token, professionals and trade unions have become narrowly based special interest groups who engage in strikes and other forms of political protest only when their own interests are threatened, and frequently do so at the expense of other sectors of the economy, as this summer's taxi drivers' strike clearly revealed. In fact, the history of the Greek syndicalist movement (syndicalist organizations are aligned with different political parties) is full of examples where what passes for radical action is in fact a subversion of the public interest. (It is quite typical in Greece for a few hundred people to block access to all main roads in the capital of Athens so they can stage a demonstration or a march!)

From the perspective of contemporary political science, all of the above are traits not of developed and democratically run societies, but of backward, clientelist-based political systems and deformed political cultures. Indeed, in surveying Greece's political landscape, one would be hard-pressed to identify a single Greek leader in recent years from any point on the political spectrum who possessed the ability, or the courage, to conceive and articulate a long-term vision for the future of the country's political life and pedagogically engage the public in the rebirth of a civic virtue. Similarly, the political elite as a whole - including intellectuals — has shown no interest at all in charting a national development strategy, or in tackling, in a concerted and systematic manner, the plethora of domestic and international challenges the nation faces. In consequence, whenever a full-fledged crisis — whether domestic, international, or environ-

mental — has surfaced in the past few decades, the country has experienced significant trauma. Hence the current situation in Greece is not merely one of a severe economic crisis but also one of deep political, social, and even moral decay.

The Greek political system has failed as tragically as it has because the two main political parties (socialists and conservatives) have governed via clientelist practices and undemocratic principles. Political leaders have taken turns locking voters into a long-term relationship based not on the delivery of public goods and a just social order, but on promises of targeted resource redistribution to party faithful. Political leaders have treated the state not as an instrument for carrying out just and effective social and economic policies, but, instead, as a tool for realizing party-based goals, clientelist relations, and purely personal interests.

This undemocratic and corrosive political process helps to explain, in large part, why the Greek public administration system is so inefficient and notoriously corrupt, but it also sheds light on why the nation as a whole seems to lack a culture of public attitudes and projects built around common interests and civic life. Indeed, in a world of ceaseless competition, possessive individualism, and social decay, all too often we forget what is most critical in the idealization of true democracy: the creation of good citizens and the pursuit of the good life.

The ills and anomalies of Greek political culture are truly astonishing when we consider that Greece is a European Union (EU) member state. Greece's underground economy generates more than 40 percent of official gross domestic product (GDP); tax evasion is so widespread that it covers virtually every aspect of society, and the percentage of people on disability pensions or early age retirement far exceeds that of any other country in the EU. In addition, political scandals and financial crimes — many of them of gigantic proportions and with such severe legal and political implications that, in other countries, they would have led to the collapse of

entire governments and heavy prison sentences for the culprits — routinely go unpunished. Laws are violated systematically on virtually every basic civil matter, ranging from drunk driving and double parking and parking on sidewalks to smoking in public places, and often with the complicity of the authorities themselves.

In this sense, Greece's sovereign debt crisis, which exploded in 2009 (the country's budget deficit stood that year at 15.4 percent of GDP) may have been precipitated by the financial global crisis of September-October 2008, but it had long been in the making. It was, in effect, a time bomb waiting to explode. In Greece, income tax rates were always very low, tax evasion massive, and Greek governments have run deficits since the early 1980s and produced a public debt which was consistently well over 100 percent of GDP. Moreover, the nation's fiscal deficit remained outside of the world's view for so long because of the systematic use of cooked statistics, which were sometimes submitted with the cooperation of the EU authorities. Even the budgetary statistics that were the basis for Greece's entry into the eurozone had been manipulated in order to present a rosier economic outlook.

The fact that Greece ran huge deficits for at least the last two decades is only part of the story. The other part is the nature of the economy itself. Greece has an economy which is not only predominantly service-oriented (based largely on tourism and agriculture), but also highly inefficient. The domestic economy is controlled by an oligarchical structure in which large business conglomerates and wealthy individuals, in alliance with the domestic political elite, own the bulk of the country's wealth, control the media, and set the political and economic agenda. Its major inefficiencies hamper severely the country's international economic relations. Indeed, the Greek economy is in such dismal condition that a restructuring with a 20% haircut, as the second rescue package seems to entail, will hardly address its problems.

In the decade ending in 2007, Greece's

GDP grew by about 4 percent a year; however, everyone now recognizes that this growth was due almost exclusively to heavy government borrowing and historically high levels of private debt and consumer spending. In a word, Greece's economic development of the last ten years was based on a bubble economy.

HAVING SAID ALL THIS, we should not underplay at all the significance of the neoliberal global crisis, especially since Greece has been fully incorporated into the neoliberal framework of the European economy for nearly a decade now. Global neoliberal capitalism has plunged much of the advanced world in a crisis of unprecedented proportions and is causing misery and suffering for millions of people. Economic insecurity, mass unemployment, declining wages, poverty, social marginalization, crime, fear, and social decomposition are now defining features of many advanced societies. With growth concentrated largely on speculative financial activities and the suppression of wages, wealth is so unequally distributed in many advanced capitalist societies that the social and historical boundaries between rich and poor nations have completely broken down. Wealth and poverty coexist in close proximity in many cities in advanced societies just as they do in the less developed world.

With the belief that markets on their own terms are the best means for the maximization of growth and development and that societal interests are best served when individuals act more like consumers than citizens, the neoliberal dogma is by far the most dangerous ideology of our times. Essentially, neoliberalism represents a counterrevolution to the post-war regime in the area of economic and social rights and connects to the interests of the rich, corporations, and the needs of the dominant form of capital in contemporary capitalism, that of finance.

Under neoliberalism, politics has surrendered power to the wealthy elite and to the financial markets and institutions. The state,

through complex forms of intervention and mediation in the public arena, has sought to balance out the sources of large-scale friction between competing social forces. In an effort to assure the stable reproduction of capitalist economic and social relations, it has been converted into an instrument for carrying out the policies of the global neoliberal project without concern for the cost on human lives.

Neoliberalism has allowed the liberalization of labor rules, privatization of state assets, budget cuts in social programs, public education, and public health. It has protected sharp tax cuts for the rich, real estate, banks, and financial transactions. It has worked to strengthen the penal state. It has supported the penalization of poverty and criminalization of many social movements resisting the collapse of the public sphere.

Europe as a whole is the latest victim of global neoliberal economic policies. The global financial crisis that reached its peak in September-October 2008 has become a global employment crisis. This crisis has engulfed Europe threatening to dismantle the last vestiges of its social market economy and complete the destruction of fundamental social rights of workers.

Since the Maastricht Treaty in which Europe fully expressed its intention to embrace and reinforce the global neoliberal project, the erosion of social welfare guarantees has proceeded with only popular resistance standing in the way of the complete dismantling of social democracy. Now, as the global crisis has spread all over Europe, bringing to the forefront the flaws of the euro as a single currency throughout the EU, fiscal problems and sovereign debt have emerged as pressing issues. Fiscal discipline and severe austerity measures are being implemented in order to tame the global financial markets and provide stability to the European banking system.

Greece, having already received one gigantic rescue package in order to avoid bankruptcy and the contamination of the rest of the euro-

periphery, is under the command of the EU and the IMF and has become subjected to unprecedented draconian austerity measures. But Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, and England have also joined Europe's austerity club with deep budget cuts. Latvia and Romania are also under EU/IMF supervision and their economies have been subjected to shock-therapy treatments for the bailout loans they received.

The wave of fiscal austerity that has spread across Europe can be seen as a reflection of the worries of European governments over market reactions following the Greek debt crisis and is fundamentally a manifestation of Europe's strict adherence to the neoliberal dogma and EU leadership's unwillingness or inability to provide an alternative policy framework to financialization in the context of the global neoliberal economy.

In Greece, Portugal, and Spain, "social democratic" governments came to power with a mandate for the implementation of a progressive agenda, but, in the face of market pressures and direct orders from the EU and the IMF, quickly discarded even the pretext of being agents of progressive reform and began to impose unprecedented cuts and austerity measures which reduce significantly the standard of living for working people through the rollback of long established social programs, social entitlements and social rights. Programmatically there is no longer anything that sets apart southern European "social democratic parties" from neoliberal parties.

Greece is by far the most striking example of how politically opportunistic social democratic parties have become in the age of global neoliberalism. In its 2009 electoral campaign, Greece's socialist party, *Pasok*, led by George Papandreou, offered the model of "participatory democracy" as the foundation of a new politics. It rejected the claims of the centre-right political party, New Democracy (which was in power since 2004), that huge deficits and a lack of state funds made any talk about massive public spending and investment highly irresponsible, and promised a break with rightist

policies. Worse, Papandreou (also the leader of the Second International) wooed voters by telling them "there is plenty of money around" and declared that, if elected as prime minister, his government would manifest "the political will" to find money for the common folk, just as it had been found to bail out the banks. Papandreou

The neoliberal dogma is by far the most dangerous ideology of our times.

continued this tactic all the way up to his win in the national elections of October 2009.

Yet, the first action Papandreou took as new Prime Minister was to prepare the ground for turning Greece over to the IMF. Next he set in place the most austere measures ever undertaken by any European government, which involved sharp pay cuts, sharp increases in added value taxes, pension reductions, slashes in social programs, increases in the legal maximum number of people companies could lay off each month, extreme pension reforms, privatization of state assets and tax breaks for the rich and the banks. He accepted without a fight the EU/IMF terms and conditions for the first rescue package (worth 110 billion euros) in spite of the usurious nature of the agreement (it carried a 5 percent interest, while Germany borrows at very low rates) and went out of his way to convince the Greek public that it had to show patience and exhibit "patriotic duty" (just as he did!) as the crisis would be over by mid-2011. What happened of course is what every economist had been predicting and warning about from the start: the economy took a sharp turn for the worse (GDP shrank by 4.5 percent in 2010 and is expected to decline again by more than 4 percent in 2011; in fact, the GDP dropped the second quarter of 2011 by 7.3 percent), unem-

ployment reached catastrophic levels (it presently exceeds 16 percent, but all labor analysts estimate it to be closer to 20 percent), and the debt increased. If this wasn't enough, Papandreou has not taken a single action to combat corruption or to go after the rich and the big businesses which owe some 42 billion euros in back due taxes. Nor has he shown any willingness to collaborate with the Swiss government in order to go after the estimated 600 billion euros that Greek tax fugitives have stashed away in Swiss bank accounts. And neither has his government reduced state expenditures or even undermined the power of vested interests. The Greek political class seems to act as if the crisis does not apply to itself, imposing in the process an ever heavier burden on the laboring population and the pensioners.

Papandreou's popularity rate is now at 20 percent, an all time low for any Greek prime minister who served in office the last 20-30 years, and is probably the most reviled public figure in the nation. At the present moment, the main task that the Papandreou government has embarked on is the sale of all state assets under the model implemented in the privatization plan by former East Germany. Indeed, the government policy, under the direct command of the European Union and the IMF, may be aptly summarized in a few words: "Greece: A Nation for Sale."

Papandreou's stance to the sovereign debt crisis of Greece illuminates a symbiotic relationship between the neoliberal project and EU interests. The EU has proven to be a disastrous economic experiment largely because of its single-minded commitment to the neoliberal economic dogma and because it has made a mockery of democratic values and institutions. It has spread general disillusionment among the European citizenry. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, stagnant wages, and deteriorating living standards are becoming the hallmark of the policies generated in Brussels. In the midst of the worse crisis in post-war Europe,

the European Central Bank regards the fight against inflation as its exclusive legal task, with growth, prosperity, full employment, and social rights having been sacrificed in order to secure the financial system's primary interests.

Neoliberal global capitalism, which Europe has fully embraced, represents a highly destructive socio-economic order. Millions of people in scores of communities around the world have been ravaged by the functions and operations of global casino economics. As for Greece, the country went bankrupt because of its domestic political, social, and cultural attributes and because, economically, the country was not ready for the challenges posed by single currency without fiscal unity. Now, as the "weak link" in the eurozone economy, Greece is in a long fight for its economic and possibly national survival. It is a crisis of profound severity. This crisis may have even greater implications. As Antonio Gramsci once said, "The old is dead, but the new not yet born." In due time, we may see similar developments in other eurozone countries. While Europe has become the last bastion of global neoliberalism, the task at hand is putting in place the conditions for radical social change — a revolt against the existing order, where competitiveness on international markets demands the pauperization of work, and an attempt to create a more decent one.

The second Greek "rescue package" (laid out at the European Union Summit in late July 2011 but currently on hold due to "technical" and political reasons) is nearly as flawed a financial plan as the first one. It will intensify the structural adjustment program already under way and will dismantle whatever is left of Greece's scant welfare system. (For the record, Greece already ranks among the most unequal societies in the world, with over 20 percent of the population living below the poverty level, and its social services resembling those of an undeveloped rather than those of a developed country). Second, it acknowledges that Greece is bankrupt (but hopes that this will be treated by markets as a temporary

development!), pushes the debt problem into the distant future, and makes some vague promises of a development program along the lines of “a new Marshall plan.” The latter is typical of the type of empty rhetoric that the EU leadership has employed from the start of the crisis, and it would be very naïve on the part of anyone to place any value in this idea. Finally, this is a plan through which, as Eurogroup Chairman Jean-Claude Juncker said recently in an interview to Germany’s *Focus* magazine, “The sovereignty of Greece will be massively limited.”

EU’s latest reaction to the Greek sovereign debt crisis is the continuation of a bad theatre play, something for which both Greece and the eurozone as a whole may end up paying quite dearly. First, the Greek debt drama has touched off a firestorm of public reaction that is uncommon even for Greece itself. The wrath of the people is not directed simply against the austerity measures but also against the political establishment. In Greece, it seems that almost everyone now has finally realized that the domestic political class is not only thoroughly corrupt and irredeemably irresponsible, but also infuriatingly inept, horribly ignorant and profoundly incompetent. In gestures of apparently complete frustration, citizens are, nowadays, physically attacking ministers and members of the parliament in broad daylight and routinely stage massive demonstrations outside of the parliament, shouting, “Thieves!” and, “Traitors!” at the elected officials inside. As to what they think about the system of parliamentary rule, the following popular slogan captures quite accurately the public sentiment: “Burn the parliament down, it is a bordello.”

The public anger over corruption, the harsh austerity measures and political incompetence is certainly justified even if it comes from the same citizenry that has allowed the two major political parties to retain their monopoly of political power by voting largely on the basis of clientelist expectations. As noted earlier, the failure for the emergence of civic virtue and a culture based on

a common good lies firmly and squarely on the back of the political establishment, the media and the intellectual classes.

The prospects for progressive change in Greece are virtually none. The Left, even though it has gained some popular backing over the last few months, remains caught in its old-fashioned fractionalist mentality and dangerous machinations for hegemonic leadership

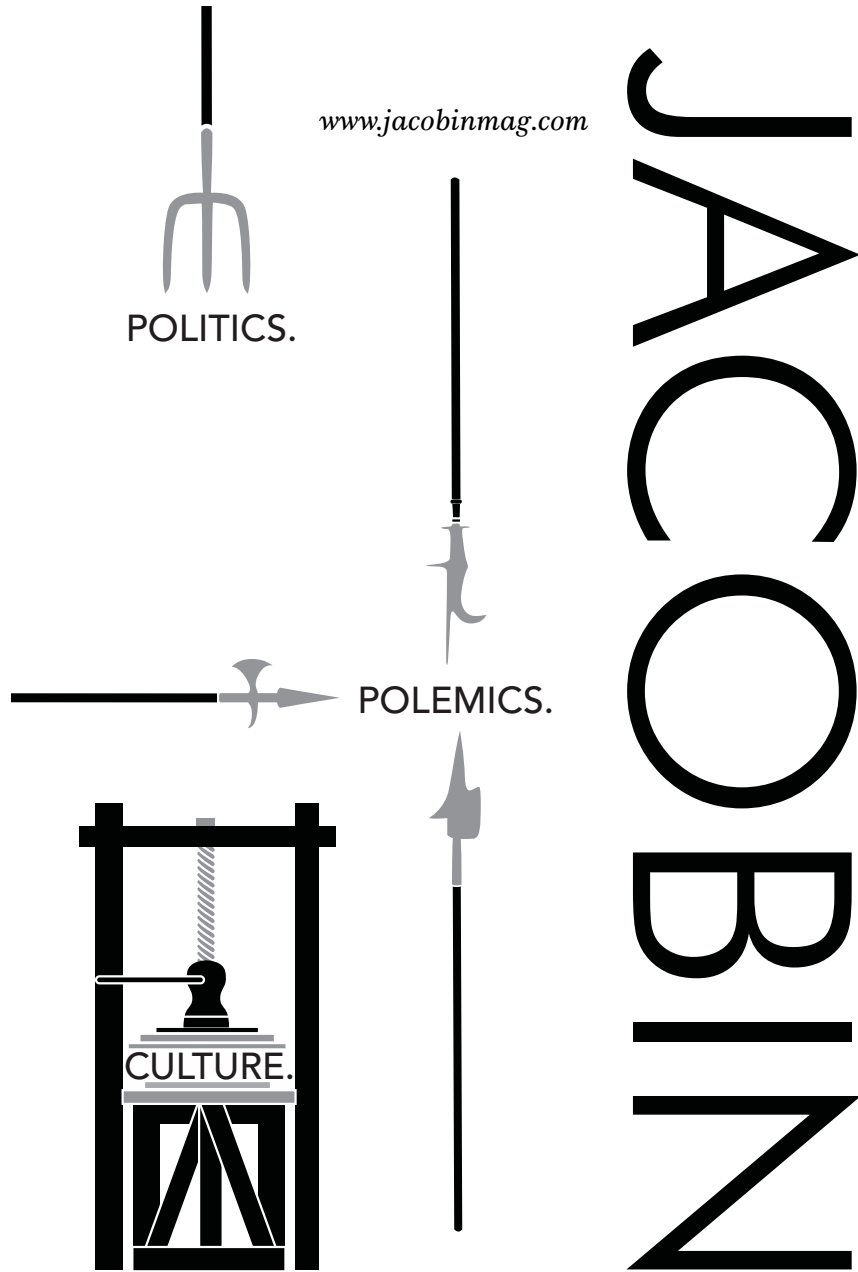
The following popular slogan captures quite accurately the public sentiment: “Burn the parliament down, it is a bordello.”

over the working class movement. It also lacks any clear vision for programmatic change and confines itself to anti-capitalist rhetoric. (The extreme right is also gaining in strength, but its leadership is keener on becoming part of a future government coalition than instigating social unrest). At this juncture, the biggest bloc of voters seem to be angry and frustrated citizens who have become fed up with politics in the traditional sense and with politics as usual. The extent to which this segment of the citizenry may emerge in the near future as a potent social force to be reckoned with remains unknown, but the chances for this happening are rather slim given the very broad and diverse background of their participants.

The future of Greece in general, and possibly of the eurozone periphery, is also rather grim. Germany and the northern EU countries have shown clear unwillingness to deal with the European sovereign debt crisis (lack of support for the European project is far greater among the citizens of the northern European countries than it is among the southern EU member states) in a firm and decisive way. As a result, Spain and

Italy have already become a target of the bond vigilantes, and countries like France and Belgium will certainly be next. But the game may not go into any extra innings if Spain and Italy begin to show signs of insolvency. Unlike Greece, the size of those economies is too big to be rescued. At that point, the party is all over and several EU

member states may be forced to return to their national currencies. This would be a great pity, but one cannot ignore the fact that the EU institutions have become a bastion of the neoliberal project and that the European project itself is turning into a scary dystopian nightmare.



The District of Columbia: From the Oldest Colony to the 51st State?

BILL MOSLEY

ON A WARM EVENING in early April, a rally on Washington, DC's Capitol Hill took a turn for the dramatic when protestors surged into Constitution Avenue, blocking rush-hour traffic. U.S. Capitol police arrested 41 of the demonstrators, among them District of Columbia Mayor Vince Gray and six members of the DC Council.

Protests in Washington are a common sight, but one featuring the arrest of much of the city's elected leadership is not. Their grievance: As part of the deal to prevent a shutdown of the federal government, Congress — with the acquiescence of President Obama — had just banned the District from using its own money to pay for abortions for low-income women, and had revived a private-school voucher program that many local officials and residents opposed. “John, I will give you DC abortion,” Obama was quoted by the *Washington Post* as telling House Speaker John Boehner,¹ words that outraged DC residents, most of whom were — or had been until that moment — strong supporters of the President. Once again, DC residents were reminded of the extent to which they lack the rights of other U.S. citizens.

It's a sad fact, but too few Americans are aware that their nation's capital is a colony within the mainland of our country — “the Canal Zone in the United States,” in the words of the late Congressman Adam Clayton Powell.² Since

the District of Columbia's founding more than two centuries ago, the city's residents have been denied the democratic rights that Americans living in the 50 states take for granted, including voting representation in Congress and control over their own legislation, budgets, courts, and prison system. Among all countries with elected national legislatures, only the United States denies voting representation to the citizens of its nation's capital.³ District residents could not even vote for President until 1964, after the ratification of the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution. However, DC residents — unlike those of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the other overseas U.S. colonies — pay their full share of federal income taxes, among the highest per-capita in the country.

While the budget deal was the trigger for the April demonstrations, two centuries of disenfranchisement were the fuel. And for Mayor Gray and many of the other protestors, the demonstration was not only to register outrage but also to promote a solution: making DC the 51st state.

Origins of DC's Disenfranchisement

THE STORY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA's struggle against disenfranchisement goes back nearly to the founding of the republic. Just after the end of the American Revolution, as Congress was gathered in Philadelphia debating, among other issues, where to locate the permanent seat of government, an incident occurred that influenced the future course of relations between the national government and the not-yet-embryonic capital city. In June 1783 a group of armed Continental Army soldiers marched

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on the State House, seat of both Congress and the Pennsylvania Executive Council, demanding back pay for their service in the Revolution. Congress, which had no armed force under its control, demanded that the Executive Council call out the state militia to confront the soldiers, but the Council refused, instead meeting with a delegation of the soldiers and defusing the

Instead of home rule, District residents had been handed “home fool,” in the derisive words of Councilmember Julius Hobson.

tension.

A number of members of Congress, notably Alexander Hamilton, cited the incident as evidence that the capital needed to be under the firm control of Congress, and this notion was soon the consensus among the early nation’s leadership. But was it justified? A number of historians have concluded that Hamilton and his allies had always wanted Congress to control the capital city, and manipulated the Philadelphia incident to build their case. By some accounts, Congress was under no real threat of harm, but Hamilton exaggerated the danger in order to gain control of the future capital for Congress.⁴

As a result, at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 — at which Hamilton played a leading role — the delegates adopted the following clause, which became part of the U.S. Constitution when it was ratified the following year: “Congress shall have power . . . to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular states, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States. . . .” The spot chosen was a 10-mile-square diamond of land

on the Potomac River, just north of George Washington’s estate, with land ceded by Maryland and Virginia.

This paragraph had the effect of consigning the residents of the future District of Columbia — only about 11,000 at its founding (including the existing cities of Alexandria on the Virginia side of the river and Georgetown, formerly part of Maryland)⁵ but numbering more than 600,000 today — to more than two centuries of barely second-class citizenship. Yet while certain members of the Constitutional Convention were determined that the federal government have firm control over the capital, a number of founding fathers made clear that they did not envision the complete disenfranchisement of the capital’s residents. “The inhabitants [of the capital] will have their voice in the election of the government which is to exercise authority over them, as a municipal legislature for local purposes, derived from their own suffrages, will of course be allowed them,” wrote James Madison in Federalist Paper No. 43. In Federalist Paper No. 85, Hamilton added that “[p]rovision shall be made by Congress for having District representation in that Body” when the population reached some unspecified number.⁶

Early History under Congressional Rule

OVER THE ENSUING TWO CENTURIES, the issue of DC’s disenfranchisement was periodically addressed by DC residents and federal officials alike. With the Revolutionary War slogan “No Taxation Without Representation” still a fresh memory, DC residents issued the same complaint immediately after their congressional voting rights in Maryland or Virginia were revoked in 1801.⁷ These complaints resulted in no representation, but Congress did grant Washington an elected council in 1802 and an elected mayor in 1820, albeit with Congress still ultimately exercising legislative control. The Virginia side of DC was eager to become part of a state again, as much to prevent abolitionists in Congress from freeing their slaves as to regain full citizenship,

and Congress granted its wish in 1846, returning the territory to slaveholding Virginia.

Nevertheless, there were reasons why demands for expanded local autonomy were fairly muted in those days. In the city's early days, many of the residents were new arrivals (an even larger proportion than today), drawn by the opportunities opened by the presence of the government; these people had little interest in local issues. And then there was the matter of race.

Race has been a major factor in the District's quest for equality, as it has in so many facets of American life. As early as 1800, the District had a substantial African-American population, both free and enslaved. After the Civil War, Congress granted local voting rights to African-Americans in the District. This provoked resistance among whites in DC, many of whom preferred disenfranchisement to being governed by blacks (and Radical Republicans, elected with substantial black support, controlled the local government from 1868 to 1870).⁸ As a result, there was little objection from whites when Congress established a territorial government in 1871, with a federally appointed governor and upper house of the legislature, nor in 1874 when Congress ended all vestiges of local democracy and established a three-member, federally appointed commission to oversee the District. This was the way DC would be governed for the next century.

Even so, during these years there were numerous pleas from DC residents for home rule and congressional representation. But these requests largely fell on deaf ears in Congress. And as the African-American population swelled after World War II, Congress — with DC affairs overseen by largely Southern legislators such as John McMillan, a Jim Crow Democrat from South Carolina — had even less interest in helping the District. The late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, a longtime friend of expanded political rights for the District, cited the “four ‘toos” as a reason that certain members of Congress op-

posed greater democratic rights, especially voting representation: they feared that members of Congress elected from DC “would be too liberal, too urban, too black, and too Democratic.”⁹

The owners of large businesses in the District, represented by the Greater Washington Board of Trade, also stood in the way of home rule. They were comfortable with congressional oversight and fought any proposal to create a local government that might have the power to interfere with their ability to do as they pleased. “The white business community . . . held more political power than the three commissioners,” wrote journalists Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, longtime observers of DC politics. “The businessmen simply leapfrogged the commissioners and went straight to McMillan’s committee.”¹⁰

Civil Rights Movement Comes to DC

DURING THE 1950S AND 1960S, many African-American civil-rights activists moved to DC to work with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and other organizations. Once they arrived and experienced the disenfranchisement that came with living in the District, many became involved in the campaign for local democracy. The experience and energy these activists brought with them infused new life into an old struggle.

One of the new arrivals was Marion Barry, an activist from Tennessee who moved to DC in 1965 to open a branch office of SNCC. Barry quickly became involved in local issues, organizing a one-day boycott against the local bus operator over a fare hike in 1966. Shortly afterward he dove into the struggle for self-government for the District, launching the “Free DC” movement. Because the Board of Trade opposed home rule, Barry demanded that local businesses (which were mostly white-owned) display stickers in support of a local elected government, or face a customer boycott if they did not. This in-your-face activism and the

wide publicity it generated established Barry as a political force in the District.

By the late 1960s, a number of developments had turned in the District's favor, most significantly the home-rule movement's becoming linked to the nationwide civil rights movement, and a national government — with Lyndon Johnson in the White House and strong Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress — more supportive than ever before of the aspirations of African-Americans and, by extension, those of the District, with a population at the time that was more than 70 percent black.

Then, on April 4, 1968, came the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the ensuing riots. Washington was not the only city to experience rioting after the assassination, but the violence was especially severe in the nation's capital, with 12 deaths and millions of dollars in property damage, most of it in predominantly African-American neighborhoods.¹¹

Was it only coincidental that Congress, in the several years following the riots, approved more legislation to advance DC political rights than ever before or since? While the riots were not triggered by the lack of home rule, clearly there had been a simmering frustration in the majority African-American city with Congress' heavy-handed control that contributed to the anger and intensity of the riots. The uprising served as a wake-up call to members of Congress, who realized that their own safety depended on calm and order in the city where they conducted their business and many of them lived — and that law enforcement alone might not be sufficient to keep the peace. “For once, someone in power was actually afraid of this city,” journalist Sam Smith commented.¹²

BETWEEN 1968 AND 1974, Congress approved legislation giving DC an elected school board, a delegate to the House of Representatives (who could serve on and vote in committees, but not on the House floor), and finally, with the Home Rule Act, a mayor and

13-member council to be elected by District voters. The first election for the new local government took place in 1974. Marion Barry, who had been one of the first elected school board members, was elected to the DC Council, while Walter Washington was elected mayor.

Beyond Home Rule

MOST DISTRICT RESIDENTS welcomed these new avenues of civic participation, but many realized that the new rights still left them short of full citizenship. Instead of home rule, District residents had been handed “home fool,” in the derisive words of Councilmember Julius Hobson.¹³ DC's representative to the House had no floor vote (the same arrangement made for the U.S. overseas colonies) and the District had no voice in the Senate at all. In addition, Congress still retained its constitutional “exclusive legislation” authority over the District; legislation and budgets adopted by the local Council were still subject to congressional review, and Congress, if it wished, could simply enact legislation and impose it on the District, whether local residents wanted it or not.

And Congress made extensive use of its legislative control, often the work of Republicans eager to win points with their constituencies by imposing conservative social policies on the mostly liberal, Democratic District. Over the subsequent years it blocked numerous initiatives of the DC government, mostly through riders on the local DC appropriations bill (even though only a small percentage of the DC budget consists of federal funding, Congress must approve the entire budget — including funds raised through local taxes — through an annual appropriations bill). Many of these budget riders targeted policies adopted by the liberal-to-progressive District government that Congress, usually during periods of Republican control, found distasteful. These riders blocked such local initiatives as a medical marijuana program, city benefits for the unmarried domestic partners of DC employees, and needle

exchange programs for intravenous drug users to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. The latter prohibition, while satisfying the need of some members of Congress to pander to conservative constituencies in their home districts, has had especially deadly consequences for DC residents: 3 percent of District residents are infected with HIV or AIDS, the highest rate of any city in the nation.¹⁴

Yet even before the first Home Rule government had settled into its offices, a number of local leaders and activists had begun discussing how the District might advance beyond the unsatisfactory limitations of “home fool.” By the early 1970s, three competing ideas each had gained a substantial number of adherents: (1) returning, or “retroceding,” most of the District to Maryland; (2) a constitutional amendment for full voting representation in both the House and Senate; and (3) making the District the 51st U.S. state.

There was a precedent for retrocession: the return of Virginia’s portion of the District in 1846. Return of the remainder to Maryland, with the carve-out of federal lands and properties to satisfy the constitutional requirement for a federal district, would provide voting representation in Congress through Maryland’s delegation. It also would end the federal government’s legislative control of the retroceded territory, although in its place the city would inherit the Maryland state government’s oversight. However, polls consistently have shown that the majority of District residents don’t want to be part of Maryland, and most Marylanders don’t want the District.¹⁵ Given these feelings, somehow forcing a shotgun marriage between the two jurisdictions would be the most blatant offense against self-determination.

The idea of the constitutional amendment for voting representation had greater support, and advocates of DC voting representation — spearheaded by then-DC Delegate Walter Fauntroy — succeeded in lobbying Congress to approve a constitutional amendment in 1978

that would give the District two voting senators and one voting member of the House. However, the amendment was ratified by only 16 states, well short of the required 38, and died when the seven-year ratification window closed in 1985.

Yet even before the constitutional amendment was taken up by Congress, a number of DC citizens were hatching a different solution for their disenfranchisement: statehood.

Growth of DC Statehood Movement

WHY APPARENTLY NO ONE PROPOSED DC statehood prior to the 1970s could be laid to a variety of factors: the District’s small size and population, and its economic dependence on the federal government, were certainly major considerations. But by the 1970s the District was a much different place than it had been during the Reconstruction era, or even prior to World War II. It had a population of over 700,000, larger than that of 10 states, with tax revenues sufficient to support a variety of local programs without depending on federal support.

THE IDEA OF SEEKING STATEHOOD for the District first appeared in print in 1970, advocated by Sam Smith in his newsletter *DC Gazette*.¹⁶ But would it be legal or constitutional for the District of Columbia to become a state? Statehood supporters, as well as a number of constitutional lawyers, argued that it would be.¹⁷ The Constitution sets a maximum limit on the size of the federal district (10 miles square, or 100 square miles) but no minimum size. The original 100-square-mile District already had been sliced to 68 square miles following the return of Virginia’s portion. Therefore, it should be possible to further reduce the constitutionally mandated “district” to the uninhabited areas of central Washington where federal buildings, museums and monuments were located (the same argument made by the retrocessionists) and to allow the populated portions of the District to become a separate state.

THE STATEHOOD MOVEMENT gained momentum through the 1970s — there was even a local political party, the Statehood Party, launched with the achievement of statehood as a principal goal. Julius Hobson, running as a Statehood Party candidate, was elected in 1974

On a number of occasions Obama stated his support for statehood. But it was never more than passive support.

as a member of the first DC Council under home rule; after his death in 1977, Statehood Party member Hilda H.M. Mason succeeded him and served another two decades. The election of Marion Barry, a Democrat, as mayor in 1978 was cause for further optimism among statehood supporters: the founder of the Free DC movement, a charismatic politician with deep support in the African-American community as well as substantial backing from the white establishment, was now the public face of the District.

The next step was to petition Congress for statehood. In 1980 statehood backers placed a referendum on the ballot to determine if voters supported statehood; 60 percent voted yes.¹⁸ Two years later a convention of elected citizens drew up a constitution for the new state-in-the-making — to be called New Columbia.

Getting citizen approval for statehood was one thing; actually achieving statehood was another. Many District elected officials, still wedded to pursuing only voting representation in Congress, did not regard statehood as a priority (although there were exceptions, notably Mason). Also, the 1980s were a time of Republican control of the White House —

first Ronald Reagan, then George H.W. Bush — making it likely that any statehood bill that survived Congress would die by veto.

By 1993, however, the political balance in Washington had shifted. Bill Clinton, a Democrat who professed support for DC statehood, was in the White House, and both houses of Congress had strong Democratic majorities. Many DC statehood advocates saw this as a propitious time to move forward — Democrats in Congress should be eager to allow the heavily Democratic District to add members to their caucuses in the House and Senate.

But, justified or not, many members of Congress, including some Democrats, concluded that the District was not ready for statehood. A fiscal crisis was unfolding in the District, one exacerbated by the inherent limitations of an enclave under control of the federal government. The District was prohibited by Congress from assessing a tax on the income of suburban commuters, costing the city more than \$2 billion annually in potential revenue. A high proportion of the District's land was occupied by entities that paid no property tax — principally the federal government, but also embassies, international institutions, and non-profit organizations. Moreover, as part of the 1974 home rule bill, the federal government had saddled the local government with unfunded liability for the pensions of DC government employees, a mounting bill that had grown to \$4.8 billion by 1997.¹⁹ These handicaps, along with the continued flight of the District's tax base to the suburbs, had by the mid-1990s led to steep and growing budget deficits.²⁰

In addition, crime was rising steeply in the District — as it was across most of urban America — fueled by the rise of crack cocaine. The crack epidemic, which was sweeping cities across the United States, hit DC especially hard, bringing with a wave of violent crime that gave the District the unwanted nickname of the “Murder Capital” of America. And then, in 1990, Mayor Barry was arrested in an FBI sting

for possession of crack. It was a dark moment for the District and its hopes of expanded self-rule.

Nevertheless, after several years of effort by Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, the statehood bill reached the floor of the House of Representatives in 1993. But with the reputation of the nation's capital at an all-time low, many congressional Democrats felt the time was not ripe for DC statehood. The bill failed, 153 to 277, with 40 percent of House Democrats, along with nearly every Republican, voting no.²¹

DC Democracy Moves Backward

OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, the District's reputation on Capitol Hill only grew worse. Barry had left office in 1991 — en route to trial for drug possession and six months in prison — but under new mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly crime continued to rise and the fiscal crisis snowballed. Public dissatisfaction with Kelly's administration led to her defeat for re-election in 1994, to be replaced by — Marion Barry.

Barry's comeback from his drug conviction to reclaim the mayor's office is one of the remarkable political stories of recent decades. Clearly, many African-American voters saw their own experiences reflected in the FBI sting against Barry. They felt themselves frequently targeted for harassment by the police, and resented the harsh penalties and aggressive enforcement against crack possession — while users of cocaine powder, who were much more likely to be white and affluent, faced much more lenient potential penalties and relatively lax enforcement. While members of Congress and many white Washingtonians were appalled by Barry's return to power, many African-Americans saw Barry's rehabilitation as a story of justice and redemption.

The redemption narrative, however, found few sympathizers on Capitol Hill. And Congress retaliated against the District for making what it considered the “wrong” choice in the election. In 1995 it created a Control Board and endowed it with complete authority over

the District's finances — DC would need the board's approval before spending any of its own money. In 1996 Congress transferred control over DC schools from the elected school board to a Board of Trustees, answerable not to voters but to the Control Board. And in 1997 Congress went further by effectively stripping the local government of nearly all its powers, making the Control Board not only the financial authority of the District but the legislative and executive arms as well. The mayor and council continued to show up for work, but they had virtually no power.

Assaults on DC Revive the Democracy Struggle

THE DC GOVERNMENT may have lost its powers, but the movement for greater local autonomy — which had gone into eclipse after the failed statehood vote — was energized by the congressional power grab. Immediately after the news broke, citizens began meeting to organize demonstrations and discuss strategy. The most visible and enduring organization to arise out of the 1997 activities was the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, which was led initially by a number of prominent figures from the civil rights movement (including Jesse Jackson Sr., Walter Fauntroy, and National Council of Negro Women President Dorothy Height) and which borrowed its slogan — “Free DC!” — from Barry's former organization. Indeed, many of Stand Up!'s early members were Barry supporters angry at the federal government's stripping away of his powers. Yet Stand Up! also attracted many longtime statehood and democracy activists who remained active in the movement longer after Barry, and many Barry supporters, had moved on.

In August 1997, Stand Up! helped to organize a bus caravan to North Carolina. Their target: Republican Senator Lauch Faircloth, the architect of the bill that stripped the District government of its local powers. Some 600 DC activists brought the District's concerns directly

to Faircloth's constituents, registering them to vote and educating them about how much of their Senator's schedule was occupied by the affairs of a jurisdiction 300 hundred miles distant from those he was allegedly representing. (The trip no doubt played at least a small part in Faircloth's defeat by John Edwards for re-election the following year). For much of the rest of that year, Stand Up! and its allies held almost-weekly demonstrations against Congress, many of them resulting in participants being arrested.²²

With the end of the 1990s came three developments that, along with the more vigorous pro-democracy activism, offered greater hope for expansion of DC's right to govern itself: (1) improvements in the national economy that erased the red ink of past decades and yielded local budget surpluses, (2) a sharp drop in the crime rate; and (3) Marion Barry's departure as mayor. Barry was replaced as mayor by Tony Williams, who rose to prominence as the Control Board-appointed chief financial officer and the reputed financial wizard who put the District's tattered finances back in order. Congress approved of DC's selection and restored the governing powers of the mayor, council, and school board — that is, to their pre-1997 state, still subject to intervention by Congress and the still-operating Control Board, but with much more room to maneuver than during Barry's final term. Then in 2001, after several years of prosperity and four consecutive balanced DC budgets, the Control Board closed its doors.

Statehood vs. Congressional Representation

YET FOR MUCH OF THE FOLLOWING DECADE, the focus drifted away from full statehood and toward a plan to achieve only voting representation in Congress. The shift became apparent after 20 DC residents filed a federal lawsuit in 1998 asking for the courts to make it possible for DC residents to either choose statehood or to unite with another state. Hard on its heels came a competing lawsuit, filed by a different

group of residents, asking only for congressional representation. The federal courts combined the two suits, where they were eventually rejected by the Supreme Court.²³

The prospects of congressional representation received a boost when Rep. Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican and chairman of one of the House committees overseeing DC affairs, took up the cause. Davis was not a supporter of statehood, in part because his constituents would be subject to the commuter tax that the new state would be likely to adopt. But he was more sympathetic to the District's plight than most Republicans, and he saw an opportunity to make voting representation for the District palatable to members of his party. Following the 2000 census, Utah fell just short of being able to add another congressional district. Creating an additional congressional district in predominantly Republican Utah while at the same time giving overwhelmingly Democratic DC a voting seat would, David hoped, allow for bipartisan support for DC voting representation.

And so in 2005, Davis introduced a bill to expand the House from 435 to 437 members, with the added seats going to Utah and the District. The bill would provide no representation in the Senate and would not address other aspects of the District's disenfranchisement, such as congressional control of the District's legislation and budgets.

Many of DC's statehood advocates were, at best, lukewarm about the Davis bill; many complained that it would leave them far short of — and divert attention from the struggle for — full citizenship. But the bill gained support from most DC elected officials, including the mayor and Delegate Norton, for whom a deal on the table was preferable to chasing a distant dream. But there was another factor, largely tied up in the politics of race and class. Affluent, well-connected Washingtonians — mostly white — had long resented their lack of a vote for Congress, but many were less than enthusiastic about the idea of giving the local government

more authority. Just as whites in the post-Civil War District were opposed to opening the door even a crack to African-American political empowerment, so were many whites a century later mistrustful of African-American leadership. Many white DC residents who worked on Capitol Hill, in federal agencies or for the various lobbying firms and pressure groups had connections to members of Congress or their senior staffers — often they were neighbors. These Washingtonians who had connections and knowledge of how to work the system appreciated their ability to go over the heads of the local government if its actions displeased them. “One of the city’s deepest secrets is how many of its elites — both white and black — have never really liked the idea of self-government. They would rather use their Rolodexes than the ballot box,” wrote Sam Smith in 1998.²⁴

In addition, Washington — more so than most large cities — features a large elite class of newly arrived political appointees, Congressional staffers, public-interest workers and others with a strong desire to have a voice on Capitol Hill but little interest in local government. “The city’s mandarin class is mainly interested in national politics. It is perfectly happy to have city services provided under a dictatorship but is frustrated by its lack of leverage in Congress,” Smith wrote.²⁵ Among these elites were the large, Board-of-Trade connected corporations doing business in DC (many of them headquartered elsewhere) who, like in the days of Barry’s Free DC movement, opposed an empowered local government that could challenge their prerogatives. Mere voting representation posed no similar threat to their interests.

Also, Barry’s return to the mayor’s office after his drug conviction — in which he received heavy support from blacks but very little from whites — led many whites to believe (whether justified or not) that they would achieve better results being ruled from Congress than by their own locally elected government.

Despite elite support for the voting-rights

bill, a number of constitutional scholars and other critics of the bill — many of whom were sympathetic to the District’s effort to end its disenfranchisement — pointed to its dubious constitutionality.²⁶ The language of the Constitution clearly referred to the right to vote for members of Congress as deriving from statehood (Article 1, Section 1 reads: “The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States”). If simple legislation was sufficient, why had the District previously taken the much harder (and ultimately unsuccessful) route of a constitutional amendment?

Nevertheless, District leaders and a newly formed advocacy group, DC Vote (which was heavily funded by DC government grants), lobbied Congress for passage of the Davis bill. They argued that pairing a vote for DC with an additional House seat for Utah gave the bill a good chance to be enacted, a much better chance than a bill for full statehood — which, they argued, could be pursued at some unidentified time in the future. They also produced their own legal experts who vouched for the bill’s constitutionality. Delegate Norton argued that the District would not be ready for statehood until it regained control of state-type functions such as prisons and courts, which the federal government had taken over in 1997 as a measure to help balance the local budget. Statehood advocates countered by pointing out that statehood would open new streams of revenue to the District, especially a commuter tax, enabling the new state to re-assume and pay for these functions.

Voting-rights advocates were still trying to push the Davis bill through Congress when Barack Obama was elected president in 2008. The accession of a Democratic, African-American, reputedly liberal president to the White House energized activists in the capital city whose residents shared so many of his characteristics. The District had favored Obama with 93 percent of its vote in the election, and had reason to expect Obama would reciprocate by making

expanded rights for DC a priority. Indeed, on a number of occasions Obama stated his support for statehood, including in a brief exchange with Stand Up! President Anise Jenkins. But it was never more than passive support; the economic recession, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the new health-care initiative dominated the White House agenda during the early Obama years.

However, the Davis voting-rights bill gained adherents, and in 2009 the Senate approved the legislation — with a catch. Members of Congress allied to the gun lobby had long attempted to repeal the District’s restrictions on ownership of handguns, among the strongest in the nation. Gun laws are the province of state governments, but given the District’s colonial status, Congress can impose measures on the District that they cannot in their own districts, or anywhere else in the country. A 2008 Supreme Court decision had struck down some of the more stringent provisions, but the District still required guns to be registered and kept in the home. So the pro-gun Senators, led by Republican John Ensign of Nevada (who later resigned after it was discovered that he had paid hush money to a former staffer to keep quiet about an affair the senator was having with his wife), tied an amendment to the voting rights bill, which would effectively eliminate all restrictions on guns in the District. If passed, all manner of unregistered guns, including assault weapons, could be concealed or carried in the open practically everywhere in the District, including into schools, playgrounds and DC government buildings (but not the U.S. Capitol; the members’ appreciation for the proliferation of guns didn’t extend that far).

This was too much for the District leadership to swallow, even in exchange for voting rights. Delegate Norton, after failing to strip the gun provision from the House version of the bill, in 2010 asked the House leadership to drop the legislation. Five years of lobbying, compromises and deal cutting to win voting representation in

the House had come to naught. The death of the voting-rights bill was an illustration of its own limitations: while it would have given the District one vote out of 437 in the House, it still would have left DC subject to the legislative whims of Congress.

Hard on the heels of the defeat of the voting rights bill came the 2010 congressional elections, in which Republicans took control of the House — with many of the new members coming out of, or lending an ear to, the hard-right Tea Party movement. Any prospects for expanded DC rights through congressional legislation had evaporated — indeed; the District now would have to defend itself against a new round of onslaughts against its limited home rule.

2011 and Beyond — Statehood Takes Center Stage

YET THESE SETBACKS may have pointed the way forward for the DC democracy movement. With the backroom dealing on Capitol Hill over the voting rights bill having come to naught, there is a growing realization that the District cannot rely on “friends” in Congress or the White House, and that more of the impetus for change will have to come from local residents themselves. A stronger, more assertive movement is needed, the kind that was displayed in the April arrests. Ultimately, the disenfranchised District of Columbia must make its voice heard throughout the country and the world, striking the consciences of all people who cherish democracy and human rights. If Americans could subject themselves to arrest for democracy in South Africa, or be willing to fight to remove a dictator in Iraq, surely they could join the movement for equal rights for 600,000 U.S. citizens in the nation’s capital.

ANOTHER LESSON of the voting rights debacle is that settling for half-measures is a fool’s errand (perhaps a “home fool’s” errand, to paraphrase Julius Hobson). Under the Constitution, only statehood confers full citizenship in

the United States. That is the path chosen by District citizens, and more residents and elected officials are coming to the realization that statehood, and nothing less, should be the goal.

AFTER THE DEFEAT OF THE ONE-VOTE BILL, Delegate Norton reintroduced legislation for voting representation — but along with it, a bill for DC statehood. “We accept no imposed limits on our equal rights as American citizens, and we will pursue them all until the day when there is no difference in citizenship between the residents of the District of Columbia and other American citizens,” Norton said in introducing the legislation.²⁷ Although there was little immediate prospect of any of the bills passing, or even getting a hearing, her decision to revive the statehood effort in Congress was evidence of the growing voice of the local statehood movement.

In his inaugural address last January, Mayor Gray signaled the DC leadership’s new outlook when he said, “Washington is the greatest symbol of our nation’s democracy. Yet, we as Washingtonians continue to be the only people in our nation that remain shut out of that democracy. . . That is why we cannot rest until we achieve true self-determination and become our nation’s 51st state.”²⁸

Now that there is no near-term prospect of favorable action by Congress, DC activists and officials should turn their attention to organizing the citizens of DC, and reaching out to supporters of human rights everywhere, in order to build a powerful movement to achieve what the District wants and needs — statehood. The day will come when the makeup of Congress will lead it to be more sympathetic to the District’s appeal for statehood. But DC will win the day only if the local statehood movement is strong enough to force Congress to do the right thing.

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Letter from Ireland

Queen Lizzy's Tour of Shame

LILY MURPHY

HERE'S ANOTHER ONE for the Irish history books: Queen Elizabeth II making a state visit to the Republic of Ireland, the first British monarch to do so since 1911. The visit began on May 18, and massive security made sure that most of the island was experiencing a lock down. She and her husband, Phillip, made Dublin their first port of call. The buildup to the royal visit was intense: Dublin, Kildare, Tipperary, and Cork — the locations where she was due to visit — all felt the wrath of severe security checks in the weeks leading up to the state visit by the Queen. But weeks of worry seemed to ebb away as the five day visit gradually turned into a five day buddy fest: once enemies now the best of friends, and maybe the books have now been closed on what was once a very volatile relationship with our nearest neighbor, Britain.

Maturity is the key to making peace. In 1998 when the Good Friday agreement was signed and the foundations of the Northern Ireland peace process were finally put in place, the island of Ireland with those of the orange and green traditions decided to mature and accept that no matter what, this little island on the fringe of Europe will always have two peoples of separate traditions. Yet the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II had been hailed in the mainstream media as historic, and no doubt it was, but we must not fall into that media-driven trap and come out with short memories.

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A British monarch is more than welcome as a visitor to these shores. We are after all the island of a thousand welcomes, but with the last thirty years of trouble in the north of Ireland still fresh in many minds, a groundbreaking speech was highly anticipated with an apology for many centuries of colonial harassment. But when the time came for that speech in Dublin Castle at a state dinner it left many people surprised, surprised that no such apology was given to the people of Ireland and surprise that the queen began her speech with a few words in Irish. She even called us all *chaired*, the Irish word for friends. In the speech she declared her deep sympathy for all those who had suffered in centuries of conflict between Britain and Ireland; it was as near an apology as we could get.

The royal visit in 1911 brought many Irish citizens to the streets declaring their loyalty to the crown. Just ten years later the Irish came back out on the streets declaring their hatred of the crown! Yes we can be a back-stabbing bunch of bastards when we want to! My tip: never trust a Union Jack-waving Irish man, he may rebel when your back is turned! But not this time though. We have parted ways with our rebellious streak and are now much more concentrated on getting our capitalist machine back working again, the same capitalist way of life which was broken by those who made it — the banks, the government, and the great greed. So fast forward one hundred years from 1911 which was a very impoverished place for ordinary Irish people and King George V, who rode by in his fine carriage along the Union Jack-laden streets of Dublin while the incredibly poor were eking out a living in the filthy slums

where a high infant mortality rate was rampant. But some did protest at the royal visit in 1911, and James Connolly was one of those who protested at the visit of a royal to the impoverished streets of Dublin. In 2011, fortunately, the slums are gone. Unfortunately maybe even

We have parted ways with our rebellious streak and are now much more concentrated on getting our capitalist machine back working again, the same capitalist way of life which was broken by those who made it — the banks, the government, and the great greed.

the revolutionary minds are gone too, but we are still somewhat poor, a little advanced yes, advanced to the point where we can determine our financial woes with a Facebook status, but nonetheless we have come full circle, back to being poor in pocket but rich in hypocrisy.

The last royal visit in 1911 created a surge in loyal support among the vast public, except for the rebellious few who were to go on and make their mark a decade later. This time around I doubt if we will ever return to our roots as troublesome cabbage-eating, dynamite-loving outlaws as the British had so often times painted us. So now Queen Elizabeth has come and seen for herself how we've done since we left the royal fold in 1922. And what better way than to bring her to places such as Croke Park, where in 1921 British troops entered onto the pitch in the middle of a Gaelic football match between Dublin and Tipperary and opened fire on the players and spectators, and to the garden of remembrance which honors our leaders of 1916

who were executed on the orders of the British government. Yes, she was brought to these sights on what I jokingly coined "the tour of shame!"

The glamorous grime that is the royal family attracts people as a car crash does. The monarchy is a tired establishment and I find it rather bizarre that even in this day and age royalty is still around, and what is worse, they are getting away with it! The royal visit did draw interest from some slack-jawed natives who came out to see the royal visitors, but high security became a great deterrent to many others who stayed at home and watched the visit on TV. The royal visit had been dressed up as a boost for tourism in Ireland even though the dogs on the street know that such a thing is absurd. The English tourist has always been a stable entity of Irish tourism; the arrival of Queen Elizabeth will not change that; she didn't send a postcard back to her subjects in England saying "wish you were 'ere!" So while she was in Ireland, the Queen could have taken the opportunity and followed in the footsteps of many of her fellow countrymen to the hotspots in the capital, most notably Temple Bar which transforms into British stag party central most weekends. Ah, yes, can you not just see herself and Phillip knocking back shots in The Quays pub, then upchucking their guts on the cobble stones, then getting picked up in a paddy wagon. "One will have a bastard of a hangover after one's adventure to Ireland!"

So considering how much of a financial fuck-up we are currently in as a nation, the visit was nothing more than a symbolic gesture, and more than likely the state will be a long time afterwards paying for that symbolic gesture, but can a price be paid on reconciliation? I guess not. So now that the Queen's visit to Ireland is done and dusted, pro-monarchy media have jizzed themselves at the excitement of the royal visit by declaring "how far" we have come as a nation since 1922, and singing of the progress which will be made from the royal visit. But I say progress is all very well and good, but sometimes Progress can also be a royal pain in the arse.

Why the Korean School System Is Not Superior

SE HOON PARK

IN TRYING TO ASSEMBLE my thoughts on comparing Korean and American schools, I have to start with my personal experience. In fact, please keep the following in mind: I am not better than you in evaluating education systems; I am just a middle-aged man who lives next door and has 9- and 11-year-old kids. This article does not aim to define the Korean school system or rigidly evaluate its pros and cons. My own analysis of some of the ideology behind the Korean school system is entirely based on experience, rather than any formal knowledge.

Midway through my first year as an assistant professor at a Korean medical school, I happened to see a medical school applicant with a distinctive career in the room of the dean. Her CV revealed that she had graduated from a college with a very high score and had done medical research for a couple of years afterwards. I watched as the dean reviewed the CV and then told her that, although her medical education eligibility test (MEET) score was satisfactory, we needed “more time to consider.” As we left the room, the dean shook her hand and said, “We’ll see how you do in our school.” However, when we filled out the meeting sheet outside of the room, I pointed out to the dean that he had not signed the sheet. “Don’t bother,” he said, pointing downward in an exaggerated manner. “She won’t be coming back because

she could not even pass the document review process.” I realized that she, unfortunately, had not graduated from any of the top universities in Korea. I felt a peculiar mixture of shame and disappointment. I should have been glad that I was able to become a faculty member in the university hospital with a “bad” college diploma. But I was also troubled. I recalled the oppressive sense of futility I had felt as a college applicant when I got “not very high” scores in my high school days.

You can see it these days at nearly every home in the Asian countries, including Korea and China: young prodigal kids, sitting at a desk studying English or mathematics by themselves, accompanied by a dutiful parent or private tutor as they take mock tests. If you live next to a Korean or Chinese family, you may notice this duo every day, rain or shine, summer, winter, spring and fall. Thanks to God, Alex and Jane (they are my obedient 9- and 11-year-old kids) look as if they have a promising future. Every time they learn something new there are smiles all around, and after that, it’s almost as if they charge to their next test because they are so excited that they can hardly wait to have the highest score again. Maybe a bright future awaits my kids, maybe not, but it certainly seems as if they are going to enjoy life one way or the other.

Unfortunately, there is another pair of kids and their parents. Of course they sit at the desk after school every day. They are always serious, business-like and quite frankly, gloomy and without any smiles. Seeing them studying something would remind one of military basic training, with the young kids playing the role of the recruits and the parent marching around

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yelling as if he were a rookie instructor. The kids are already very good students in school but I cannot imagine “learning” is ever anything that they would mistake as fun.

Everyone has already heard about the article by Amy Chua, a Yale law professor and self-described “Tiger Mother,” explaining the Chinese Way of raising her children. I happened to finish reading her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* during the writing of this article. Her stories of never accepting a grade lower than an A, of insisting on hours of mathematics and English study, of not allowing play dates, sleepovers, television, computer games, or even school plays, have left many readers outraged.

“To be perfectly honest, I know that a lot of Asian parents are secretly shocked and horrified by many aspects of Western parenting, including how much time Westerners allow their kids to waste — hours on Facebook and computer games — and in some ways, how poorly they prepare them for the future,” she said. “It’s a tough world out there.”

I try not to forget that everyone’s opinion is simply that: their opinion. It is filtered through experiences (or lack thereof) and breadth and depth of knowledge, but it is, and should be, just their own personal opinion. As a typical Korean parent who thinks and behaves in a totally oriental way, I do agree 99 percent with her opinion on Western parenting. Nevertheless, I always wonder if her kids would become happy with merely surviving in this tough world. In Korea, public schools are like the homes in which the “Tiger” teachers live. The traditional school system in Korea was influenced primarily, though not exclusively, by China. Over the centuries, Koreans have learned Confucianism at school in which such “Tiger” teaching and parenting are considered standard. After the Korean War, the Korean school system suffered dramatic changes reflecting those established under the United States occupation. Because of the huge amount of influences from the United States, the current Korean school seems to be a

product finished with hardware from the United States and software made by Confucians.

As you may already know, President Barack Obama has praised the Korean education system more than a few times. “Our children spend over a month less in school than children in

Forty-four percent of Korean students who enter “top” American universities drop out before graduating. This is much higher than the dropout rate for students from China (25 percent), India (21 percent) and even the 34 percent dropout rate for American students at the same universities.

South Korea every year. That’s no way to prepare them for a 21st century economy.” This comes as a shock to many in Korea, land of the “goose father,” international school controversies, constant bitching about private tutoring and never-ending talk of public education reform. According to one Korean news source, “Obama’s remarks came as a surprise to many South Koreans, as the country’s education system has been under constant public criticism due to its lack of creativity and heavy dependence on private tutoring.”

As a result of spending more days in school and many more hours preparing for tests, the Korean system has produced results. Korea has higher high school graduation rates (for those aged 25–34) and university graduation rates than the United States, and while Korea places in the upper ranks of international academic evaluations, the United States finishes in the bottom ranks. Korean students do get high scores on

standardized tests, and apparently that is all that counts.

Of course, the model of school systems varies from country to country because education is affected by the social culture, and because there can be no common solution. One might question whether it would make a difference if you sent American kids to school for the same number of days as Korean kids without first adopting Korea's cultural enthusiasm for education. In fact, and I know I'm stepping onto sensitive ground here, Asian-American kids seem to do just fine in the United States' educational system, despite its many flaws.

As a Korean who recently moved to the United States, I see differences between Korean and American schools. In Korea, physical education is not considered important as it is not regarded to be education, and therefore many schools lack high-quality gymnasiums and varsity athletics. Entering top universities is considered by many a top priority. Diplomas from those top universities would promise us survival in the tough world out there. Most students enrolled in high school apply to colleges at the end of the year. Students will have to take the College Scholastic Ability Test (collectively termed the entrance examination). The curriculum of most schools is structured around the content of the entrance examination. Unlike the American SAT, this test can be taken only once a year and requires intensive studying, some starting preparation as early as kindergarten. No wonder the test lacks subjects like sports, arts, music, or even poetry.

For several decades, the university a South Korean high school graduate attended was perhaps the single most important factor in determining his or her life chances. Thus, entrance into top universities was the focus of intense energy, dedication, and self-sacrifice. Those who failed to enter the prestigious institutions are eventually forced to enter average universities or colleges. Because college entrance depends upon ranking high in objectively graded exami-

nations, high school students face an "examination hell," a harsh regimen of endless cramming and rote memorization of facts that is probably even more severe than the one faced by their counterparts in Japan. Unlike the requirements of most universities in the United States, their ultimate goal is a matter of importance not just for the elite, but for the substantial portion of the population with middle-class aspirations. The Koreans' rate of entrance to university or graduate school was 71 percent in 2010, greatly exceeding the OECD average of 56 percent; those who failed faced dramatically reduced prospects for social and economic advancement.

Most observers agree that South Korea's spectacular progress in modernization and economic growth since the Korean War is largely attributable to the willingness of individuals to invest a large amount of resources in education: the improvement of "human capital." The traditional esteem for the educated man, originally confined to the Confucian scholar as a cultured generalist, now extend to scientists, technicians, and others working with specialized knowledge. Furthermore, statistics demonstrate the success of South Korea's national education programs. In 1945 the adult literacy rate was estimated at 22 percent; by 1970 adult literacy was 87.6 percent, and by the late 1980s various sources estimated it at around 93 percent. South Korean students have performed exceedingly well in international competitions in mathematics and science.

It is problematic that entering top universities is the ultimate goal for many Korean students. Then they would be enjoying freedom after entering "heaven," as they are successful in escaping hell. One critic of the Korean educational system, Dr. Samuel Kim, a senior research scholar at the East Asian Institute of Columbia University, reported that 44 percent of Korean students who enter "top" American universities drop out before graduating. This is much higher than the dropout rate for students from China (25 percent), India (21 percent) and

even the 34 percent dropout rate for American students at the same universities. Essentially, years of extra tutoring prepares Korean students for college entrance exams but not for acquiring a college education. That is, Koreans are so good on international test scores because they work overtime being taught to pass these tests. When they enter the real academic world in college, they do not have the skills necessary to succeed. According to Dr. Kim, such a high dropout rate is largely attributable to Korean parents forcing their children to study rather than participate in extracurricular activities, an essential part of overseas education for foreign students to acclimate themselves to American society and get a good job in the long run. According to the thesis, Korean students consume 75 percent of their time available for studying, while they allocate only 25 percent to extracurricular activities such as community service. In contrast, American students and those from other countries tend to equally share their time for both study and other activities.

Social emphasis on education was not, however, without its problems, as it tended to accentuate class differences. In the late 1980s, possession of a college degree was considered necessary for entering the middle class; there were no alternative pathways of social advancement outside of higher education, with the possible exception of a military career. People without a college education, including skilled workers with vocational school backgrounds, often were treated as second-class citizens by their white-collar, college-educated managers, despite the importance of their skills for economic development. Intense competition for places at the most prestigious universities, the sole gateway into elite circles, promoted, like the old Confucian system, a sterile emphasis on rote memorization in order to pass secondary school and college entrance examinations. Particularly after a dramatic expansion of college

enrollments in the early 1980s, South Korea faced the problem of what to do about a large number of young people kept in school for a long time, usually at great sacrifice to themselves and their families, and then faced with limited job opportunities because their skills were not marketable.

One argument that the leaders of the United States always seem to make in defense of their proposed “school reforms” is that they have to prepare the next generation for 21st Century jobs. Supposedly that is what Korea is doing. Korean children can become the world’s greatest experts on test taking, and some can succeed in entering top universities as they always desired. However, then they finally realize that it is not the end of the tunnel or the gate to a better life. I wonder if President Obama really wants his kids to go to a Korean school. Is he really such a hardcore parent at his home, the White House? Does Mrs. Obama follow the tiger mother’s way? All I can say is does that really matter? Sad. Give American schools a little more credit. As a Korean parent with kids attending American public schools, seeing their American friends at school, there is little to distinguish their desire to learn from that of Korean school students. Often, in fact, there is no distinction at all. Except for languages they speak, and needless to say for their skin colors, they have same potential for learning and achieving anything. Why most haven’t is another matter. Regardless of where you fall in the debate, understanding the pros and cons of the Korean school system will help with your decision. With that said, Alex and Jane (my lovely kids, if you remember) are not looking forward to wandering back into the competition that is the Korean school system, especially in this bad economy. But the fact is, they couldn’t avoid it even if they wanted to.

A fully footnoted version of this article will appear online at www.newpol.org.

The Bible on Community, Poverty, and Riches

RUSSELL PREGEANT

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IS WRONG on many points, but perhaps its most outrageous distortion of truth is its use of the Bible in support of predatory capitalism. The Hebrew prophets' bombastic indictments of the exploitation of the poor by the rich are fairly well known outside the boundaries of right-wing fundamentalism.¹ What I emphasize in this article is a broader point: the centrality of economic justice in ancient Israel's self-understanding as a community in covenant with God and in the New Testament as well.

As Richard Horsley observes, early Israel made a radical break with the imperial economies of the ancient Near East, in which the people basically served the rulers. Those in power took much of the people's produce to maintain the military forces that engaged in conquests and kept the empires intact. They also used the people's labor to build monuments symbolizing their rule and employed religion as a means of sacralizing their regimes. The Israelites, however, withdrew from this system to form "an alternative society in which the people no longer bowed down and served the Forces of civilization, but served a transcendent Force of freedom, who insisted upon justice in relations with other people, not hard labor."²

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The ancient world knew nothing of our modern tendency to think of religion, politics, and economics as separate spheres of existence. The laws of ancient Israel embraced both sacred and secular matters, without distinction. And the people's responsibility toward God embraced their responsibilities toward their neighbors. We therefore find in the Torah a remarkable set of provisions protecting the welfare of all members of the community.

At the heart of ancient Israel's view of economics was its attitude toward the land, classically expressed in Leviticus 25:23-24: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land." This means that all human ownership is relative: the land is God's. As God's tenants, however, human beings have a limited claim upon it. God has in a sense leased the land to families, and each family is entitled to its ancestral holdings. Any sale of the land is therefore temporary. If a family is forced to sell because of economic failure, it retains the right to buy it back when their fortunes are reversed (Lev 25:25-27). Leviticus 25:9-10 also provides for a Jubilee Year (every fiftieth year) in which the families who have lost their land can return to their property. We are unsure whether this was actually practiced or remained an ideal. Either way, it reveals the intention, also expressed in the promise in Deuteronomy 15:4-5, that if the people obey God's commandments "there will be no one in need among" them.

To achieve that goal, the Torah commanded both lending to needy neighbors (Deut 15:7-

11), coupled with a prohibition of interest-taking (Exod 22:25), and the cancellation of all debts every seven years (Deut 15:1-2). It also forbade farmers to harvest to the edges of their fields, granting both the Israelite poor and resident aliens (!) the right to glean what was left. (Lev 19:9-10)

In withdrawing from the imperial economies, early Israel initially rejected monarchical rule. There are two strains of tradition in the books of Samuel, one favoring the establishment of a royal household and another that interprets the desire for a king as a rejection of God. We therefore find in 1 Samuel 8:11-17 a speech by Samuel that warns the people how a king would treat them. These excerpts capture the essence of the speech:

[H]e will appoint for himself commanders of thousands...and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots....He will take one tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers....He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

This description fits what actually happened when monarchical government was instituted. The harsh rule of Jerusalem kings led to the secession of the northern tribes, which split the Israelites into two nations. The pattern of exploitation was found in both; however, and in both cases the ruling class used religion to legitimate their power. Thus, as Horsley observes, "the monarchy stood in opposition to the Mosaic Covenant, in which Israel declared exclusive loyalty to God as their king precisely as a way of avoiding falling back into bondage to a human king."³ Whereas the Mosaic Covenant made God's protection of the nation contingent upon the people's obedience to covenant law, the rulers in Judah (the southern monarchy) promoted a new version of the covenant that declared God's unconditional support of the House of David in perpetuity. (2 Samuel 7:4-17)

It was against this background of exploita-

tion by kings and their officers that the great Hebrew prophets spoke their powerful condemnations of economic injustice. Thus Isaiah indicted those "who add house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you" (Isaiah 5:8), and the book of Amos is a relentless attack on the rich, "who oppress the poor, who crush the needy" (Amos 4:1).

The gospels present economic justice as a central motif in Jesus' preaching of God's Rule.

Jeremiah, moreover, inspired by his loyalty to the Mosaic covenant, condemned the Jerusalem temple itself. Naming it a "den of robbers," he indicted those who appealed to the Davidic covenant as an assurance of God's protection even as they committed gross abuses. (Jeremiah 7:8-15)

The heavy tax burden placed on the peasants by the monarchies was increased by the imposition of further taxes by the series of empires that consumed the societies of the ancient Near East. During periods under Roman Rule, the Israelites paid taxes to the Jerusalem Temple, the Herodian royal household, and Rome itself. The Herods used taxes to fund elaborate building programs, and the Romans exploited the subjects of their empire to feed their troops and the population of Rome itself. The Temple was the center not only of religious life but also of the Judean economy, and the tithes and offerings it demanded added to the burden. Although the religious authorities had no means of enforcement, those unable to pay "faced social ostracism, shunning, and vilification by Temple authorities."⁴ Estimates of the percentage of peasants' produce paid in the

combined taxes range from 20 to 50 percent, “a significant and damaging amount for those living near subsistence levels.”⁵ Faced with financial failure, many people had to borrow from the aristocracy, which added to the latter’s wealth as the situation of the poor became ever more desperate.

In light of these circumstances, it appears probable that Jesus’ demonstration in the Temple (Mark 11:15-19) was at least partly a protest against the exploitative practices of the Temple aristocracy. In any case, the gospels present economic justice as a central motif in Jesus’ preaching of God’s Rule. We see this particularly in the beatitudes in Luke and Matthew. Following a formula of blessings and curses familiar from covenantal contexts in the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 28),⁶ Luke’s version (6:20-23) is followed by a series of woes (6:24-26). Blessings on the poor (destitute), the hungry, and those who mourn are paralleled by woes upon the rich, those who are full, and those who laugh. The passage is not only an expression of solidarity with the poor but also a condemnation of the exploitative system that makes some poor and others rich. And the economic dimension is clear in Matthew’s version (5:1-11) also.⁷ The shift from “poor” to “poor in spirit” does not, as many commentators claim, represent a “spiritualization” of the concept. The “poor in spirit” are those whose spirits have been crushed by oppression. Nor are the “meek” those who are mild-tempered. They will “inherit the earth” (land) precisely because they are the dispossessed—those who have lost their ancestral holdings to the rich and powerful. And in v. 10, we should translate the Greek word *dikaioσύνη* not as “righteousness” but as “justice.” The point is that those who are persecuted because they seek justice for the downtrodden will receive God’s Rule along with the poor themselves.

At other points, Jesus criticizes the scribes as those who “devour widows’ houses” (Mark 12:40), proclaims the difficulty the rich will have of entering God’s Rule (Mark 10:25-

27), and lambastes the Pharisees for neglecting “justice, mercy, and faith.” (Matthew 23:23) Also, two lines in the Lord’s Prayer reveal the economic dimension of God’s Rule. “Give us this day our daily bread” is a request of people who live in daily fear of impoverishment. And the petition to “forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors” has a literal as well as a figurative meaning. Those who pray the prayer commit themselves to keep the covenantal responsibility to forgive the financial debts of those who cannot repay. Along similar lines, Jesus follows traditional covenantal guidelines when he urges his hearers to “lend, expecting nothing in return.” (Luke 6:35)

The theme of economic justice continues in other parts of the New Testament. Acts twice describes the early Jerusalem church as having a communal economy (2:43-47; 4:32-37), and it was central to Paul’s ministry to take up a collection in all his churches for that impoverished community. (1 Cor 16:1-4; Gal 2:10) The book of Revelation, moreover, condemns Rome for its exploitative practices (see esp. Rev 18). And the letter of James echoes the Hebrew prophets in its indictment of the rich who oppress the poor: “Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” (5:4)

This last passage in particular should resonate with anyone familiar with the financial collapse in the United States in 2008, brought on by the rapacious practices of major financial institutions. But do the people and the leaders of the industrialized nations have the will and the courage to ask hard questions about our economy? Current economic theory assumes that there are actual “laws” of economics, ignoring the fact that all economic arrangements are human constructs. It also assumes that human beings act almost entirely out of self-interest, stifling all attempts to think creatively about how a new economy, focused on justice and ecological responsibility, might be possible.

To that extent it stands as a major example of idolatry. The Bible, on the other hand, invites us to think and act differently.

My concern, however, is less with specific remedies than with the criteria we use to evaluate them. And one would hope that persons of biblical faith would make their evaluations on the basis of biblical principles rather than a preconceived economic ideology. In our current arrangement, human beings are treated as cogs in a machine, servants of a system that has taken on the quality of an idolatrous religion. For many people throughout the world, this system resembles Pharaoh's Egypt more than the covenantal economy enshrined in the Torah and retrieved as an ideal in the New Testament. That biblical vision is of an economy that serves the people—one that works not for the advantage of a favored few but for the common good and that enhances our humanity rather than diminishes it.

THE BIBLICAL WRITERS were well aware, however, that action on behalf of the common good inevitably runs into serious opposition from institutionalized forces. Although Paul declares that those in Christ manifest a "new creation," he envisions the faith community as living in an in-between time, when "the present evil age" (Gal 1:4) overlaps with the age to come. Forces that he identifies variously as "the rulers (of this age)," "authorities," and "powers"⁸ are still active in the world. Scholars once debated whether these terms refer to demonic forces or earthly institutions such as governments. But Walter Wink has shown that "[t]hese powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural."⁹ That is, earthly institutions are the tangible manifestations of cosmic forces.

The New Testament view of these powers is complex, because Paul also says that God instituted governmental authorities (Rom 13:1-7); and the author of Colossians states that they were created through Christ (1:15-18). Also,

Paul lists angels among the forces against which the faith community struggles (Rom 8:38-39). What are we to make of all this? Wink argues that "the powers" have a legitimate place in God's creation but become corrupt when they are ignorant of God's plan. And when human beings give them the unqualified allegiance that belongs only to God, the result is idolatry. Thus, in Wink's words, "even then good, made absolute, becomes evil."¹⁰ The biblical perspective thus demands discernment in dealing with these powers, encouraging cooperation with them when they serve God's purposes but opposition to them when they demand idolatrous loyalty and stand in opposition to God. Often, however, popular readings of two biblical passages discourage confrontation of "the powers that be."

The first is Roman 13:1-7, where Paul counsels his readers to "be subject to the governing authorities." Some Christians think this means that they must obey the dictates of any government that might happen to rule over them. To "be subject," however, does not necessarily mean to "be obedient to." The non-violent civil rights demonstrators of the 1950s and 1960s remained subject to the laws of the Southern states even when they broke the segregation laws. They acknowledged governmental authority by submitting to arrest even as they engaged in civil disobedience. It is clear, moreover, that Paul's ultimate allegiance was to God alone, since he was willing to suffer frequent imprisonment for the sake of the gospel. Nor did he shrink from indicting "the rulers of this age" for the unjust crucifixion of Jesus or from proclaiming that they are "doomed to perish." (1 Cor 2:6-8) In Romans 13, Paul warned his readers against conflict with the Roman authorities; but he expected them, when faced with a choice between obeying God or human authorities, to obey God.

The second passage is a saying of Jesus. Asked whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Rome, he replied, "Give to the emperor the things that

are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mark 12:17; Matt 22:21; Luke 20:25). This saying has been used to support the notion that God instituted two realms—the religious and the secular—and human beings owe obedience to both. It is also the root of an attitude expressed in a letter to a major newspaper claiming that "Jesus was politically neutral." The intent of such a claim is to de-legitimate Christian social action, but it is based on a misunderstanding of the passage. Jesus' statement is actually a clever way of making a "subversive" point without getting oneself in trouble—a well-known tactic among subjugated peoples.

All Jews knew that everything belongs to God, and the notion of separate political and religious spheres would have been unintelligible to Jesus' listeners. The coin Jesus asked to see, moreover, was a *denarius*, which depicted the emperor and claimed divine status for him. As William Herzog comments, it was "a piece of political propaganda that staked Rome's claim to rule the cosmos."¹¹ Jesus implies that the coin must be given back to the emperor "because it is blasphemous and idolatrous,"¹² not because the empire is worthy of loyalty. Jesus could not say this directly without being arrested, but his hearers would have understood the point: "Pay the tax if you have to, but withhold your loyalty."

There are, of course, no simple guidelines for knowing when to resist "the powers" and when to join forces with them. Sometimes, however, the right choice is clear, even though many have found ways of distorting the biblical witness in order to avoid it. Some Christians in Nazi Germany joined the Confessing Church, which opposed the regime; others embraced German Christianity, which supported it. Some Christians have supported murderous, totalitarian regimes in Latin America that oppressed the poor. Others, notably Bishop Oscar Romero and a number of Roman Catholic priests and nuns, were murdered because they opposed these governments and stood in solidarity with the poor. Some persons of biblical faith joined

or supported the civil rights movement, while others opposed or ignored it. If my reading of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is accurate, however, there should be no doubt as to which of these groups were faithful to the biblical witness and which were not. Contrary to the pronouncements of the religious right, the Bible clearly demands of those who profess to worship God that they challenge "the powers that be" whenever they "push aside the needy in the gate." (Amos 4:12)

NOTES

1. I discuss the nature of Hebrew prophecy in Chapter 4 of *Reading the Bible for All the Wrong Reasons* and address biblical economics more broadly in *Knowing Truth, Doing Good: Engaging New Testament Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).
2. Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision for Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Ch. 1; quotation from p. 15.
3. *Ibid.*, 57.
4. William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 181.
5. Warren Carter, "Taxes, Taxation," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible S-Z*, Vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 479.
6. Horsley, 107.
7. Mark Allen Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 119-40; Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 33 Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), 87-96; Russell Pregeant, *Knowing Truth, Doing Good*, 129-33.
8. 1 Cor 2:6-8, 15:25; Rom 8:38.
9. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11; emphasis original.
10. *Ibid.*, 49.
11. William R. Herzog, *Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 185.
12. *Ibid.*, 189.

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In Sweden, When the Voters Turn Right, the Right Turns Left

STEVEN SAXONBERG

WITH THE ELECTORAL LOSSES of left-leaning parties in the past year in Germany, the UK and even in the model social democratic country, Sweden, recent events do not seem encouraging for those engaged in progressive politics. Given the meltdown of the financial markets and the rising consensus against free-market policies, even within the business community and business magazines, such as the *Economist*, one might have expected the Left to do much better and even see some kind of renaissance. However, if one puts it in perspective, the situation in my opinion is not as gloomy as it seems.

A quick comparison to the previous meltdown — the Great Depression — is useful here. First, in contrast to the Great Depression large-scale economic collapse was averted; and it was averted because most Western governments agreed to quickly rehabilitate Keynes, regardless of whether they were from the Left or the Right. Thus, when it came to saving the economy even the Right was willing to discard its free-market ideology. Second, even though rightist parties came into power in countries with relatively strong nominally leftist parties, they did not come to power spouting traditional rightwing slogans (conservative or free-market); and even more importantly, none of these parties came to power with openly fascist or even neo-fascist programs. Instead, the Right in Europe mostly

won their elections on centrist, semi-Keynesian platforms, which borrowed a lot from the social democratic parties. Meanwhile, in contrast to the onset of the Great Depression, when social democratic parties had very little experience in power, during the recent economic crisis social democratic parties had already been in power for long periods in many European countries. Thus, a vote for the Right was not necessarily a move toward more “rightist” attitudes among the populations, but rather it often simply signified dissatisfaction with the relatively conservative trends and tiredness among the social democratic parties.

For example, in Germany the Social Democrats had been largely discredited for having carried out radical free-market reforms in welfare policies. Known as the Hart reforms they lowered benefit levels and made many areas means-tested. Meanwhile, when the conservative Christian Democrats became the largest party in the 2005 elections and formed a coalition with the Social Democrats, they pushed through a radically revamping of the country’s family policies to push the country toward the Swedish model, in which fathers are encouraged to share in the parental leaves and access to daycare was to sharply increase. Thus, the Christian Democrats did more to encourage gender equality in its first years of government than the previous social democratic-green coalition had managed in 7 years of rule from 1998–2005. So the Christian Democrats increased their votes enough to be able to form a government without the Social Democrats in the next elections in 2009.

Similarly, in the UK New Labour began

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to lose support among voters both for taking part in the war in Iraq and for drifting too far to the Right. In addition, its prime minister, Brown, was not as popular as Blair had been. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats had gained a lot of support by positioning themselves to

Apparently, my attempt to buy the train ticket had failed because while I was pressing in all the right buttons, the price was already changing.

the left of Labour on social-welfare issues, while the conservative Tories had promised they had long since given up their Thatcherist tendencies. These developments rather than a big swing to the Right account for the center-right electoral victory. It turns out that once they won the elections, the Tory-Liberal Democrats actually moved in a very Thatcherist direction and began slashing welfare benefits, but they were not elected to do so: rather they were elected because voters did not expect them to do so.

Similarly, the recent two center-right electoral victories in Sweden did not signify a strong shift to the Right. Rather they were the result of other factors. To understand Sweden, it is important to keep in mind that the Social Democrats were in power without a break from 1932-1976, which is a world's record for democratic states only approached by the Liberal Party in Japan. During this period they were able to build up a rather hegemonic position in the country. I write "rather," because they were also good at borrowing progressive ideas from other parties. For example, it was the Liberal Party that had originally proposed replacing the maternity leave with an insurance-based paren-

tal leave that would encourage fathers to share in the leave time, but it was a social democratic government that introduced their plan. Fathers had incentives to share in the leave time, both because the leaves were now open for fathers and because the income replacement level was very high (originally 90 percent now 80 percent of previous income) so that fathers would not lose much income if they stayed at home with their children. (Since fathers usually earn more than the mothers, fathers could often previously argue that their family could not "afford" to have the father stay at home with the children, because the loss of income would be too high). Another example in the area of family policy is that a minister from the Liberal Party introduced the "daddy month" that saves one month of the parental leave only for fathers, so that the family will lose the money if only the mother stays at home, but the Social Democrats added a second month when they came back to power.

Because the Social Democrats have dominated Swedish politics so much, when the Center-Right comes to power, usually it is because the Social Democrats lose the election, not that the Center-Right wins the elections. So when the Social Democrats lost the elections in 1976 and 1979 the main reason was their support for nuclear energy. The agrarian-oriented Center Party at the time had opposed nuclear energy, which induced enough leftwing environmentalists to vote for them to give the Center-Right coalition an electoral victory. The Three Mile Island nuclear incident solved the problem for the Social Democrats, as they agreed to a referendum on the issue. Their compromise line of finishing the power plants that were already being built, but cancelling plans for further development won the referendum. Once this sticky issue was removed from the political agenda, they were able to regain power in the 1982 elections.

The next time the Social Democrats lost an election was in 1991, right after they introduced a free-market tax cut, which caused

a grave economic crisis. Having succumbed to the influences of Reagan and Thatcher, the Social Democrats decided to lower taxes, so that people would have a “greater incentive to work.” In order to finance the tax cut, they decided to eliminate subsidies for mortgages. Meanwhile, they also gave up full-employment as the main fiscal goal and replaced it with the goal of keeping the Swedish crown stable vis-à-vis the German mark. As a result of these policies, many people could no longer pay their mortgages and thus both the housing sector and the banking sector immediately collapsed. Four out of the five largest banks went bankrupt, inducing the

state to take them over to save them. For several years the construction industry came to a complete standstill. The previous budget surplus changed overnight into the largest deficit in Europe next to Greece. Not surprisingly, under these circumstances unemployment rose from 1.1 percent to over 8 percent. So much for the tax cuts giving greater incentives to work!

Given that the Social Democrats had turned into a free-market party, it is not surprising that voters reasoned, “why not vote for true free-market parties?” Many social democratic voters decided that rather than punishing the party by voting for center-right parties, it was



better to stay home, so voter turnout declined by about 10 percent. Consequently, the Social Democrats took an electoral beating, amidst cries among members that they “do not recognize their party.” The conservative Moderate Party had transformed itself into a purer free-market party and had talked about the need for “systemic change.” However, they quickly ran into grave problems as their desire to keep the Swedish crown stable against the mark led to amazingly high interest rates that reached up to 500 percent! Once this happened the government was forced to let the crown float. After three years of attempts at “systemic change,” the voters had enough. Free market policies had become completely discredited and even among the Social Democrats, the rightwing phalange centered around the finance ministry left politics and thus a more left-leaning Social Democratic Party easily won the next elections in 1994.

Nevertheless, the Social Democrats by now had lost much of their earlier radicalism. They believed their main task when coming back to power was to make order in the state finances. By increasing taxes and cutting spending they soon were able to bring the budget back into balance and then into surplus. Since 1998 the government usually had a budget surplus of over 2 percent except during the occasional recession. To their credit the social democrats did in fact bring order back to the economy, as inflation remained low (ranging from -0.2 percent in 1998 to 2.4 percent in 2002, and averaging 1.2 percent for the period of 1998-2008), the economy grew steady and the country had perhaps the best public finances of any Western country. Most of the literature on retrenchment also credited Sweden with being able to avoid retrenchment and keep its generous social welfare system intact.

The truth is a bit more complicated. It is true that social benefits have remained relatively generous, although the social insurance coverage (for illness, unemployment, parental leaves, etc.) decreased from 90 percent to 75 percent

before being raised up to 80 percent. However, analysts have often neglected the service sector. For although cutbacks were not so great in benefits, they were much greater in the provision of services. For example, the percentage of elderly with help needs, who received municipal home help decreased from 46 percent in 1990 to 33 percent in 1999. In addition, the fees increased in real terms, so that by the “end of the 1990s approximately one in six of everyone aged 75+ who needed assistance refrained from having home help because of the cost....” In fact, the percentage of elderly receiving home help decreased from 15.8 percent in 1989 to 8.4 percent in 1997. One survey shows that in the 1990s 41 percent of the municipal governments had taken away certain kinds of home help services to the elderly, who still live at home. In addition, about half of the municipalities have changed the contents of the help they give. As many as 58 percent of the municipalities have stopped providing help with cooking, 22 percent have stopped taking the elderly for walks and 17 percent have stopped helping them to go shopping.

Furthermore, the Social Democrats began privatizing some state-owned companies, such as the telephone company. Often they did so by transforming the companies into stock companies and then selling off some of the stocks, while keeping a portion for the state. This improved the state’s finances, but the increased marketization also prevented companies from putting public service above profit motives. A typical example is the state-owned electric company Vattenfall, which has invested heavily in coal and nuclear power in countries outside of Sweden, where environmental standards are not as strict.

Even fully state-owned companies, such as the train company, have begun to act more on market principles. The actual rail-lines have been privatized, so that the state train company has to compete with private ones. The result is that many lines have been closed, trains go less

often, and prices have increased. For example, where I live sometimes I can take the state train straight to Stockholm, but sometimes I must ride part of the way in a private train and then switch to the state train. One would expect these tickets to be cheaper, since it is more bother and it takes more time if one must change, but usually it is at least twice as expensive and sometimes even more expensive, thus making passengers wonder what the benefits are of having a private line. To make things worse, when one must change trains and both trains are state-run, then the second train usually waits if the first train is a bit late. When the first train is a private one, then the state train refuses to even wait 10 minutes. Once this happened to me and I was forced to take a taxi several hours to the airport, making the trip to the airport more expensive than the airplane flight! Also the state trains are pretending that they are airplanes, so you can no longer buy a simple ticket from point A to point B. Instead, you must buy tickets for a specific date and time and the price of these tickets can vary from day to day or even minute to minute. Once I almost missed a train at the airport, because I tried to buy a ticket in the machine and after spending about 5 minutes pressing all the right buttons, I got the message that my purchase failed and I had to redo the process. When I finished, the ticket was twice as expensive! Apparently, my attempt to buy the ticket had failed because while I was pressing in all the right buttons, the price was already changing.

In general, in the late 1990s the Social Democrats continued to believe in the myth that people want greater “freedom of choice” and freedom of choice means the need to choose between many competing companies. Thus, now one must choose one’s pension company, one’s telephone company, one’s electricity company, etc. Studies have shown that deregulation did work well for the telephone industry, where prices fell dramatically. However, in most areas prices in fact rose and services decreased. Now

the worst example is electricity, where the marginal pricing system allows private companies to charge the highest possible price. For example, if 99 percent of the electricity they produce costs .1 crown per kilowatt, but the last 1 percent costs 10 crowns, then they are allowed to charge 10 crowns for all the electricity the homeowner uses. Now the newspapers are filled with articles about how homeowners are protesting against the high electricity prices and how the country now has the most expensive electricity in Europe, although it is relatively cheap to produce.

Another problem with deregulation is that free market economists assume that consumers have perfect information, which is rarely the case in reality. In order to get anything nearly approaching perfect information, consumers would have to spend all their free-time comparing prices of every service that they use. Not surprisingly, most people are not 100 percent *homoeconomicus* and have other interests in life than comparing prices.

A typical example of this problem is the new pension system. Previously, everyone’s pensions were tied to a state fund, but now all adults can choose a private fund that invests in stocks or bonds. If one does not choose, then one automatically joins the state system. When the reform was launched the state made a lot of propaganda about the need to choose a fund, so most people did. The problem is that every year a new group of people reaches adulthood and hardly any of these people choose a pension fund. As a result they become part of the state fund. If these trends continue it will not be long before the state fund completely dominates the market and private funds will die out. Freedom of choice also means the right not to choose! Because of this rightward drift, the Social Democrats steadily lost ground to the Leftist Party (the former Eurocommunist party) and the Greens. Yet, the Left still maintained a healthy majority and was able to continue to rule after regaining power in 1994.

On the positive side, the government did

improve policies in some areas, especially in family policy. Throughout the 1990s the government increased access to daycare, so today virtually all children attend daycare by the time they are two unless one of their parents is at home with a second child. Even in this case conditions improved, as children have the right to attend cheap public daycare 15 hours a week even if one of the parents is at home with a younger child. The idea is that children suffer when they suddenly have to leave daycare and miss their friends when their parents stay at home with a new baby.

Parental leave times have also increased from 12 to 13 months since the early 1990s. Furthermore, to encourage fathers to stay at home with their children, two “daddy months” have been introduced, so that families lose two months of parental leave benefits (at 80 percent of one’s previous salary) if the father does not stay at home. State employees often get another 10 percent for their parental leave as a result of benefits gained through collective bargaining. To further encourage fathers to share more equally in the leave times, fathers have officially half of the leave time, so they must sign a statement allowing the mothers to take “their” leave time if they do not want to stay at home for at least 6 ½ months. The social insurance office also regularly sends statements to fathers reminding how much leave time they could take to put further pressure on fathers to share the leave times more equally. Although gender relations are still far from equal, fathers nevertheless now take over 22 percent of the total leave time, which is still among the highest in the world.

The government also took some important steps in improving the environment, such as giving support to alternative forms of heating (solar, pellets, pumps that get heat from under the ground), biogas, etc. The government has strongly pushed recycling, including a law forcing beverage companies to make all their plastic bottles in recyclable material. Consumers also get a refund when they return these plastic

bottles (as well as cans and glass bottles).

The Achilles heel for the Social Democrats has been unemployment. The traditional Swedish Model gave the highest premium to low unemployment and a high level of employment. At the end of 1990 unemployment was 1.6 percent and over 80 percent of the population from 16-64 was employed. By 1997 the percentage of the adult population in employment had dropped to 70.7, and although it went up to 75.3 percent in 2001, it declined again to 73.4 percent by 2004. Concerning unemployment, after reaching a high of 8.2 percent in 1993, it went down to 4 percent by 2002 before increasing again to 5.5 percent in 2004. Thus, in a country, where unemployment had usually been around 1-2 percent in the post-war era, the Social Democrats had failed to meet their traditional standards in what had previously been their heart issue.

The continued persistence of relatively high unemployment and the lack of solutions (or even interest in the issue) shown by the party leadership contributed greatly to the party’s loss in 2006. During that electoral year, unemployment continued to rise and by July, two months before the elections, unemployment was at 6 percent. Even though the trends were starting to turn and unemployment had started to decline, 6% unemployment was an unacceptably high level for most of the population and the high level allowed the center-right parties to steal the unemployment issue from the leftwing parties.

The fact that voters discarded the Social Democrats for the Center-Right in 2006 and then re-elected them again in 2010, however, does not mean that the voters had become more conservative. Ironically, the Center-Right victory reflects the hegemony of social democracy in Sweden. For in order to win the elections, the conservative Moderate Party had to shed its free-market ideology and reframe itself as a supporter of the welfare state. After a disastrous showing in the 2002 elections, the free-market wing of the party stepped down and a new

centrist generation took over. Copying New Labour in the UK they called themselves the “New Moderates” and claimed to be the “true” working class party.

Just as the Blairites concluded that they had to give up socialism and the idea of state-owned industry in order to win elections, the New Moderates concluded they had to give up the idea of a “system shift” and admit that after decades of social democratic dominance and hegemony, they could never convince the electorate to give up the welfare state.

Thus, the New Moderates gave up their opposition to some of the main pillars of the Swedish labor market model. They announced that they no longer want to close down the National Labor Council, which is responsible for implementing the active labor market policy (for example, job re-training projects and running the public employment agencies). In addition, they decided to no longer try to loosen up the rules on job security (LAS), which regulate such issues as a demand that those, who have worked the longest at a firm, must be laid off last, etc. Rather than promoting radical tax breaks that could not be easily financed, the party claimed to be a new workers’ party and therefore wanted to limit the tax breaks to low-income workers.

Along with the previous problem of the Moderates being seen as a dogmatic party that had no ideas other than to cut taxes, the center-right had also suffered from an inability to rule successfully together. When a three-party coalition unseated the Social Democrats in 1976 for the first time since 1932, the coalition was unable to last the entire mandate period, as the prime minister resigned over the issue of nuclear power. Even though the center-right won the next elections in 1979, the coalition government again collapsed — this time over the issue of taxes. When the electorate finally decided to give the center-right another chance in 1991, the coalition managed to stay together during the entire period, despite the fact that it had increased to four parties, as the Christian

Democrats had entered parliament. The price for keeping the coalition together, however, was the decision to allow each party push through some of its main programmatic points, which often led to contradictory policies and prevented the budget deficit from coming under control.

In order to win the elections, the conservative Moderate Party had to shed its free-market ideology and reframe itself as a supporter of the welfare state.

In order to gain voter confidence, the center-right parties decided in 2004 to build an alliance. They put together working groups to work out coherent policies, so that the four parties could stand the elections with a common basic platform. Consequently, they gave the voters the impression that they were ready to take responsibility.

Just when the right seemed more united than ever, the left seemed more disunited than ever. Traditionally, the Social Democrats completely dominated the left and although they rarely received their own majority, they usually obtained around 45 percent of the vote. This allowed them to basically rule as if they had their own majority, as they knew the Communists would not take responsibility for bringing down a “workers” government. As long as the Communists were small and communist, the Social Democrats did not have to take them seriously. Meanwhile, the communists were quite aware that they were always in danger of falling under the 4 percent minimum required to come into parliament and that many of their votes came from social democratic sympathizers, who voted for them only for tactical reasons: either to keep

pressure on the Social Democrats from the left or because they feared that if the Communists received slightly less than 4 percent and failed to enter parliament, then the rightist parties could form a majority in parliament even if the leftist parties received the majority of votes. Thus, the term “comrade 4 percent” arose to denote these social democratic supporters. The Communists were well aware that these “comrades” would quickly abandon them if they voted against social democratic proposals in parliament.

In the 1990s the political calculations began to change for the Social Democrats. The Communists changed their official name from the Left Communist Party to the Left Party. Their new leader, Gudrun Schyman, quickly proved to be one of the most gifted speakers in the country and clearly the best debater of any party leader. Under her leadership the party succeeded in giving the image of being a modern party of the democratic left, which focused on “post-modern” issues, such as feminism and the environment. She also succeeded in bringing reformers into top leadership posts. Consequently, the party increased its support from its previous average of around 5 percent to 12 percent in the 1998 elections. Even though it fell to 8.4 percent in the 2002 elections, it still was strong enough to force the Social Democratic government to enter serious negotiations with it in order to gain passage of its proposals in parliament.

Not only did the Left Party make a dent in the Social Democrats’ monopoly of the center-left, the party also began to face competition from the Environmental Party, which has made it into parliament during every election since 1988 with the exception of the 1991-1994 period. Consequently, after receiving 45.3 percent of the votes in the 1994 elections, the Social Democrats plummeted to 36.4 percent in 1998 and 39.9 percent in 2002. As a result, rather than being able to bully a small communist party as in the past, the Social Democrats were now forced to seriously negotiate with two center-left parties in order to maintain power.

The relationship between the three parties grew uneasy. The Social Democrats were not used to sharing power. The Environmental Party accepted its role as a support party from 1998-2002 to show that it is capable of taking responsibility, but during the 2002 electoral campaign it demanded that it receive cabinet seats in return for supporting the government. It could rightfully point out that in neighboring countries, such as in Germany, Finland, and France, green parties have ruled together with social democratic or socialist parties, so there was no reason why Sweden should be an exception. A crisis arose after the 2002 elections when the Social Democratic leader, Göran Persson, refused to give the Environmentalist Party cabinet posts, so the Environmentalists began negotiations with the center-right. Once these negotiations broke down, the Environmentalists were forced to support a Social Democratic government, but the results were unsatisfactory for all sides. The Social Democrats seemed arrogant and power-hungry, while the Environmentalists seemed weak for giving in and the Leftist Party seemed even weaker as well as toothless compared to the Environmentalists, as the Leftist Party did not even demand any cabinet seats.

Even though Persson succeeded in forming a pure Social Democratic government, he seemed to realize that in the future he would need to include the Environmentalists in his government. In fact, despite his original bitterness that the Environmentalists had negotiated with the center-right, he appeared to like the new green leadership duo, which had become more pragmatic and result-oriented than previous green leaders.

However, two problems remained. First, the Leftist Party suddenly became much less palatable as its leader, Gudrun Schyman stepped down amidst personal scandals. Her replacement, Lars Ohly, not only lacked her charisma and communicative skills, he also reversed the party’s modernizing image, calling himself a “Communist.” The party congress purged the

reform wing from the leadership as more orthodox cadres came to the fore. Even though the more orthodox leadership probably more truly represented the membership base than the Schyman leadership, it made the party definitely less popular among the voters and less acceptable to the social democratic leadership. Persson was weary about offering cabinet posts to the radicalized party. Yet, even though Ohlsson often proclaims that influencing policies is more important for him than receiving cabinet posts, it would have been difficult for Persson to offer ministries to the Environmental Party while simultaneously excluding the Leftist Party.

The second problem is that even if the Environmentalists could rightly argue that green parties were sitting in government coalitions in Finland, France, and Germany, in these countries the greens do not oppose the EU. In fact, in Germany, the Green Party leader and Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, even suggested that the EU become more powerful and evolve into a federation — which was heresy for the Eurosceptic Swedish Environmental Party. Persson often turned to the center and rightist parties for support on issues concerning the EU and the military and he feared that it would be difficult to govern with two anti-EU parties with a pacifistic orientation in the government.

Consequently, Persson refused to say what kind of government he would try to form if the center-left won the elections. He wanted to keep all options open, including a coalition with center-right parties, although he knew that they would refuse. The roles were now definitely reversed. Whereas voters had traditionally chosen between a strong social democratic government and an unstable, divided center-right opposition, now they had to choose between a united center-right and an uncertain, divided left.

Perhaps because it was becoming more difficult to govern in a period in which the Social Democrats needed to actively cultivate the support of two other parties, Persson appeared to grow tired of ruling and seemed to be look-

ing for a way to retreat from politics. Rumors spread that he wanted to retire and hand over the reins to Foreign Minister Anna Lindh. Such a move would have probably rejuvenated the party, since she was widely perceived as the most talented politician of the younger generation of politicians. She was extremely intelligent and articulate and used her skills as a lawyer to give well-balanced explanations. Even the center-right politicians openly showed their great respect for her as a foreign minister who was well acquainted with international law. Tragically, she was murdered in the fall of 2003 and Persson no longer had a given leader, to whom he could pass the baton.

This worn out leader, who felt forced to stay on and campaign without being able to explain to the electorate what parties he wanted to rule with, faced yet another problem: the populace was greatly dissatisfied with the manner in which the government dealt with the tsunami, which had killed many Swedes in Thailand on December 26, 2004. Not only did he and his fellow ministers appear arrogant in refusing to take responsibility for their inaction during the first days of the disaster, the Social Democrats also lost their argument that they were the most capable party for managing the state.

Thus, many political factors contributed to the Social Democrats' electoral loss. They faced a united opposition, while the left remained divided. The Moderate Party gave up its *laissez-faire* policies and embraced the welfare state, claiming to be a new workers' party and arguing that by giving highest priority to fighting unemployment, they were taking over traditional social democratic policy priorities, which Persson had abandoned. Meanwhile, Persson had grown tired of ruling and his heir apparent had been murdered, which had prevented him from stepping down. Finally, the government had lost the confidence of many voters by the way it handled the tsunami catastrophe.

What is important for our present analysis is that none of the main reasons for the defeat

of the Social Democrats indicate that support for the country's generous welfare policies was declining. In fact, a recent survey shows that 80 percent of the population thinks the municipal and regional governments should increase the quality of childcare, while only 15 percent think that taxes should be lowered instead. Furthermore, 93 percent believe that the local governments should increase care for the elderly, while only 5 percent favor lowering taxes. Similarly, 91 percent prefer increasing the quality of healthcare rather than lowering taxes.

Given this situation, it is not so surprising that shortly after coming to power, support for the center-right parties almost immediately crashed. By January, 2007, four months after the elections, a Synovate survey showed the Left block led by 7.4 percent and by April 2008, the Left block was leading by over 16 percent, which would be a record high victory.

So why didn't the Left block go on to win the elections in 2010? As late as March 2010, they were still ahead in the polls, but several things hampered them. First, they ran a lackluster campaign, without having any clear alternatives to the Center-Right government on most issues. Moreover, the Center-Right actually benefited from the economic crisis, because they managed to keep the state finances relatively sound during a period in which other states were close to economic collapse. For example, on April 7, 2011, the *Economist* reports that the budget deficit is only -0.8, compared to -9.9 percent in the United States, -9 percent in the UK and -6.4 percent in France. Meanwhile, its trade surplus is 11.7 billion dollars, while the United States has a deficit of -659.7 billion dollars and the UK -148.9 billion. In times of crisis the population tends to support the current government if they think it is doing reasonably well, since it provides security. They had ruled for 4 years, so the voters knew what to expect and they trusted the government to carry out these things.

Meanwhile, in the leading morning newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, one could read on April 12, 2011 the claim that

our idea on secure economic growth requires a policy that gives jobs without making the economy overheat, which guarantees that the growth will bring benefits to the majority and which hinders groups with weak positions in the labor market from being left behind. We want to strengthen the quality in education and welfare. The financial sector, which is the often the source of economic imbalances cannot be allowed to shake up the economy.

Were these the demands of the Leftist opposition? No, it was a policy statement written by the ruling Center-Right ruling coalition! Since the four Center-Right parties claim to have such goals, it is not surprising that the leaders of all four parties also supported Obama over McCain in the last American election.

Sweden is still far from the dreams of creating a democratic socialist society that were still very popular in the 1970s. In many ways it has retreated and its policies are much more accommodating to the market than they were in the 1970s. The country had privatized and deregulated so much that in most towns the postal services is leased out to private grocery stores, and post offices have basically disappeared except for those which cater to private enterprises. The Social Democrats no longer talk about "building socialism" or the need for economic and workplace democracy. The party has become much lamer than in the Palme era of 1968-1984. Yet, the country still has one of the world's most generous welfare states and support for it is so great that the Center-Right has only been able to rule by becoming semi-social democrats. So the Social Democrats' loss of political power has been accompanied by a complete hegemonic ideological victory for the basic Social Democratic welfare tenets. It is far from utopia, but also far from the damage done in the United States by Reagan and the Bushes or in the UK by Thatcher and New Labour.

Teacher Unionism Reborn

LOIS WEINER

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, we have witnessed a demonization of teachers unions that is close to achieving its goal: destruction of the most stable and potentially powerful defender of mass public education. Teacher unionism's continued existence is imperiled — if what we define as “existence” is organizations having the legal capacity to bargain over any meaningful economic benefits and defend teachers' rights to exercise professional judgment about what to teach and how to do it.

As I explain elsewhere,¹ financial and political elites began this project forty years ago when they imposed school reform on Latin America, Africa, and Asia as a quid pro quo for economic aid. Though specifics of this global social engineering differ from one country to another, reforms have the same footprint: School funding is cut and school systems are broken up to promote privatization under the banner of “choice”; teachers and curriculum are controlled by tying pay to standardized test scores and eliminating tenure; standardized testing measures what is taught to most students, reducing content to basic math, reading, and writing. Teachers unions have been singled out for attack because throughout the world they are the most significant barriers to this project's implementation.

Rhetoric about equalizing school outcomes for groups long denied access to adequate, let alone quality education, masks the real aim

of the last twenty years of reform, creating a docile workforce that receives no more than the 8th grade education needed to compete with workers elsewhere for jobs that can be moved easily from one city, state, or country. World Bank materials lay out the assumptions seldom articulated in this country: Money educating workers beyond the level most will need wastes scarce public funding; and minimally educated workers require minimally educated teachers, whose performance can be monitored through use of standardized testing. The newest World Bank report, “Making Schools Work” takes the reasoning (and policy) even further, insisting that “contract teachers” who work for one-quarter of what civil service employees receive, have no benefits, no job protection, and no rights produce good enough outcomes.²

The attack has been fueled by right-wing foundations and advanced by Democrats and Republicans alike. The corporate media, including traditionally liberal elements, like Hollywood, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, have blanketed TV, radio, and the press with bogus premises about education's relationship to the economy and the role of teachers unions in blocking much-needed change. The Obama Administration substitutes educational reforms straight out of the playbook of right-wing foundations as the panacea to unemployment and poverty. When Secretary of Education Arne Duncan avers that education is the “one true path out of poverty” he displays the administration's intention to divert attention away from unemployment, health care, child hunger, and homelessness. School improvement supplants all the economic and social reforms that have, historically, been used to ameliorate poverty. Defenders of public education frequently answer

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these inflated claims for education with protestations that schools can do nothing to alter the fate of poor children. Unfortunately, their response serves to heighten public perceptions that school people — teachers — refuse to take

Local union officers and activists have often been clueless about how to respond to the blitzkrieg of vitriol, and the national unions have been little help. They have been unwilling to “rock the boat,” desiring above all to stay politically moored to Obama, a president who has pressed for a thoroughly anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-public education agenda.

responsibility for what occurs under their watch. The more accurate and politically effective response is that schools can do more and better if we have well-prepared and well-supported teachers at work in well-resourced schools, and yet, even with these conditions, schools are hostage to powerful forces that depress achievement — factors that are beyond their control. This more nuanced defense of public education and teachers undercuts one of the most difficult problems we face in defending public education, neoliberalism’s exploitation of historic inequalities in education. This is especially true in the United States, where the rhetoric of the civil rights movement has been totally hijacked in defense of charter schools and improving “teacher quality” by eliminating seniority and tenure.

Even *The Nation* has bought the reification of individual teacher performance as the sine qua non of school improvement.³

Teachers unions globally have experienced an astoundingly well-orchestrated, well-financed attack, and resistance elsewhere in the world has been forceful and persistent.⁴ In contrast, U.S. teachers unions have been easy targets. Most teachers belong to a local affiliate of the NEA or the AFT. Both the NEA and AFT are national unions with state-level organizations. In general, teachers in the largest cities are in the AFT, which is a member of the AFL-CIO. The NEA functions as a union and collaborates with labor on legislation and in politics but is not in the AFL-CIO. In the NEA, state organizations are the most powerful component. In the AFT, the local affiliate is key. Staff generally control the NEA, officers the AFT. In most school systems, the union apparatus is intact, but the organizations are shells, weakened by their embrace of the “business union” or “service model” that characterizes most U.S. unions. The synergy of business unionism’s hierarchical ethos and the legal framework giving unions the right to bargain on behalf of teachers, namely exclusive representation as bargaining agent, the right to collect “agency fee” (payment to the union of what is generally the equivalent of dues, to cover expenses the union expends in negotiating and enforcing the contract), and dues check-off (automatic deduction of dues from the member’s paycheck) has encouraged a totally bureaucratic approach to contract enforcement, member passivity, and erosion of the union’s school-site presence. Local union officers and activists have often been clueless about how to respond to the blitzkrieg of vitriol, and the national unions have been little help. They have been unwilling to “rock the boat,” desiring above all to stay politically moored to Obama, a president who has pressed for a thoroughly anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-public education agenda. Another factor is, of course, the personal power and

privilege national officers and staff enjoy as a result of their cozy relationship with powerful elites.

From the start of mass public education, teachers unions, like most of organized labor, turned a blind eye to racism and anti-immigrant sentiment.⁵ Teachers unions' failure to acknowledge this history has facilitated their being cast — incredibly, by billionaires who have plundered the nation's resources — as a special interest group, more interested in protecting teachers' jobs than in helping poor children succeed in school. Many parents and citizens, even some teachers, have been persuaded that tenure and seniority protect “dead wood,” not realizing that when tenure and seniority are lost, so is democratic space in classrooms. The unions' unwillingness to acknowledge schooling's past and current role in reproducing social inequality, their reluctance to work as partners with activists to take on racism, sexism, militarization, and anti-immigrant prejudice, have weakened their credibility with groups who should be teacher unionists' strongest allies.

This problem is exemplified by Diane Ravitch's defense of teacher unions. Unlike Chester Finn, a former ally who brags about his desire to destroy public education, Ravitch understands that once public education is destroyed, like Humpty Dumpty, it won't be put back together again — and when public education goes, so will a powerful force for democracy. Another explanation for Ravitch's about-face on the neoliberal reforms she advocated as part of the Bush Administration is that she is an intellectual and unlike her former neo-conservative allies is genuinely interested in education. She is, rightly, horrified by the anti-intellectualism that is writ large in neoliberalism's successful efforts to vocationalize education. Most of what she writes is eloquent, passionate, and accurate. Unlike the disoriented bureaucrats who run the unions, Ravitch understands that a fight needs to be made and she is willing to wage it.

Ravitch criticized mayoral control of the New York City schools as undemocratic when the president of the union representing New York City teachers supported the measure. Ravitch has come out against linking teacher pay to test scores while the national unions have caved. Ravitch has shown the union bureaucrats how they could, if they wished, defend the union and public education more effectively. She is Albert Shanker's doppelganger, that is, while he still acted like union president rather than a labor statesman.

However, as was the case with Shanker and is true of NEA and AFT officials today, Ravitch's defense of teacher unionism and public education is constrained by an ideological commitment to defending U.S. capitalism at any cost. Because she can't or won't acknowledge what has been wrong with U.S. society and public education, she can't devise a compelling alternative to the neoliberal reforms. She embeds, subtly, in her current defense of public education the claim that there was no crisis in U.S. public education before the neoliberal reforms were imposed. But there was. The Left historians she blasted in the 1960s and 70s in her defense of the status quo had it right. The schools did — and do — reproduce social inequality. In her recent essay in the *New York Review of Books* (September 29, 2011) she reduces current educational inequality between Whites and minorities to yet another in a series of over-blown crises U.S. schools have endured since their creation. She argues that “poverty matters,” which it does, of course. So does racism, which she does not mention. So do other forms of discrimination which she ignores. Elsewhere, Ravitch states her desire for public education to be what she experienced in high school, in Houston, Texas.⁶ (In the PBS history of U.S. public education, Ravitch fondly recalls her days as a high school cheerleader.) But how many Black and Hispanic parents will fight for a return to the status quo that barred their children from schools that served Whites?

An Emerging Resistance

THE NATION'S LARGEST CITIES were home to teacher unionism's original birth and its rebirth in the 1960s. Today opposition caucuses have emerged once again in cities, where conditions have deteriorated to an extent unimaginable even a decade ago. Charter schools, as their proponents freely admit, are one of the main weapons to make school systems free of union influence. A charter school is essentially its own school district, free of district regulations — and union involvement. In most large cities, teachers unions gave up seniority in transfer when the first wave of school closings began. Now, when schools are closed because of poor test scores and replaced by charter schools, experienced teachers are often thrown into pools of “displaced teachers.” They must compete for jobs with new hires who earn one-half the salary. Teacher pay now comes out of a school's budget, so many principals, especially those with little or no teaching experience themselves, prefer hiring two new teachers for the price of one more-experienced teacher. A fact little publicized by the unions is that older minority teachers face intense racism when they interview for jobs, especially with young, white principals. Readers familiar with labor history will see the dismaying parallels to “shape up” on the docks and fields, before unionization brought hiring halls and protections for older workers.

Although tenure has been dismissed as irrelevant in K-12 teaching, its importance is greater today than ever before. As principals' pay is increasingly tied to improving test scores, and the noose between teacher pay and student test scores is tightened, teachers who want to give their students a richer diet than test prep are facing the prospect of losing their jobs if they follow their moral and professional principles. Even more chilling is schools' use of corporate propaganda, obtained through seemingly trustworthy vendors, as occurred with *Scholastic Books* promoting a fourth-grade curriculum written

by the coal industry with its perspective.⁷ Even where it still exists in state law, tenure has been greatly weakened because administrators can easily give teachers spurious unsatisfactory ratings due to weakened enforcement of evaluation procedures. In many city schools, principals can and do function without any check on their power, other than what is exercised by distant officials whose only concern is test scores. Over and over one hears of teachers who have bought the anti-union propaganda that is so prevalent in the media, or are too overworked and demoralized to do anything other than what they are told, or are too afraid of retribution to voice a contrary opinion. The union's presence has been so eroded and its credibility so damaged that “transforming the union” in many districts probably means building it from scratch.

At the same time, some teachers have become politicized by the vicious, unfair political attacks on their ability, character, professional authority, and economic well-being. Still, they often cling to the “service model” of unionism and expect “the union” to somehow, magically, intervene. The idea that they ARE the union is slowly percolating through the ranks, and increasingly, a new generation of teacher union activists is emerging. Union renewal is taking many forms, but the most important developments from a strategic perspective are occurring in the nation's cities. Not all major cities are experiencing the kind of change that's needed. For example, in Washington D.C., a protracted, ultimately successful court challenge by a former union official who vied for the presidency did little to mobilize teachers and community. On the other hand, in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), a vibrant leadership, mostly new to union office, has brought their commitment to mobilize the membership, explicitly rejecting business unionism. In Milwaukee, long-time education activist Bob Peterson, a founder of the magazine *Rethinking Schools*, now heads Milwaukee's teachers union. Radical teachers who previously shunned the union now understand

that they need it to protect teachers' economic rights, and like Peterson, see the union capable of fighting on a "tripod" of concerns: "bread and butter unionism... professional unionism... and social justice unionism." Peterson points to the need for truly mutual alliances, building strong relations with parents and community groups "not just to ensure adequate support for public education, but so that we as a union are also involved in improving the community."⁸

Though "Rethinking Schools" and others use the term "social justice" union, I think the idea of a "social movement" union is more useful because it addresses the need for transformation of the unions internally, especially the need for union democracy. Union democracy is a thorny issue for radicals, especially those who assume leadership of moribund organizations. "Social justice" unionism addresses the positions the union takes on various political, social, and economic issues. One temptation for radicals who take office without a mobilized base to support them is that union democracy becomes a hindrance to the union acting on a "social justice" program. On the other hand, "social movement" unionism gets at the need for empowering members, building the union from the bottom-up, making the union itself a social movement. A social movement union not only endorses social justice demands in education and the society, working with social movements to further these aims, it also exists as a social movement itself, pressing as much as it can against the constraints of its being a membership organization — with the responsibility to protect its members.

The CTU is probably the most important testing ground for social movement unionism. The union is now led by activists from CORE (Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators).⁹ Using new-fangled social media and old-fashioned face-to-face meetings and organizing, CORE defeated the older guard leadership loyal to the national AFT office. With scarcely a second to catch their breath, CTU's new leaders were confronted with ferocious attacks by the state

and city on the contract and teachers' pensions. In gaining their political footing, the inexperienced leadership made mistakes that were both natural and damaging, for instance, trusting that

The AFT and NEA national leadership pursue a strategy of cozying up to their "friends" in the Democratic Party, including President Obama. This undercuts the brave activity of many teachers battling in their schools against the policies Obama and Duncan are pushing.

state union officials would be more expert about policy decisions and allowing the local president to participate in meetings with high-ranking state officials by herself. The CTU leadership faces a stunning phalanx of opponents, ranging from Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, who flaunts the prestige and support he has in the White House and from powerful "friends of labor" in the Democratic Party, to Republican and Democratic state politicians, eager to destroy all public employees unions, mostly especially those representing city teachers. CTU leaders must simultaneously take from the state and national union resources that are needed while simultaneously doing all that is necessary to oust these officials who impede the movement's objectives. In my opinion, CORE activists are an inspiration, heroic and wise.

Like teachers in other cities, Los Angeles teachers face a viciously anti-teachers union mayor. But what differentiates LA's Mayor

Antonio Villaraigosa is that he parlayed his position as a staffer for the teachers union, United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), and his close relationship with two of UTLA's highest ranking officers — well-known leftists — to become a labor bigwig and then mayor. UTLA was the first teachers union in a major U.S. city in which a reform caucus succeeded in sweeping the old guard out of office. However, only a small fraction of the membership voted in the election (and in the most recent election as well). The reformers have been in the unenviable position of responding to horrific attacks while also managing the union's bureaucratic operations, without being able to count on much support from the membership. Unfortunately, the reformers, who took office in a coalition that did not permit accountability among the factions, maintained many of the bureaucratic practices of the previous administration. The leadership's disastrous decision to support mayoral control — because their buddy was the Mayor — was a function of an emphasis on playing power politics rather than addressing the union's bureaucratic functioning. In the most recent elections, a long-time activist running as an independent but aligning himself with a more conservative caucus won the presidency. At the same time, a progressive caucus, PEAC, took a majority of seats on the union's board of directors. What needs to be done now — and quickly — is for leaders and activists to focus financial and human resources on reviving the union at the school site. Probably one-third of the schools, campuses as they're called, lack functioning chapters. This admittedly painstaking work of educating members that they "own" the union, to help them in organizing themselves, is inescapable. One bright spot from the reformers' victory is that UTLA's Human Rights Committee has embraced international work with Canadian and Mexican teachers unions, under the umbrella of the Trinational Coalition to Defend Public Education.¹⁰

Of all the teachers unions in major cities,

it appears at first glance that New York's union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), has done the best job in protecting teachers and public schools. Many of the worst abuses teachers have suffered elsewhere have been forestalled by the union's political clout in Albany. Charter schools have not mushroomed as fast as they have elsewhere, for instance California. Schools being closed due to low test scores are not being auctioned off to the highest bidder, as is occurring in Los Angeles. But appearances are deceiving because while the UFT has indeed been able to protect many of the vestiges of the old system by calling in its political chips, it has done so at the expense of alienating its natural allies, insulating the bureaucracy and allowing the union to all but disappear at the school, and seriously erode at the district level, where union staff may decline to provide chapter chairs with the most minimal forms of support, like meeting with principals about grievances. One estimate I've heard from a loyalist to the current leadership puts the number of schools with no functioning union chapters at far more than one-third, probably closer to three-fifths. Many teachers are too frightened to attend union meetings or even meet privately with union staff at the school site. What they may consent to do, when pressed, is to put union materials in teachers' mailboxes, but they will do so only in secret. One fine young teacher in a selective Manhattan high school touted to be "progressive" and favored by leftish parents was given "unsatisfactory" ratings by the principal for "harassing" colleagues. He put a notice in their mailboxes informing them of a get-together to discuss the school's admission policies. The chapter chair refused to help because she wanted to stay in the principal's good graces, and union staff were unwilling to be involved. Their job as they see it is to file grievances that they are sure will succeed. The UFT clearly lacks the capacity — and will — to defend its members and the schools. Some activists theorize that the union is morphing, perhaps through conscious

intent, from a “service model” of unionism into a membership organization that wears the mantle of union but in fact is a provider of consumer services, like low cost auto insurance.

Still, the UFT bosses have not yet seen a serious challenge. In the last change of rule, the crown was passed to Michael Mulgrew, who actually taught in the city schools, unlike Randi Weingarten, a lawyer who served as UFT President and is currently AFT national President. Mulgrew’s face is new, but the apparatus remains impenetrably bureaucratic and the union’s politics are essentially as they were under Shanker. There is little sense from the way the union leadership presents itself or acts that teacher unionism has experienced an assault that challenges its existence. The union newspaper’s coverage of school struggles — or rather lack of it — shows how little engaged the UFT is in protecting the contract, schools or teachers, as well as how remote it is from community-based groups fighting on social justice. In the October 27, 2001 issue of the union newspaper, Michael Mulgrew’s picture appeared 9 times in the first 11 pages. An article applauded the success of Junior ROTC at one of the city’s many racially segregated city high schools. No mention was made of the anti-militarization campaigns that are occurring elsewhere in the nation, for instance in Los Angeles, with UTLA’s support. Another story informed teachers about their rights — in handling disruptive students. No mention was made of advocacy groups’ work about racial discrimination in school disciplinary policies, of activists working to alter school organization and culture so that “disruptive” students are less so. Stories on charter school organizing painted a glowing picture — another victory! There was one nod to the fact that Occupy Wall Street was a few blocks away from union headquarters, a story (with a picture of Michael Mulgrew) described the union’s participation in a coalition demanding no tax breaks for millionaires. But mostly the newspaper contained sentimental snapshots of teachers

doing charity work. In light of the real conditions in the school system, including thousands of teachers who are paid (for now) but jobless, draconian cuts in funding felt in loss of money for supplies and class sizes that often exceed the contractual norms (not enforced), and the absence of union chapters in at least one-third of the schools, the paper’s contents are almost surreal. Clearly, this is a union leadership that doesn’t understand that publicity about teachers walking in support of breast cancer awareness will not suffice to defend their schools, their jobs, or their right to have a real union represent them.

The UFT’s one victory in recent memory was organizing family day care workers, that is, making them union members. The UFT, in alliance with ACORN, used its political muscle to win the right to have family day care workers have union representation and have their dues deducted from their wages, which are paid by the state. An election for the bargaining agent occurred, a small fraction of the workers in the unit voted, and the UFT won the vote. While this seems to be a win-win, strengthening the union and giving exploited workers union representation, in fact the “top-down” process fails to build the resiliency union members will need to win or defend gains. Often what occurs in this kind of organizing is that shortly after the election for representation, the new members are forgotten. In this familiar scenario not limited to the UFT, union officials use the new members to strengthen their bureaucratic hold on the union apparatus. Union membership gives workers access to some protections, much needed and deserved to be sure; but especially when members are not in the majority constituency (teachers in the case of the UFT), they are trapped in a union that does little to represent them. The case of the family daycare workers is especially poignant because the UFT/ACORN alliance muscled out what had been the authentic community-based organizing of family daycare workers, by a Brooklyn group, Families

United for Racial and Economic Equality.¹¹

One bright spot in the New York City teachers union's political horizon is Teachers Unite, which is trying to bring activists on social justice in schooling together with teachers who want to see the UFT transformed.¹² Teachers Unite is small but growing. One of its most successful activities has been providing workshops on building the union at the school site, taught by teachers who are themselves chapter leaders. Teachers Unite's activity demonstrates what could be done to build the union if the UFT bureaucracy really wanted to do so. Teachers from other activist groups, including Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), which produced a splendid video countering the misinformation in *Waiting for Superman*, are collaborating with Teachers Unite on social justice campaigns in the city schools, including helping to organize against school closings.¹³ Another hopeful development is that Teachers Unite is part of a still-emerging national network of reform groups.

Occupy the Unions!

IF TEACHERS UNIONS ARE TO CONTINUE to exist as a meaningful form of workers' representation, members need to transform them — and fast. The future of the movement depends on activists realizing that they, not staff or officers on the state and national levels, have to be the catalysts for change. Just as there is no escape from building the union at the base, there is no getting around the hard work of developing authentic alliances with parents and community activists, coalitions that acknowledge historic inequalities and support communities in their needs, rather than being paper organizations that are dusted off when the union wants to display community support. Elected officials, from school boards to governors, are violating union contracts with impunity. Lawsuits, by themselves, the favored method of dealing with law-breaking officials, can't stop this. What can is direct action undertaken with parents and

community, as the CTU has done in combating school closings in Chicago.

In contrast, the AFT and NEA national leadership pursue a strategy of cozying up to their "friends" in the Democratic Party, including President Obama. This undercuts the brave activity of many teachers battling in their schools against the policies Obama and Duncan are pushing. For instance, both national unions have accepted use of standardized tests to judge student performance and teachers' pay, in order, they say, to stay "credible." But "credible" to whom? Certainly not teachers who risk their livelihoods by speaking out against the harm done by education having been reduced to teaching to/for the test. The president of the AFT chapter in his charter school shared with me his outrage and dismay at what occurred when he called the state union for help in dealing with the principal's demand for pay increases linked to student test scores. He was told the changes the principal demanded were official AFT policy.

In July 2011, the NEA officially endorsed Obama for President. The AFT will undoubtedly follow suit, once organized labor decides the time is right to make this commitment. Although the AFT and NEA nationally are in the Democrats' hip pocket, a different scenario might occur in local school board elections. Teachers unions are beginning to run candidates for school boards. Often local unions support candidates with the same "lesser evil" rationale the national and state unions use in endorsing Democrats. But in some places, this strategy is being challenged. Instead of electing someone, anyone, who is marginally better, teachers unions are thinking of how they might use the races as an opportunity to build support from the ground up. Campaigns for school board elections can be testing grounds for building new electoral alliances, alliances that are wholly independent of both parties, speak truth to corporate power, and advance a vision of public education that supports collaboration among

schooling's constituencies. As Occupy Wall Street has demonstrated, the country is hungry for leaders who will speak out against capitalism's excesses. Neither the NEA nor AFT can provide that leadership, nor be partners in a movement that challenges Wall Street, as long as its top officials want the unions to be included as collaborators in maintaining U.S. capitalism's domination of U.S. society and the globe.

As labor researchers Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock explain, though the AFT supports its far-flung global operations with "high-minded rhetoric of global labor solidarity, philanthropic goodwill, and democracy promotion," the union wants most of all to further U.S. hegemony. The AFT's international operations are vast, ranging from "Bolivia to Burma and Kenya to Kazakhstan." ¹⁴ Ironically, the AFT aims to educate teacher unionists elsewhere in the world to desert the traditions of social movement unionism that we in the United States should be learning — and imitating — here at home. Given claims by some progressives that the AFT changed with the end of the Cold War and Shanker's death, it's important to note Sukarieh and Tannock contend that the AFT "continues with its cold war legacy largely uninterrupted. Its current director of international affairs, David Dorn, was also director during the Shanker era. Rather than question, apologize for, or distance itself from any of its past international work, the AFT celebrates and explicitly claims to be continuing with this exact same line of activity...The AFT continues to expand its international programs.. from its 1990s base in Eastern Europe to the current focus on the Middle East." (p. 186).

AFT and NEA rely on their size, wealth, and connections with the U.S. government to dominate politics of the Education International (EI), the global federation of teachers unions. There used to be significant foreign policy differences between the NEA and AFT, with the NEA being more liberal. However, those distinctions, even ephemeral, seem to have

been lost. Both joined in squashing democracy at the EI conference in Capetown this past summer, where they used their control of the EI's administrative apparatus to push through a palatable (to them) resolution on Palestine and Israel. According to a conference participant with whom I spoke, AFT and NEA shocked Western European delegates with their brazen (and successful) effort to control debate and force an outcome that was more in line with U.S. foreign policy.

Three different resolutions on Palestine and Israel were presented to the conference. One came from the EI board, another from the UK higher education union, Universities and Colleges Union, and the third from the National Union of Teachers (NUT). Operating much as the AFT leadership does at its own conventions, the AFT and NEA maneuvered to suppress the NUT resolution, which was a forthright condemnation of Israel's actions towards Palestine. They first tried to persuade the presiding NUT officer to withdraw the resolution. This effort at intimidation failed, so they warned NUT delegates that should they persist in presenting their resolution, the AFT delegation would bolt from the conference. An NEA staffer being groomed for leadership in the EI's administrative office handled negotiations on behalf of the AFT and NEA, and ultimately, a "compromise" resolution was approved, one that dropped sharp criticism of Israeli policy. Delegates from the Middle East were enraged at the resolution and by their having been silenced in the debate.

With all of the political struggles going on in the world, with the concerted attacks against teachers unions, why did the AFT and NEA make the NUT's resolution on Palestine the main focus of their political intervention at the EI? Why would the leadership of NEA and AFT jeopardize their political legitimacy by flaunting their control over the EI's administrative apparatus? The answer is in the lopsided nature of the AFT and NEA's political compass,

permanently stuck in the direction of the U.S. government's desires. Nothing counts as much for the NEA and AFT leadership as the prerogatives of U.S. capitalism and the government that protects it. Their political loyalties to U.S. imperialism are seen in almost every political decision. For example, the NEA and AFT ban membership by the Chinese and Cuban unions in the EI because they are not free of government control. Fair enough, but why then permit participation of the Egyptian union — entirely controlled by the Mubarak dictatorship — until the union fell in arrears on its dues, shortly before Mubarak was overthrown? Teacher union leaders from the global south object to the contradiction between EI's professed support for free trade unions throughout the world and its, that is, the NEA and AFT's, one-sided application of criteria that coincide with the desires of the U.S. government. Under life-and-death pressure from their own governments and fearful of further attacks by international agencies that answer to Washington, teacher unionists in Asia and Africa are understandably reluctant to challenge the AFT and NEA. Given this imbalance of power between unions in the global south and the AFT and NEA, the Western European unions have a special responsibility to fight for democracy in the EI and for consistent application of the ruler measuring whether unions are indeed "free" of government control.

When Naomi Klein spoke at Occupy Wall Street she noted that the rest of the world had been waiting for this challenge at capitalism's

heart. The same is true of U.S. teacher unionism's renaissance. Teachers and students around the globe need teachers in this country to occupy their unions. At this writing, the eyes of the world are on the courageous activists who are facing down the world's most powerful elite in downtown Manhattan. Our eyes should also be on the heroic activity of teachers moving to occupy their unions. The future of public education globally depends in great measure on them.

NOTES

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The Rise and Fall of ACORN

BETTY REID MANDELL

MOST PEOPLE NEVER HEARD OF ACORN (Association of Community Organization for Reform Now) until the conservatives attacked it. The media does not follow long and complicated organizing campaigns. It prefers more time limited dramatic news such as lawsuits or demonstrations. But even when ACORN organized large demonstrations, the media was not likely to credit ACORN. However, they eagerly featured false accusations of fraud in ACORN's voter registration drive, and when a man posing as a pimp and a woman as a prostitute videotaped an interview with an ACORN worker, hoping to trick her into giving illegal information, the media jumped on it like wolves snatching red meat. By that time, 82 percent of the public had heard about it.

I knew about ACORN, had even once considered joining it, but had never realized how large, powerful, and effective it was until I read this book. In 2007, there were 260,000 members in 100 field offices across the country. By 2008, the combined "family of organizations" had an

annual budget of \$100 million, over a thousand employees, and 400,000 members. The "family" included two nonprofit corporations that conducted research, policy analysis, and leadership training, two union locals, two Southern-based

radio stations (KNON and KABF), several publications (including the magazine *Social Policy*), an accounting, financial, and payroll services firm (Citizen Consulting, Inc.), a law office, and a variety of other vehicles that supported its organiz-

ing and issue campaigns, such as the Financial Justice Center, the Living Wage Resource Center, and Project Vote. There were even international chapters in Argentina, Canada, Peru, and Mexico, but these were short-lived.

In 1994, Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation created a coalition of churches and labor unions called BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development) to fight for higher wages for the working poor. They succeeded in passing the nation's first living-wage ordinance. Inspired by their success, ACORN led living- and minimum-wage campaigns to victory in Chicago, St. Louis, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Boston, Oakland, Denver, New Orleans, Detroit, New York City, Long Island, Sacramento, and San Francisco. In 2006, they won what the *New York Times* called a "ground-breaking ordinance," the first ordinance in the

Seeds of Change: The Story of ACORN

JOHN ATLAS

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2010, 336 pp., \$20.40

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nation that required all big-box retailers (such as Wal-Mart) to pay a “living wage.” Retailers with more than \$1 billion in annual income and stores of at least 90,000 square feet, by mid-2010, would pay workers at least ten dollars an hour in wages plus three dollars an hour in fringe benefits.

ACORN was founded in Arkansas in 1970 by Wade Rathke, along with other idealistic college graduates, with a vision of organizing the poor and working class to build a new political force.

When I read this, it occurred to me that Wal-Mart’s eagerness to build smaller stores in neighborhoods might be their strategy to get around this requirement, so that they would be able to pay smaller wages.

ACORN mobilized voters around ballot initiatives for minimum-wage campaigns. This strengthened ACORN’s voter registration drives. One poll found that three-quarters of African-Americans who had not voted in the past said that the minimum-wage issue was “very important” and would motivate them to vote. Their voter registration drive helped Democrats take control of the House and the Senate and led to the federal increase in the minimum wage signed into law by George Bush in 2007. John Atlas sums up their victory as follows:

One cannot underestimate what ACORN had done. Until 2006, the living wage was a radical idea. John Kerry was afraid to promote it in 2004. The transfer of income from employers to workers in eleven states that passed minimum-wage increases in 2006 equaled

some \$16 billion. Moreover, with such allies as the AFL-CIO and SEIU, ACORN had used its local minimum-wage and living-wage victories as stepping-stones to propel the new Democratic-controlled Congress to support a significant increase in the federal minimum wage. After the 2006 elections the Democratic Party leadership embraced ACORN and agreed to look more closely at its issues. (p. 117)

ACORN was founded in Arkansas in 1970 by Wade Rathke, along with other idealistic college graduates, with a vision of organizing the poor and working class to build a new political force. The organizers were mostly middle class, white, and college educated. Organizers were paid, and members paid a yearly fee of \$120. Rathke’s vision was a multi-racial organization, which was easier to achieve in rural Arkansas than in segregated Philadelphia.

Rathke was a member of SDS until 1968, when he heard a member of the Progressive Labor Party talk about workers’ “false consciousness” and challenged students to start a worker-student alliance. Rathke was disgusted by this. He told his wife that the speakers were a bunch of spoiled students who had never worked a day in their lives. He thought, “The idea that workers were looking for alliances with students, and that students would lead them to the Promised Land, was bullshit.” (p. 10)

Rathke worked with a federally funded anti-poverty program in North Adams, Massachusetts. The program informed welfare recipients of their rights. When Rathke read Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward’s 1950 article in the *Nation*, “A Strategy to End Poverty,” he was inspired to join the Welfare Rights movement, led by George Wiley. The Piven and Cloward strategy was to recruit people who were eligible for welfare, who would demand their rights and flood the welfare offices until their demands were met. According to the theory, this would precipitate a “profound financial crisis” because cities and states lacked the funds and the staff to meet the demands. This strategy, they said,

would force governors and mayors to lobby Congress for a guaranteed adequate annual income for the poor.

Welfare recipients did flood the offices with their demands, including a guaranteed annual income; state and city officials cracked down on the recipients at welfare offices, which precipitated urban rebellions in several large cities. As we all know, the Piven and Cloward strategy didn't end poverty, but it later inspired conservatives to accuse Piven of trying to bring the capitalist system down! Glenn Beck described the "Cloward/Piven Strategy" as a world view responsible for everything from creating a "culture of poverty" and fomenting "violent revolution" to causing global warming and the recent financial crisis. Called an "enemy of the people," over the past year Piven has been subjected to an unprecedented campaign of hatred and disinformation, spearheaded by Beck. When Piven was interviewed by Scott McLemee of *Inside Higher Ed*, she said, "Bill O'Reilly has connected the dots to identify me as being behind the occupation (of Wall Street). I'm sorry to say that's not true."¹

Conservatives argued against expanding welfare because, they said, it would foster dependency, and welfare recipients should be working. Some liberal critics also believed that strategy should focus on getting people work rather than welfare. But no one, not even John Atlas in his critique of the welfare rights strategy, pointed out that caring for children was *work* and should be paid.

By the early 1970s, the welfare rights movement had lost momentum. Conservatives and centrists had convinced the broad middle class majority that paying for welfare came out of their pocketbooks. NWRO had lost the support of the white middle class. George Wiley was planning to move NWRO organizing to Arkansas in order to lobby U.S. Senator Russell Long and Rep. Wilbur Mills to enact a national guaranteed annual income. Wiley asked Rathke to lead the Arkansas organizing. However, Rathke

believed that "the base of welfare mothers and their children was too thin to support the heavy political weight needed to change the nation," (p. 17) and in order to change the nation, it was necessary to build a powerful poor people's organization that included working class as well as poor people. He persuaded Wiley to let him build a larger organization, beginning in Arkansas. Wiley agreed and raised \$5,500 from a foundation for Rathke's six months' salary and expenses. Rathke's new organization was named Arkansas Community Organization for Reform Now — ACORN.

Rathke subscribed to what Bill Fletcher, a labor activist, has called the

white populist error. He thought he could build a cross-class association, with support from labor unions, by attacking poverty caused by corporate abuse; his populist error was ignoring cultural issues or race and gender. . . . He was wrong, and in terms of organizational growth, his error kept large numbers of Americans away from ACORN. Its big tent was too small. (p. 85)

Rathke dismissed women's issues such as day care, equal wages, and abortion as unimportant. He rarely supported women's issues. "Although by the mid 1980s, 70 percent of ACORN's rank and file were women, most of them black, and the majority of its leaders were women, Rathke and other middle class white males like the Kest brothers dominated staff decisions. Not only did this discrimination contribute to the organization's neglect of women's concerns, it began to affect staff morale." (p. 85)

ACORN also avoided framing its issues racially. This hampered its work with local community black power organizations, and limited its ability to cooperate with single issue minority groups organized around desegregation, police brutality, or saving vital services.

Rathke's model of organizing was Saul Alinsky's — organizing around issues that directly affect people in a community — but he envisioned a broader national organization

that would take on political issues. Alinsky was adamant that campaign issues should be chosen by grassroots community people. I was part of an organizing campaign led by Alinsky in the 1950s at the Hudson Guild settlement house, in the Chelsea district of New York City. A friend of mine applied for a job with Alinsky and he asked my friend, "If the community wanted to organize to get a bar in the neighborhood, would my friend go along with that?" My friend said he wouldn't, and he didn't get the job. I doubt that Alinsky ever led a campaign to get a bar in the neighborhood, but he used the question to test organizers' commitment to honoring the wishes of neighborhood residents.

There are several organizations that advocate for the poor, but Alinsky and ACORN mobilized poor people to speak for themselves.

Unlike Rathke, Alinsky refused to participate in electoral campaigns. "He assumed that efforts to bring community groups into partisan electoral battles only sapped the organization's strength, co-opted its issue focus in a cult-of-the-candidate mentality, and alienated its members." (p. 43) "Alinsky feared the budding 'fascism' of large organizations and sought to build only local organizations." (p. 271) However, he was willing to put pressure on candidates after they were nominated.

ACORN realized that third parties had no chance of winning an election, but they were attracted to the theory of "electoral fusion" that was being used in New York City. They worked with the Communications Workers of America, United Auto Workers, New York Citizen Action, and many labor unions and other citizen organizations to create the Working Families Party (WFP) in New York, which replaced the Liberal Party as New York's most important third party.

Organizers disagree on whether to combine service work with organizing, but ACORN successfully conducted a campaign to get poor people enrolled in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) while also carrying on other

powerful organizing campaigns. In 2004, they had EITC tax assistance centers in 51 cities and generated \$19 million in total refunds.

ACORN won a nationwide battle against predatory mortgage lending. Through shareholder actions and local demonstrations, they kept a spotlight on predatory lending, and they were instrumental in persuading thirty-five state Attorneys General to work on the issue. They brought a class-action suit against the Housing Finance Corporation, and in 2003, HFC agreed to distribute \$484 million to abused borrowers. Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller called it "the largest restitution amount ever in a state or federal consumer case." (p. 129)

Conservatives blamed the subprime mortgage crisis on ACORN, based on its support of the Community Reinvestment Act. The *Wall Street Journal's* lead editorial on October 14, 2008, titled "Obama and ACORN," "described ACORN as a 'shady outfit' and accused the group of being 'a major contributor to the subprime meltdown by pushing lenders to make home loans on easy terms, conducting 'strikes' against banks so they'd lower credit standards.'" (p. 3)

In Philadelphia, ACORN initiated a campaign in "Urban Homesteading," i.e., squatting, which expanded into a nationwide campaign and led to a dramatic change in federal law. In 1982, Congress enacted the National Homestead Act, which reformed federal policies and procedures to make it easier for low- and moderate-income people to purchase properties owned by HUD.

ACORN expanded its housing work by creating a new spin-off institution, ACORN Housing, that raised significant funds and became a vehicle for ACORN's role in the redevelopment of New Orleans and New York City. By 1982, headquartered in New Orleans, they had a national budget of \$2.3 million. Rathke wanted to expand further, but some organizers objected, feeling they did not have the resources or energy to do more.

Organizers burned out and quit. Mary Lassen left in 1980, she and her husband wanted children and Lassen didn't think ACORN's employment policies and culture were family friendly. Other good organizers left, feeling that as ACORN got larger, it had become lethargic. New organizers reflected a wide disparity in talent and commitment, as well as in local accomplishments. ACORN barely had enough money in the treasury to pay its staff. Personnel and bills were paid late. There were big communication gaps among members of local chapters. Except for those who attended national meetings, most of the members in one state had no idea what members in other states were doing. Unless addressed, these issues could undermine ACORN's future. (p. 79)

ACORN won a victory in mixed-income housing in a development in Brooklyn. A private developer, Bruce Ratner, wanted to move the pro basketball New Jersey Nets to Brooklyn to play in a new twenty-thousand-seat arena, "the crown jewel of his planned \$2.5 billion development, Atlantic Yards." (p. 138) In addition to office space and retail space, it included 4,500 units of housing. It did not initially include mixed-income housing, but ACORN, in cooperation with unions and neighborhood groups, succeeded in securing an agreement with the developers to guarantee that units would be affordable to families at five income levels — very low, low, moderate, low middle, and high middle. Rents would be subsidized by the New York City Housing Development Corporation.

There was a great deal of controversy over the project. The area was becoming gentrified by white liberals who opposed the development, and there was tension around the issues of class and race. Even ACORN members disagreed about the project. A few black leaders opposed the project, but most blacks in Brooklyn supported Atlantic Yards. The leader of the ACORN organizing, Bertha Lewis, was black and poor. "On more than one occasion, she called her opponents 'white liberals.' Although she would publicly apologize, in her heart it was partly about race." (p. 152) Letitia James,

a black woman who was the Working Families Party candidate running against a Republican and a Democrat in the November 2001 elections in the Thirty-fifth Council District, opposed the development. She accused Ratner of intentionally stirring up racial divisions, typecasting

Conservatives had been gunning for ACORN for years, especially its work on voter registration.

upscale white residents as the main source of resistance and numb to the needs of black Brooklynites.

In 1983, ACORN began organizing in Chicago and founded the Chicago Homecare Organizing Project, which affiliated with SEIU through ACORN's own Local 880. In 1985, Obama started his new job as a community organizer with the Gameliel Foundation, helping poor blacks on the South Side. Madeline Talbott, the Chicago ACORN organizer, at first considered Obama a competitor "when both were working to get asbestos insulation removed from a Chicago housing project, but his work impressed her so much that she invited him to conduct a few trainings for her staff." (p. 100)

Obama saw that community organizers needed allies in city government and, inspired by the election and accomplishments of Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor, Obama began to think about running for public office. "Perhaps a charismatic elected official could make a bigger difference than a community organizer. He would soon decide to go to Harvard Law School, but he would return to Chicago and ACORN." (p. 100) In 1992, he returned to Chicago and took a job running Project Vote, a voter registration group.

ACORN and Project Vote united in their voter registration drive to help Carol Moseley Braun run for the U.S. Senate. "Braun was elected, the first African-American woman senator in U. S. history." (p. 101)

In his run for the presidency in 2007, Obama would apply the philosophical and practical lessons he learned on the streets of Chicago. He enlisted the help of Marshall Ganz, a Harvard lecturer and one of the country's most brilliant community organizers, to help train his get-out-the-vote volunteers. Sounding like an ACORN organizer, in his speeches he would often allude to his organizing history, urging followers to think of his campaign as a social movement in which he was just "an imperfect vessel of your hopes and dreams." (p. 101)

ACORN's success attracted enemies, many of whom were McCain supporters. For years ACORN was a target of Fox News, Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh, and conservative magazines. "Sol Stern in the *City Journal* argued that ACORN promotes 'a 1960s-bred agenda of anti-capitalism, central planning, victimology, and government handouts to the poor.'" (p. 3) The *New York Times* and CNN also attacked ACORN, alleging that it had submitted allegedly false or duplicate voter-registration applications in a number of states (an allegation that was proven untrue).

Internal troubles in ACORN added fuel to the fire. Rathke's brother Dale, whom Rathke had appointed to be the organization's comptroller, embezzled almost \$1 million from the organization in 2000. Wade had fired Dale as comptroller but kept him on as a special assistant. "Although this debt would be repaid, it turned out that Wade Rathke not only hid the embezzlement from ACORN's funders but also did not report all the details to the national board." (p. 223) An embittered ACORN member leaked the story to the press, and on July 9, 2008, the *New York Times* published an article about it.

The McCain campaign used this informa-

tion to link Obama with ACORN, describing it as an outlaw leftist group. "Despite ACORN's endorsement of Obama, he immediately distanced himself from the group. 'The only involvement I've had with ACORN,' Obama told the media, 'is I represented them alongside the U.S. Justice Department in making Illinois implement a motor voter law that helped people get registered at DMVs.'" (p. 4)

Several politicians and legislators supported ACORN until the conservatives attacked it. Hillary Clinton was the keynote speaker at ACORN's 2006 annual convention, and Bill Clinton gave the keynote speech at New York's twenty-fifth anniversary gala in 2007. Yet, while Community Reinvestment Act enforcement improved under Clinton's Justice Department and bank regulators, and ACORN received funds from HUD for housing counseling and racial testing, Clinton made compromises that alienated some of his key supporters, including ACORN, in November 1994, after the Republicans won a majority of seats in the House under the leadership of Newt Gingrich. (His signing the welfare "reform" bill was one of those compromises, but John Atlas doesn't mention that particular devastating compromise.)

Even Rick Perry supported ACORN. A reporter from the *Economic Policy Journal* said, "I found that Perry had *good friends in ACORN*, a community organization that Republicans love to hate. In 2006, Perry signed into law a bill which benefited low-income homeowners. ACORN called this their 'proudest moment.' When Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson opposed funding ACORN in 2007, he attacked her."² When a *Economic Policy Journal* reader confronted Rick Perry about tripling the state debt, massively increasing spending, and helping out ACORN, his response was "you obviously don't know what you're talking about." Yet there on the internet for all to see is his picture, smiling with his pen poised to sign a bill, and ACORN members standing around him.³

Hurricane Katrina created a crisis for

ACORN, as its headquarters were there and the hurricane destroyed their homes and all their records. Rathke and his family lost their homes. Phone lines were down, including cell phone towers. Few ACORN members had e-mail. "How was the organization to give voice to members who were now scattered across Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi, and elsewhere?" (p. 160)

ACORN had done significant organizing in New Orleans. The local chapter had more than nine thousand dues-paying members in 2005. "Sixty-six people — the local staff as well as some of ACORN's national staff — worked in a crowded two-story wood-frame house, a former funeral home that now served as the New Orleans office." (p. 159) Most of the operations had to relocate to Baton Rouge. From there, the staff worked to locate ACORN members. They were helped by nationwide staff and members, who were able to find housing for displaced New Orleans members in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Little Rock, Atlanta, Birmingham, Seattle, Vancouver, and New York. A message board on the ACORN website made it possible for those who had e-mail to contact each other. Using creative improvised technology, staff set up a communications center in Baton Rouge. They assisted evacuees with financial and housing matters, giving advice about mortgage relief, preventing foreclosures and evictions, available credit, and their entitlement under the emergency.

ACORN joined the AFL-CIO and consumer groups to pressure mortgage holders not to foreclose on New Orleans houses. They worked to postpone the deadline for owners to rebuild, and worked to rebuild houses. Rathke described it as a "guerilla war in which people are fighting house by house, block by block, to save their neighborhoods." (p. 182) They organized a demonstration in Washington, D.C. in February 2006 and lobbied Congress. Working with other groups, they organized a Home Cleaning Program and met their goal of saving a thousand

homes.

Rathke was a charismatic leader, but tried to keep control of decision-making. Atlas says, "Most successful large organizations, even non-profit and activist ones, depend on dynamic, innovation, risk-taking leaders who mirror the savvy successful entrepreneur who starts a small business and grows it into a large profitable company. Rathke was ACORN's venture capitalist." (p. 219) Since he was focused on building relationships, tactics, and campaign strategies, he delegated administration to others, especially his brother Dale. But it was hard to keep track of such a large and scattered organization. Staffing and training staff was a continual problem. There was large turnover, and only volunteers staffed some offices. Despite strenuous efforts to recruit black organizers, most of them were white. There was tension among board and staff over Rathke's authority and leadership ability. Despite these problems, Rathke wanted to expand ACORN to 2,500,000 members by 2010. Some experienced lead organizers opposed his plan as unrealistic. Madeline Talbott, an experienced organizer, wanted to focus on building alliances with other organizations that were working on economic justice issues. She and others thought Rathke was being driven by ambition and dreams of an unrealistic legacy. She led her large Illinois chapter out of ACORN.

After Rathke's brother Dale embezzled a million dollars, Rathke hid it from his board for eight months, believing he could continue as usual. The Rathke family pledged to repay the money. When the scandal surfaced inside the organization, before the *New York Times* article came out, the board was angry that Rathke had kept his brother on the payroll for eight years and that Rathke failed to inform them immediately. They forced Rathke to resign and fired his brother. "In an act that reaffirmed the democratic nature of ACORN, the board replaced Rathke with Bertha Lewis because of her proven leadership qualities and her reputation for fighting for more transparency and

accountability.” (p. 225) Bertha Lewis was a black woman. After the *New York Times* broke the story, given to them by disgruntled ACORN members, some foundations that had funded them, including the Catholic Church, withdrew their grants.

Some foundations offered Bertha Lewis their help in reorganizing ACORN. Her difficulties were compounded by the factionalism within the organization. The majority of the board supported Lewis’ decision to fire Rathke and move on. The New Orleans chapter valued Rathke’s work and wanted to keep him. A third faction had for years tried to wrest control over ACORN from Rathke and run it themselves. They were the source of many negative articles in the *New York Times* and Fox News. Despite all these troubles, ACORN continued its organizing work and won a major victory when, along with other groups, they pressured President Bush to sign a federal affordable housing bill, which provided five billion dollars for low-income housing, financial counseling, and mortgage restructuring for people and neighborhoods hit hard by the predatory subprime mortgage crisis.

Conservatives had been gunning for ACORN for years, especially its work on voter registration. The final blow was struck in July 2009 when James O’Keefe and Hannah Giles, posing as a pimp and a prostitute, asked an ACORN staff member to give them information on how to establish a brothel. Apparently the staff member gave them irresponsible information. O’Keefe videotaped the interview and publicized it widely. ACORN fired the staff member and hired Scott Harshbarger, former attorney general of Massachusetts, to investigate the charge and implement necessary management changes. Harshbarger’s report said that although some of the statements by ACORN staff were inappropriate and unprofessional, it was not illegal. He found that the video had been doctored but was unable to obtain the original video to compare. The video that was

publicized showed O’Keefe and Giles in ridiculous costumes, although when they conducted the interview in the ACORN office they were dressed in regular street clothing. The fact that ACORN had done nothing illegal got little publicity in the media, but the media continued its negative assault.

Bertha Lewis and other ACORN staff, following the recommendations made by Harshbarger, reorganized. Seventeen state chapters established statewide groups separate from ACORN, including the adoption of a new name. The new groups will emphasize state and local issues. In January 2010, California ACORN became the first chapter to go independent, calling itself the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment.

In an epilogue, John Atlas asks, “Is a twenty-first century social movement likely?” (p. 252) As I write, the Occupy Wall Street movement is gathering steam. It rejects the charismatic leader, seeking to make decisions collectively and democratically. No one can predict what change it will accomplish, but they are dealing with the same issues that ACORN dealt with and it is possible that they will accomplish change that is deeper and more profound that ACORN was able to do.

This would be a good training book for students of community organizers. As an organizer myself, I was interested in the blow-by-blow descriptions of strategies and tactics. The research is exhaustive. It reads well. Atlas says he consulted with a novelist to help him with his style, and it shows. There are a couple of minor flaws. In listing potential allies of ACORN, he includes neoliberals. (p. 274) When talking about compromises that President Clinton made that alienated supporters, including ACORN, he does not mention Clinton signing the welfare “reform” bill. (p. 64) Since Rathke began his career working with the welfare rights movement, that was a particularly bitter pill. Not only had the welfare rights movement died, but welfare itself was eviscerated by Clinton.

The biggest mistake is the misplacement of pages in the book. Page 49 comes after page 52, 53 comes after 56, and it doesn't straighten out until page 65. Still, it is worth the trouble to figure it out as this is a valuable book.

NOTES

1. Scott McLemee, (2011, October 12). Welcome to the Occupation. *Inside Higher Ed*. http://www.insidehighered.com/views/mclemee/mclemee_on_occupy_wall_street

2. Economic Policy Journal.com. (2011, August 16). EPJ reader confronts Rick Perry about Texas spending and ACORN connection. www.economicpolicyjournal.com/2011/08/epj-reader-confronts-rick-perry-about.html

3. The picture is on the Free Republic web site, www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-bloggers/2762618/posts

The Consequences of Denial and Indifference

MICHAEL WRESZIN

ANYONE WALKING ABOUT in a large urban city today cannot help but see the overwhelming signs of the importance of race in our daily lives. Neighborhoods are segregated into black and white areas. The former are invariably blighted and unattended. The schools are almost totally segregated, black in the inner cities and white in the suburbs.

The New York Times almost daily has a story on the impact of race on employment. Black resumes are often simply rejected without being read. Police raid black communities for drug use and sales but ignore white communities.

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The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

MICHELLE ALEXANDER
New York, NY: New Press 2010
290 pp., \$27.95

These things have to be obvious and yet they are uniformly ignored or denied. There appears to be an overriding indifference that makes the

treatment of blacks invisible. On the contrary if there is discussion it is to say that the racial problems have been solved. At this writing the *New York Times* (Oct. 17, 2011) quotes Lonnie Bunch, Director of the National Museum of African-American History and

Culture at the dedication of the Martin Luther King memorial on the national mall, lamenting the continuous efforts "to ignore race, tamp it down, or try to say that it's over, that we have solved all the problems." We are constantly told to look at the TV. Black anchormen are common; blacks are seen in many ads, blacks own successful businesses. Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and of course, Barack Obama, the

African-American president of the post-racial United States, are pointed to as illustrations of the nation's victory over racism. Harvard academics, Steven and Abigail Thernstrom, in their very successful book *Black and White In America* (1997), attack affirmative action as unnecessary since blacks and whites are now treated equally.

Caste systems do not require
racial hostility or overt bigotry
to survive. They need only racial
indifference.

They see nothing but the remarkable progress of blacks in American society. Many now believe the Supreme Court will rule against affirmative action. And yet in 2004 the distinguished columnist and economist, Paul Krugman, in *The Times* asked "who could honestly deny that race is a major reason America treats its poor more harshly than any other advanced country?" (9/19/2005) With mounting evidence of racist policies in housing, employment, and in government services the indifference and denials simply increase.

Michelle Alexander in her extraordinarily important work, *The New Jim Crow in the Age of Colorblindness*, goes a long way toward explaining this tragic phenomenon. Her introduction alone is a breathtaking account of a deliberate policy designed to return the black community to the caste-ridden oppression of the former Jim Crow system. Race is no longer mentioned; the N word is banned; there is no racial hostility expressed. The state and its correctional institutions insist they are simply fighting crime. Alexander states explicitly that "crime" is a code word for black. (p.102) Police raid the black ghetto communities explaining that that is where crime is the highest. This is a myth. They

raid the black communities to fight the drug war but ignore the campus communities where whites deal and use drugs. The War on Drugs was a godsend to right wing conservatives. It was the perfect way of achieving mass incarceration of young black men arrested and labeled felons for use of crack cocaine. One Senator declared:

If we blame crime on crack, our politicians are off the hook. Forgotten are the failed schools, the maligned welfare programs, the desolate neighborhoods, the wasted years. Only crack is to blame. One is tempted to think that if crack did not exist, someone somewhere would have received a Federal grant to develop it. (p.52)

Once labeled "felon" the defendants are legally barred from voting or serving on juries, there is legalized discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public benefits just as their parents were discriminated against under slavery and also under Jim Crow laws. However, according to Alexander, when the Brown Decision finally brought an end to overt segregation it contributed to the collapse of Jim Crow. Then the criminal justice system was used to label blacks criminals and to reengage all the discriminatory practices of Jim Crow. Alexander insists that "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it."

The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The penal system is a system of social control defined largely by race. In 1972 fewer than 350,000 were held in prisons. Two million people are held today. How this system survives and is largely ignored by the public is the question Alexander raises. She notes that caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to survive. They need only racial indifference. President Reagan in the 1960s avoided race while pursuing racist policies. He attacked the welfare system, claiming that blacks were cheating the system at the expense of the white working class. The media with endless pictures of criminal blacks helped persuade the white working class to abandon the Democratic Party in the South on the grounds

that the Democrats were aiding blacks at the expense of whites. This became the “Southern racial strategy” under President Nixon with its constant demand for the restoration of law and order. Prosecutors and police departments insisted that they were fighting crime rampant in the black ghettos. But these were lies; crime was not rising in the ghettos. Alexander lists all of the myths used in the promotion of the drug war at the core of the law and order campaigns. The war on drugs was not, as was claimed, aimed at ridding the nation of the big time dealers. There were far more arrests for minor drug use and not sales. The drug war was not focused on dangerous drugs. Marijuana accounted for 78 percent of arrests. Marijuana is far less dangerous than alcohol. But arrested drunk drivers are predominantly white and male and they receive minor punishments and are seldom jailed. The 4th Amendment protecting the citizen against “unreasonable searches and seizures” was constantly violated with stop and frisk and constant search and seizure in the black communities. Minor traffic violations are used to conduct illegal searches. Why do the cops do this? Because they and their departments receive cash, expensive equipment, and they are able to confiscate private property. They seize cars, cash, homes, and other property.

This war on drugs is institutionalized and

accepted. Hundreds of thousands go to jail without seeing any lawyers. Eighty percent can’t afford them and the public defender systems are inadequate. Most of the blacks arrested never go to trial, accepting a plea bargain through a coerced confession. Then in many states there is now mandatory sentencing of five to ten years, leaving judges with no ability to make a discriminating judgment. Once convicted, the victims are locked out of society. Branded a felon, they are no longer eligible for food stamps; they are discriminated against in employment, disenfranchised, evicted or barred from public housing. Once homeless, the children are put in foster care. It is almost impossible for them to be returned to the parent.

In this drug war, the enemy is racially defined. Blacks are 80 to 90 percent of all who are sent to jail. Alexander insists the majority of drug users are white but three-quarters of accused blacks and Latinos are sent to jail. So when whites see crime they automatically see black. They do not think they are biased, but fear of young black men has been reinforced by the constant media imagery.

In the black ghetto, the police are referred to as “the occupation.” Stop and frisk is so common that when African-Americans encounter a cop car they automatically assume the position soon to be demanded. Supreme court cases have liter-



ally granted the police the right to discriminate in the era of colorblindness. Several Supreme Court decisions have made the system of mass incarceration “thoroughly immunized from claims of racial bias.” However, today in the *New York Times* (Oct.18, 2011, p. A21) a New York City police officer was accused of violating the civil rights of a black man in an unmerited stop and frisk. He told his girlfriend he had “fried another nigger.” The prosecutor described the officer as a “blatant racist.”

Once declared by the courts a felon, the victim faces “a lifetime of shame and contempt, scorn, and exclusion.” It is not just a matter of punishment: “One’s debt to society is never paid. The badge of inferiority remains for the rest of the victim’s life.” Alexander is hard on spokesmen like Bill Cosby, Sidney Poitier, and President Obama as well; they preach the old litany about black men accepting responsibility and their need to become better fathers. There are too many fathers missing from the home. Where are they? Alexander points out that the critics and the president don’t mention the prisons. Where have all the black men gone is a common refrain among black women. Their disappearance is rooted in the incarceration reality but few deal with the obvious explanation. Alexander, writing with rage, remarks:

Hundreds of thousands of black men are unable to be good fathers for their children, not because of a lack of commitment or desire but because they are warehoused in prisons, locked in cages. They did not walk out on their families voluntarily — they were taken away in handcuffs. Often due to a massive federal program known as the War On Drugs. (pp.173-4)

Often Blacks are quiet about mass incarceration. They blame themselves and feel shame. The victims are seen as behaving badly when in fact the society has created the conditions. “The deep failure of morality,” Alexander insists, “is our own.” She asks with respect to shaming those trapped in ghettos: “Are we willing to

demonize a population, declare a war against them, and then stand back and heap shame and contempt upon them for failing to behave like model citizens while under attack?”

Alexander statistically shows that African-Americans “are no better off today than they were in 1968. If the incarcerated population is counted in unemployment and poverty rates, the best of times for the rest of America has been the worst of times for African-Americans, particularly black men.”

Alexander claims that mass incarceration has been an overwhelming success at social control. In less than two decades, the prison population quadrupled and large majorities of poor people of color were placed under the control of the criminal justice system. Alexander claims “this was not an unforeseeable consequence. Judging by the political rhetoric and the legal rules employed in the War on Drugs this result is no freak accident.” It was because of race. But the subject is ignored. A callous colorblindness prevents us from seeing racial institutions. We have become blind to racial cast in America. Toward the close, Alexander is critical of the Civil Rights Movement’s focus on affirmative action, which only made the mass incarceration more invisible. Affirmative action has promoted the erroneous trickle down theory of justice and acclaims the progress that has been made. It tends to support the argument that “Race no longer matters.”

Alexander’s book is a powerful and persuasive attack on the criminal justice system and the War on Drugs. There is some ambivalence as to whether the policies she describes are deliberately undertaken by the press, politicians, and the Federal government or are they simply the result of an unconscious racial bias? It seems that she believes both are true. The results are no freak accident, but the policies may also be motivated by an unconscious racism. In any case it has been a tragic history; her book is a powerful weapon toward the necessary remedies.

Building the Party

KENT WORCESTER

A FAIR NUMBER of *New Politics* readers will have read one or more of Tony Cliff's books, or perhaps even seen him deliver one of his stem-winding speeches. For more than half a century, Tony Cliff (1917-2000) played a leading role in the movement to rebuild the international far left in the wake of Stalinism and fascism. He was a proponent of the theory of Soviet state-capitalism, a biographer of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, and a central figure in the development of the International Socialist tendency. In person, he was charming and charismatic, but as a political organizer he could be utterly ruthless.

Born and raised in a small village outside Haifa, Palestine, Tony Cliff came from a prosperous Russian family with strong Zionist beliefs. His given name was Ygael Gluckstein; Tony Cliff was one of several pseudonyms he adopted over the years. Cliff's father worked in the construction industry, and Ian Birchall reports that, "his business partner at one time was Yehiel Mikhail Weizmann, the youngest brother of the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann." Cliff began reading the socialist classics in his early teens, and joined a small Marxist group in Palestine at the age of sixteen. One comrade from those days remembers him

as a "youth with an inner fire...a boy/old man who drew happiness not from the love life of youth but from complete dedication to the revolutionary cause." Even then he was known as a "brilliant, riveting speaker" with an animated

sense of humor. By the time Cliff was twenty, he was a dedicated Trotskyist, committed to building the Fourth International.

Life as a revolutionary socialist in pre-Israel

Palestine was difficult indeed. For one thing, there was a dearth of leftist analyses on the history and politics of the region. For another, the British authorities were determined to stamp out any group that called for Arab and Jewish unity or advocated on behalf of the working class. Cliff actually spent a year in prison for distributing leaflets that denounced British imperialism. According to Birchall, "food was served in a large cauldron, and to get a piece of meat prisoners had to plunge their arm" into the steaming pot. A variety of diseases were "widespread in the jails," but "medical inspections were perfunctory." In addition, British intelligence officers often tortured prisoners by sticking pieces of wood under their fingernails, hanging them by their hands, or exposing their feet to open flames. Even after his release, Cliff was initially placed under house arrest and then subjected to intensive surveillance.

State repression was only one obstacle that the small circle of Trotskyists in Palestine was forced to contend with. Objective political conditions were another. By the 1930s, Jewish migration to the area was steadily rising. Zionist ideas were popular among these new migrants,

Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time

IAN BIRCHALL

London: Bookmarks, 2011, 648 pp., £16.99

KENT WORCESTER edited a symposium on "*The Meaning and Legacy of the Magna Carta*" for *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 43, no. 3 (July 2010). His books include *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (1996), *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (2004), and *A Comics Studies Reader* (2009).

regardless of their location in the class structure. At the same time, many Arabs were nationalist in their orientation, and increasingly hostile to any form of cross-ethnic solidarity. Cliff's first contribution to the radical left came in the form

By the late 1970s he was beginning to wonder whether the socialist left faced a protracted downturn.

of essays on Middle Eastern politics, several of which circulated widely among socialists in North America and Western Europe. These pieces expressed both the strengths and the weaknesses of Cliff's Marxism. On the one hand, they were written in a lucid, straightforward style, and were stuffed with facts and figures that their author largely culled from the business press. They attempted to grapple with the real world. At the same time, they often concluded with lofty calls for the establishment of a "Republic of Workers and Peasants of the Arab East" that assumed that a looming economic crisis would erase deeply-rooted social differences and generate an era of revolutionary transcendence. This combination of empirical fastidiousness and rash political optimism would become a hallmark of Cliff's approach.

Cliff moved to England in 1946, accompanied by his wife Chanie Rosenberg. They had met when Cliff gave a talk at the left-Zionist kibbutz where Chanie lived and worked. (As Birchall wryly notes, the "meeting itself was not a great success"; Cliff spoke for hours and hours, "and his Hebrew was often incomprehensible to the audience of new immigrants.") Chanie Rosenberg was born and raised in South Africa, and her passport allowed her to relocate to Britain. Her father "had a visa for Britain which he did not need," which he

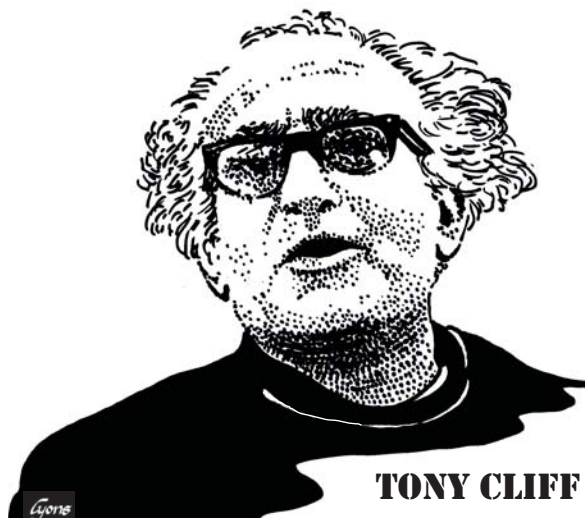
passed along to Cliff. They first traveled to Paris, to meet with leading members of the Fourth International. Unfortunately, Cliff's glasses fell into the Mediterranean during their voyage to Europe, so he couldn't see very well. It was in England — armed with a new pair of glasses — that he embraced the theory of state capitalism that had already been propounded by C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, among others. Cliff's writings on the Soviet Union provided a "wealth of concrete examples" along with "constant references to the Marxist classics." He did a better job of demolishing the orthodox Trotskyist position than he did of countering the "bureaucratic collectivist" analysis of Max Shachtman and his supporters, and there was a sloganeering, one-size-fits-all quality to many Cliff-inspired state capitalist polemics. But, as Cliff later noted, "if the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class, then you cannot have a workers' state without the workers having power."

Securing permission to stay in England proved difficult, and for a period of four years, 1947 to 1951, Cliff lived in Ireland, whose authorities viewed "the Jews of Palestine" as "fighting a struggle for national liberation from British colonial rule." Chanie remained in London and worked as a teacher, earning seven pounds a week. As Birchall writes, "Chanie's income had to support both of them, Cliff's lifestyle was frugal: his normal diet was bread, jam, a bar of chocolate and an egg each day." By the time he was able to return to England, the country's main Trotskyist group had broken into several factions, and Cliff's small band of supporters decided to launch their own organization. Their first meeting was held in the fall of 1950, with "21 people in attendance, representing a total membership of 33." Calling themselves the Socialist Review Group, they mainly reached out to manual workers and Labour Party activists. One of their most notable recruits was Duncan Hallas, who would play a pivotal role in the IS, and subsequently the British SWP,

during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Birchall's account of the group's formative period is mostly level-headed, which makes his hagiographic comparison of Cliff and Hallas all the more disconcerting: "If Cliff resembled Lenin in his remorseless focus on the political, Hallas took after Engels in his vast range of interests in the natural and social worlds."

The Socialist Review Group faced an uphill struggle. Living standards were rising, and many, if not most, active trade unionists regarded the Labour Party as *their* party. Furthermore, the Communist Party was still quite strong in certain areas. Cliff poured his energies into building the SRG, but by the end of the decade it was still a marginal force, even in relation to competing groupuscules. Two things helped keep it going. The first was the high quality of its new recruits, including people like Michael Kidron, Peter Sedgwick, Jim Higgins, Alastair MacIntyre, and Paul Foot. The second was the decline of the Communist Party in the mid-1950s and the early stirrings of what would become known as the New Left. Some of Cliff's best writings date from this period, including books and essays on Mao's China, Rosa Luxemburg, the permanent arms economy, and the postwar boom. The group launched a new quarterly publication, *International Socialism*, in 1960, and renamed itself the International Socialists in 1962. For the next several years the fledgling group was able to develop a consistent approach, and attract new members, without behaving like a sterile sect. By the time a new radical generation burst on the scene, in the late 1960s, the IS was well positioned to relate Marxist ideas to students and young workers whose political outlook was decisively shaped by their disaffection with mainstream parties and by their opposition to the Vietnam War.

From the standpoint of intellectual history, the most interesting period in the development of the IS tendency came in the 1950s and 1960s. This was when Cliff seemed most open to new ideas, and most willing to collaborate with



those whose sensibility differed from his own. For this reason, rival tendencies viewed the IS group with suspicion, and in particular as being insufficiently Leninist in its approach. A decisive turning point came at the end of the 1960s when Cliff explicitly pushed IS in a democratic centralist direction. "A revolutionary combat organization," he wrote in an internal document in 1968, "needs a democratic centralist structure." As Birchall points out, the "IS group had traditionally been fairly lax organizationally. In the 18 years since the founding of the SRG there had been just three expulsions." Now Cliff was calling for a major overhaul in the group's internal life and political perspectives. Rather than seeing itself as a loosely organized tendency, it began to regard itself as the nucleus of a — or rather *the* — revolutionary party. The struggle to transform the group along vanguardist lines soaked up considerable energies in the 1970s, even as the class war was heating up. The membership expanded, but the group's rhetoric became more predictable. By 1977 it renamed itself once again, as the Socialist Workers Party, which reflected its revamped aspirations, as well as its growing presence on the left. Cliff spent the early part of the decade looking forward

to a revolutionary crisis that would place the working class in power. By the late 1970s he was beginning to wonder whether the socialist left faced a protracted downturn. The Cliffites pulled off some successes in this period, most notably the Rock against Racism initiative, and the high-profile Anti-Nazi League. But they also lost some of their most capable and thoughtful members, through attrition and expulsion.

IAN BIRCHALL WRITES AT LENGTH about the SWP's subsequent ups and downs, from the bitter industrial disputes of the 1980s to the anti-capitalist protests of the 1990s. He also documents Cliff's tireless efforts as a pamphleteer, organizer, and public speaker. He emphasizes the extraordinary impression that Cliff often left on younger socialists, including former members who drifted from the organization but who nevertheless kept plugging away as trade unionists and social movement activists. He implicitly acknowledges, I think, that Cliff's approach became less innovative as the decades wore on. (The fact that the book's subtitle calls Tony Cliff a Marxist for *his* time, rather than *our* time, is pretty telling.) He even cites the justified complaint of one of the group's most impressive writers, Nigel Harris, that the "SWP in the 1980s had stopped producing new ideas." And he readily admits that Cliff "had a tendency to make favorites — and drop them." Indeed, several of Birchall's anecdotes make Cliff look callous in his dealings with longtime comrades. His book certainly offers a far less flattering portrait than the one provided by Cliff's autobiography, *A World To Win: Life*

of a Revolutionary (2000), which I reviewed in NP #32 (Winter 2002).

From Birchall's perspective, of course, the key thing is not that Tony Cliff was imperfect, but that he never wavered in his socialist convictions, and never stopped building the party. As he pointedly insists in the book's conclusion, "Among writers of the anti-Stalinist left who built on Trotsky's heritage in the second half of the twentieth century, Isaac Deutscher, C.L.R. James, and Hal Draper produced books comparable in quality to Cliff's, but their organizational legacy was negligible." It's impossible to make sense of Cliff's Marxism, in other words, without also coming to terms with the strengths and weaknesses of the organization that he and his collaborators practically built from scratch.

As it happens, Tony Cliff played a formative role in my own development as an impressionable young radical. I saw him speak a dozen or more times, sometimes to small audiences and, on a few occasions, at mass rallies. He was a formidable orator — witty, insightful, and quick on his feet. Birchall's thoroughly researched biography brought back many fond memories. In fact, I spent a few happy afternoons with Tony Cliff and Chanie Rosenberg in their modest London home in the late 1970s and early 1980s. When I first met Cliff I was still in secondary school. At the time, I was thinking about getting a factory job, or a printing apprenticeship, after graduation. Cliff helped me get past my workerist ambitions. There are plenty of opportunities for useful political work on campuses, he pointed out. Besides, he added, you might even learn something.

German Resistance to the Nazi State

HORST BRAND

THE BOOK'S TITLE TRANSLATES A TERM, "Rote Kapelle," that the Gestapo applied to a relatively small circle of men and women in Berlin, active in seeking to weaken the political authority of the Hitler regime during the 1930s and early 1940s. The term, however, was meant to convey the notion that the group was involved in a Soviet conspiracy — a notion that survived the war and was perpetuated in the ensuing climate of a public opinion shaped by the cold war and hostility to the Soviet Union. The group's "historical legacy" was diminished and "distorted," not least by its former adversaries in Germany (as was that of the German resistance to Hitler generally whose acts, such as their attempt to assassinate the "Fuehrer" in July 1944, were held to be treasonable for many postwar years).

This reviewer has no knowledge of any of the vast number of German sources the author cites; nevertheless the book reads like a powerful argument in telling the story of untiring resistance to Nazi tyranny by the Red Orchestra — a resistance in which the group's retaliation to Soviet agents was but one of the means.

Some of the Orchestra's members had been active in the German Communist Party and were in sympathy with its views. Information thought useful to the Soviet Union, such as

warnings about its planned invasion (in June 1941), was transmitted by those of the group's members in a position to do so. But at the core

of the Orchestra's actions was the uncompromising moral impulse to fight the evil of the Hitler regime. It was an impulse motivated also by a passion to exonerate the German people from the atrocities committed in Eastern Europe in its

name, and from an aggressive, unjustifiable war. It was that impulse and passion which also moved the participants of the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, even at the risk of failure (which, fatefully, ensued). What mattered indeed was not so much failure or success of that conspiracy but the testimonial to the will of the German resistance to challenge Hitler's rule — a testimonial the world would not, could not ignore.

The Orchestra was not part of the high-placed network of political and military leaders to which the July 20th conspirators were more or less loosely linked nor did it share their broader political or social horizons. The author does not probe these matters. But the group was evidently driven by the same moral force as the July 20th conspirators.

A leading member of the Orchestra was a German air force First Lieutenant, Marro Schulze-Boysen, "scion of a prominent military family" with close ties to the German navy. Schulze-Boysen worked in the air force's intelligence division, and thus had access to foreign publications (whose circulation was otherwise strictly limited) — hence to much information

Red Orchestra: The Story of the Berlin Underground and the Circle of Friends Who Resisted Hitler

ANNE NELSON

New York: Random House, 2009, 588 pp. \$27

HORST BRAND, a veteran socialist, has contributed many book reviews to earlier *New Politics* issues. He is on the *Dissent* editorial board.

damaging to the Nazi regime. In collaboration with fellow members of the Orchestra, Schulze-Boysen detailed such information in pamphlets, and had them hectographed. The pamphlets were then underhandedly distributed in the dark of night, either let go in the city's streets or pushed into residential mail boxes. Even

The German Communist Party in effect withdrew from resistance activities after the German-Soviet nonaggression pact.

obtaining the paper for the pamphlets was risky since the purchase of large amounts of it aroused suspicion (the Gestapo counted 40,000 officers and could rely on many willing informers). Being caught distributing the pamphlets meant incarceration in a concentration camp and, in the later phases of the war years, death.

Another key member of the Orchestra was Arvid Marnack who had in time attained high office in the economics ministry. He too came from a prominent family (he was a cousin of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a dissident Protestant clergyman, and one of the July 20th conspirators). Marnack had attended the University of Wisconsin as a Rockefeller fellow in the 1920s. He and his wife (an American) eventually moved to Germany and became close to the Social Democratic Party. They had also partaken in a Soviet Union study group, and, like others of their family, “had been openly critical of the Nazis’ rise to power” — hence vulnerable to the scrutiny of the new power holders. Yet, Arvid’s abhorrence of the regime led him to sporadic and later closer contact with Soviet agents.

The book presents much interesting detail concerning these contacts as well as about the

wide ranging sources of information upon which Marnack as well as Schulze-Boysen drew. Here an example must suffice. Thus, Marnack reported what he had heard from an army staff officer at the high command that in preparing for the war against the Soviet Union the following year (i.e., 1941), Romania would be occupied, and the planned invasion of England would be postponed. It is of course well known today that Stalin at the time was skeptical about this and subsequent similar reports about Hitler’s interventions, leaving the Soviet Union initially unprepared for the invasion by Germany. Hitler in fact had earlier sent a message to Stalin, assuring him that warnings about a coming invasion were unfounded rumors — a message that reassured the recipient.

Soviet agents, and here the author cites surviving records, did not consider Marnack (and perhaps other members of the Orchestra) as “ideal” espionage agents. The best amateur agents were the most easily controlled, usually motivated by greed or blackmail.... The perfect spy was dedicated to the single narrow function of espionage, and rejected any political activity ... that could attract attention. ... But Arvid Marnack made it clear ... that he would not allow his intelligence work to extinguish his resistance work.”² Be it noted, however, that ideological fervor such as Marnack’s was a powerful motivation of espionage during much of the earlier 20th century — the cases of the Rosenbergs and some high officials of Great Britain being only the more prominent ones.

Soviet agents also attempted to discourage Orchestra members’ effort to enlarge their circle of opponents, which Marnack and others declined to do. But this effort was at any rate undermined by the Munich 4-power “settlement” (September 1938) by Great Britain, France, and Italy, in addition to Germany. The agreement in effect ceded the Sudetenland, an integral part of Czechoslovakia, to the Germans, greatly enhancing Hitler’s prestige. Another outcome of Munich was the occupation of Czechoslovakia

in March 1939. Politically still more disorienting for the opposition was the German-Soviet nonaggression pact, concluded in late August 1939, ten days prior to the outbreak of World War II. The pact also divided Poland between the two powers.

The reaction to those events in particular by those of the Orchestra's members who had been associated with the Communist Party or had been sympathetic to its views was deeply demoralizing. The pessimism of Orchestra members became more pronounced as German troops invaded France, The Netherlands, and the Nordic countries (other than Sweden, which, however granted transit rights). The withdrawal of British troops via Dunkirk finally led the Orchestra people to believe that Hitler's political stature would not be weakened in the near future.

In his *Germany, 1866-1945*, Gordon A. Craig writes that "The German resistance movement, in contrast to the French, had a narrow social base. Despite its Socialist and trade union component, it never extended, as the French movement did, to the masses of the working class or even to the 'Mittelstand.' It was in a real sense, a movement of officers without soldiers...." (p. 667) Craig counts the Orchestra as a part of the German resistance although without links to the July 20th conspirators, and notes that the German Communist Party in effect withdrew from resistance activities after the German-Soviet nonaggression pact.

Among 26 of the "Cast of Characters" listed by the book's author, tied in one way or other to the Orchestra, only one is identified as a blue-collar worker; another had worked in factories but had in time become a journalist and then a well-placed railroad official. Many of the others were artists, playwrights, film writers. All sought to widen their circle by carefully contacting others about whom they had reason to believe were opponents of the regime — but such contacts were necessarily limited to persons of similar or social or occupational background.

In reaction perhaps to Hitler's victorious campaigns in Western Europe, some of the Orchestra's members began to feel that the risks to their lives by their illicit antifascist work was not worth the "modest return." Some of them distanced themselves from Narro Schulze-Boysen who had a way of tempestuously giving vent to his animosity to the Nazis. A lesson, if such it was, was brought home to the group after a Jewish Communist, Herbert Baum, and his associates exploded a bomb at a Nazi-sponsored exhibit of the "Soviet Paradise," injuring several persons (in 1942). Baum's group was rounded up by the Gestapo, 22 of them being executed; in addition 250 Jews were arrested, with 100 of them shot at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Orchestra members strongly opposed anti-Semitism, and aided individual Jews when feasible. Schulze-Boysen may have had access to a copy of the Wannsee documents, which outlined the planning of the destruction of European Jewry, 300 copies of which had been made available to other Nazi officials. But there is no evidence that he had in fact seen one, let alone sent it abroad. His wife Libertas, an employee of the UFA film studio, however, established a secret archive of photographs, taken by German soldiers in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, of atrocities committed against Jews and other civilians. Taking such photographs was forbidden, but this was usually ignored. Libertas, an employee of the UFA film studio, had ways to obtain such photographs which she copied for her archive so as to aid any indictment of the Nazis after the war.

In his magisterial work, *Die Deutsche Diktatur*,³ Karl Dietrich Bracher writes that underlying all the descriptions of the Nazis' rise to power was the question, "How was it possible that a dictatorial regime of such vast scope in a country so rich in traditions and culture such as Germany, could gain victory so rapidly, and virtually without resistance?" This question is not touched on in this book nor raised by any

of the people we meet here. Possibly the author lacked the sources to probe this matter or the inclination to do so, given the uncounted number of works that have been dealing with it. As noted, members of the Orchestra were driven to act, at times recklessly, to weaken the regime, their hope of its destruction being fulfilled in the spring of 1945 — some three years after most of them had been executed under a German court (*Kriegsgericht*) verdict.

The political views of the Orchestra's members are not detailed in this book. Their actions are of course in themselves an expression, a demonstration of their politics, and parallel those of the Staufenberg-Laber wing of the July 20th conspirators — "...getting rid of Hitler, ending the war, restoration of law and freedom."⁴ This was also Dietrich Bonhoeffer's position. He held that the guilt of the German people ruled out any autonomous foreign policy (which some of the leading July 20th conspirators assumed possible after Hitler's disappearance). Unconditional surrender, Bonhoeffer believed, (prior to its pronouncement by the Allies in 1943 at Casablanca) was unavoidable, and the military defeat of Germany and its occupation "necessary for moral and political reasons," the

resistance "an act of atonement." (Bracher, *ibid.*)

During the first two decades of the postwar years, the struggle and message of the German resistance were widely treated with disdain, its activists and spokespersons held guilty of high treason. A disturbing example, cited by Bracher, was the rejection of renaming a number of schools after some of the July 20th participants by groups of parents, with close to one-half of those surveyed in opposition, one-third "undecided," and only 18 percent in favor.⁴

Succeeding generations will undoubtedly rethink the tainted past of their country and will remember that those of the Orchestra and of the July 20th conspiracy who were hanged or guillotined sacrificed their lives in a just cause.

NOTES

1. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des National-Socialismus* (Origins, Structure and Consequences of National Socialism), 1969, (Quotations translated from German by HB.) p. 490
2. pp. 186, 187.
3. Bracher, p. 1.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 480
5. Bracher, *Deutschland zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*, 1964, p. 310



Setting the Feminist Record Straight

LYNN CHANCER

CAROL GIARDINA'S *Freedom for Women*, a study of the development of American second wave feminism from 1953 through 1970, is a well-documented, thorough, and often fascinating history of a period of intense social movement activism: the exhilarating and intensive early days of the women's movement. Giardina's book vividly depicts the passionate radicalism of feminists during these too easily forgotten years. As I write these words, though, "Occupy Wall Street" has brought comparisons with protest movements of the 60s into mass cultural consciousness; in so doing, it provides an evocative context within which to reflect on Giardina's detailed historical study.

Several points stressed in Giardina's book seem particularly worth exploring here, in *New Politics*, a journal devoted itself to chronicling and forwarding social movement debates spanning decades and generations. Giardina explores the relationship between the women's and other movements during the 50s and 60s as well as how the plural term "feminisms" came, of late, to critically displace the singular "feminism." She also discusses how theoretical influences interact with other kinds of "activist" involvement. But while each of these themes is nicely developed

in this book, I sensed that the first theme was by far the most salient for Giardina. Above all, perhaps, *Freedom for Women* sets out to correct what the author — who participated herself in early feminist organizing — believes to be

a serious and ongoing interpretive error.

According to Giardina, an inaccurate narrative has stubbornly persisted in both scholarly writings and popular cultural treatments of the origins of second wave feminism. This is the idea that the

Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953-1970

CAROL GIARDINA

Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of
Florida, 2010, 336 pp., \$29.95

"male chauvinism" women encountered in other movements — in particular, within the civil rights movement and on the left — caused early feminists to start their own organizations out of anger at the sexism and hypocrisy they encountered. However, as Giardina contends, the problem with this interpretation is that it overlooks the invaluable skills and experience that women gained in myriad organizations from the NAACP through activism in SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). Indeed Giardina does a beautiful job of showing the courage women from different class and racial backgrounds commonly exhibited in traveling to Mississippi, for instance, to do dangerous SNCC work around 1964. Through their participation in the civil rights movement and in the Old and New Lefts, women learned that they could lead — and lead effectively — in addition to actually seeing how political organizing can change both the world and oneself. It is this sense of agency gained elsewhere, and

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of cross-movement synergies, that Giardina posits is too often left out of histories of radical feminism that tend to portray — she cites Alice Echols’s *Daring to Be Bad* as one example — 60s protest movements as antagonized from, rather than interconnected with, one another. Thus whereas dominant interpretations stress (for

Giardina does a beautiful job of showing the courage women from different class and racial backgrounds commonly exhibited in traveling to Mississippi, for instance, to do dangerous SNCC work around 1964. Through their participation in the civil rights movement and in the Old and New Lefts, women learned that they could lead — and lead effectively.

example) that Stokely Carmichael told SNCC women their best position was “prone,” a more nuanced story can also be told about humor and comradeship that characterized many day-to-day interactions of social movement life.

No doubt Giardina’s point is well taken and her account persuaded me — to a fair extent. But I also wonder whether a third interpretation needs to be stressed that combines a) the interpretation that the women’s movement emerged from, and against, virulent sexism encountered in the civil rights movement and on the left and b) the interpretation that women’s participation in 60s race and class-based organizing was actually far more valuable than has often been recognized. The very consciousness-changing

character of organizing against racial and class injustices surely revealed a glaring contradiction between working for equal rights and facing subordination within one’s own organization and interpersonal relationships. Consequently to acknowledge that experience gained was valuable, and *also* that thereby sexist hypocrisies became clearer so as to “jump start” the women’s movement, can be themselves mutually synergizing — rather than either/or — takes on recent history.

Of course, on the one hand, Giardina’s corrective certainly matters. Anyone who knows even a tad about the history of U.S. social movements will be familiar with the fragmentation and divisions — between left sectarian groups, and among race ‘versus’ gender feminist politics — that have pitted progressive groups against one another insidiously, affecting an increasingly marginalized state of U.S. progressivism through different waves of social movement activism. In this sense, Giardina’s interpretation is a helpful one. Ditto for another kindred theme that Giardina demonstrates, namely, that the early women’s movement was cross-racial and cross-class in participants and leaders. This is in contrast to another dominant historical interpretation which has portrayed the early movement as overwhelmingly white and middle-class. But by showing in *Freedom for Women* the initial significance of feminist figures like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and Zoharah Simmons — among other important African-American women — Giardina makes it clear that the women’s movement was integrated across class and race from its beginnings. In this regard, Giardina’s work is fine and deserves to be oft cited. Based on her thorough research, she argues that referring to the development of American *feminism* (singular) makes more sense than alluding to *feminisms* (plural) — even though the latter term has become habitual among writers hoping to dissociate themselves from the movement’s allegedly one-dimensional past.

On the other hand, though, I found myself wondering whether in her eagerness to compensate for historical inaccuracies, Giardina's own interpretation veers slightly too much in the opposite direction. For unless the validity of women's anger at the "contradictions" they encountered — i.e., sexism in their own organizations rendered all the more galling for taking place in movements dedicated to overcoming injustices — is equally highlighted, another crucial historical lesson may also be overlooked. Yes, playing gender against race and fragmentation on the left are ongoing problems of progressive organizing in America. But so is ongoing sexism and the unfortunate "social fact" that neither feminism nor feminisms have managed, by 2011, to successfully attain many of the major goals Giardina reminds us were so dear to early feminists whether liberals, radicals and/or socialists: secure and affordable abortion rights and reproductive freedoms for all women; universal and high quality child care; economic parity; freedom from violence and abuse, to name a few.

Consequently, part of the problem may be that feminists have not rebelled from sexism encountered in other organizations, and at the hands of sexist individuals *enough* — i.e., some of the feisty independence Giardina vividly recounts has become watered down over the last several decades. For example while there is every reason for progressives to be thrilled about the unfolding of Occupy Wall Street, and the return of class politics this bodes, I wonder whether gender issues and problems of sexism are being discussed within this movement with necessary concern and awareness. In the wider culture, it was just recently that a young French woman

was quoted saying her socialist mother advised her not to prosecute Dominique Strauss-Kahn for sexual harassment because he was an influential figure. On the Republican side of the spectrum, and back in the U.S., Herman Cain vigorously accused a woman who accused him of sexual harassment of lying. Neither in France nor in the U.S. was a movement near at hand to defend women who are, years later and in their own ways, insisting — as did Carol Hamlich decades ago — that the "personal is political." Rather, as Giardina notes, a decline began in the 70s that moved the feminist movement from the offense to a defensive position from which it has still, I fear, to recover.

Nonetheless, bearing Giardina's fortifying recollections in mind, there may be reason to pause here on a hopeful note. If (American) history repeats itself, then perhaps — like the first and second waves — future waves of feminism will likely take *both* inspiration and rebellious energy from new bursts of social movement activism. Moreover something I loved about *Freedom for Women* was the credit it gives to theoretical not just "activist" influences on early feminism's unfolding: undoubtedly, as Giardina emphasizes, Simone deBeauvoir's *The Second Sex* had a huge effect on second wave women as did other seminal early feminist writings like Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*. If Giardina is right, then it is also silly to divide between the 'theorists' and the "doers" (as can be an old American social movement propensity). Again, both matter — not only one or the other — so that we can only hope, too, for new feminist classics to appear in writing which will inspire us, yet again, in practice.

The Dialectical Biologist

PHIL GASPER

IT HAS BEEN ALMOST 10 YEARS since the death of the Harvard paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould at the relatively early age of 60. Gould was not only a major figure in the life sciences, he was also one of the great popularizers of science. He wrote a monthly column for *Natural History* magazine from 1974 to 2001, generating exactly 300 essays that explained complex scientific ideas without oversimplifying them.

Ten collections of Gould's popular articles, together with several other books aimed at a general audience, were best sellers, making him one of the best-known scientists of his generation. A year before his death, he was named a "living legend" by the U.S. Library of Congress.

What makes Gould of particular interest to readers of this journal is that his scientific views were informed in interesting ways by his radical politics. His parents were New York leftists, probably in or around the Communist Party in the 1930s, and he once boasted that he had learned his Marxism "literally at [my] daddy's knee." Gould's essays often revealed his interest in Marx and Marxism, even though he also made clear that his politics were "very different" from his father's, most likely referring to his own rejection of Stalinism. But Gould remained politically active for left-wing causes

during his whole life, including as a member in the 1970s of Science for the People, the most prominent of the radical science organizations that emerged from the antiwar movement.

Richard York and Brett Clark have written

an accessible introduction to Gould's work. They divide their book into two parts. In the first four chapters they discuss Gould's contributions to evolutionary theory and his distinctive views about the history of life. In chap-

ters 5 through 8 they look at Gould's views about the human condition, including his critiques of biological determinism and his defense of human equality. However, as the authors point out, there is a lot of overlap between the chapters, because "Gould's ideas ... are complexly integrated into a larger worldview, so that it is not easy to examine an idea or theme in isolation... [A]lthough we separate out certain themes into distinct chapters, our discussions inevitably engage the whole of Gould's worldview making the themes bleed together." (20)

As a working scientist, Gould was both the leading expert on the evolution of Bahamian land snails and one of the leading evolutionary theorists in the second half of the twentieth century. Gould made at least four distinctive contributions to evolutionary theory, all of which remain controversial. First is the theory of punctuated equilibrium, which he originally formulated with fellow paleontologist Niles Eldredge in 1972, and which proposes a non-gradual model of evolutionary change. Second was Gould's view that natural selection was

The Science and Humanism of Stephen Jay Gould

RICHARD YORK AND BRETT CLARK
New York, Monthly Review Press
2011, 223 pp. \$16.95

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importantly limited by structural constraints, with the corollary that the physical and behavioral features of organisms are not necessarily all adaptations that can be explained in terms of the functions they serve. Third is the idea that evolution is a contingent and directionless process that is not moving to any preordained end. Fourth is the view that selection can take place not only at the level of the individual organism or the level of the gene, but can also take place at the level of groups or even entire species.

Taken together, these four themes illustrate Gould's enthusiasm for thinking about the natural world in dialectical terms — in other words, seeing it as made up of complex and dynamic interactive processes. "Dialectical thinking should be taken more seriously by Western scholars, not discarded because some nations of the second world [the former Soviet Bloc] have constructed a cardboard version as an official political doctrine," Gould wrote. "The issues that it raises are, in another form, the crucial questions of reductionism versus holism, now so much under discussion throughout biology (where reductionist accounts have reached their limits and further progress demands new approaches to process existing data, not only an accumulation of more information)."

When presented as guidelines for a philosophy of change, not as dogmatic precepts true by fiat, the three classical laws of dialectics [formulated by Engels] embody a holistic vision that views change as interaction among components of complete systems, and sees the components themselves...as both products of and inputs to the system. Thus the law of "interpenetrating opposites" records the inextricable interdependence of components: the "transformation of quantity to quality" defends a systems-based view of change that translates incremental inputs into alterations of state; and the "negation of negation" describes the direction given to history because complex systems cannot revert exactly to previous states.

Gould and Eldredge's theory of punctuated equilibrium claims that evolutionary develop-

ment isn't gradual, as Charles Darwin supposed, but takes place in concentrated bursts, followed by long periods of stasis. Gould freely admitted that he was attracted to the idea of punctuated equilibrium because of his knowledge of the dialectical theories of Hegel and Marx. "The dialectical laws are explicitly punctuational. They speak, for example, of the 'transformation

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of quantity into quality.' This ... suggests that change occurs in large leaps following a slow accumulation of stresses that a system resists until it reaches breaking point. Heat water and it eventually boils. Oppress the workers more and more and bring on the revolution."

At the same time Gould and Eldredge suggested that the traditional, gradualist view of evolution was "the translation into biology of the order, harmony, and continuity that European rulers [in the nineteenth century] hoped to maintain in a society already assaulted by calls for fundamental social change." They added, "We mention this not to discredit Darwin in any way, but merely to point out that even the greatest scientific achievements are rooted in their cultural contexts—and to argue that gradualism was part of the cultural context, not of nature." But if Gould and Eldredge are correct, then on this point at least, Darwin has been discredited, for their argument is that he allowed his judgment to be shaped by his cultural context rather than by the available evidence.

But wasn't Gould's view also a result of cultural context and political preconceptions? Gould denied this. While his political background made him open to an idea he might otherwise have overlooked, he emphasized that he accepted the theory because of the data, not because it matched his political views. He and Eldredge first proposed the idea to explain the fact that there is little direct evidence in the fossil record for the gradual transformation of one species into another. Most species appear to remain the same for millions of years, then abruptly disappear to be replaced by new ones. If evolutionary change takes place in relatively short bursts compared to the average lifetime of a species (thousands of years compared to millions), this is exactly what we would expect, since the chances of intermediate forms being preserved as fossils would be quite small. Punctuated Equilibrium remains a controversial idea, but in *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* published shortly before his death, Gould made a strong case that the punctuational view of evolution provides a better overall account of the evidence than gradualism. Others have suggested that Gould's demonstration that many species remain relatively unchanged for long periods of time was his single most important scientific contribution—something that other biologists had ignored until Gould and Eldredge published their 1972 paper on the subject.

Gould's view that natural selection is limited by structural constraints represents another dialectical theme in his thought—the idea that organisms are complex wholes whose various parts cannot be understood in isolation, because they interact with and influence each other. As York and Clark note, "Gould's advocacy for recognizing the important role structural forces play in evolution is in large part a critique of the hyper-functionalism and extreme reductionism of ultra-Darwinians who identify all traits of organisms as adaptations." In a famous paper written with his Harvard colleague, and fellow dialectical biologist, Richard Lewontin, Gould

argued that many features of organisms are the result of structural constraints, rather than adaptive advantage—accidental byproducts of evolutionary change, brought about because natural selection acts on existing structures. Here Lewontin and Gould were rejecting the "tendency to divide an organism into separate traits, assuming that natural selection acts on each trait individually, optimizing it." Lewontin and Gould were also rejecting the practice of many biologists to look for "just so" stories, "constructing tales of how each and every trait served some function, regardless of whether sufficient evidence existed to support these claims." (56)

York and Clark provide a nice example of one piece of research that Gould conducted to demonstrate the importance of structure. This involved the now extinct Irish Elk, which grew extremely large antlers. "After the discover of fossils of the Irish Elk, debate generally focused on ascertaining what function such large antlers had for the deer, in order to explain why they were developed." Picking up an idea that had been proposed earlier by Julian Huxley, Gould compared the body size and antler size of 81 Irish Elk and showed that "among deer, antlers grow at a faster rate than body size, so that simply increasing the body size of a deer without altering the relative growth rates of different parts will lead to an animal with very large antlers." (57) Natural selection seems to have favored larger deer, and exceptionally large antlers came along as a byproduct of increased body size, not because they had any adaptive significance themselves.

Gould's third distinctive contribution to evolutionary theory was his insistence that evolutionary development is a contingent process with no pre-ordained goal. The history of life on earth is dependent on "quirks, chance events, and unpredictable twists and turns," so that "history could have turned out other than it did." Gould rejected the metaphor of evolution as a ladder in which there is an ascent from lower to

higher life forms. Instead, “Gould argued that we should see evolution as a bush, frequently branching, with some twigs dying, while others flourish—an image that suggests no overall direction or judgment of higher or lower, better or worse.” (22) Gould was right to reject the idea that life must evolve along a single path and the view that human beings have somehow emerged as the inevitable outcome of this process. But it is also important to note that this does not mean there are no discernible evolutionary patterns, or that evolutionary history is nothing more than a series of accidents. Just as in human history, determinism and randomness do not exhaust the possibilities. There can be recognizable trends in historical processes even if no particular outcomes are inevitable.

Finally, Gould rejected the reductionist view of evolutionary change in which natural selection acts only on individual organisms, and the even more reductionist view—associated with Richard Dawkins and others—that selection acts only on genes. In this respect Gould was returning to the views of Darwin, who also held that natural selection could operate at higher-levels—on groups of organisms and on whole species, rather than only on individuals. Here too we see a dialectical theme—the idea “that there are emergent characteristics at different levels of aggregation, and thus evolution cannot be understood solely by examining processes occurring at the level of individual organisms or genes.” (23)

As York and Clark go on to show in the second half of their book, all of the themes that are central to Gould’s theoretical contributions to the study of evolution informed his discussions of the relevance (or otherwise) of the biological sciences to understanding human behavior and human society. Gould devoted a considerable amount of his time to combating scientific racism, biological determinism and other attempts to misuse biology to justify social inequality and the status quo. The claim that existing social hierarchies are the inevitable outcome

of biological facts goes back to the nineteenth century, reappearing in new guises whenever it is needed to support the idea that progressive social change is impossible.

Biological determinism resurfaced in the United States as a response to the social movements of the 1960s, just as Gould was complet-

Gould devoted a considerable amount of his time to combating scientific racism, biological determinism and other attempts to misuse biology to justify social inequality and the status quo.

ing his PhD and becoming a faculty member at Harvard. In 1969, Arthur Jensen, a Stanford Education professor, argued that IQ differences between Whites and Blacks are genetically based and unalterable. Two years later, Harvard psychologist Richard Herrnstein claimed that socioeconomic status is a direct function of inherited intelligence and that the “tendency to be unemployed” would soon run in families just like the “tendency to have bad teeth.” Then in 1975, to great media fanfare, Gould’s prominent Harvard colleague Edward Wilson published his book *Sociobiology*, which argued that traits such as aggression and xenophobia are genetically based. In an article published in the *New York Times Magazine*, Wilson claimed, “the genetic bias is intense enough to cause a substantial division of labor even in the most free and egalitarian of future societies. Thus, even with identical education and equal access to all professions, men are likely to play a disproportionate role in political life, business,

and science.” If we attempt to create a more egalitarian society, Wilson continued, we will “place some personal freedoms in jeopardy.”

Gould and other members of Science for the People responded by rejecting these ideas as simply the latest version of a scientifically bank-

In exposing the social roots of scientific ideas, Gould followed in the footsteps of one of his intellectual heroes, Karl Marx’s close collaborator Friedrich Engels.

rupt biological determinism. “The reason for the survival of these recurrent determinist theories,” they wrote in a letter to the *New York Review of Books*, “is that they consistently tend to provide a genetic justification for the status quo and of existing privileges for certain groups according to class, race, or sex.” Gould pointed out that there was no scientific evidence for any of these claims and that changes in human society are far too rapid to be explained in biological terms.

In opposition to determinism, Gould emphasized the enormous flexibility of human behavior.

The central feature of our biological uniqueness also provides the major reason for doubting that our behaviors are directly coded by specific genes. That feature is, of course, our large brain.... [M]arkedly increased brain size in human evolution ... added enough neural connections to convert an inflexible and rather rigidly programmed device into a labile organ, endowed with sufficient logic and memory to substitute non-programmed learning for direct specification as the ground of social behavior. Flexibility may well be the most important

determinant of human consciousness....

Violence, sexism, and general nastiness are biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality, and kindness are just as biological—and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish.

Gould continued the critique of biological determinism in his award-winning 1981 book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, one of the best arguments against scientific racism and the idea that intelligence is genetically fixed. Fifteen years later, after Herrnstein and Charles Murray attempted to revive these ideas in *The Bell Curve* in order to provide pseudo-scientific support for slashing social spending and ending affirmative action, Gould took them on again. He issued a revised and expanded edition of his book with new material showing how Herrnstein and Murray omitted facts and misused statistical methods to reach their racist conclusions.

Gould’s book is still raising sharp debate. In one chapter, Gould concluded that the nineteenth-century physician Samuel George Morton—who claimed that, on average, whites have bigger brains than blacks—had unconsciously biased his measurements of skulls from around the world. In an article published last June, six anthropologists claim that Morton got his measurements right and that Gould’s remeasurement over a century later “is likely the stronger example of bias influencing results.”

Was Gould himself guilty of the kind of bias of which he accused Morton? *The Scientific American* blogger John Horgan raises some important caveats about this critique:

First of all, [the paper’s authors] analyzed fewer than half of the skulls in Morton’s collection. Second, their analysis, far from being “straightforward,” was highly technical and based on many judgment calls, as were those of Gould and Morton. The divergent results depend in part on whether to include or exclude certain skulls that could unduly skew estimates of brain sizes. Third, neither Morton

nor [the new paper's authors] corrected their measurements for age, gender or stature, all of which are correlated with brain size.

Horgan also notes that one of the researchers, Ralph Holloway of Columbia University, "is obviously biased against Gould." In an interview with the *New York Times*, Holloway called Gould a "charlatan" and admitted, "I just didn't trust Gould. I had the feeling that his ideological stance was supreme."

Horgan himself offers a more balanced judgment:

Maybe Gould was wrong that Morton misrepresented his data, but he was absolutely right that biological determinism was and continues to be a dangerous pseudoscientific ideology...

Biological determinism is a blight on science. It implies that the way things are is the way they must be. We have less choice in how we live our lives than we think we do. This position is wrong, both empirically and morally. If you doubt me on this point, read *Mismeasure*, which, even discounting the chapter on Morton, abounds in evidence of how science can become an instrument of malignant ideologies.

In exposing the social roots of scientific ideas, Gould followed in the footsteps of one of his intellectual heroes, Karl Marx's close collaborator Friedrich Engels. Gould praised Engels' 1876 pamphlet *The Part Played by*

Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man. In it, Engels correctly rejected the claim that "our evolution was propelled by an enlarging brain" (brain enlargement began only after upright posture first freed the hands for manual work) and offered a "perceptive analysis of the political role of science and of the social biases that must affect all thought." In class societies, Engels argued, physical labor has low status while mind is seen as dominating and noble. This deep-seated bias explains why, despite the lack of evidence, most biologists until the 1920s wrongly assumed brain development must have come first. But in placing science in its social context, Gould (also like Engels) was careful to reject the claim of relativists who abandon the idea of objective truth altogether. "I share the credo of my colleagues," he wrote. "I believe that a factual reality exists and that science, though often in an obtuse and erratic manner, can learn about it."

York and Clark's short book is a clear and lively introduction to this and other aspects of Gould's work. If it encourages a new generation of political activists to engage with Gould's own writings it will have served a worthwhile purpose.

A fully footnoted version of this article will appear online at www.newpol.org.

The Situation of the Situationists

A Cultural Left in France in the 1950s and 60s

DAN LA BOTZ

MOST OF US, if we know anything at all about the Situationist International, know Guy Debord's brilliant and famous pamphlet *The Society of the Spectacle* and, if we are old enough, perhaps remember the striking cover of its English language edition showing rows of moviegoers sitting passively and expectantly in a theater wearing 3-D glasses. Debord and the Situationists made their big splash with that pamphlet which was published in France in 1968 just in time to inspire young people with its powerful anti-commodity and anti-capitalist message. Society, said Debord, had been emptied of all life, reducing us to an audience of contrived spectacles, the consumers of vapid commodities, the incarnation of alienation. Some have credited Debord and his Situationist co-thinkers with having inspired the student movement which in turn detonated the national strike that brought France to a standstill and shook the foundations of President Charles De Gaulle's government in 1968. While Debord wrote a remarkable pamphlet and the Situationists offered a fascinating critique of contemporary capitalist society, crediting them with being the catalysts of France's May-June 1968 events would be going too far. Mostly they were an interesting group of Bohemian intellectuals on the left who happened to be in the right place

at the right time for one remarkable moment.

McKenzie Wark, a teacher at the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College, makes no extravagant claims for the Situationists' role in modern history, though he does argue that the group's ideas about art and architecture, about geography and city planning, about modern cit-

The Beach Beneath the Street

MCKENZIE WARK

New York: Verso, 2011, 197 pp., \$26.95

ies and capitalism, and about everyday life and revolutionary change remain meaningful. Wark's book, one of about a dozen studies of the Situationists published in the last forty years or so, traces the group from its origins in post-World War II Europe until its demise in the early-1970s. *The Beach Beneath the Street* is a micro-history of the sort of aesthetic-political sects that issue manifestos declaring that theirs is the only and true art and that their school of art provides the only real foundation for revolutionary politics.

Most readers — myself included — will find the book lists all too many groups and artists and fails to explain clearly both what these groups and artists meant and why what they thought, did, and wrote is important. The central problem is that Wark tends himself to become a Situationist, speaking in their peculiar jargon, rather than explicating and elucidating their ideas. The author's aphoristic style produces some gems, but they mostly get lost in the recitation of cliques, manifestos, bohemian theorists, and oddball artists. I fear that in writing this review, I too will have to list too many names, but please excuse me because it comes

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with the territory.

Wark traces the intellectual history of small groups of artists and Marxists intellectuals whose spiritual origins might be traced back to the Surrealists and Dadaists of the early twentieth century. Beginning in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood of Paris in the late 1940s, in an ambience of jazz, existentialism, elements of American popular culture, and radical currents of socialism, a group of thinkers and writers began to criticize the culture of capitalism while at the same time rejecting the alternative of Soviet Communism. They eventually came to call themselves “situationists” but the term does not refer to their contemporary Sartre’s “situation” where human freedom encounters physical and social limits. On the contrary, their “situation” refers, as Wark writes, to the “probabilities of realizing a desire.” If Sartre’s freedom in the situation was conceived during World War II under Nazi occupation, theirs is conceived in the post-war struggle between Communism and capitalism and in the process of reconstruction in Europe. The question: What sort of Europe to reconstruct?

What fascinated Debord, and the artists Gil. J. Wolman, Isidore Isou, and Ivan Chtcheglov was the idea of the city and the question of how the city might be saved from capitalism, how art might be saved from dealers, galleries, publishers, and movie producers, and how architecture might be saved from their nemesis and foil Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier, a Swiss-born French architect inspired by American industrialism, designed huge apartment complexes and envisioned entire cities created along modernistic lines. Debord and friends (at this point they called themselves The Lettrists) were appalled by Le Corbusier’s radiant city which, as they saw it, represented the architecture of the ruling class, the power of capitalism, and the alienation of modern life. As Wark writes, they saw in Le Corbusier’s vision “the colonization of everyday life at the heart of empire.”

While Le Corbusier envisioned the planned

city and its stolid structures, the Lettrists dreamed of the city as life, as process, as change. Projecting the Bohemian lives they themselves led, revolving around alcohol, drugs, art, political debate, and love affairs, they imagined a city of movable parts and of infinite possibilities. The Situationists were interested less in Le Corbusier’s modern, efficient capitalist city than they were in the drift (*dérive*) and the detours (*détournements*), literal and figurative strategies

Most of us perhaps remember the striking cover of *Society of the Spectacle*’s English language edition showing rows of moviegoers sitting passively and expectantly in a theater wearing 3-D glasses.

for resisting the dehumanization of contemporary life. Rejecting the capitalist commodity form, the Situationists conceived of a society based on mutual gift giving, the potlatch. They envisioned an emerging communism of culture that could contribute to creating a communist society with real freedom.

The Situationists absorbed a variety of intellectual, aesthetic, and political influences. One of the greatest influences on the future Situationists was the former Communist Henri Lefebvre whose writings decried the colonization of everyday life by the commodity form. His 1947 book *Critique of Everyday Life* provided intellectual tools for analyzing the process of reification and its impact on our ordinary existence. Another influence was Paul Henry Chombart de Lauwe, a former Free French fighter pilot, who used aerial photography and interviews with workers as part of a monumental study of Paris published in 1952. Chombart, himself

influenced by the Chicago School of sociology, pointed out how the city's concentric circles mapped class onto space. The Danish painter Asger Jorn, who had worked in the studios of Ferdinand Léger and Le Corbusier, brought his interests in painting, Scandinavian culture, and theory. Constant Nieuwenhuys, who believed that art had come to an end altogether, imagined what he called "unitary urbanism," and constructed a model of a future city called New Babylon. The American beatnik novelist Alexander Trocchi, author of the classic *Cain's Book*, linked the group intellectually to William Burroughs, Samuel Beckett, and the Olympia Press.

By 1957 the former Lettrists had evolved into the Situationist International, a kind of leftwing aesthetic political sect dominated by Debord and his collaborator Nieuwenhuys. The outstanding woman of the group, Jacqueline De Jong, editor of *The Situationist Times*, came to the conclusion that anyone who shared the group's views was actually a Situationist. Debord, however, continued to lead his sect, polemicizing against his opponents, and carrying out expulsions of dissidents.

Wrapped up in their little world, little even though it was cosmopolitan and international, they were utterly outside of the French intellectual mainstream of the time which was dominated by the existentialisms of Sartre, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Camus, by the Stalinist Communist Party, and by the university academics and the major publishing houses. As Wark writes, "They did not really take their place in the exchanges of views between the journals and groups of their time." And they participated in leftwing politics only briefly and marginally, Debord and one or two others becoming involved for a while in Socialisme ou Barbarie (Socialism or Barbarism), the group led by the brilliant Cornelius Castoriadis. A former Communist, then a Trotskyist, Castoriadis developed his own trenchant analysis of the Soviet Union and its bureaucracy, before becoming a

Lacanian psychoanalyst and joining others in the great descent into the post-modern.

Except for that one passing flirtation between the marginal artists and the fringe leftists, the Situationist International never really participated in politics as an organized attempt to change public opinion, to develop a social base, to build an organization, and to struggle for power. Yet somehow, for a moment, the Situationists emerged as an influential little current in the great May-June 1968 days in France. Their critique of modern life — its bureaucracy, its oppressive hierarchies, its commodities, its spectacles, its emptiness in the midst of plenty — spoke to the French students and young workers and provided insight into their own frustrations with the university and the society as a whole.

The Situationist International, it seems to me, mirrors on a very small scale and with certain distortions, the experience of the Frankfurt School — Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Habermas and friends — who, surrounded by Nazism and Stalinism and seeing the working class movement not up to the task of resisting them, took a defensive stand on the ground of high culture: in particular the classic tradition from the Greeks, through the Renaissance to the European novel, classical music, and the plastic arts of the nineteenth century. Finding Marxism not entirely up to the task of understanding their situation, the Frankfurt School supplemented it with psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and existentialism. With the coming of the 1960s, the anti-colonial struggles, the French events of 1968, the civil rights movement and black power in the United States, the Frankfurt School's ideas of aesthetic Marxism suddenly found an audience in the new movements.

The Situationists seem like a miniature of this experience. With no apparent revolutionary alternative in France, the Situationists too turned to art as an alternative, not the classic traditions but the Expressionist, Surrealist, and Dada traditions. Guy Debord and his friends,

however, never measured up to the stature of Sartre in France or the Frankfurt School in Germany, and with the coming of the structuralist, post-structuralist, and post-modern intellectuals such as Althusser, Foucault and Lacan, they were eclipsed and passed into obscurity. The Situationists' central ideas that their anti-art,

art criticism, and way of life formed part of a movement toward a new communism proved to be wishful thinking, yet their utopian ideas contributed in a small way at least at one crucial historical moment to what turned out to be one of the greatest revolutionary movements of the late twentieth century.

"Our Movements Suffer as We Do" Ending Abuse in Activist Communities

AMY LITTLEFIELD

MY FRIEND, A YOUNG, RADICAL WOMAN of color, is frustrated. She has been participating in our local contingent of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and has been accused of perpetrating "hate speech" for gently reminding white men in the group that they should share space with women. She has watched women and people of color leave meetings after being silenced. She can't decide whether to keep fighting or quit. Across the country, in spaces occupied by "the 99%," women are finding themselves marginalized or harassed. When they organize, creating blogs like Occupy Patriarchy (<http://occupypatriarchy.org>), they are accused of hindering the movement and hating

men. Implicitly or explicitly, they are told to wait their turn for revolution.

These words — these weapons of patriarchy — and the physical abuse that is their frequent counterpart, have debilitated social movements for decades.

I think back to another movement with a patriarchy problem — the local chapter of Students for a Demo-

cratic Society I joined as an undergraduate. While we mocked the old sexist slogan from the Vietnam War era — "Girls say yes to boys who say no" — implicitly congratulating ourselves on how far we had come, the group lacked a framework for examining gender dynamics. We were hindered by white male dominance; women felt their opinions were not valued. When we formed a women's caucus, we discovered that one of the group's most dominant and charismatic men had abused or sexually coerced several women in the group. Lacking another model to address his behavior — and prioritizing our

The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities

CHING-IN CHEN, JAI DULANI AND LEAH
LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA, EDS.

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\$16 paperback, 368 pp.

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own emotional safety — we asked him to leave.

One in three women in the United States in both queer and straight relationships reports domestic abuse in her lifetime (27). Activists are no different. Patriarchy and violence surface regularly among activists on the Left — even, and perhaps especially, among those who fancy themselves liberated from all oppressive tendencies. Abusive behavior among activists trauma-

Stories of survival from sex
workers, LGBT people, disabled
people, immigrants and people of
color are this book's backbone and
its guts.

tizes individual survivors and, if left unchecked, can poison social movements. Those abused by fellow activists may find themselves with nowhere to turn if the community fails them by siding with their abuser. Now, there is a book that connects abuse within our communities to the larger struggle for liberation.

The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities, edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, is a brave, beautiful and deeply necessary book. The editors build on the principles of the prison abolition movement and the work of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, connecting the struggle against gender violence to the struggle against capitalism and white supremacy. As INCITE! cofounder Andrea Smith writes in her preface to the book, “movements must dispense with the idea that we can worry about gender violence ‘after the revolution,’ because gender violence is a primary strategy for white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism” (xv). By dismantling heteropatriarchy, Smith argues, we

also attack the underlying idea that domination on the basis of gender, class, or race is natural or acceptable (xv).

The editors envision their book as “a community builder, an educational resource, a toolkit, a prayer, and documentation of a collective effort to document where we are with this work” (xxxiv). It is also a call to action for activists who have not addressed patterns of abuse within their communities. Some activists will recognize familiar patterns, such as the abusive man who is also a “big activist” — you know, the dude who occupies extra space at meetings and uses his intellectual power and enlightened rhetoric to trap activist women in a cycle of power and control (25–26). As many of us have learned through personal experience, some activists on the Left possess a keen ability to “talk the talk” without “walking the walk.” Among activists, patriarchal behavior — which ranges from dominance during meetings to sexual assault — is often greeted by silence. Targets of abuse may silently disappear. In their essay, “Ending Oppression. Building Solidarity. Creating Community Solutions,” authors Meiver De la Cruz and Carol Gomez of the group MataHari: Eye of the Day demand that we notice these disappearances: “It’s time we acknowledge the absence of voices, resulting from abuse, as significant political losses. These absences matter; our movements suffer as we do” (26). As this book shows, some groups have found a way to address abuse without forcing either the abuser or the survivor to leave the community.

Some groups opposed to the prison industrial complex have attempted to confront gender-based violence through community-based responses, applying the concepts of “restorative justice,” “transformative justice,” or “community accountability.” Thankfully, *The Revolution Starts at Home* is not an unapologetic defense of the community accountability model, nor do the authors seek to steer all survivors away from the criminal legal system and toward community-based solutions. They avoid the trap

in which “Not calling the cops’ becomes a litmus test for radical realness,” as activist Connie Burk describes it in her essay, “Think. Re-think.: Accountable Communities” (269).

The authors are generally frank about their own experiences of abuse, and equally frank about the difficulty of executing an effective community response. Rather than demeaning survivors with unequivocal rejections and ideology, the editors honor the complexity of abuse by using storytelling as the book’s framework. Stories of survival from sex workers, LGBT people, disabled people, immigrants, and people of color are this book’s backbone and its guts. LGBT people and those whose stories are most likely to be ignored or erased by the mainstream domestic violence movement become the central voices in this book. These stories are the best hope we have for learning, healing, and eventually ending abuse. In a powerful essay called “Seeking Asylum: On Intimate Partner Violence and Disability,” author Peggy Munson describes how disability isolated her from family and friends, leaving her dependent on abusers. Her approach reflects the complexity and honesty of many of the book’s essays:

Abusive partners have been the same people who often saved my life and gave me caregiving for much of the last ten years, while simultaneously brutalizing me. I found myself, by my late twenties, trapped in a city where I knew almost no one, so sick I could barely leave my bed, unable to move back home due to the severity of my illness, trying to negotiate with ableist strangers over the internet and phone to get love, care, help, anything. The reality was nobody, including my family, wanted the responsibility of taking care of someone with my extreme combination of limiting disabilities....I was beaten long before I ever met a batterer. (117)

Imagining accountable communities, then, also means providing care for the disabled, and meeting all survivors where they are. Support is not merely an ideological construct, but a tangible goal that involves time, energy and a commit-

ment to what Munson calls, “the radical notion of doing what is needed” (133).

By now, the lack of adequate support for survivors is well-known among radical feminists and activists on the Left. Mainstream domestic violence agencies rely heavily on the criminal legal system and law enforcement, alienating survivors who do not wish to see their undocumented abusers deported, or who have learned to expect violence and abuse from police. Within domestic violence shelters, survivors may find their lives tightly controlled in a hierarchical system that, in its own bizarre way, can replicate the cycle of power and control imposed by the abuser. Men and LGBT people, or parents with older male offspring, may have trouble finding shelter at all. Yet while activists on the Left may reject the criminal legal system in broad terms, few can offer a meaningful and specific idea of what a community solution looks like. It is one thing to reject the current system — rife as it is with racism and brutality — and quite another to imagine a world where survivors can find safety and heal, while abusers are held accountable.

Andrea Smith addresses one of the biggest challenges of the community accountability model in her preface, noting that “developing community-based responses to violence cannot rely on a romanticized notion of ‘community’ that is not sexist, homophobic, or otherwise problematic. We cannot assume that there is even an intact community to begin with. Our political task then becomes to *create* communities of accountability” (xvi). The book answers this call by offering stories and helpful, concrete suggestions from groups that have attempted to create strong communities. In an interview with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Alexis Pauline Gumbs of the UBUNTU coalition describes the group’s highly involved and detailed support of an UBUNTU member (“June”) whose abusive husband and father of her children, a member of the local police force, began threatening her:

[T]he conversation started with her needs and priorities and vision for the situation. Her priorities were that she and her kids be safe, and that her kids know that they were loved by everyone (including their father, who was being violent).

From there we brainstormed possible plans of actions, including information to be obtained (for instance, the name and contact details for an important person respected by her husband who could talk to him and hopefully bring him back from the violent place he had gotten to, and the process for and consequences of obtaining a restraining order so that she could decide if she wanted or needed one). Then we assessed what resources we could assemble, including: a place for her to stay that her husband did not know about and to which he had never been; people to accompany her to meetings with him on arranging logistics regarding the kids and the separation; folks to attend the kids' dance recital that the husband would also be at; people to hang out with the kids while they did their homework etc. so that she could have difficult phone conversations with her husband that she did not want them to overhear; people to stay at the house with her and the kids so that she would not have to be there alone with the threat of her husband possibly showing up. (83-84)

Here we see an activist group responding to a single case of domestic abuse as robustly and strategically as our own activist groups might respond to any other political issue — with long meetings, strategy sessions, and the offering of their homes, energy, and patience. Importantly, the response begins with a discussion about what the survivor needs, and the group does not automatically eliminate the possibility of engaging the criminal legal system through a restraining order. To accomplish this level of support, Gumbs argues that groups need little more than a commitment to support each other: “Too often simple but crucial resources, like people to talk to, and space and time to deal with something hard and/or scary, are not available to most people. But when we decide to support each other, we have what we need” (85).

The use of community accountability in domestic abuse cases is controversial. It hinges on the assumption that the abuser can change, and that the community can offer a more promising option than prison. Sometimes, that community is not available. In the essay “A Sliding Stance,” the author N. recounts the failure of both the courts and the community. After describing the harmful gendered assumptions made about the relationship by the court officer and judge, N. writes, “The truth was, though, in their own way, my queer feminist activist communities didn’t know any more what to do with me or us than the courts did” (163-164). N. goes on to justify the decision to go to court: “I didn’t love the option of engaging the court system, it being an institution embedded in racism, classism, patriarchy....Unfortunately there didn’t appear to be a lot of other options available. I didn’t trust my lover to hold herself accountable, and who else would be there to deal with whatever came next? However conflicted my decision, in the absence of community alternatives it offered me some promise of response, some authority where I felt like I had none” (164). Given the relatively new and experimental nature of many community accountability efforts, the inclusion of stories from activists who chose to engage the criminal legal system seems a realistic and helpful approach. Stories like N.’s also indict communities that fight for gender inequality, but fail to provide necessary support to individual members.

Just as the support process for survivors relies on a sensitive community, the accountability process for abusers, in most instances described in the book, relies heavily on the presence of people whom the abuser respects and to whom he or she will listen.

In their essay, “Beautiful, Difficult, Powerful: Ending Sexual Assault Through Transformative Justice,” The Chrysalis Collective, a group formed in response to the acquaintance rape of a community member (“Diane”) by another local activist (“Tom”), describes an exhausting

accountability process with apparently lukewarm results. Here, we see a survivor who is surrounded by sympathetic allies (“a group of womyn and trans folk of color with experience organizing around reproductive justice, queer health, racial justice, gender justice, youth issues, immigration rights, and food justice” (190)). The group approaches Diane’s experience of injustice with organized fervor, forming a “Survivor Support Team” for Diane and an “Accountability Team” for Tom, the latter of which is composed of people whom the group thinks Tom will respect (“...the aggressor was a middle-class, straight, white male with a pattern of not listening. We felt that an AT led by working-class womyn of color would be less effective than a predominantly white and/or male AT (192)). The teams spend “several months mentally and emotionally preparing for the initial approach and first meeting with Tom” (196). This cumbersome-ness is a drawback to the community accountability process; the amount of time and energy required may be a privilege that groups do not have, nor do all activist groups have a team of willing people to whom the abuser will listen. But given the amount of damage done by abuse in our communities, the alternative — ignoring the abuse and thus likely forcing the survivor to leave — is even less acceptable. The results in this case appear mixed: the authors write, “Our unfinished process has lasted almost two years so far and we have gone through stressful times. Yet healing and transformation is clearly, slowly, steadily happening for everyone involved” (203–204). The authors are honest about their pitfalls as well as successes, and the detailed outline of goals and lessons learned provides one of many helpful resources in this book for groups that might be embarking on accountability processes.

It was inspiring to see the commitment of the Chrysalis Collective and the other groups featured in the book to a process that, under the best of circumstances, supports the healing of a single survivor and changes the outlook of a single abuser. This is one vision for creating a

world without abuse; if each survivor and each abuser is surrounded by friends and allies, with the support they need to heal and change, we may — slowly, steadily — build the framework for a better world. This and other stories in the book left me marveling at what a privilege it can be to have a community strong enough to support the profound processes of healing and accountability. The task of establishing these communities when so many survivors never even feel empowered to speak about their abuse is a daunting concept, but a beautiful one. I also wondered how this model could ever spread to survivors who are not members of activist communities, or to those who have been isolated by abuse, or by racial, class, immigrant or sexual identity, or other circumstances, and who do not have a community to support them. The issue of child abuse is also not addressed directly by this book, although at least one essay mentions abuse involving young people. Perhaps these are topics for future books.

One of this book’s many takeaway messages is about deconstructing the victim/abuser dichotomy, in part by acknowledging that those who are being abused may react abusively to their circumstances. While the mainstream domestic violence movement makes demons of abusers and heroes of survivors, embracing incarceration as the solution, contributor Shannon Perez-Darby in her essay “The Secret Joy of Accountability: Self-accountability as a Building Block for Change,” shows how this outlook renders abuse in activist communities invisible: “If survivors are perfect, then people who batter are evil monsters, barely human. This binary allows us to think of batterers as people who exist somewhere else, in fantasy and stories but not in our lives, communities, and homes” (101–102). Perez-Darby asks us to look inward and take responsibility for our decisions in order to begin the process of changing our communities (107). Examining our own abusive patterns may be one of the most difficult things we do as activists. It is also one of the most important.

French Welfare

BETTY REID MANDELL

THIS IS A STUDY of two French welfare offices, done in six months in 1995. Dubois says that it is the first study of French welfare offices ever done. He calls it a “critical policy ethnography.” Dubois observed interactions between workers and clients, mostly at the reception desk. He is a political scientist/sociologist (he says that political science in France was redefined on a sociological basis in the 1980s).

He was not a specialist in welfare policy, which he claims as an advantage as it left him free of preconceptions. I don’t agree that it was an advantage. France has a complex welfare system — Dubois said there were more than 20 different programs at the time of his study — and it would be hard to understand some interactions between workers and clients without knowing something about how those systems fit together. For example, most of the clients (whom he calls “visitors”) seem to receive housing benefits, but it is not clear whether those benefits are counted as income in computing other benefits. There is a glossary of acronyms in the book, but it would have helped to include a glossary of French social welfare benefits and how they fit together. The index is sketchy as it doesn’t include some of the key themes of the book, such as “entitle-

ment,” “workfare,” and “means-tested,” and not even the names of the benefit programs that the author discusses.

Dubois draws on the theories of Michael

Lipsky (*Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*), the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, and Everett Hughes in this study. He combines Goffman’s method of looking at everyday

encounters with Bourdieu’s sociology, which places interactions in the context of institutions and class, race, and gender.

This book is a warning sign about what happens when benefits are means-tested rather than universal. Those who advocate privatizing Social Security and Medicare in the United States are sounding the death knell for the dignity of those programs and their claimants. Some French benefits are universal, not means-tested. Benefits are funded by employer and employees’ payroll contributions. They include health and retirement benefits. Everyone with at least 2 children under the age of 20 is entitled to a family allowance. This was originally aimed at increasing the birth rate.

In 1988, France added a new minimum benefit called the Revenu Minimum d’Insertion (RMI). Rising unemployment brought in a new, impoverished clientele, sometimes homeless, to the family benefit office. Those offices had previously dealt with people in more stable conditions, and workers (whom Dubois calls “agents”) were confronted with massive poverty

The Bureaucrat and the Poor: Encounters in French Welfare Offices

VINCENT DUBOIS

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Translated by Jean Yves-Bart

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and had to shift their focus. Workers looked back longingly to the “golden age” when they served “normal people.” Middle-class people who received the universal benefits came to the office only occasionally to straighten out some problem about receiving those benefits. They distanced themselves from the other clientele by a superior attitude. Workers tend to treat middle class clients with more respect.

The RMI is aimed at people of working age without any income and no rights to contributions-based employment benefits. It requires people to commit to finding work within 3 months of the first payment. It contains a training component. The official policy says that it aims to “reintegrate people,” which means getting them back to work. It was a neoconservative policy with the motto “beyond entitlement.” Dubois says that generally, the tendency to replace welfare by workfare has developed in France as in other European countries. The United States has probably gone the farthest of any country in turning welfare into workfare in its program for parents and children, with strict sanctions that have resulted in millions of people being kicked off welfare. The United States has never had a cash benefit program for able-bodied unemployed people. Some, but not all, states once had a state funded General Assistance program for them, but most states have done away with those programs. Massachusetts did away with it when Mike Dukakis was governor and Phil Johnston was director of Health and Human Services in Massachusetts. (Phil Johnston later became chair of the Massachusetts Democratic party.)

Another means-tested benefit in France was the single parent benefit, mainly for single mothers, called Allocation de Parent Isolé (API). During the period of Dubois’ study, workers dealt mostly with recipients of RMI and API. Workers generally did their best to give all the benefits that clients were entitled to, but they also had the responsibility of checking whether the client was fulfilling his work requirement

for the RMI, and determining whether the API client was cheating and was actually married or getting funds from a man. When the mothers’ allowance was first created, motherhood was valued as a means of populating the country. However, when it became a poverty program, motherhood was devalued.

Those who advocate privatizing Social Security and Medicare in the United States are sounding the death knell for the dignity of those programs and their claimants.

Welfare control has greatly increased in France. The discretionary power of the worker has increased from entitlement to deciding on a case-by-case basis who is “deserving.” The workers’ previous role of dealing with the collective treatment of clients who received universal benefits changed to promote individualization in dealing with social problems. Family benefits offices have been overwhelmed by the economic crisis and rising unemployment. The 2008 financial crisis brought a dramatic increase in unemployment. Dubois cites a March 2010 article in *Le Monde* which said that “family benefit offices are snowed under with claims and files because of the economic crisis. From 2008 to 2009, the number of recipients’ visits increased by 15 percent, phone calls by 40 percent, and files by 11 percent.”

Dubois claims that his 1995 study is still relevant, as things haven’t basically changed. Yet there were two significant changes. In 2004, under the regime of Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the work requirement was enforced more strictly. In 2009 the Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA) replaced the RMI. The RSA is more workfare-oriented.

The RSA had not yet been implemented when Dubois wrote the book, and he doesn't make any prediction about its possible effects. My guess is that things have gotten a lot tougher for clients.

As far as I could tell from the observations that Dubois describes, few if any people lost their RMI benefits for not complying with the work requirement, but workers continually nagged them about complying with the requirements. Although the RMI was supposed to reintegrate people into the work force, it sometimes became a barrier to working. One unemployed client who was working part-time was not eligible for benefits. His resources were much less than if he had received RMI and not worked. He complained that this was unjust, that the law did not encourage work. Some workers agreed that there were problems with the legislation.

The cartoon on the front jacket captures the book's main message. It shows 6 people lined up in front of the RMI worker, all but one shabbily dressed, and all of them headless. There are two mice on the floor, one of them headless. The caption is, "Le plus pénible, c'est ce vague sentiment de n'être plus rien!" (The hardest thing is this vague feeling of being nothing.) The welfare bureaucracy creates a feeling of alienation. Even the mice feel alienated. Both workers and clients lose some of their humanity in the transaction between them. Clients are forced to play games in order to get benefits, either becoming docile and passive or protesting aggressively. Workers are in the dominant position of giving or withholding. The press of work rises as unemployment continues to rise, so that clients are not served well and workers burn out.

Workers are responsible for meeting needs, but also enforcing social and institutional order. Workers use "the iron hand and the velvet glove." They give the client the feeling that their personal problems are understood, while at the same time reminding them that they need to adhere to the rules. An undercurrent of ten-

sions is ubiquitous, an inevitable byproduct of the authority of the state. There are long waits, files are lost, computation errors are made, and computer-related problems are pervasive. Bureaucratic impartiality breaks down in practice. Workers are relatively uncertain of their function. There are tensions between "born and bred French" and "foreigners" (mostly North Africans, Africans, or Turks). There is a lot of prejudice expressed by the "born and bred French." They accuse the "foreigners" of cheating, having many children, and taking benefits unfairly. The poor whites find themselves on the same level as immigrants, with whom they don't want to be associated.

Physical violence happens occasionally but is rare, although there is frequent verbal aggression. One of the offices that Dubois studied was in a larger metropolitan area, where the waiting time was longer and the atmosphere more aggressive. The workers are trained to avoid calling the police, and there were no security guards in the offices that Dubois observed. Recourse to the police is very exceptional. There is one security guard in the Lyon office. This contrasts with the welfare office where I have done outreach in Boston, the Dudley Square Department of Transitional Assistance in Roxbury, a predominantly African-American neighborhood. There are three state police stationed in the office permanently. A client once knocked a worker to the floor. Once when I sat in on an interview and the client raised his voice, a nearby worker alerted a policeman, who lurked outside the cubicle. The client actually posed no threat and he later complained to me about the policeman. I think the ghost of the 1967 black urban rebellion in Boston lingers in the minds of welfare officials. That rebellion began in the Grove Hall welfare office in Roxbury, and sparked rebellions in other cities.

I was surprised at the apparent lack of a formal appeal process in French welfare offices. Aggrieved clients were sometimes told they could complain to the manager. When they

did, workers sometimes complained that the manager gave in too easily. One worker said that managers cave in as soon as the recipient yells a little. "All you have to do to get more than the others is to yell a little." Occasionally a client went to the media, and workers often complained that this form of pressure makes the bosses give in too easily.

In Massachusetts, there is a formal appeal process that can result in a fair hearing conducted by an arbiter. I have attended some of these hearings, and they seem to me to be conducted objectively and result as often as not in ruling in favor of the client. There are extensive legal services, many of them devoted exclusively to welfare clients. When I did outreach, I would often call one of their lawyers for advice, and I always advised clients to contact them if they felt they were being treated unfairly.

The best part of the book is the sociological

insights that Dubois uses in analyzing interactions between workers and clients, as well as the arrangement of the office and furniture. The desk is the symbol of the authority of the worker. The computer often serves as a screen, a protective device to avoid facing the client. (At the Roxbury DTA, workers look at the computer much more than they look at the client.) Workers sometimes blame mistakes on the computer. During rush periods, workers sometimes take the phone off the hook. (Clients at the Roxbury DTA are often unable to call workers because their message mailbox is full.)

As the stable institutions of family and work and socialization opportunities break down, poor people are increasingly isolated and lonely. Some people come to the welfare office "just to talk." Although the workers are not officially social workers, they sometimes take that role.

The Fires Next Time

GREGORY SMITHSIMON

ON DECEMBER 3, 1967, Regina and Charles Schneibel were trapped by fire in their Lower East Side apartment. Charles was unable to open the wooden shutters he'd installed in their home after one of their children had fallen from the window and died. In the blaze, Charles, Regina, and their two oldest chil-

The Fires: How a Computer Formula, Big Ideas, and the Best of Intentions Burned Down New York City—And Determined the Future of Cities

JOE FLOOD

N.Y., NY: Riverhead Books, 2010
325 pp., 26.95 cloth.

dren suffered severe burns. Their three youngest children died of smoke inhalation. Incredibly, the death of the three children didn't even merit its own headline, because it wasn't the biggest fire tragedy to report. They shared a story with five children in Brooklyn who had died in a similar fire earlier the same day. A month earlier, a mother, her two children, and her niece and nephew were all killed in a fire.

All thirteen victims died in an era of New York's history when more than 300 people, mostly poor Black and Latino New Yorkers, were killed every year by fire. The fires were

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one of New York's worst disasters, and the toll was devastating. By the time the fires were out, thousands of New Yorkers had been killed between 1965 and 1983. One South Bronx neighborhood that held 836 buildings in 1970 had nine left in 1980. Other tracts lost more. Tens of thousands of people lost their homes.

The city's crises, fiscal collapse, and shock therapy of the 1970s are the Big Bang from which today's neoliberal New York erupted.

City officials had advocated abandoning whole neighborhoods and then closed fire stations in the very Black and Latino neighborhoods that were burning out of control. The deaths were the direct result of those policies. It was the closest New York City came to genocide in the twentieth century.

For the current generation of writers making sense of contemporary New York — from William Sites' *Remaking New York* to Miriam Greenberg's *Branding New York* — the city's crises, fiscal collapse, and shock therapy of the 1970s are the Big Bang from which today's neoliberal New York erupted.¹ Joe Flood contributes to the study of this vital period a rich description of the era and explains how a handful of officials with the power to stop the fires watched while New York burned. The fires are not an unknown part of New York's history.² But there has been no broad history of the fires until now. In presenting the protracted trauma, *The Fires* makes the story of the burning of the South Bronx so engaging that we are a little less likely to ever forget. It is a much needed book. But the reckoning of the fires is not done.

The Fires tells the story of what firefighters call the "War Years" by following the rise of

John O'Hagan, a determined, reforming firefighter who rose through the ranks to become the youngest fire chief and one of the only New Yorkers to hold simultaneously the titles of chief and fire commissioner. Flood tells an engaging story of how O'Hagan single-handedly modernized the fire department, literally writing the book on high-rise fire codes, improved fire fighting techniques, and professionalized fire-fighting. O'Hagan should have been the best person to face down the Fires. But in a failure that spoiled an otherwise exemplary legacy, O'Hagan's actions exacerbated the worst fire disaster in the city's modern history.

The Fires is Flood's first book, and he is an unnervingly good writer. Flood, himself the son of a police officer, lends the urgency of a crime story to the story of city bureaucrats. O'Hagan used the RAND corporation's computer analysis to justify closing fire departments in the Bronx even while whole neighborhoods burned, thus earning the appreciation of financially strapped mayors John Lindsay and Abe Beame. In Flood's telling, this is a story of hubris, of the reforming O'Hagan who, like his blueblood counterpart Lindsay, put too much faith in rational management methods. In the process, Flood tells of the rise of RAND from a group of World War II slide rule warriors to an influential, politically savvy, and high-priced consulting organization. No one else has made the story of rational management and early computer modeling read like an engrossing Greek tragedy.

Along the way, Flood weaves together many threads of this story. He explains how redlining by banks and the federal government's Home Ownership Loan Corporation explicitly denied non-white neighborhoods the loans that building owners needed to maintain their property, leading to the deterioration that was a precursor to the fires. He just as deftly dismisses some of the popular assumptions about the chaos of the era when he demonstrates that the notorious killing of Kitty Genovese did not, in fact, reflect a callous city that ignored a murder victim's cries,

but a typical case of residents who did call for help.

Flood makes a convincing argument that even the politically progressive explanation for the fires—that they were caused by cold hearted landlords burning tenants' homes for fire insurance payoffs—accounted for only a minority of the fires. The most common cause of the conflagrations was more dismaying for how mundane it was: a much larger constellation of powerful people allowed perfectly normal fires to burn out of control and displace tens of thousands of families. Flood's explanation underscores Hannah Arendt's argument about the banality of evil: the fires were not generally the work of malevolent villains who held a torch to the buildings. Instead, Flood presents it as the perfect storm: a city in tight financial straits, a reforming mayor and a fire commissioner who believed that rational management could deliver more with less, and a computer model by RAND that reassured them that the cuts to fire service were sound.

As rich and breathtaking as the story is in Flood's telling, one omission is glaring: race. In following the story of reforming hubris and the "best of intentions," Flood seeks to make the point that the burning of the South Bronx was not, first and foremost, a story of racism. From the beginning, Flood derides this view as a "conspiracy," an understandable but still mistaken attribution of far too much planning and competence to a dysfunctional city government. City housing commissioner Roger Starr proposed boldly enough that hundreds of thousands of poor residents in the South Bronx and Brooklyn should be forced out of their homes. But Flood discusses Starr after telling the story of the fires, as if Starr's proposal was an afterthought, not a prescription.

It is difficult to argue that the fires weren't fed by the racism of the city's elite when Starr suggested the Bronx be leveled to reduce city expenditures, and when, as Flood acknowledges, the spokesperson for the city's powerful

Municipal Assistance Corporation complained that "New York's in trouble because it's got too many fucking Blacks and Puerto Ricans." Flood shows that Blacks and Puerto Ricans weren't the cause of New York's problems. But that's what it means to be a scapegoat.

Flood seems to believe that he cannot have the complex causality of his story and evoke racism at the same time: racism is a simple, easy-to-identify evil, and this is a story of misplaced confidence, of the deadly effects of everyday city politicking and seemingly benign bureaucratic jockeying, of unintended consequences as often as malicious intent. But it is in unraveling something as complex as the fires that we see the most deadly effects of race. And it is to prevent future tragedies on the scale of the fires that it is absolutely imperative that we have the best possible understanding of how racism actually catalyzes such an event.

The book's first oversight is its assumption that well-intentioned liberals aren't racist. Flood sees a paradox in the fact that the fires took place on the watch of a crusading fire chief and Mayor Lindsay, "an ardent supporter of civil rights." Liberals are not progressives or radicals. Lindsay may have been a supporter but was never a civil rights activist. The adage that in a crisis you can always count on a liberal — if you're a conservative — is never more true here. For a brand of liberal then and now, "supporting" civil rights while doing over the poor has been the rule, not the contradiction: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, another sometime supporter, famously advocated neglect of African-Americans. ("Benign" was always a meaningless modifier of that neglect.) In my own research on the building of New York's Battery Park City neighborhood (the planning of which spanned the War Years), a parade of liberals, including Mayor Lindsay and Governor Nelson Rockefeller, enjoyed reputations as crusaders against racism and ghetto poverty even while they unceasingly insisted that the state reinforce that segregation by building elite enclaves like Battery Park City.

This combination of claims of liberal virtue and actions of capitalist avarice is best captured in David Halberstam's term "the best and the brightest." As Flood points out, Lindsay and Rockefeller embodied the term when they claimed to care for the downtrodden and did them such harm. But the irony of the term is less pronounced in Flood's account. And while it is important to chronicle the policymakers, it is unfortunate that this history of the burning of the South Bronx does not include in its extensive interviews conversations with the people who lost homes, families, and communities to the fires. In another way, the book demonstrates that the best and the brightest are not only a relic of the seventies, for Flood himself fits the bill, with the full ambiguity of that term. Harvard educated, 29, a quick study and remarkably knowledgeable, Flood leaves the impression he could well reach a position of influence like O'Hagan. That Flood's generation will still govern a highly segregated city makes it all the more important that a better understanding of the role of race in the War Years emerge from this account of the fires.

Eric Klinenberg's social autopsy of the 1995 Chicago heat wave that killed 739 people (also primarily poor, politically disempowered people of color), describes the broad, multi-institutional causes of that disaster as a "total social fact." To Klinenberg, whose account of the instantly forgotten heat wave is comparable in its scope and accomplishment to Flood's study of the burning of the Bronx, a total social fact is "one that integrates and activates a broad set of social institutions and generates a series of social processes that express the inner workings of the city.... When hundreds of people die slowly, alone and at home, unprotected by friends and family and unassisted by the state, it is a sign of social breakdown in which communities, neighborhoods, networks, governmental agencies, and the media charged with signaling warnings are all implicated."³ In both the heat wave and the fires, racism is like the water in a marsh: om-

nipresent, but absorbed into the very structure of the place more than visible on its own. Just as the every part of the marsh is waterlogged, on second inspection all the institutions Flood dissects are steeped in racial inequality.

Poor people of color were already subjected to dangerous overcrowding and substandard housing. Poor African-Americans were concentrated in poor neighborhoods as no other group was. At the city level, they were politically disenfranchised. Then there was O'Hagan, for whom ghetto fires were a "blind spot." He reformed firefighting at so many other levels, but did little to address tenement fires. Why? Within the FDNY as a whole, Flood explains, fighting fires in high-rent Midtown skyscrapers was always more prestigious than saving the lives of low income residents. One firefighter noted that the department's leadership consistently cut its teeth in the prestigious Midtown firehouses, and was rarely drawn from stations in poor neighborhoods. (Thus snubbed, Bronx fire stations produced generations of radicalized firefighters union leaders.) That downtown got attention and the ghetto could be so ignored were part of the mechanics and the assumptions of racial inequality.

As Flood tells it, the RAND computer models were a central player in the story of how the city justified closing down firehouses. The computer models were presented with the veneer of objectivity that can be lacquered on statistics. But any honest modeling would have recognized that the ghetto fire companies were the busiest, and the least-utilized fire companies were in comfortable parts of Queens and Staten Island, as well as in city councilmen's neighborhoods. To correct that problem, RAND followed O'Hagan's instructions to re-design their models to compare ghetto fire companies against each other to determine which stations would be cut. Year after year, hundreds of low-income households were burned out, and year after year, the city closed fire houses in those same neighborhoods. Overweening proponents

of computer simulations alone fail to account for the disaster.

Flood argues that fires set by landlords for insurance money never amounted to more than small a minority of fires in the Bronx. While this appears true, the fivefold increase in arson in those years still required that landlords dehumanize their tenants enough to burn them in their homes for insurance proceeds. Without acknowledging racism's moral corrosion, it's difficult to explain how that happened. Flood concludes his argument that the fires were tragic, not malicious, by observing that "No one with any power, it seemed, had any interest in saving the Bronx, and many were doing just fine letting it burn." Precisely. To return to Arendt, what is morally fundamental about the human condition is that people should not be treated as objects. We discard objects when we are done with them. We even destroy buildings. But someone who destroys another person as a means to an end violates the most basic meaning of what it is for them themselves to be human. Politicians initially preferred cutting ghetto fire companies because there was less political power in poor and Black neighborhoods. But the disaster, the death toll, the children burned to death in their bedrooms occurred in public view. To ignore such a basic human emergency would not have been possible without stunning dehumanization. For these observers, the ongoing disaster did not sound an urgent alarm. A city government, fire chief, media, populace, landlord class, and political system allowed the burning to continue once it was going on because racism denied most of them recognition of the human condition.

The lessons for today are disconcerting. As sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton showed in their study of the creation of Black ghettos in the 1920s, African-Americans first relocated from scattered black enclaves into large ghettos to protect themselves against a nationwide wave of deadly, large-scale race riots.⁴ For a racial group who cannot always count on

protection from the fire department, who feels threatened by the police, and who would feel uneasy around large numbers of white neighbors, living with fellow African-Americans is a basic survival strategy. But while ghettos provide collective protection, those same sociologists have detailed how damaging social policies can be targeted at African-Americans precisely because they are residentially isolated: from underfunded schools, to police harassment, to slower property value appreciation, to poor fire protection. Whether they move to Black neighborhoods or white ones, African-Americans looking for a place to live are forced to choose between risky compromises.

The risks for Black residents continue today. Choose any city with a large African-American population. Make two maps, one of where Blacks live, and one of where subprime mortgages or foreclosures are prominent. The maps are interchangeable. In the short term, losing one's home to foreclosure is less dangerous than losing it to fire. In the long term, any mass displacement can cause overcrowding, social disruption, building abandonment, even epidemic disease. One lesson from the War Years to be carried over to today is that financial crises are especially devastating to Black and Latino communities, and that we need to be vigilant to prevent the current cycle from being as damaging — to African American families' investments in their homes, to the school performance of children threatened by displacement, to neighborhoods punctured by abandonment and uprooted families — as the last one. The fires' other lesson is utterly denied in the contemporary political rhetoric that promises to respond to the fiscal crisis by painlessly cutting "fraud, waste, and abuse": cuts to municipal services exact a human toll, and it is borne unevenly.

Until *The Fires*, the burning of New York had languished in the city's collective memory. Flood has brought the story forward in bold relief, compellingly told and in impressive de-

tail. With this account in hand, an annual day of commemoration in New York to the fires, akin to the annual September 11 ceremonies, would help remember the children of Regina and Charles Schneibel, and remind us of the dangers of overconfident bureaucrats, dehumanizing landlords, impersonal computer models, politicians' promises of budget cuts without consequences, and deeply saturated racism. Until then, Flood's account keeps alive a memorial flame that should not be extinguished.

NOTES

1. For post-1975 histories of New York, see Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Alex Vitale, *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). William Sites, *Remaking New York: Primitive Globalization and the Politics of Urban Community* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003).

2. For the most complete epidemiological account of the fires, see Deborah and Rodrick Wallace's crusading investigation in *A Plague on Your Houses: How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled* (New York: Verso, 1998).

3. Eric Klineneberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 32.

4. On the construction of the ghetto, see Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton's classic *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

Planning the Neoliberal City

DAN STEINBERG

RADICAL PLANNING THEORISTS have long held that one of the defining activities of municipal government historically has been to physically shape the city in order to facilitate the circulation and accumulation of capital. This traditionally involved the coordination of infrastructure, land use, and service provision and dated back to the Progressive Era, when economic elites extended their influence

through a Reform movement that emphasized clean government, technical acumen, and the methods of business (all preludes to "the Bloomberg Way"). Efforts by urban political economists to grasp the influence of business interests on municipal policy have largely focused on real estate developers and other locally dependent business interests.

Bloomberg's New York: Class and Governance in the Luxury City

JULIAN BRASH

Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011, 344 pp., \$69.95, \$24.95 paper

The advent of neoliberalism, however, requires a new examination of the role that postindustrial economic elites — the owners and managers of global capital — play in urban politics and governance. Although concentrated in a number of cities, their work was famously characterized by Manuel Castells as occupying the "space of flows," operating in a world of mo-

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bility, networks, and technology that seemed to preclude any localized spatial agenda. And even if they were to challenge developers for control of urban governance, what would it entail for them to refashion the city to serve as an instrument of postindustrial capitalist accumulation? And how precisely would such a regime be sold to the mass public as serving the public interest?

Julian Brash views New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg's ascendancy and administration as a class project unto itself, one in which postindustrial elites discovered their collective identities and interests by participating in government efforts to (re)shape the production of urban space. According to Brash, two motifs epitomize the Bloomberg regime: 1) "The Bloomberg Way," a particular mode of neoliberal and entrepreneurial urban governance; and 2) "the Luxury City," the New York imagined by members of the postindustrial elite that served as a coordinating mechanism for various policy areas, especially economic development and urban planning.

In times past, political economists could follow the trail of money in the form of campaign contributions that filled a mayor's campaign coffers. However, in the case of Michael Bloomberg, there are no contributions to cast suspicion on the influence of private interests on the billionaire mayor who "couldn't be bought." This places an even greater imperative on the task of unpacking the ideology and politics driving Bloomberg's development policies. It also requires close examination of the new set of actors who penetrated the city's influential civic groups and the administration itself. Brash's book accomplishes this through an eclectic mix of methodologies: a close analysis of the Administration's stated goals and policy rationales, a rigorous examination of the public officials and civic elites who crafted the city's development policies, and an in-depth case study of the attempted redevelopment and rezoning of the Far West Side of Manhattan.

"The Bloomberg Way" refers to an osten-

sibly pragmatic, nonideological approach to urban governance that places a premium on management skill, technical expertise, and data-driven evaluation. In its core formulation, the mayor serves as CEO, the city government is a corporation, businesses and residents are clients and customers, and the city itself is a product

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to be branded, marketed, and developed. On this logic, the city's bottom line depends on its ability to generate more property tax revenue, which therefore is a primary consideration when it comes to land use policy and economic development. The flip side, of course, is that distributional concerns — for example, the quality of jobs produced and the impacts of public actions on the stability of neighborhoods and fragile networks of small businesses — are of secondary importance at best.

Indeed, the cornerstone of the city's policy efforts has been to improve New York's standing in the global competition for jobs, investment, and residents abounding in human capital. Brash describes this entrepreneurial approach to enhancing the city's competitiveness as quintessentially neoliberal, though he is careful to point out that neoliberal projects "are fashioned out of preexisting political, cultural, and economic

materials that lie close at hand.” Indeed, an early chapter examines how the post-fiscal crisis political environment, a reactionary drift in national politics, and a number of contingent local events combined to make the election of Bloomberg possible. Throughout the book, Brash then details how the Bloomberg Way actually represents a “complex reworking of post-fiscal crisis neoliberalization” that was required for Bloomberg to govern effectively. It is within this broader context, where governmental priorities had been redefined and a new process of postindustrial class formation was underway, that the Bloomberg Way is revealed as “ideological, class-based, and deeply political.”

Brash documents the influx of members of the Transnational Capitalist Class (TCC) and Professional-Managerial Class (PMC) into the Bloomberg Administration, beginning with the appointment of financier Dan Doctoroff to the newly empowered position of Deputy Mayor for Economic Development. Indeed, according to Brash, Doctoroff’s hiring was a “watershed in New York City class politics, the moment when the city’s TCC first asserted itself as a player in the city’s governance.” Doctoroff also had strong ties to the development community due to his own real estate holdings and his relentless efforts to bring the 2012 Olympics to New York City. Bloomberg and Doctoroff recognized the potential of using the Olympics to push along numerous development projects and, most importantly, the extension of the Midtown Central Business District to the Far West Side of Manhattan. Shortly after Doctoroff’s appointment, Andrew Alper was plucked from Goldman Sachs to run the city’s Economic Development Corporation (EDC). As Brash shows, before stepping into their respective positions, neither Doctoroff nor Alper were even sure what EDC was. This reflected a faith that it was the corporate leadership skills and experience of postindustrial elites, assisted by a professional technocracy, that would propel the city toward economic growth and prosperity.

In crafting an overarching economic development strategy for the Bloomberg Administration, Doctoroff and Alper worked closely with the Partnership for New York City, the business advocacy group representing the “leadership of New York’s international business community” (as described the Partnership itself). It was determined that New York should not compete on the basis of business costs, and instead should focus on a high-end market segment that valued the city’s labor pool, its infrastructure, and its urbanism itself—the city’s dynamic culture, its energizing density, and its inimitable cosmopolitanism. In effect, New York itself was envisioned as a high-end product—not just to be consumed, but as an asset in the postindustrial production process since the “luxury city” would attract “high-value-added postindustrial sectors that comprised the city’s target market.” New York was therefore an urban brand, and development policy would be geared toward shaping the city to meet this marketing imagery. Specifically, this involved comprehensive planning for upscale residential projects, the creation of new and enhanced office districts, and improved parks (especially on the waterfront) and cultural resources that would appeal to the city’s postindustrial denizens. Compared to traditional growth regimes, where development incentives are distributed in a piecemeal fashion, “the Bloomberg Way revitalized the role of the local state in the economy, centralizing its development functions, enhancing its capacity for coordinated action, and permitting it to guide, rather than merely support, development.”

Brash further argues that the technocratic Bloomberg Way and the associated vision of the Luxury City were “premised on the existence and identification of a unitary interest of the city as a whole, the delegitimization of particular interests, and the rejection of political conflict.” Following the logic of Paul Peterson in *City Limits*, Bloomberg officials claimed that their growth-oriented economic development strategies were in the interest of the reified city, since

this approach enhanced New York's position vis-à-vis other cities competing for investment. Bloomberg is also quick to point out the fiscal imperative of facilitating development, since an enhanced tax base is necessary to fund the services to New Yorkers who may not directly benefit from a corporate-center strategy.

In reality, though, there were losers associated with this approach, namely the cost-sensitive industries and neighborhoods impacted by this agenda. Though Brash does not list specific examples, there are many to draw from: for instance, the ethnic food distributors in Bronx Terminal Market who were displaced by a city-subsidized mall; the independent retailers in Albee Square Mall who were cleared to make room for a glitzy shopping and housing complex sponsored by EDC; the small manufacturers in Greenpoint-Williamsburg and other rezoned neighborhoods who could not compete with higher-rent uses; and the residents of neighborhoods where gentrification was facilitated by public policy. Despite the administration's deployment of "urban patriotism" intended to portray opponents of redevelopment projects as "NIMBY" (Not In My Backyard) obstructionists working against the public interest, these policies generated a good deal of political conflict that occasionally challenged the broader class-inflected vision held by the administration.

Far West Side Stories

THE BREWING TENSIONS between Bloomberg's grandiose plans for the luxury city and local interests and neighborhoods bubbled to the surface with the announcement of an ambitious plan for the development of a football stadium as the centerpiece of the city's Olympic bid, along with a large-scale rezoning intended to facilitate the westward expansion of the Midtown business district. Brash devotes several chapters to these controversies, often bringing to light crucial details that escaped the notice of mainstream reporters. As Brash argues, the larger effort to transform the Far West Side was

premised on familiar postindustrial fantasies that producing an oversupply of office space would somehow generate office demand, or that the "information economy" would produce an endless supply of office jobs that would quickly be absorbed by the new buildings.

Bloomberg's aversion to democratic planning and oversight, which Brash attributes to his corporate background and CEO persona, fundamentally impacted the design of the projects and the manner in which they were pursued. For instance, Bloomberg deferred to the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) as the lead agency for developing the stadium, thereby avoiding the city's public land use review process. He also created the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation (HYIC) as an off-budget financing mechanism for the extension of the Number 7 subway line, partially because it did not require approval from the City Council to issue bonds. As Brash shows, there were substantial costs incurred by this arrangement, where funds from new commercial development in the area would be diverted from the city's treasury and instead used to service the debt incurred for the subway project (which itself raises distributional issues). Aside from the fact that developers would pay the equivalent of discounted property taxes, this strategy required the city to plan for an unprecedented level of density in order to raise enough funds to cover the \$3 billion transit project, which Bloomberg officials viewed as the key to developing the Far West Side at the speed and scale they desired. Furthermore, because the bonds were being issued by HYIC, they were not technically backed by the full faith and credit of the city, thereby increasing the city's borrowing costs. As Brash observes, "getting the project underway and completed quickly, without undue interference or delay, trumped democratic niceties and even profitability." In the public discourse, these prosaic issues were overshadowed by legitimate questions pertaining to the wisdom of placing a football stadium, which hosts a small number

of games a year and does not pay property taxes, on prime Manhattan real estate.

Brash artfully constructs a narrative of “the battle for the West Side” that reveals how elements of the Bloomberg Way ironically worked against the mayor’s own objectives, contributing to the demise of the stadium proposal despite the fact that the rezoning was passed with only minor concessions to the community. As Brash shows, Bloomberg’s arrogance and his animus against “politics” resulted in the Administration’s failure to placate the concerns of New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who feared that overdevelopment on the West Side would undermine efforts to bolster the economy of Lower Manhattan (situated in Silver’s district). To be sure, Silver personifies the traditional style of political horse-trading disdained by Bloomberg, but the fact of the matter is that Silver eventually killed the stadium project through his vote on the state Public Authority Control Board.

Brash also demonstrates how the Bloomberg Way’s technocratic bent put a premium on the opinion of experts, giving additional weight to devastating critiques of the project published by the Regional Plan Association and planners working on behalf of the local Community Board. These reports gave Silver all the ammunition he needed to eventually kill the stadium. Rather than attacking the class-inflected character of the Administration’s vision, however, these critiques mostly refuted the Administration’s arguments on their own terms — contending that the stadium was not a “profitable investment” and did not meet the standards of “best practices” in urban planning. In this respect, Brash argues that the Bloomberg Administration ultimately succeeded in determining the parameters of the debate, as evidenced by the passage of the massive rezoning and risky financing plan related to the subway extension. In my view, this could not have been accomplished without the partial complicity of Christine Quinn, the

local Council member who aspired to become speaker of the Council (which she achieved in 2006) and has aspirations to receive Bloomberg’s support in her own bid for mayor. Because of these ambitions, Quinn abandoned her more progressive political roots to strike a conciliatory note in the hopes of garnering the support of the influential, prodevelopment building trades and the business community despite her opposition to the stadium. Thus, Quinn was walking a political tightrope, which she resolved by convincing other Council members and community leaders that it was necessary to accept the contours of the rezoning in order to defeat the stadium (a dubious claim since there is no evidence that Silver was influenced by this line of thought). This was key to Bloomberg’s ability to implement his overall vision, and the absence of Quinn’s role in Brash’s narrative is my only quibble with his otherwise impeccable account of the micropolitics involved with these projects.

THE BLOOMBERG WAY HAS BEEN COMING apart at the seams since Brash’s book was written, with Bloomberg’s third term producing a series of debacles that undermine the ideal of technocracy and his image as non-ideological. Bloomberg’s management skills have come into question due to several scandals, none more costly than CityTime—the massive automated payroll system Bloomberg promoted as a way to regulate workers and cut down on inflated overtime pay. Despite investigative news reports that sounded the alarm when the project’s budget ballooned from \$63 million to over \$700 million, Bloomberg insisted that the private companies contracted to design CityTime were working in good faith. Eventually the U.S. Attorney’s office would level charges of fraud, money laundering, and receiving kickbacks against the private contractors and consultants, arguing that they were able to manipulate the terms of their contracts and inflate the costs eleven times its original estimate. James A. Parrott, chief economist for the Fiscal Policy

Institute, commented: “Given the magnitude of the CityTime scandal, I think the mayor has already squandered most of his smart management reputation.” The city’s lackluster response to the catastrophic 2010 snowstorm further tainted this image, especially since there was confusion over who was in charge of declaring a snow emergency and coordinating the efforts of various agencies while Bloomberg spent the weekend at his home in Bermuda.

The notion that Bloomberg stands above the fray of urban politics also took a hit this year with the trial of John Haggerty Jr., a Republican campaign operative convicted of stealing over a million dollars from the Bloomberg campaign (which spent a total of \$105 million in this election alone). The trial revealed that Bloomberg had hired Haggerty to implement a “ballot security” initiative on Election Day. As journalist Tom Robbins reported, ballot security operations have historically been a Republican tactic intended to suppress voter turnout in targeted neighborhoods. During the 2005 election, Bloomberg first hired Haggerty to supervise a ballot security operation, prompting Fernando Ferrer to file a complaint with the Justice Department claiming that Bloomberg had planned to use off-duty correction officers to guard polls in the Bronx as “an organized effort of voter intimidation disguised as poll watching.” During the most recent election cycle, Bloomberg avoided this sort of scrutiny by funneling Haggerty’s payments through the beleaguered Independence Party as a donation to their housekeeping account, thereby ensuring that this expenditure would not show up on campaign disclosure reports before Election Day. At the very least, this smacked of the kind of “dirty politics” that contradicted Bloomberg’s cultivated image as being “above politics.”

When Bloomberg appointed publishing magnate and Upper East Side neighbor Cathie Black as Schools Chancellor, he argued that her lack of experience in public education did not matter because her attributes as an effective

corporate leader were all the credentials needed. This ended with her resignation 95 days later. Bloomberg’s fabled facility with data has come back to haunt him in several respects. Bally-hooped improvements in student test scores were mostly negated when state officials recalibrated the results. Data-driven policies in the police department have resulted in the systematic misreporting of crimes and recent corruption scandals. Still more troubling, last year the New York Police Department conducted over a half-million forcible stop and frisks, 85 percent of which were of non-whites, and only 10 percent of which led to arrests (usually for petty crimes). This has triggered a federal lawsuit and several large protests in recent months.

However, it is the Occupy Wall Street protests that have exposed Bloomberg’s class politics. Given his immense wealth—a net worth estimated at \$19.5 billion, mostly derived from providing financial information to Wall Street—Bloomberg epitomizes “Wall Street” excess and power. Perhaps for this reason he has chosen to publicly support the First Amendment rights of the protesters, all the while making tone-deaf and patronizing statements about the substance of the demonstrations.

During the first week of OWS, Bloomberg made a muddled argument about the protests harming the tourism economy of New York. Ironically, within days newspapers were reporting that Zuccotti Park had itself become a tourist attraction. More recently, Bloomberg resorted to flippant language, calling OWS “fun,” “cathartic,” and “entertaining to go and blame people,” but concluded that “it doesn’t get better by complaining about it; it doesn’t get better by disrupting commerce; it doesn’t get better by vilifying people and scaring them away from taking risks.” Bloomberg has also adopted the standard reactionary interpretation of the mortgage crisis, saying that it was “plain and simple, Congress who forced everyone to go and to give mortgages to people who were on the cusp” and implicated Fannie and Freddie

Mac as the principal culprits. Finally, Bloomberg has strenuously opposed a state income tax surcharge on top earners and a Living Wage bill currently wending its way through the City Council.

It is to Brash's credit that Bloomberg's recent failures are all comprehensible within the framework of his book, especially his trenchant debunking of "the Bloomberg way" and the nonsensical claim that Bloomberg is "above politics." Perhaps Brash's most valuable contribution is that he demolishes the notion that there is "a unitary city interest" that can be determined by

disinterested elites through technical analysis. When it came to shaping the city, Bloomberg focused on creating a place for postindustrial elites to work and play by directing incentives toward office buildings, stadiums, and shopping centers, and strategically using a hot real estate market to encourage speculation and gentrification across large swaths of the city. Clearly, the Bloomberg Way points up the pitfalls and dangers of neoliberal city building, as well as the need to democratize urban planning and economic decision-making processes.

A Journey to Mean-spiritedness

MICHAEL WRESZIN

THIS BIOGRAPHY SUFFERS from extreme hagiography and fanatical sycophantry. Norman Podhoretz is a notoriously opinionated ideologue (always denied) who expressed the most provocative statements on a world of ideas and issues. For more than fifty years there was a steady stream of books, three memoirs or autobiographies, and an endless list of articles from the early 1950s through the first decade of the 21st century.

Not once, to my knowledge, in this entire volume is there a single word of questioning, skepticism, criticism, or disagreement although in the introduction he declares that he "wasn't always" prepared to embrace Podhoretz' con-

clusions. If so it is not made clear anywhere here. There is a detailed record of his editing, writing, and speaking. Even the personality of the subject, notorious for his aggressive response to opponents, often abusive language and deliberate ridicule, is invariably praised and admired as honest, candid, and straightforward.

His biographer offers

ONLY applause for a lifetime of fine achievements.

Norman Podhoretz was born in a "slum" and rough neighborhood in Brooklyn and became, at an early age a distinguished social and cultural critic during the post World War II years. In the words of a fervent admirer, the conservative, Paul Johnson he was

"a thinker and writer and polemicist, geopolitician, and student of religious ideas, an autobiographer of genius, a man who reacts sharply to the news as it pours from the press

Norman Podhoretz: A Biography

THOMAS L. JEFFERS

New York, Cambridge U. Press, 2010,
393 pp., \$35

MICHAEL WRESZIN is Professor Emeritus, Queens College and the City University of New York. The biographer of Dwight Macdonald, he has written on several journalists of intellectual distinction.

and airwaves, who thinks deeply, angrily, and sincerely about it, and commits his thoughts into vivid and penetrative argument.”¹

An exceptional student of Lionel Trilling at Columbia University, he won a Fulbright to study at Cambridge under F.R. Leavis. He soon decided the academic life was not for him after Leavis rejected one of his essays. He returned to New York to pursue a journalistic career. He quickly became a well-received freelance literary and cultural critic writing for such established literary journals as *The Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and *The New Yorker*, among others. What launched his reputation was a devastating critique of Saul Bellow’s widely acclaimed *The Adventures of Augie March* published by *Commentary* in 1953. He later wrote that he was well aware of how such a negative review would attract attention. As a young man with inordinate ambition he was obsessed with attracting attention. He traced his astonishing rise in the autobiographical *Making It*. In 1960, at the age of 30 he was offered the editorship of *Commentary* magazine, and he transformed it from a Jewish-focused journal into one of the mostly lively and respected intellectual publications competing with the *Partisan Review*, *Nation*, and *New Republic*.

Podhoretz saw himself and was seen by many as a young radical who quickly moved the journal editorially to the dissenting left by publishing such provocative figures as Paul Goodman, Norman O. Brown, Bertram Wolf, and Dwight Macdonald, among other well known intellectuals. It was a star-studded intellectual cast that put the magazine in the forefront of New York intellectual life, certainly no mean achievement.

Jeffers has an inclination, I think correctly, to see beneath the surface — a conservative mind despite his innovative and seemingly initial radical editorial decisions. In the 50s Pod-

horetz downplayed the danger of McCarthyism. He frequently threw around the charge of homosexuality, a pejorative offering little in the way of evidence. He was taken with Whitaker Chambers’ *Witness* especially for its prophetic treatment of Communism and its indictment of Alger Hiss. He was critical of Irving Howe’s “This Age of Conformity” published in *The Partisan Review* (1954), which criticized the growing cozy relationship between intellectuals

When it came to foreign policy,
waging war was his driving
enthusiasm. He spoke in favor of
every war of his lifetime.

and the government. Always on the search for power and influence, it is not surprising that Podhoretz’ alliance with the left was short lived. The sixties completely turned him off and he previewed his growing contempt by writing in *The Partisan Review* in 1958 a devastatingly effective assault on the Bohemians of the 50s, focusing on Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. He saw them as ignorant and anti-intellectual. They were energized by “emotion rather than cerebration.” It was the forerunner of his life-long attack on the New Left.

He was initially troubled by the New Left’s support of Castro. The young were being corrupted by third world Communists, just as the old leftists of the 30s were corrupted by Moscow-dominated Communists. But it wasn’t only that. There was the liberal’s naive adoration of African-Americans.

In 1963 he published “My Negro Problem” in which he argued that, contrary to liberal sentimentality, in his experience Negroes bullied and beat up whites, not the reverse. It was

¹*The Norman Podhoretz Reader*, ed. Thomas L. Jeffers, (N. Y.: Free Press, 2003), xii.

seen by many as an attack on the Civil Rights movement and particularly on affirmative action, which he charged was a reactionary and condescending idea. Before the decade was over he claimed that Black Nationalism was a major threat to the country. Podhoretz had broken completely with his brief radical past.

Like Don Quixote he is both thoughtful and well meaning and at the same time given to violent eruptions. When he writes of the tawdry cheap vulgarity, he is astute and clearly defined. However, when he assumes the role of super-patriot his writing turns into an endless rant, often approaching hysteria and incoherence. It is hard to take seriously his fears of such horrendous demons as multiculturalism, homosexuality, rampant egalitarianism, feminism, Black Nationalism, secular liberalism, or any liberalism that differs from his own 19th Century anti-statism.

When it came to foreign policy, waging war was his driving enthusiasm. He spoke in favor of every war of his lifetime, with a full-throated defense of the Vietnam intervention after an early ambivalence and confusion. He favored the invasion of Iraq and called for the bombing of Iran. The recent Gulf war and the Balkan war were enthusiastically supported, and opponents are liberally smeared as pro-Nazi, Islamist fascists, anti-Semites. This is all a part of his extreme anti-Communism accompanied by his total support of all things Jewish and of Israel as a nation state.

In February of 1970 Podhoretz, now in his 40th year, had a visionary experience, an epiphany, in which he saw the true Jewish law. A law of duty and responsibility against rights and entitlements. This vision was carried to the pages of *Commentary* where Podhoretz, according to a conservative admirer, attacks "our enemies, blow by blow — the New Left, the radicalized professor, the generation gap, the Black Panthers, the clerics, the WASP 'patriciate,' the [worst] of them all the *New York Review* — that pernicious journal." Podhoretz believed that he had a

sacred mission to protect the country from the inroads of liberal sentimentality. His biographer writes at one point that Podhoretz and his friend Patrick Moynihan believed that

In the United States for more than two centuries American law, and the culture that stood behind it, had progressively treated the individual as an individual, not as a member of a category based on sex, race, or class. The idea of social justice was that rewards should be distributed according to personal merit. What the law guaranteed was equal opportunity. Some with a combination of innate talent and energy, acquired knowledge and skills, and some lucky breaks would cull more prizes. (p.137)

They believed in a safety net, but not in a system that sought equal outcomes. Jeffers makes no comment about this sanguine view of American history, which ignores the existence of poverty, racism, and sexism as playing a crucial role in living an American life.

By now Podhoretz has become a champion of the white working class, which sees liberal programs as serving blacks at the expense of whites. The blacks, in addition to their violence, are anti-Semitic and pro-Arab. In his *Breaking Ranks*, (1979) he went so far as to deny that African-Americans were segregated in the North. Southerners erroneously argued that blacks "were penned up in ghettos and kept out of the neighborhoods and schools of the whites." Podhoretz stated flatly that this was a distorted view not based on reality: "Negroes were not segregated in the North. They lived together in certain neighborhoods, as did Jews and Slavs and other ethnic groups. They were clustered together for a variety of reasons. Discrimination is not an important one." They might, he suggests, "feel more comfortable living among 'their own kind,' surrounded by stores catering to their tastes and with churches and synagogues conveniently at hand."

As for the Soviet Union, it was always a major menace. For years Podhoretz insisted that it outdistanced the United States in arma-

ments. Those who disagreed were appeasers. He felt that his role and duty was to make the present danger, the title of his polemic, so clear that even deniers would be ready for action. He attacked the "Culture of Appeasement" that was "Making the World Safe for Communism." When liberals recognized international law he wrote "Appealing to international law is a form of unilateral disarmament." Any criticism of these positions is seen as "snide" "misconstrued," "deliberately distorted." Ronald Steele told Podhoretz to relax. "Just because the United States had not invaded any country this week did not mean Western civilization was tottering on the brink of ruin."

In the mid 80s he found George Kennan, McGeorge Bundy, Gerard Smith, and Flora Lewis appeasers for their support of a detente with the Soviet Union. This appeasement would lead to "a Soviet-dominated world or a nuclear war or both." He now writes that he would rather be ruled by the Tea Party than by the Democratic Party, and would rather have Sarah Palin sitting in the Oval Office than Barack Obama. (*Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2010).

Why have I bothered to review Mr. Podhoretz' work and waded through much of his writing? Because he writes very clearly and his works offer genuine insights into the rise of the right wing in America over the last two decades. His writings are historical documents shedding light on the contemporary culture. They also pose the difficult question, how does an intelligent mind become so narrow and limited? In my copy of his *Breaking Ranks* I have written a subtitle: "The Journey to Mean-spiritedness." Alfred Kazin was provoked to wonder how a

man like Podhoretz could have developed so much heartlessness in a world where the evidence of wretchedness on the streets of much of the city would have been enough to jar someone who had grown up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The failure of this volume is the biographer's refusal to entertain such a question, dismissing it as simply snide.

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Many of our readers contribute to the annual NP fund drive. Another way to help the magazine is to leave a bequest. A gift of this type can help ensure that New Politics continues to publish for many years to come. We ask that you consider one of the following options:

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THE INNER LOGIC OF AVATAR

MARK P. WORRELL

IN MARCH 2010, Žižek reviewed *Avatar* for the *New Statesman*; his conclusion was that, at its core, the film duplicates a time-honored “reactionary myth” that perpetuates “vampiric exploitation” in the guise of “compassion for the poor.” In short, *Avatar* is racist and brutal in its implications. The film offers up the ideological choice of being “the victim of imperialist reality” or playing the “allotted role in the white man’s fantasy.” I think Žižek was more or less correct in his evaluation of the film but he could have gone much further and drawn out many more regressive features. *Avatar* is important and deserves more attention, as it provided, arguably, an ideal-typical expression of what we might think of as the pseudo-progressive consciousness of our time. My intention, now, is not to summarize or review the film; readers are either already familiar with it or can read Žižek’s adequate summary in his review, which is freely available online.¹ My intention is to briefly tunnel into the inner logic of the film and extract what amounts to its ideological essence — an initial gambit, potentially, in an exploration of cinema and culture in the late American imperialist era.

One of the most obvious and problematic features of *Avatar* is that it imagines that the solution to the pathological functions of the military industrial complex (MIC) is already

found inside the MIC — like a Luther inside the Church who, alone, and driven by ethical purity, can undermine ruthless institutionalized tyranny. Nothing is more fantastic than the notion of an ethically pure trooper who could bring the operations of the MIC to a standstill on the frontier of extraction. We have to do nothing about the MIC because the seeds of its own self-destruction are already festering away, internally. We can go on consuming like mad and burying ourselves in debt because the Department of Defense (DoD) can ultimately purify itself. Indeed, the worse the MIC and we become in our malevolence, the more likely a good change will spontaneously produce itself. Bad capitalism is actually the road to freedom! *Avatar* splits (fetishizes) capital into two separates species: the classic division between rapacious, evil capital — here it subsidizes the DoD for the purpose of clearing a path for corporate globalization. In the background is the promise of a return to old-fashioned good business. If only the evil excess of capital, the MIC-speculation complex could be pacified, then we could get back to the business of good business and the DoD could get back to what it does best: peace-keeping missions and making the world safe for democracy.

A key promise the film makes is that violent revolution is necessary but will happen somewhere else, literally in another world, another time, and another place. The mess and destruction of a revolution can be avoided here and now because, evidently, “here” is a great place, requiring only minor revisions. Revolution should not cost us “our” world but should come at the expense of the other’s world. And if the mass destruction and death involved in revolution is only possible someplace else, then

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it is because it deserves to be purified. Our world is good; the revolutionary battleground, on the other hand, is defective (but naturally perfect) and in need of annihilation. Pointing to the “speculative identity” of the film, the presence of the evil corporation prefigures the primordial defect of the aboriginals — as if evil capital is forced to appear due to the primitive stupidity of others to get with the program of free market exchange. Of course, what *Avatar* hides is that our almost perfect world of middle class material sumptuousness is built on top of the other’s radical impoverishment and free market exchange. And revolution, while unavoidable, will be postponed for the future — somebody else in the future will have to deal with all this; for now, all we can do is just keep doing what we’ve been doing.

“Radical” or revolutionary potential is not simply embodied by the white male. The white man hero is the embodiment of justice, a gift that he can bestow on others if and when he chooses. However, actual revolutionary action would require a transformation of the white male into a hybrid, alien being (literally inhuman). Revolution is not something a decent American (white male) would get involved in. The revolutionary situation is a classic case of the person becoming simultaneously more than and less than his individual form: as a “sublimate” (his noble and heroic form) must be purchased at the price of assuming a more ‘primitive’ form; *Avatar* implies that revolution is not inherently progressive but regressive.

In order to save an environment we should be willing to destroy it in a glorious struggle. We will have to face losing “the tree” in order to save the tree. And the loss of nature is acceptable because the apparently sui generis “network” of nature is greater than the tree — loss of finite parts of nature is a trivial price to pay because we need only retain a fraction of the whole in order to preserve the whole itself. The destruction of a key but finite piece of the natural world is bearable because the very loss itself will spon-

taneously activate its automatic compensation.

One point that *Avatar* gets right is that sociological altruism (Durkheim) can defeat technology (a lesson that Americans continuously fail to grasp, from Korea, Vietnam,

We can forge ahead in our
purely self-destructive mode
(domestically and internationally)
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white, right, and full of might.

to Afghanistan). But the limits of altruism are reached when war passes over into total war. *Avatar* slips in petit bourgeois justice as a notion that can suspend even the trump card of total war. We can forge ahead in our purely self-destructive mode (domestically and internationally) without regard for total war and nuclear winter because we are white, right, and full of might — or at least we could be if we wanted to. We can be stopped but even in our “defeat” we emerge victorious. As always, for Americans, every situation is a “win-win.” This bizarre notion also reinforces the notion that science and technology are inferior to myth, belief, and faith. We may have a lot of high-tech gadgets but what will save us, like the “primitives,” is our irrational faith-based society.

Justice in the *Avatar* world is local (particular) and universalism is inherently evil and corrupt. Forces that penetrate or appear on the boundaries with the particular are only evil, and particular communities will always be forced to circle their wagons at the first signs of universalism. Freedom can be actualized only via particular mediation rather than directly, and freedom will come at the price of intellectual stagnation and submerging the mind in faith and myth. It

is permissible to degrade the earth so long as it is done in good faith and based on faith. Our lack of reflexivity is our alibi: of course, had we known what we were doing we would never have done otherwise but since we were misled or duped (a defect of faith) we could not know. The very experience of something like global climate change is proof enough that we were well intentioned, a faithful, good people.

Just as *Avatar* fetishizes capital it fetishizes nature. We should be willing to fight to the death for natural resources because they have “value” as if value were inherent in nature. The film hinges on a naïve realism that ordinary people share with orthodox Marxology: value per se. The film redoubles our misplacement of morality into the natural (amoral) domain. *Avatar* makes as much sense as evil sharks and Bolshevik ants that populate nature programming. Further, in *Avatar* we find that some places are sacred and worth dying for; some places are worth the cost of lives — and, if we lose one or two, it is no big deal since our revolutionary fighter is not even human any more.

Avatar also appeals to upper-middle class egoism in that it constructs a morally pure, incorruptible, and noble other for us to project our abstract and impersonal humanitarianism on to — our love of aliens is linked to the inhuman “brotherly love” of the Calvinist and his desublimated descendant, the modern consumer. What *Avatar* reinforces is the fear of the organized spiritual elite. The film structures revolutionary action along two possible lines: the naturally attuned aliens who are bogged down by the collectivist (horde) mentality and, in the second group, the ethically driven individual; the available options are masses or individuals but not the elite cadre — cadres (and success) are for fanatics and terrorists. The good (and

imaginary) fight just needs one “activist” or good guy (with a little good luck thrown in along with common sense and a dash of moral indignation) to mobilize the masses. One could easily see in this fantasy not just narcissism but full-blown psychosis. And since in this arrangement everybody in the category of “mass” would have to agree to follow the singular leader, and since that is impossible, it means that actual revolution would have to remain forever in the domain of fantasy. Either we all pull together or nothing is possible. I’m not going to risk my life unless everybody is willing to die for my adventure. The *Avatar* fantasy also says a lot about the uniquely American conception of self-sacrifice.

Self-sacrifice, here, is a form of degraded utilitarianism. The hero who sacrifices his self actually gains much more: regaining the full use of a (alien) body: sacrifice is worth it only so long as I get a lot more out of it and do not actually lose my life. Revolutionaries qualify for a life upgrade upon completion of the mission. Sacrifice in *Avatar* follows an all-or-nothing logic: either I will save the whole world or I’ll just stay at home and do nothing. Something like mundane, simple forms of everyday assistance are too boring and trivial to imagine. It is easier and more fun to imagine my body transformed into an alien who defeats the combined forces of evil capital and to have unlimited sexual relations with a princess than it is to just do something small but potentially helpful for concrete people with actual needs. For *Avatar* fans, the revolution will have to be mightily entertaining and rewarding for them to get interested.

NOTES

1. “Return of the Natives.” (www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality-love-couple-sex).

Tim Sanders

KENT WORCESTER

THE CURRENT WAVE OF INTEREST in comics and cartooning has mainly focused on book-length stories — graphic novels, graphic memoirs, and nonfiction comics that use an extended canvas to explore serious subjects in depth. The implication is that length equals substance. But effective cartooning often consists of a few economical brushstrokes. A well-crafted cartoon reminds us that comics is by definition an art of encapsulation. Even as graphic novels command the cultural spotlight, the short form

“Cartoonists are generally of a leftist tinge. If you’re being satirical and exposing the powers that be, the current order, then you tend to end up in some way on the other side to them — to be radical and critical.” —TIM SANDERS



cartoon confronts the old-fashioned challenge of distilling the zeitgeist into a compact, hand-drawn image.

One of the unacknowledged stalwarts of the short form political cartoon is Tim Sanders, who works as a “pocket cartoonist” for the *Independent*, an English newspaper. The term pocket cartoon was coined in the late 1930s to describe topical, black-and-white cartoons that can be squeezed into a single newspaper column. For more than a decade, Sanders has generated a



steady stream of single panel cartoons that tartly comment on the day's news. During this time he has found fresh ways of visualizing issues that have already been extensively debated in the media, from corporate scandals and political corruption to social inequality, budget cuts, and the Iraq war. He is one of a number of newspaper cartoonists on both sides of the Atlantic who consistently craft first-rate illustrations but whose work has gone unnoticed despite the boom of public and scholarly interest in comics and cartoons.

Tim Sanders was born in 1957 in the small town of Castle Donnington, in the English Midlands. He attended the Harrow School of Art in the late 1970s and subsequently worked

as a freelance illustrator and cartoonist. He has contributed to an impressive range of publications, including the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, *Private Eye*, *BBC Good Food*, *Nursing Times*, and *Red Pepper*. He started working for the *Independent* in 1999, and his cartoons also appear in the *Independent on Sunday*. He is fluent in Spanish and occasionally contributes to Spanish language newspapers. His work is characterized by an old school, somewhat inky style that uses caricature, iconography, and an irreverent wit to skewer the pretensions of the rich and powerful.

Sanders is also a longtime contributor to the British weekly newspaper *Socialist Worker*. The left press is not always identified with



high-quality design and illustration, but *SW* is something of an exception. From the 1970s onwards the paper has drawn of a coterie of professional artists and graphic designers. For many years it featured the memorable imagery of Phil Evans, who seems to be semi-retired these days but whose spare and often mordant images still turn up on occasion in labor movement periodicals. Over the past couple of decades *SW* has mainly relied on Tim Sanders to bring a decorative touch to weighty topics. In a 2008 interview for *Socialist Worker* (www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=15261) Sanders talked about his approach as a cartoonist and emphasized the ways in which political cartooning and leftwing politics are a good match: "Cartoonists are generally of a leftist tinge. If you're being satirical and exposing the powers that be, the current order, then you tend to end up in some way on the other side to them — to



be radical and critical.”

Like many newspaper cartoonists, Sanders usually operates under tight deadlines and doesn't necessarily have the time to produce, say, a two-volume graphic memoir about his teen years. As his personal website (www.timonline.info) makes clear, however, he works in a variety of artistic media. In addition to producing pen-and-ink cartoons, he paints and creates eye-catching collages. While he mostly addresses political topics he is also capable of rendering beautiful landscapes as well as lively street scenes.

Tim Sanders was kind enough to answer a handful of questions that I sent to him via email. My first question was rather obvious:

Who are some of the cartoonists whose work inspires

THE STOCK EXCHANGE
HAS BEEN OCCUPIED
BY A BUNCH OF CRAZIES
BENT ON DESTROYING
THE SYSTEM.
BANKERS?





you?
SANDERS: Of the current cartoonists in the UK the outstanding figures are Steve Bell of

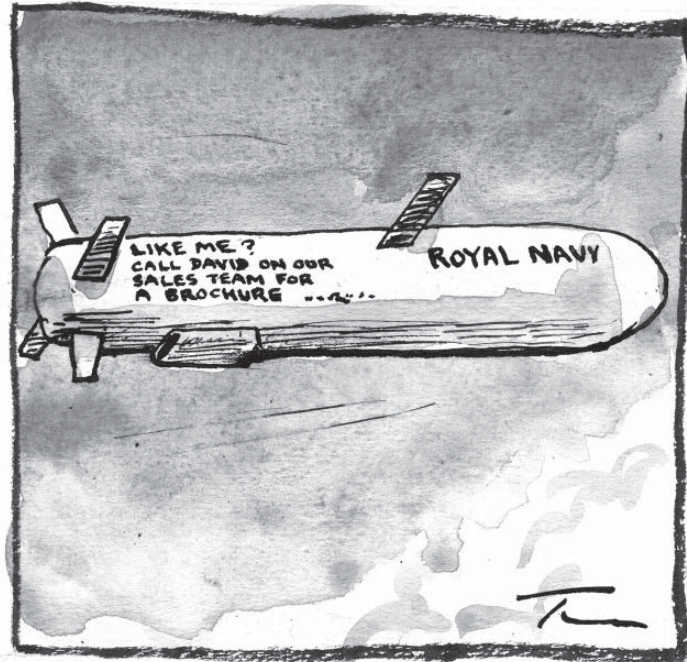
the *Guardian*, Dave Brown of the *Independent*, Ralph Steadman who does stuff in lots of places, and Matt, who is the pocket cartoonist on the



Daily Telegraph. Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that it's a rightwing paper, the *Telegraph* has the funniest cartoonist on the block. From the past there is such a rich tradition to choose from it is hard not to name everyone. I think the great figures of Thomas Rowlandson, James Gillray, and George Cruikshank are a huge influence on all cartoonists, even if they don't know it themselves. I also think the Great Masters of Art have a massive influence and are a constant source of inspiration.

NP: How many cartoons do you generate in a given week?

SANDERS: On a good week I will produce at least ten small



cartoons and one or two larger ones. This changes from week to week, of course. Generally speaking, I'd like to do more if only my brain wouldn't overheat and my hands begin to tremble.

NP: Do you get much feedback from your readers? Do your editors ever ask you to tone things down?

SANDERS: Feedback tends to be positive, though not always. Sometimes people want to buy the drawing which is always nice. As far as censorship goes it's hard to say as I usually offer several roughs and only one gets chosen, so if it is censored it happens before it's drawn.

NP: Do you enjoy working as a political cartoonist or do you wish you had more time for other kinds of art?

SANDERS: I really like being a political cartoonist, though I sometimes get fed up with listening to politicians and news media, but then again I suppose the job of a cartoonist is to puncture the bubble and expose the nonsense, that's what I try to do. I do like to do other sorts of work too. I think it can help with the political cartoons to do something different which makes you look at things in a different way. Really, it's all grist for the mill.

NP: Is your job easier now that the Conservatives are back in power?

SANDERS: In a way it is a bit easier when the



Tories are in power because generally they are really an ugly lot — maybe that's why they went into politics? — and I personally loathe them, which helps if you're trying to get a bit of bile going. On the other hand, I think it would be very difficult to find a more scurrilous figure than Tony Blair, and most of his colleagues are hardly any better, so on balance I think most politicians are a frightful lot who deserve to be pilloried and brought down to size. When I manage to do something which I think will encourage people to see themselves as equal to or better than politicians then I think I'm doing my job. George Orwell said every joke is a tiny revolution and I think that's true. If we can laugh at these people we shrink them and make them less intimidating. It is the first step to standing up to bullies, and you can tell it works because tyrants always try to ban satire. Our politicians have to pretend they like it but that's OK. We know they don't.

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IN THIS ISSUE

What is perhaps best and most exciting about the movement is the confluence of the many social movements with middle class and working class people who have come down to Wall Street or in some other town or city down to Main Street to say, "We've had it."

Dan La Botz

FROM OCCUPY WALL STREET TO OCCUPY THE WORLD

Stephen Jay Gould freely admitted that he was attracted to the idea of punctuated equilibrium because of his knowledge of the dialectical theories of Hegel and Marx.

Phil Gasper

THE DIALECTICAL BIOLOGIST

Local union officers and activists have often been clueless about how to respond to the blitzkrieg of vitriol, and the national unions have been little help. They have been unwilling to "rock the boat," desiring above all to stay politically moored to Obama, a president who has pressed for a thoroughly anti-teacher, anti-union, anti-public education agenda.

Lois Weiner

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