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new POLITICS

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 Apr. 9 and May 31, 2013 or during Sep. 2013. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, Mar. 1, 2013. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500.

MARVIN AND BETTY

From the Editors

TOO OFTEN WE HAVE WITNESSED the political reversal of men and women who began fully committed to liberty, equality, and fraternity and ended up as reactionaries. Max Shachtman, James Burnham, Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol, Wilhelm Reich.... We were saddened by their radical change. Benito Mussolini and Jacques Doriot were even more egregious examples. These are people who have besmirched what once were their core values. But there are people like our journal's founders, Phyllis and Julie Jacobson, who, aging, remained true to the cause, true to their inner selves. The late Harvey Swados, a member of the Workers Party, wrote a novel (*Standing Fast*) about such people.

Michael Wreszin, who died in August, belongs in this company (for us, a pantheon). Michael, a long-time and regular contributor to *NP* who was working on a review for us just before his death, wrote only when it moved him. No surprise that the biographies he wrote were of radicals: Dwight Macdonald, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Albert Jay Nock. In *New Politics* (Winter 1997) Michael called attention to the extreme difficulties of radicals in a dark age, but he concluded, "Engaging in the struggle is what makes us human."

In this issue we have tried to engage a wide variety of pressing issues (when in our lifetime have there not been pressing issues?) with special sections on the European crisis and on the backlash of racism here in the United States. We especially want to thank new Board member Adaner Usmani for organizing the special section on Europe.

MARVIN AND BETTY

CORRECTIONS

In our summer, 2012 issue, #53, we misspelled on the cover and in the table of contents the name of one of our authors, Rachel Garaghty. We regret the error.

Readers have called my attention to some errors in my article "Mobs, Vigilantes, Cops, and Feds: The Repression of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee" (*New Politics*, Summer 2012).

1. In referring to the beginning of a voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama, I mistakenly referred to the Southern Christian Leadership Council. It is Conference, not Council.

2. I referred to federal laws that could have been used to protect SNCC voters, including Article 14 of the Bill of Rights. It is the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, not the Bill of Rights, that should have been cited.

3. In October, 1960, when demonstrators including Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. were arrested at a sit-in in Atlanta, Georgia, John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, who intervened informally, had not yet taken office. I should have said Candidate Kennedy, and Soon-to-be Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

Mea Culpa. I am grateful to careful readers who called these mistakes to my attention.

MARTIN OPPENHEIMER

We Stand with the Greek People Fighting Austerity

For Their Sake and Ours

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

SEPTEMBER 2012

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY in Greece is only the most extreme example of a global phenomenon: the world's political and economic elites, who are responsible for the current economic crisis, want to make the rest of us pay for that crisis, no matter how much suffering this creates. But Greece also exemplifies the determined resistance of millions of ordinary people who refuse to pay for a crisis they did not cause. Their fight is a model for all of us.

Greeks are subjected to an extraordinarily harsh austerity program that has devastated the lives of most of the population. Draconian measures demanded by European bankers and politicians and carried out by the Greek government have drastically reduced workers' wages, pensions, social welfare, and labor rights; poverty and hunger are rising rapidly and suicides of people unable to cope with their rapidly deteriorating circumstances are increasingly common. Hospitals lack basic medical supplies and the under-funding of government social insurance is making it impossible for many Greeks to obtain the medicines they desperately need to survive. Current unemployment for the general population is officially 23 percent, but in reality

closer to 30 percent, and over 50 percent for young people.

Meanwhile, the Greek government continues to bail out Greek banks and to sell off precious public assets at scandalously low prices. For global elites, Greece is a laboratory for a savage form of neoliberalism — the wholesale privatization of public goods, deregulation of markets and turning the workforce into a powerless and financially precarious underclass wholly dependent on employers.

But Greeks have forthrightly declined to play the role of guinea pigs. We are deeply heartened and inspired by the Greek people's resistance. They have mounted general strikes, massive demonstrations and occupations, and, most recently, they have voted in large and increasing numbers for a leftwing political party, SYRIZA, which is leading strong opposition to the government's catastrophic policies and has a good chance of winning the next election.

Greece is worse off than most developed countries, but it is not unique. The worldwide crisis, which is actually worsened by austerity policies, is being used as an opportunity to take away hard won social and labor rights everywhere. Though most other countries haven't yet seen policies as punitive as those in Greece, throughout the OECD unemployment remains high, while cutbacks lead to massive layoffs, and deficits are used as an excuse to attack public services. In the United States the banks have foreclosed millions of homes, students are burdened with huge debts they are unable to repay, and a vicious assault has been waged on

Campaign for Peace and Democracy, 2790 Broadway, #12, New York, NY 10025. To see the full list of signers or to add your name to the statement, go to the Campaign's website at www.cpdweb.org. For further information, write to the Campaign's co-directors Joanne Landy and Thomas Harrison at cpd@igc.org

the collective bargaining rights of public sector workers.

Austerity policies also pose a critical threat to democracy. Increasingly, elites seek to insulate economic decision-making from democratic control. To them, not just Greeks but ordinary people everywhere cannot be trusted to act “responsibly” and therefore do not “deserve” democracy. For the elites, austerity is imperative not only to “solve” the crisis, but also to restore unfettered markets — that is, the very conditions that threw the world into an economic and social meltdown in the first place. The people, who fail to grasp the wisdom of neoliberal ideology, cannot be allowed to interfere.

At the same time, however, grassroots democratic resistance to austerity is intensifying. As in Greece there have been large-scale strikes, demonstrations and occupations of public space in Egypt, Spain, Chile, South Africa, Mexico, China, Quebec, Wisconsin, and the Occupy movement around the world.

In Greece, the left is also struggling to prevent the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn from turning people’s rage and desperation against immigrants. Golden Dawn’s violent pogroms

are paralleled by the Greek government’s persecution of immigrants, both documented and undocumented. The crisis has likewise fostered the growth of the extreme right in Europe and the United States, as well as xenophobic demagoguery and repression by “mainstream” politicians. It is all the more urgent, therefore, to support the Greek left and to promote elsewhere its radical democratic proposals: taxing wealth, nationalizing banks, cutting military spending, boosting wages and social services, and strengthening labor rights.

We Are All Greeks!

GREECE IS THE SITE of a cruel experiment by economic and political elites: driving people into extreme poverty and stripping them of their social rights as a “solution” to the economic crisis. It is an experiment that these elites wish to extend throughout the world. They have already begun. We declare that it doesn’t have to be this way. We stand with the Greek resistance to austerity, both as a moral imperative and because it shows the way to secure a decent future for people everywhere.

The signers include Ervand Abrahamian, Bashir Abu-Manneh, Michael Albert, Greg Albo, Anthony Arno, Stanley Aronowitz, Etienne Balibar, Medea Benjamin, Sam Bottone, Jeremy Brecher, Robert Brenner, Beth Bush Greenstein, Noam Chomsky, Cornelis (Dennis) de Jong, Hamid Dabashi, Manuela Dobos, Ariel Dorfman, Steve Early, Daniel Ellsberg, Gertrude Ezorsky, Samuel Farber, Barry Finger, David M. Finkel, Bill Fletcher, Jr., David Friedman, Mike Friedman, Sam Friedman, Dan Gallin, Barbara Garson, Dan Georgakas, Jack Gerson, Sam Gindin, Jeff Goodwin, Suzanne Gordon, Richard Greeman, Jules Greenstein, Arun Gupta, Ernest Haberkern, Thomas Harrison, Howie Hawkins, Doug Henwood, Michael Hirsch, Nancy Holmstrom, Jan Kavan, Michael Kazin, Robin Kelley, Kathy Kelly, Daniel La Botz, Xavier Lafrance, Joanne Landy, Jesse Lemisch, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Traven Leyshon, Nelson Lichtenstein, Michael Lowy, Ravi Malhotra, Betty Reid Mandell, Marvin Mandell, Dave Marsh, David McReynolds, Marilyn Morehead, Manijeh Nasrabadi, Molly Nolan, David Oakford, Derrick O’Keefe, Costas Panayotakis, Leo Panitch, Christopher Phelps, Frances Fox Piven, Danny Postel, Vijay Prashad, Judy Rebick, Leonard Rodberg, Richard Roman, Herman Rosenfeld, Andrew Ross, Matthew Rothschild, Pierre Rousset, Anna Sabatova, Saskia Sassen, Jay Schaffner, Jason Schulman, Peter O. Schwartz, Stephen R. Shalom, Margaret Shelleda, Marina Sitrin, Richard Smith, Stephen Soldz, Norman Solomon, Michalis Spourdalakis, Jill Stein, Stephen Steinberg, Cheryl Stevenson, Bhaskar Sunkara, David Swanson, William K. Tabb, Bernard Tuchman, Petr Uhl, Adaner Usmani, Immanuel Wallerstein, Judith Podore Ward, Lois Weiner, Cornel West, Reginald Wilson, Sherry Wolf, Julia Wrigley, and Gabi Zimmer.

Europe at a Dark Crossroads

Letter from France

RICHARD GREEMAN

WHEN *NEW POLITICS* ASKED ME this July to write a piece about France under the new Socialist government, I excitedly drove out to Serviers-et-La Baume — my Provençal sweetheart Elyane's little village located in the heart of *la France profonde* — to interview her rural neighbor Robert about this big change (and sip some of his home-made plum brandy).

François Hollande's June electoral victory had just ended seventeen long years of conservative administrations — the last six under the insufferably loathsome Sarkozy. In June, Sarko was ushered out of office with the same popular cries of *dégage* (beat it) that attended last year's ouster of his former North African clients, Tunisia's corrupt tyrant Ben Ali¹ and Libya's unspeakable Gaddafi². Good riddance! Moreover, that very week *Le Monde* had headlined Hollande's proposed budget: hire 65,000 teachers to fill France's overcrowded classrooms and break through Sarkozy's famous "fiscal shield" protecting the rich by raising the top tax bracket to a whopping 75 percent. Could this guy mean business?

Robert has the best vegetable garden in the village and is counting the months until he can take early retirement from France's newly

privatized phone company and begin to farm his family plots in earnest. His friend Michel provides boar meat for Christmas dinner. As the conversation turned around to the best way to preparing olives, I waited impatiently for the right moment to ask them what they thought of the new government. My question was received with rolling eyes and Gallic shrugs.

Both these guys are traditional anti-clerical village radicals, nostalgic for the rebellions of 1968, so I mentally discounted their apparent cynicism. However, I kept getting the same reaction all summer every time I brought up the subject with French people from every sphere. Michel, the boar hunter and self-proclaimed "anarchist," finally broke the embarrassing silence, muttering "Obama, Hollande — they're all the same: puppets of the banks."

"But what about the tax on *les grandes fortunes*?" I naively pursued. (I couldn't even imagine the cries of class war in the United States if Mr. Obama, already stigmatized as a "socialist," proposed such a tax.) Patiently, a pained-looking Robert explained to me how the tax actually hurts the "people in the middle," folks whose "fortunes" may amount to 150,000 € (\$200,000) — the cost of a tract house. "The poor are supported and warehoused in public housing to keep them quiet. The rich get away with murder. People like me," says Robert, who has seniority at the telephone company and inherited two houses in the village from his grandparents, "pay all the taxes, do all the work."

The New French Malady: "Suffering in the Workplace"

ON THIS LAST SCORE, I can personally testify,

RICHARD GREEMAN, best known as the translator of Victor Serge's novels, has been contributing to NP since 1968. He is a co-founder of the Praxis Research and Education Center in Moscow, Russia (www.praxiscenter.ru) which recently published his *Beware of Capitalist Sharks! Radical Rants and Internationalist Essays, Illustrated* (available through Amazon.com). He divides his time between Manhattan and Montpellier, France.

having seen Robert come home from work Friday evening looking like Hell warmed over. He barely said “bonjour,” and I ran for the door, suddenly remembering an urgent errand. In recent years, Robert has seen France-Telecom, the once-proud government service that pioneered e-commerce with its Minitel home terminals, turned into a privatized Hell, known for employee suicides. First, Telecom was gutted from the inside to cut costs, push up profits artificially, and get a higher price on the market for their IPO after merging with the British firm Orange. Then Orange introduced a new management system designed to crush the highly professional workforce by “individualizing” each employee, making him responsible for meeting ever-shifting personal “contracts,” de-skilling work (for example sending line-men trained to handle high-tension wires 30’ in the air to work behind a desk), and breaking up informal groups by transferring employees to other sites, often with exhausting commutes.

This kind of *Souffrance au travail* (suffering in the workplace), the subject of a startling book and TV documentary by a concerned psychiatrist Christophe Dejours, is the direct product of new destabilizing French management practices aimed at breaking the morale of the traditionally feisty French worker, and its results are visible on the faces of the letter-carrier and the other workers with whom one is used to exchanging *bonjours* (they no longer have time). The only people who look sadder are the unemployed, and by the latest official statistics there are five million of them here.³ Industrial areas like Northern Normandy are particularly hard hit, with 25 percent youth unemployment among men and 36 percent among women, inspiring the headline, “How barren is my valley: an everyday story of France’s disappearing industrial fabric.”⁴ Moreover, in August, France’s flagship industry, automaker Peugeot-Citroën (PSA), embarrassed the new Socialist government by making public its plans (kept secret during Sarkozy’s bid for re-election) to close its plant near

Paris and lay off 8,000. Following PSA, Alcatel and Air France both announced *plans sociaux* (the French euphemism for firings) affecting 5,000 workers each.⁵

Change Nobody Believed In

CANDIDATE HOLLANDE HAD PROMISED to curb layoffs, revive the economy and fight the pro-

This kind of *Souffrance au travail* [suffering in the workplace], the subject of a startling book and TV documentary by a concerned psychiatrist Christophe Dejours, is the direct product of new destabilizing French management practices aimed at breaking the morale of the traditionally feisty French worker.

posed European Union austerity plan, but four months after his election *Médiapart* was headlining “In the spring we elected him and in the autumn he betrayed us.”⁶ (How many months or years did it take some of us U.S. Lefties to see through “Change You Can Believe in”?) No wonder village cynics like Robert and Michel — and everybody else I tried to interview — replied to my questions with shrugs. These folks knew that François Hollande and the Socialists, committed to making France “competitive,” were not about to do anything significant to relieve their suffering. It turned out, for example, that the tax on the rich (“more show than dough”) was full of loopholes, exempting for example, income from investments (!)⁷

Moreover, the Administration of President Hollande, whose moving speech in July memorializing France’s national “infamy” in the

deportation of French Jews to German death camps as “The Crime Committed in France, by France” was honored by a full translation this fall in the *New York Review of Books*,⁸ has distinguished itself by a consistent practice of brutal armed police expulsions all over France of peaceful families of Roms (Gypsies, barely mentioned in Hollande’s Holocaust speech). Since July, Hollande’s Interior (Police) Minister Valls has ordered the demolition of Roma encampments in Paris, Lille, Marseille and Aix en Provence for “reasons of public sanitation.” (Shades of Zuccotti Park). These Roms from Bulgaria and Romania are part of the European Union and legally have transit rights in France, where towns must provide camping grounds.⁹ Interviewed during one Roma expulsion, a CRS riot cop criticized the disproportionate means (two CRS companies plus the police) used to round up a small number of peaceful civilians: “When you see their poverty, it makes me sad. They have a right to live, those people.” Asked about Sarkozy’s high profile crackdowns on Roms, he replied: “Whether it’s under the Left or the Right, it doesn’t change much, there weren’t more before and no more since the government changed.”¹⁰

Racist Underpinnings of French Prosperity

AS A JEW IN FRANCE, I am naturally gratified by President Hollande’s recognition of the atrocities of 1943 and by his vows, following recent attacks on Jewish students and a Jewish market, to severely punish anti-Semitism. However, I am also concerned with French racism as it affects my fellow-Semites, the six million or so Arabs who make up about 10 percent of the local population here and are subject to what to American eyes are outrageous forms of both racial and religious discrimination. My Franco-Algerian friend Hacène considers the North Africans in France an “internal colony” and repeats (in Arabic) the saying handed down by his father and grandfather: “*Mah Hi Habounech*”

— “they don’t like us; they don’t want us.”

I learned this to my own discomfort this July, when I went to the Préfecture to renew my *Carte de Séjour* (Residence Permit) which I had carelessly let go out of date. Since as a non-European alien I am in the same category as the Africans and Asians, every year I stand on a long line early in the morning, one North American among about 300 Arabs and a dozen or so Asians, waiting for the Prefecture to open in the hope of getting a ticket and submitting my renewal application. This July they changed the rules. Since I am technically an alien in a *situation irrégulière* I am now barred from entering the Prefecture except on Thursday or Friday mornings, when tickets are distributed by the CRS Policemen guarding the outside gates. I asked the officer how early I should come to have a good chance of getting in, and he pointed to a groups of elderly Arab women and headscarves under some trees nearby: “They’ve been waiting since yesterday for tomorrow morning.” “How many tickets do you have to give out?” I asked the cop. “Fourteen.” I then understood that these fourteen mothers and grandmothers of North African workers vital to their families were holding their places. When I complained to Hacène, he told me that in Lyon the Préfecture used to renew their permits only during a designated period of five days in mid-winter, causing them to camp out in the cold by the hundreds.

These Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians, or their parents and grand-parents, were recruited by the French during the 60s, after their countries became independent, to do the dirty, low-paid jobs the French didn’t want, for example in construction and on the roads. Along with oil and mineral revenues from Algeria and other former French colonies (*La Françafrique*) their cheap labor powered France’s post-war modernization. Far from being the burdensome “welfare profiteers” of mainstream media and politicians, these Arabs literally rebuilt France. Typically, they were hired “off the books,” with

little or no payroll contributions. Single men, often housed in dorms or shacks, who sent their meager earnings to their families back in the village. Now thousands of these old, mostly illiterate Chibanis have reached retirement age, only to find that they're only entitled to 30€–300€ (\$40–\$400) a month, including some meager poverty allowances for old people and immigrant laborers. Worse still, indeed heartbreaking, the French subject their pensions to strict residence restrictions that keep them from retiring to their villages and at last enjoying the children and grandchildren they slaved to support. To collect their pensions, they must reside 9 months of the year in France. If caught, not only do Chibanis lose their retirement benefits permanently, the government sues them for retroactive fraud so as to recover the stipends already paid.

This odious, racist French government regulation is second only to the one regulating the lives of (mainly) Arab women, who entered France as the spouse of a French citizen and who then separate or divorce, generally as a result of wife-beating and other spousal abuse. On the presumption that these abandoned or battered immigrant women only married as a legal ploy to enter France, they are immediately deprived of residence permits and all social benefits. On this, the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence, won at the price of a terrible war of attrition, one would hope that the new French President would say a few words about this anti-Semitic “Crime committed in France by France.” However, to add insult to injury, a “Museum of France in Algeria,” praising the benefits of colonialism and glorifying the terrorists of *Algérie française*, has been opened in Perpignon.¹¹

The Dark Side of Modern France

AS FOR FRANCE'S REPUTATION for religious toleration, the Rights of Man, and *la Laïcité*, the much ballyhooed French version of secularism and the “separation of church and state,” allow

me to make three observations.

- Although up to 1962 Algeria was an integral part of the secular French Republic, divided into Départments with Préfectures, only Christian (and occasionally Jewish) citizens were allowed to vote. The “Moslems” (as the indigenous Arabs and Berbers were officially known) were denied the suffrage on the (religious) ground that they practiced polygamy. Otherwise, they would have outvoted the white settler minority at the polls and shifted the balance of power in continental France.

- The French government subsidizes the Catholic schools and pays the upkeep on half of the Catholic churches (“historical monuments”) in which Mass is celebrated. Christian church towers, crosses and belfries dominate France's landscape and city squares and their bells ring out daily calling the Faithful to pray at taxpayer expense. On the other hand, except for the Great Mosque in Paris, there are zero minarets in this country of six million Arabs, and no *musseins* are permitted to call the Faithful to prayer outside of their generally makeshift storefront mosques.

- After fifty years living here, I can't recall seeing any Arabs in official uniforms or behind the grilled windows of government offices, the telephone company, the bank, or railway stations — at least not here in Montpellier in the South, with its heavy *pied noir* influence. These posts are ubiquitous in this bureaucratic land where the public sector employs as much as the private.

As a veteran of the U.S. Civil Rights movement (and of the French student anti-Algerian-war movement) I am appalled by these shocking observations of obvious discrimination, all the more so when I attempt to bring them to the attention of my Leftist French acquaintances who don't even seem to see them. As Hacène says: “They wear veils over their eyes and then attack us over our veils.”

Faced with capitalist regression on the cultural and economic fronts, the best that French intellectuals have been able to come up with has been Stephane Hessel's runaway best-seller

pamphlet *Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!* and its sequel, co-written by another octogenarian, the philosopher Edgar Morin. Both call for the restoration of the 1944 Program of the National Council of the French Resistance, which established social justice as a human right and set up

“They wear veils over their eyes
and then attack us over our veils.”

the welfare state whose admirable benefits are now under attack in the name of profitability and competitiveness. This step backward would indeed be a step forward. (So would a return to President Eisenhower’s tax code in the United States with its 91 percent top bracket.) But it is hardly an adequate response to the total crisis of 21st Century.

Moreover, the Hessel-Morin nostalgic picture neglects the ‘dark side’ of the Liberation — starting with the exclusion from the victory parade of the Spanish-Republican and Algerian troops who helped liberate Paris in August, 1944, and continuing with the 1945 V-E day massacre of thousands of Algerians demonstrating for their civil rights and the sending of Gen. Leclerc’s expeditionary force to Indochina to crush the native resistance. It forgets that post-Resistance France was dominated by a nationalistic alliance between the right-wing Gaullists and the Stalinists dedicated to restoring capitalist order, disarming the partisans, and protecting the big collaborators, while punishing a few Rightist writers with death and shamefully parading young French women through the streets, heads shaved, for the crime of having loved a German boy. Hardly an edifying example for today’s indignant youth.

The French Exception?

LAST SPRING, as the peoples of Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal were fed into the meat grinder of Austerity, François Hollande pledged that France would resist debt-mania, restore growth, and refuse the social spending cuts imposed by the *diktat* of the German banks (fronted by the “Troika” of IMF, European Commission and Central Bank). On Sept. 29, Hollande suddenly reversed himself and adopted the policy previously scorned as “Merkozy,” provoking defections among the Socialists and their coalition partners, the Greens, as well as howls from the more radical Left Front of renegade Socialist Jean-Luc Mélançon, who had made a significant showing in the first round of the 2012 Presidentials. On Oct. 11, the first anti-Socialist, anti-Treaty mass demonstration (80-100,000?) descended into the streets of Paris under the aegis of the “Left of the Left”: 60-odd organizations including ATTAC, the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party) and Melançon’s crowd.¹² A week later the CGT organized a separate march with other unions.

At issue were Hollande’s stark austerity budget and his support for the new neo-liberal European Treaty. Known as the “fiscal austerity pact,” the Treaty, which supersedes national sovereignty, establishes a “Golden Rule” limiting deficit spending (the classic Keynesian solution to recession) to 3 percent and curbing inflation (which normally helps debtors and debtors’ nations keep their creditors at bay). Despite defections on the Left, the Socialists were able to ram both the austerity budget and the European Treaty through the Chamber of Deputies without recourse to votes from the Right. Once ratified, the Treaty will (to paraphrase William Jennings Bryant) “crucify” the people of Europe “on a cross of Euros” — just like the hard-money/gold-standard deflationary policies that transformed American farmers into debt-peons and provoked the 19th Century Populist revolt.

A Senile French Disorder: Parliamentary Cretinism

ONE RECALLS that the feisty French electorate (along with the Dutch) had previously dealt a stunning blow to this neoliberal project by voting a resounding Non to an earlier version of the European Treaty in 2006. In the election year 2007, there were high hopes that the grass-roots coalition of the “Left of the Left” forces that, against all odds, had won the referendum with a Non vote could unite around a broad program behind a common candidate — for example the popular Jose Bové of the Peasant Confederation. Alas, these hopes dissolved in sectarian power struggles, leaving a field of nine far-left parties (including three brands of Trotskyists and two Greens) scrambling to get onto the ballot — a tedious process that requires militants of each group to obtain signatures from a minimum of 500 elected officials on their petition. At stake, among other things, in this *querelle de boutique* (shopkeepers’ rivalry) were the subsidies the French state gives to qualified minority parties. Just before the deadline, when my local comrades of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), predecessor of the NPA, well short of 500 signatures, were despairing, they were rescued by none other than Nicolas Sarkozy. Calculating that far-left voting would hurt his Socialist opponents, he ordered his conservative party’s local mayors to sign as many petitions as possible!

The LCR’s candidate, the adorable young postman Olivier Besancenot, scored 1.5 million votes (4 percent), on the strength of which the LCR (an affiliate of the IVth International) was encouraged to re-invent itself as the openly electoralist NPA (New Anticapitalist Party). But this reincarnation fell apart over the question of whom to form electoral alliances with — the CP and super-Trotskyist *Lutte ouvrière* on their left or Mélançon’s Left Front? — resulting in defections, an historically low score in 2012, and the loss of government subsidies. This was

yet another hopeful effort fallen victim to what Lenin considered the congenital vice of the French Left: “parliamentary cretinism.”

These farcical misadventures would be laughable were it not for their demoralizing consequences. So let us pause to admire French capitalism’s success in channeling all this radical energy into the electoral swamp. A small political class recruited from *Les Grandes Ecoles* and the five hundred families continues to run France and her neo-colonial African empire, alternating Left and Right administrations in defense of French capital while diverting thousands of militants full of energy and a will to change the world away from the social struggle. Between electoral periods, the leaders of the unions (Communists included) are also co-opted by French Government subsidies and can be counted on to divert the spontaneous mass strikes that periodically paralyze France by channeling them into harmless, spaced, one-day demonstrations. These ritual parades are designed to let the steam out of the pressure cooker of social struggle — an ongoing practice I recently documented and analyzed in these pages with reference to spontaneous mass strikes from 1936 and 1968 to 1995, 2003, 2009 and 2010.¹³

France Becalmed in the Eye of the European Storm

MEANWHILE THIS FALL, as the French Left lay paralyzed in the electoral doldrums, all hell was breaking out in Southern Europe with massive, spontaneous, self-organized strikes and demonstrations protesting austerity measures in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In Portugal on September 15 over a million people — one tenth of the population — poured into the streets of Lisbon and thirty other towns to block the imposition of a new sales tax and a change in social security deductions raising the workers’ contribution and lowering the employers’ share. No unions called for this demonstration, which was organized over the Internet. The

following Monday, the government withdrew the proposed law, while the CGTP and other unions belatedly called their own march for the end of the month.

In Spain on Sept. 25, tens of thousands of demonstrators surrounded the Parliament, which was defended by a phalanx of 2,000 riot cops whose brutality was “a throwback to the Franco era.” Undaunted, the protesters came back on Sept. 29 and surrounded the Parliament for the whole evening. In Italy on Sept. 28th, 30,000 public sector workers demonstrated in Rome against cutbacks. In Greece, general strikes and violent confrontations with the police have continued, culminating in the “warm welcome” that attended Angela Merkel’s state visit in early October. Previously, the government had launched a diabolical plan to collect revenue from the common people by adding their tax bill onto their electrical bill. But this outrage was foiled by solidarity among consumers who refused to pay and electrical workers, who turned the current back on.

All these largely spontaneous popular movements are directed against Troika-dictated austerity measures aimed at making the working populations pay for the debts incurred by their “betters” — measures imposed by these same local elites with the acquiescence of mainstream left parties and unions pledged to “save the Euro.” In practice, these measures are identical to the “structural adjustment” measures imposed by the IMF on the emerging African nations in the 80s, demolishing their public educational and social institutions, allowing their local infrastructures to decay, and reducing them to debt peonage. Today, these measures are being deployed against the (mainly) white populations in Europe and the United States — chickens come home to roost as it were. Naomi Klein calls this process “disaster capitalism,” and the Crash of 2008 was the “disaster” that prepared the ground here, starting with Greece, the weakest of the debtor nations.

Solidarity Solutions vs. Salami Tactics

THE MOSTLY-GERMAN BANKS, acting through the Troika, have up to now succeeded in applying ‘salami tactics’ — carving up and subjugating Europe piecemeal, much as Hitler did in the 30s. Then, as now, the “democracies,” rather than uniting, practice appeasement, allowing themselves to be picked off one at a time until it was too late. The political class in each of the so-called PIIGS thinks it can make a better deal with the central European banks who own their national debt. Instead of chanting “better to hang together than be hanged separately” they bleat “every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.” Clearly, Socialist France has chosen to cleave to German capital at whatever cost to France’s social structure. Thus, Chancellor Merkel seems to be succeeding in imposing Chancellor Bismarck’s dream of German hegemony over Southern Europe, using peaceful means where the bellicose Kaiser and Hitler both failed.¹⁴ If the old Russian Empire was rightly known as the “prison-house of nations,” the German-dominated Euro-zone may soon be accurately described as the “debtors-prison of nations.”

Predictably, despite shows of international solidarity displayed in slogans on banners and signs visible in recent spontaneous anti-austerity demonstrations, there has been no significant attempt at building a united front among the official trade unions and left parties of France, Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal. As a result, the workers and general populations of these once-proud nations stand disarmed and disunited in the face of a united adversary: the creditors’ “Europe” of the Troika. Meanwhile, the near-total lack of international solidarity in a European Union that has abolished national borders and currencies is shocking to a U.S. observer. One hopes that in the next phase of this struggle, which will likely intensify as the inflated capital markets careen toward another, more devastating Crash of 2008,¹⁵ the peoples of

Europe will be able to form their own horizontal solidarity networks, perhaps with the help of the Internet and social media as during the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements of 2011.

As George Caffensis has pointed out, the example of the South American countries like Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, and Venezuela who over the past decade or so successfully stood up to the structural reforms of the IMF and World Bank evokes the nightmare that must be haunting the European Troika: the specter of a debtors' cartel uniting to collectively bargain down the terms of repayment or simply walk away from their "obligations" to the big banks. More recently, the new popular government of Iceland refused to pay the mountainous debts contracted by their naive bankers and former officials with no apparent negative consequences. As opposed to the nation-based "every-man-for-himself" approach (which opens the door to Nazi-type scape-goating of immigrants as in Greece and increasingly in France), such a "debtors vs. creditors" approach would have the advantage of bringing the European peoples together on the basis of class. The first step toward constructing a "peoples' Europe."

Alas, so far I have not heard any such solutions being discussed here.

NOTES

1. To whom Sarkozy's Interior Minister offered police assistance to Ben Ali during the January 2011 pro-democracy demonstrators.
2. Ghaddafi was Sarkozy's official guest in Paris was permitted to pitch his tents in the garden of the presidential Elysée Palace.
3. This breaks down to three million 'job seekers' still collecting unemployment, plus another two million in the various 'discouraged' categories who try to get by

on welfare. www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/260912/trois-millions-de-chomeurs-cest-encore-pire

4. www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/france/260912/how-barren-my-valley-everyday-story-frances-disappearing-industrial-fabric

5. www.nytimes.com/2012/08/16/world/europe/peu-geots-troubles-test-francois-hollandes-contradictory-campaign-promises.html?ref=todayspaper

6. *Médiapart*, founded and edited by ex-Trotskyist former *Monde* editor Edwy Plenel is a subscriber supported, left-wing online full-fledged daily newspaper, with an informative English-language page. www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/france/051012/spring-we-elected-him-and-autumn-he-betrayed-us

7. www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/france/070912/french-socialists-wealth-tax-more-show-dough

8. *NYRB*, Sept 27, 2012, pp. 40-41.

9. One wonders if Hollande is trying to imitate the Obama Administration's high-profile roundups and brutal imprisonment of a half-million undocumented Latin-American men, women and children pending their deportation (ironically banned from their ancestral Mexican States of CA, NM, CO, TX, and AZ)?

10. www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/international/210812/its-all-show-french-police-officers-speak-out-roma-evictions

11. Information based on articles in Oct. 2012 *Motivées*, the local bulletin of the NPA.

12. www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/300912/manifestation-anti-tscg-une-premiere-etape-pour-la-gauche-de-la-gauche

13. Please see my 'General Strikes and Massive Demonstrations Challenge Neo-Liberal Reforms in France' (*NP Summer 2011*)

14. Indeed, toward the end of his life the "Blood and Iron" Chancellor urged the militaristic Kaiser to use financial and diplomatic, rather than military methods to dominate Europe. Please see my essay: <http://dissidentvoice.org/2011/11/germany-gambles-on-the-old-dream-of-european-hegemony/>

15. This is a safe prediction, given that nothing has been done to eliminate the immediate causes of the Crash of 2008. Please see my 'Is There Life After Capitalism?' www.stateofnature.org/isThereLifeAfter.html#next

The State of Anti-Austerity Struggles in Greece

COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS

IN RECENT YEARS Greece has come to exemplify the attempt of capitalist elites to respond to the global capitalist crisis through an attack on the rights and living standards of workers and ordinary citizens around the world. As the brutality of this attack has been nowhere as pronounced as it is in Greece and as it has understandably given rise to a strong (though not strong enough up to this point) popular response, Greece has received a lot of attention from capitalists, workers, and concerned citizens the world over.

The importance of Greece as a test case for the attempt to solve neoliberalism's crisis by entrenching the neoliberal model even further is amplified by the historic presence in Greece of a strong Left, with a long tradition of militant social struggles. This history suggests that if capitalist elites get away with imposing shock therapy as the response to the current crisis in Greece, there is no reason why they cannot follow the same recipe everywhere else.

In fact, they have started to do so, both in Europe and beyond. And, as they do so, other European countries are increasingly coming to realize that Greece is their future, if the austerity programs imposed on them are allowed to run their natural course. Country after country in the European periphery finds itself in a

deepening recession, with unemployment rates breaking one record after another and young people beginning to migrate in droves. This social devastation is, however, also accompanied by mounting resistance. By now, anti-austerity resistance is mounting around the Southern European periphery, encompassing even countries, like Portugal, which until recently were portrayed by mainstream media as being much more stoic in the face of austerity than Greece. In short, Europe and the world are faced with the prospect of prolonged social and class conflict. It is the outcome of this conflict that will determine the way the current crisis is resolved.

To understand the state of the struggle in Greece today, some background may be helpful. As far as its position in the international division of labor is concerned, Greece is a country of the semi-periphery. As such, it went through a process of industrialization before its neighbors in the Balkans but after the countries of Western Europe. This special position of Greece within the world capitalist system accounts for two of the specificities of its class structure and history. First of all, Greece is characterized by a long history of indebtedness dating back to the 19th century and the loans Greece took to finance the struggle of independence from the Ottoman empire. This history of indebtedness, which has for over a century accompanied the effort of capitalist elites to "modernize" the country, is not surprisingly also a history of periodic insolvency and loss of national sovereignty.

Secondly, Greece has long been characterized by a class structure that is not fully capitalist. Indeed, until recently the percentage of the

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population that was self-employed, living off small businesses, etc., was much larger than in most advanced capitalist countries. In fact, one of the effects of the current austerity program is to destroy tens of thousands of these businesses and to lead to a greater concentration of capital. This development obviously benefits large capitalist businesses, both domestic ones and foreign ones, looking to gain from the massive and brutal restructuring of Greek society. In this sense, the Greek austerity program is a vast experiment in the dispossession and proletarianization of Greek society's middle strata.

In any case, however incomplete and flawed Greece's industrialization and adoption of the capitalist model may have been, it generated, from early on, intense social and economic struggles and the development of a strong political left. These struggles have often been met with state repression that has at times, such as in the 1930s and between 1967 and 1974, even taken the form of military coups and a suspension of the trappings of bourgeois democracy. One important moment that has long shaped the country's political life and social struggles alike was the civil war that erupted soon after the end of Nazi occupation in 1944. During the war, the Greek Communist party and the Greek left more generally played a leading role in the development of a strong anti-Nazi resistance movement. Because of its role in the resistance, the Greek left saw its power and prestige grow, a development that was seen as a threat by Britain and the United States, which intervened after the war to make sure that the left would not take power. In fact, it is to Greece that we owe the dubious honor of having inspired the Truman doctrine.

Having asserted its control over Greece immediately after the war, the US remained a dominating presence for decades. In fact, the post-war period was one of parliamentary authoritarianism and a persecution of the left, culminating in another right-wing coup in 1967. The military regime installed by this

coup lasted until 1974. It was only in 1974 that political conditions in Greece normalized, bringing that country closer to the realities of other capitalist democracies. For example, the

As the building of this welfare state was not, however, accompanied by a corresponding rise in the taxation of Greek businesses and the rich, it was financed by borrowing that led to a growing public debt.

Communist Party was no longer illegal and it became possible for other forces on the left end of the political spectrum to organize in the open.

The legacy of the civil war and the period up to 1974 has had a strong polarizing effect in Greek politics, an effect that persists, while taking ever new forms. In the 1980s, this effect was expressed as a rivalry between the Socialist and conservative parties. Most recently, as socialists and conservatives have become political allies faithfully administering the brutal austerity policies favored by Greek and European capitalist elites, anti-communist rhetoric has been revived and reserved for the rising anti-austerity party of the left, *Syriza* (which is the Greek acronym for Coalition of the Radical Left).

In any case, the end of military dictatorship saw an intensification of class struggle and a strengthening of the labor movement. At least as important, however, were the youth and student movements. In fact, it was a peaceful student revolt in November, 1973 that paved the road to the collapse of the military regime. Although the regime brutally suppressed this revolt, killing dozens of students and young protesters, it was

seriously weakened in the process. By the summer of 1974, and under the additional blow of Turkey's invasion of Cyprus, the military regime was history.

The strengthening of the Greek left and Greek social movements was able to produce important gains for Greek workers and citizens once the military dictatorship came to an end. It also contributed to the coming to power of the Greek "socialist" party in 1981. This party rose to power by combining a left social democratic platform, with respect to domestic policy, with a left nationalist discourse that lambasted the historic subordination of Greece to the United States.

To begin with, the rise of the socialists was accompanied by rising salaries in the public and private sector and by the establishment of a rudimentary welfare state. As the building of this welfare state was not, however, accompanied by a corresponding rise in the taxation of Greek businesses and the rich, it was financed by borrowing that led to a growing public debt.

At the same time, the Greek economy was weakened both by the effects of the structural economic crisis of the 1970s and by the effects of its growing economic integration within Europe. As the recent European crisis has made clear, most of the benefits of European economic integration have gone to the economically stronger countries of the European North, such as Germany, which gained greater access to the markets of the South. Meanwhile, the productive capacity of weaker countries, like Greece, was wiped out.

In particular, a process of deindustrialization set in. This process was aggravated by the collapse of Communism, which led many businesses to close their plants in northern Greece and reopen them in neighboring low-wage countries, such as Bulgaria.

Even before Communism collapsed, however, Greece had started to align itself with the rightward turn that many other countries in Europe and the world experienced after the

crisis of the 1970s signaled the end of the post-war golden age of regulated capitalism. Indeed, by the mid-1980s the Greek "socialists" had begun their move to the right, inaugurating a neoliberal restructuring of Greek society. Slow at first, this process of neoliberal restructuring has proceeded at a breath-taking pace since Greece turned in 2010 to Europe and the International Monetary Fund for loans that allowed it to continue servicing its debt.

The implementation of neoliberal policies, through the alternation of "socialist" and conservative governments at first, and through a coalition government between them by now, has been as disastrous in Greece as it was in other parts of the world. These policies have led to growing economic inequality, lower business taxes that contributed to rising deficits, and more flexible labor relations that drastically increased the numbers of precarious workers, especially among the young.

These grim realities were for a time obscured by a false sense of prosperity prevailing among large segments of the population immediately after Greece entered the eurozone about 10 years ago. Greece now enjoyed easy access to low-cost credit. At a time when the breakup of the eurozone seemed inconceivable, its participation in the exclusive euro club meant that, as far as financial markets were concerned, Greece and the European south were almost as safe as Germany and the countries of the European North.

Not surprisingly, access to cheap credit, in conjunction with the real estate and construction bubble associated with the preparation for the 2004 Olympics, produced a period of high growth rates. This growth was not accompanied by a significant improvement in Greece's finances, so when the global capitalist crisis erupted, Greece, like other European countries, saw its tax revenues shrink, its access to credit curtailed and its budget deficit increase both because of the fiscal effects of the crisis and because of the need to bail out its financial sector.

Interestingly, however, Greece experienced serious social turmoil even before it had felt the full impact of the global crisis. Indeed, the murder of an unarmed teenager by a police officer in December, 2008 triggered a major youth revolt that mobilized large and varied sectors of the population for weeks, thus leaving the conservative government in power at that time seriously weakened. Although this major upheaval can, in retrospect, be explained by reference to the bleak future that young Greeks were already facing at that time, this revolt caught everybody, including the Greek left, by surprise.

One of the remarkable features of the December, 2008 revolt was that it encompassed not just the usual suspects in anarchist and left-wing social movements and political parties, but also high school and university students, as well as many immigrant and precarious workers. In addition to responding to the difficult and deteriorating situation facing them as a result of decades of neoliberal policies, the groups participating in the uprising were also reacting to the first wave of bank bailouts in Greece, as well as to the proverbial corruption of the Greek political class.

By weakening the conservative government at the time, the December, 2008 revolt helped to pave the road to the “socialist” party’s victory in the fall of 2009. The “socialists” ran on an anti-austerity platform but quickly reversed themselves, instituting a brutal austerity program in exchange for loans from the European Union, the IMF, and the European Central Bank. These loans allowed Greece to continue servicing its debt and unsuccessfully sought to prevent a generalized debt crisis across the continent.

The austerity program inaugurated in May 2010 has effected a brutal assault on salaries and wages in the public and private sector, instituted successive cuts of pensions, liquidated labor and collective bargaining rights, instituted social security reforms that will force people to work many more years before they can retire,

and dramatically cut the rudimentary welfare state that Greece had built up to this point. Not surprisingly, this program has produced a deep economic depression, with the Greek economy expected to shrink by at least 25 percent over the program’s duration, while official unemployment rates have skyrocketed to over 25 percent, with youth unemployment standing at around 55 percent. As a result, Greece now has the dubious honor of leading Europe in unemployment, having recently surpassed even Spain, the country that had for years experienced the highest unemployment rates in the continent.

Meanwhile, poverty has risen rapidly and so have hunger and despair, as illustrated by a rapid growth in the number of suicides. While many of the suicides have been the product of desperation, others have been carried out in protest to the social barbarism that the austerity program has produced. For example, in a case covered by media around the world, a retired pharmacist shot himself in front of the parliament a few months ago, leaving behind a note lambasting the Greek political elite for surrendering national sovereignty and obediently implementing the extreme austerity program dictated by Germany.

PROTEST HAS OF COURSE EXPRESSED itself in other forms as well. Strikes are a daily occurrence, as every sector of the Greek working class is under brutal assault, while there have also been over twenty general strikes in the last three years. These strikes are usually accompanied by militant demonstrations that often lead to brutal repression by the police, who beat protesters as well as journalists, while also making liberal use of tear gas and stun grenades.

Occupation of public space and squares has been another tactic used by the protesters, a tactic which had also been widely used during the December, 2008 revolt and which has been central to the repertoire of collective action of the Greek student movement for decades. The use of this tactic to protest austerity reached

a peak in the summer of 2011, as Syntagma square, located in the middle of Athens and across from the Greek Paliament, was occupied for weeks. In part inspired by the *Indignados* in Spain and, before them, the example of Tahrir Square, this movement also prefigured the erup-

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tion of the Occupy movement in the United States and around the world. In line with the Greek government's repressive approach to protest, the occupation ended as a result of police intervention in July, 2011. Moreover, university asylum was recently revoked to make it more difficult for the student and popular movements to use occupied universities as a site of resistance to the austerity onslaught.

Although the movement has not yet been successful in reversing the austerity program, it has produced a political earthquake by delegitimizing the conservative and "socialist" parties that had for decades dominated the political landscape in Greece. This earthquake has been the product of the failure of the pro-austerity camp and the troika, made up of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, to make good on the promises that were originally made regarding the austerity program's likely results.

As the International Monetary Fund recently admitted, the assumptions underlying the

austerity programs in Greece and the European South greatly underestimated the contractionary effects of austerity policies. The result has been a death spiral for the Greek economy that has increased the burden of debt as percentage of GDP. Thus, the first loan agreed in May, 2010 did not allow Greece to regain the confidence of global financial markets. Hence, a second loan and a restructuring of Greece's privately held debt became necessary in early 2012. Also accompanied by harsh austerity measures, this second loan was supposed to allow Greece to reduce its debt to 120 percent of GDP by 2020, a level comparable to the level that triggered the debt crisis back in 2010. By the time I write these lines in October, 2012, it is clear that even this goal is not likely to be achieved. This has created tension between the IMF and Greece's European creditors, as the IMF has come to recognize that Greece's debt will not be stabilized by the present policies and that a further restructuring of Greece's publicly held debt is necessary. This prospect is not appealing to European politicians who feel that their electorates would not welcome any more financial support for Greece.

As for Greeks, they have lost patience for austerity policies that do not seem to lead anywhere. While some Greeks were originally willing to give the then new socialist government the benefit of the doubt when austerity policies were first introduced in 2010, by now they have abandoned the socialist party in droves. In fact, the socialist government elected in 2009 had reached its limits by fall, 2011 and the continuation of austerity after that point was made possible only through the unprecedented formation of a coalition between the socialists, the conservatives and a racist, anti-immigrant party of the extreme right.

This coalition lasted until May, 2012, when elections were held. Support for the pro-austerity parties collapsed, while anti-austerity parties of the left and the right saw their support grow significantly. Especially impressive was the

rise of the Coalition of Radical Left (*Syriza*) from the status of a minor political party with 5 percent of the electorate to a contender for power as its support grew to 17 percent in May and 27 percent in the June election that followed after the May election proved inconclusive.

While the rise of *Syriza* is a hopeful development, the also meteoric rise of neo-Nazi Golden Dawn is very disturbing. Adopting a racist and xenophobic message, Golden Dawn has not only capitalized on people's anger and insecurity by looking for scapegoats on whom to blame the crisis and its devastating effects. Its members routinely attack immigrants, while trying to pose as a philanthropic force through programs that distribute food and services only to Greeks.

The Golden Dawn phenomenon is arguably not unique to Greece, as the impressive performance of the far right in France's election last spring shows. This rise of the fascist and racist far right serves as a reminder that one of the main challenges facing the left around the world today is to prevent a reactionary response to the crisis by making clear that it is not immigrants who are to blame for this crisis but the

capitalist system itself.

We are entering a period of intensifying social and class conflict globally, so it is urgent that the left rise to the occasion. Greece exemplifies the attempt of capitalist elites to impose on us a dark future without giving us a say on the matter. Ordinary Greeks are fighting back, however, so the game is not over yet. The rise of a left that is by now leading in the polls raises the possibility that an alternative strategy of dealing with the current crisis may soon be put to the test. Given the rapidly deteriorating situation in Greece, such a left government would be faced with huge challenges. It is also presented with the opportunity to act as a catalyst for changes throughout the European continent and beyond. As progressive forces around the world are grasping for alternatives to the current strategy of "solving" the crisis on the backs of those least responsible for it, they can be expected to learn from Greece both about the high stakes of the struggle over austerity and about the opportunities for progressive (or even radical) change that capitalism's current crisis presents us with.



The Netherlands: Neoliberal Dreams in Times of Austerity

ALEX DE JONG

DESCRIBING DUTCH SOCIETY AND POLITICS in 2012, sociologist Willem Schinkel used the metaphor of a museum.¹ Conservative and turned inward, Dutch society is afraid of change, fixated on something called “Dutch values.” One expression of this is the right-wing, nationalist populism that since a decade stood in the center of Dutch politics and public debate. Social-economic policies were guided by an unquestioned acceptance of neoliberal principles. The elections of 2012 seemed a chance to break with this pattern. For a few weeks, the left-wing Socialist Party (SP) dominated the polls and the social questions made a return in politics. But the elections ended with a major victory for the neoliberal right and stagnation for the SP. What happened?

The euro crisis plays a remarkably small role in Dutch politics. Not that the crisis is without consequences for Dutch politics, but so far it mostly reinforces conservative tendencies. The Dutch government remains a strong supporter of forcing austerity measures on the crisis-ridden countries of South-Europe. Neoliberalism and its answer to the failure of austerity to resolve the crisis (more austerity) remain dominant. At the moment of writing, the new government is still in formation, but it's certain to continue the austerity policies of its predecessor. To explain the impasse in Dutch politics, this article looks at the nineties, when

government coalitions of social-democrats and free-market liberals made neoliberalism the dominant ideology, and the evolution of the major anti-neoliberal force, the Socialist Party (SP).

From Dutch Disease to Dutch Miracle

FOR DECADES, Dutch politics was dominated by Christian-Democracy, since 1980 organized in the CDA (*Christen-Democratisch Appel*, Christian Democratic Appeal). Despite a relatively weak social-democratic tradition, the Netherlands had one of the more developed welfare states in Europe. For a long time the CDA's social-economic policies were heavily influenced by Keynesian ideas, similar to those of social-democracy. Christian-democracy supported numerous social-democratic measures together with the social-democratic PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*, Labor Party).

The Dutch economy entered into crisis in the seventies. Unemployment soared, approaching one million on a total population of 14 million. The national deficit was growing, because of rising social security costs but also because of handouts to corporations. In 1979-1980 alone, corporations received 23 billion guilders in financial support.² In response, conservative governments in the eighties in reaction attacked the welfare-state. Former prime-minister Joop den Uyl of the PvdA in 1982 already remarked that the crisis and unemployment were used to diminish the power of the trade-unions, restore old privileges, increase inequality, and demolish the welfare state.³ Wages stagnated or even decreased but profits increased. Large strikes in

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the early eighties failed to turn the tide, and in the “Wassenaar agreement” of 1982 the trade-union movement committed itself to moderation of wages and a “shared responsibility” for economic growth and profitability.

The neoliberal offensive intensified after 1994 when the PvdA formed a government coalition with the right-wing, pro-business, secular VVD (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy) and another free-market liberal party, continuing in the same coalition after the 1998 elections until 2002. The PvdA converted to Blairite “third way” politics and its leader called for a “final goodbye to the old socialist ideology.” With Christian-Democracy finally out of power, the new “purple” government (so called because of the mix of the social-democratic red and liberal blue) introduced reforms on cultural issues like LGBT rights and euthanasia. At the same time, the labor and housing-markets were liberalized, the railways split up, important parts of social security, health care, and pension privatized, and benefits cut.

The cooperation between the major parties on the right- and left-wing of Dutch politics, without the traditional “center” of the CDA, gave the impression that political conflict was something of the past. Politics were reduced to a form of problem management, a question of how best to implement policies almost the entire parliamentary spectrum agreed on. The trade-union movement was unable to stop the rightward shift as its leadership continued on the road of the Wassenaar agreement and cooperated with its traditional political ally, the PvdA. Where in some other states neoliberal governments confronted the unions to break their power, in the Netherlands the emphasis was on coopting the unions and making them partly responsible for government policies. Numerous strikes by disgruntled rank and file members didn’t change the course of the trade-union movement and social inequality increased.

In the nineties, the coordinates of Dutch

politics changed fundamentally and many of the major political events since then, like the “no” to the European constitution in the referendum of 2005 and the rise of right-wing populism after 2001 but also the rise of the SP, can largely be understood as parts of a diffuse and contradictory backlash to the politics of “purple.”

Neoliberalism had promised continuous

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Netherlands was one of the European frontrunners in the dismantling of the welfarestate.

economic growth, and Dutch economic success in the nineties seemed to confirm this.⁴ Growth rates were higher than they had been since the early seventies and victims of the government policies were marginalized. A neoliberal view of humans as rational, calculating, selfish individuals, *homo economicus*, became the unspoken assumption on which policies were based. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Netherlands was one of the European frontrunners in the dismantling of the welfare state.

The populist political maverick Pim Fortuyn began his rapid rise in 2001 in large part by basing himself on people who felt ignored by this kind of politics. Fortuyn was murdered in 2002, but his legacy continued with other politicians, most prominently ex-VVD parliamentarian Geert Wilders, who radicalized Fortuyn’s nationalist, anti-Muslim populism. When it came to economics, Fortuyn and his apostles offer mostly more of the same free-market ideology. But Fortuyn reintroduced an idea of conflict in politics, and right-wing populism gave its followers the feeling of belonging to

a larger whole: the Dutch nation, threatened by immigrants, Muslims, and the “left-wing elites.” Neoliberal economic policies remained unquestioned as culture, especially the attitude regarding the country’s one million strong Islamic minority, became the central issue in politics.

Populism has a useful function for the other political parties who can hide their own ideological character by pointing an accusing finger at it. Compared to the ravings of Geert Wilders, leader of the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV, Freedom Party⁵, before the 2012 elections the third party in parliament) who demands the banning of the Quran and describes law-and-order problems in terms of a civil war, it is easy to resemble a moderate liberal, even when implementing hard right-wing policies. Although PVV parliamentarians mostly vote with other members of the right on economic issues, they also pose as defenders of the welfare-state by rejecting certain highly unpopular austerity measures.⁶ Its opportunism is clear in its willingness to use these issues as political bargaining chips. Even differences on economic matters are framed in cultural terms: the PVV argues its position as part of a defense of “Dutch values”; the neoliberal right attributes both the economic and xenophobic positions of the PVV to its conservatism. This way neoliberals can amalgamate the nationalists and the left-wing opponents of neoliberalism who are accused of the same conservatism as Geert Wilders.

Dutch Dissidents

YEARS INTO THE EURO CRISIS, with an unstable political landscape (the last time a government served its full four year term was in 1998), Dutch politics remained focused on cultural issues and neoliberalism the default foundation of economic policies. How did the anti-neoliberal SP become a mass-party in such a country? Did the 2012 elections really provide a chance for it to shake the neoliberal consensus of Dutch politics as both left-wing commentators and the

Wall Street Journal thought?⁷

The roots of the SP are in the *Kommunistiese Eenheidsbeweging Nederland* (*Marxisties-Leninisties*), (KEN, Communist Unity Movement Netherlands, Marxist-Leninist, using the alternative spelling popular among leftists at the time) one of several Maoist groups that were part of the radical movements of the late sixties and early seventies.⁸ What made the KEN different from many other groups was that it included radicalized students as well as blue-collar workers. In the harbor of Rotterdam, one of the country’s labor strongholds, it had some support in the traditional working class, and in 1970 it gained national attention for its support for a wildcat strike there. This gave the KEN credibility as an organization of the working class, both domestically and abroad: the Chinese government supported their Dutch comrades with tens of thousands of dollars.

One of the important leaders of the KEN in those days was Daan Monjé, a pipefitter by trade. For Monjé, the Maoist ideas of “serve the people” and the mass-line were central. The mass-line meant the party should listen to “the masses,” sort through their ideas, concentrate them on the basis of its ideology and base its political work on the result. For Monjé this meant that the KEN should concentrate on daily problems of Dutch workers and be guided by their demands. This approach, different from much of the other far-left groups at the time, had a lasting impact on the organization. In 1970 the KEN split and Monjé’s wing went on as the *Kommunistiese Partij Nederland* (Communist Party Netherlands), changing its name two years later to *Socialistiese Partij* (Socialist Party) which grew to around 750 members.⁹

Where before the party focused on industrial workers and urged its student-members to take factory jobs, experience led to a revaluation of this approach. Many former students had problems adapting to factory jobs. Trade unions were relatively strong in the larger factories and numerous far-left groups competed with

each other for influence among the organized working class. Still heavily influenced by Maoist ideas and its distrust of established trade unions, which it saw as dominated by the “labor aristocracy,” the SP took a different approach. As other radicals tried to win influence in the unions or entered the established workers’ parties, the SP reached out to unorganized workers, not in the factories but in popular neighborhoods. It concentrated on issues like housing conditions, pollution, and safety. This way the SP reached workers who had very little, if any, contact with left-wing politics before.

Part of the relative success of this approach was because of the peculiar history of the Dutch workers’ movement. Compared to similar North-European countries, the Netherlands has a weak socialist movement. Even during the “left-wing seventies,” the Communist Party never gained more than 7 out of 150 seats and its support was unevenly distributed across the country. The PvdA was much stronger, but its social implantation was still weaker than that of other North-European social-democratic parties. Part of the explanation for this is that the industrial sector, the bastion of the workers’ movement in many other European countries, remained relatively weak. In the early seventies, around a quarter of the workforce worked in the industrial sector and this percentage gradually declined.¹⁰

Another part of the explanation for the relative weakness of Dutch socialism is the tradition of what in sociology is called *verzuiling*; “compartmentalization.” The dominant interpretation of this term is that since the late nineteenth century, Dutch society was organized in different vertical, cross-class compartments, each with its own cultural and social life and own political elites. There was a socialist compartment but also one of the disadvantaged Catholic minority. Catholic workers were organized in separate, Catholic trade-unions. When the PvdA was organized after the end of the German occupation in 1945, one goal of the new party was to

break through such barriers and win Catholic workers for socialism. It failed to do this. But the system of compartmentalization rapidly lost influence during the cultural changes in the sixties. As the influence of religion declined, religious social ties weakened. Young people in the emancipating Catholic communities came under the influence of radical ideas, their religious background no longer a reason to be hostile to socialism. The SP grew roots among such youth, with membership concentrated in the Catholic south and east of the country. In a student city like Nijmegen, where during the seventies the Catholic university was a hotbed of activism and the industrial city of Oss in the south, the party won its first councilors in 1974.

The relative weakness of established workers’ parties in such regions made it easier for a young organization like the SP to win support. Even though other left groups might not have had a strong presence there, people did not turn to the SP by default. What made the SP attractive was its practical approach to politics. Where other far-left groups often concentrated on national campaigns, the SP focused on local issues. The earlier workerism, which had led to practices like urging male members to cut their hair short and female members to wear make-up, as “real workers would,” gradually softened.

What remained was the orientation of “serving the people.” The SP organized juridical support for people who had a conflict with their landlord or boss. In several cities doctors who were members of the party organized medical assistance for the poor. This created a lot of sympathy as the party was seen to make a real difference in working people’s lives. Its interpretation of the mass-line meant that the SP’s work was very visible and enabled the party to pick up issues that were neglected by or hardly visible to other parts of the left, such as pollution.¹¹

The eighties were mostly a time of steady growth for the SP. The SP-cadres might have been mocked as “Red Jehova’s” because of their

missionary zeal, but their hard work won support. The focus on local work and pragmatism strengthened under its new leader Jan Marijnissen, a former factory worker.

However, the decline of the far-left during the decade and the SP's failures in national

Roughly four years into the euro crisis, the elections of 2012 can be said to have been the first in which the recession was a central issue. But the SP failed to convince the electorate that there is a left-wing exit to the crisis.

elections created doubt whether the party could ever achieve a national breakthrough. In the early nineties, the party reoriented itself. In 1991 "Marxism-Leninism" was dropped as the foundation of the party's thinking and the earlier distinction between cadre- and mass-members was abolished, convincing many of its sympathizers to finally join the party. The party grew to over 15,000 members in 1992. An important change this decade was in the goal of the party. This remained "a socialist society," but the words were given a new meaning. "Socialism" for the SP now means "a society in which human dignity, equality between people and solidarity between people take shape."¹²

IN THE FIRST NATIONAL ELECTIONS of the new decade, in 1994, the PvdA lost 12 of its 49 seats. After the elections of 1989, the Labor Party had joined a government-coalition led by the CDA and helped to implement a number of cuts, most significantly on the *Wet Arbeids*

Ongeschiktheid, the Law on Labor Disability that provides ill and disabled workers with support. This led to mass-protests and a crisis in the PvdA. It had entered the nineties with over 90,000 members but membership dropped below 70,000 in 1994. In 1990 other far-left parties, including the Communist Party, had fused into the new *GroenLinks* (Green Left). A number of former members of these parties didn't agree with the new "green" orientation and joined the SP, bringing valuable experience with them.

As the PvdA was struggling and most of the left was still disoriented from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the SP's work paid off; the party won two seats in parliament. The Dutch electoral system, based on proportional representation and without a threshold, makes it relatively easy for smaller parties to enter the parliament. The SP's first parliamentarians, Remi Poppe and especially Jan Marijnissen became prominent leaders of the opposition. With the only other party to the left of the PvdA, *GroenLinks*, evolving more and more into a green party for the progressive intelligentsia, the SP was well placed to lead the opposition to "purple." With its election slogan of "vote against, vote SP" and its symbol of a thrown tomato in full flight, the SP was clearly a party of protest.

In 1998 the SP won 5 seats, in 2002 nine. The next year, the party started to emphasize its capabilities as a ruling party and how in government it would repair the damage done to the welfare-state. Its slogan was changed from "vote against" to "vote for," for example, social reconstruction. Membership of the SP continued to increase, with many former PvdA-members joining, and reached a peak of around 50,000 in 2007. In 2006 the party won over 16 per cent of the vote, 25 seats, becoming the third party in parliament. This proved to be a high point for the party; the pattern of rising support in almost every election was broken a few years later, with defeats in the municipal elections of 2010 and the loss of ten parliament seats that

same year.

A Lost Opportunity?

TO THE SP, the parliamentary elections of 2012 were a chance to make up for its losses and finally reap the awards it expected from the collapse of neoliberal euphoria in 2008. In 2006, the other parties had excluded the SP from talks to form a government coalition and successfully put the blame for this on the SP's supposed radicalism and unwillingness to compromise. This impression cost the SP dearly in 2010, and the party was determined to avoid a repetition. The SP moderated its program and in the most moderate election campaign in its existence tried to present itself as the most viable alternative to the right. For a while, the approach seemed successful but in the weeks before election day, its enemies went on the offensive and within two weeks the SP's lead in the polls vaporized. The party remained at 15 seats, at a tie with the PVV for the third party, even gaining slightly fewer votes than in 2010.

Roughly four years into the euro crisis, the elections of 2012 can be said to have been the first in which the recession was a central issue. But the SP failed to convince the electorate that there is a left-wing exit to the crisis. The SP underestimated the impact its opponents' attacks on it had, how these rallied the right-wing behind the VVD, which won its largest victory ever, and the PvdA was able to win over many people that had planned to vote SP.

The SP can be understood as a product of the weaknesses and defeats of Dutch socialism. The weakness of the social democrats and Communists meant that a small group of Maoist activists in the seventies and eighties had access to a large potential of unorganized workers. As the PvdA turned its back on its social democratic roots, more and more people didn't see any other option than the SP. The SP realized that its strength was not in winning political battles with other left-wing forces but in representing people who were disenfranchised.

In the eighties, this meant that it took up local issues that were ignored by other parties.

A major element of the SP's strategy then is to connect with existing constituencies of people looking for someone to represent them. After its national breakthrough, the SP persisted in prioritizing battles it was sure of it would find mass support for. Issues that are less popular, like anti-racism, are neglected. The SP has little experience in recruiting people on the basis of ideas or in ideological struggles in which different long term views and conceptions of the world clash. For such a large party, the SP has weak roots in the media or academia, and few writers or public intellectuals are associated with the party. These weaknesses came back to haunt the party during the campaign as it came under attack in the media and its candidates struggled to explain what its differences with the PvdA, which had adopted a new, progressive sounding discourse, actually were.

The misfortunes of the SP in the last elections can be illustrated with the question of the pension age. For the last years, raising of the pension age from 65 to 67 was a central issue in Dutch politics. Already before the crisis in 2008, right-wing parties and the PvdA suggested cuts on the pension system. After 2008, the crisis became the argument for an increase of the pension age. Only the SP consistently resisted such a change and demanded that "65 stays 65," again connecting with widespread feelings in Dutch society. However, it became clear that the other parties, including the PvdA, were determined to raise the pension-age, and continuing resistance against these plans would exclude the SP from any government coalition in the near future. The SP's election program of 2012, "New Confidence" opened the door for a concession on this point by stating that "in any case, the pension age remains at 65 until 2020."

This left the question open to what the party's final position would be, but during the campaign it turned out that it had accepted an increase in the pension-age. Most political

parties in the Netherlands submit their election programs to an independent government agency called the CPB (*Centraal Planbureau*, Central Planning Bureau), the bureau for economic policy analysis. This institution gives a prognosis of what the consequences would be of the proposals. It doesn't limit itself to calculating, for example, changes in taxes revenues for the coming years but makes wide-ranging predictions about employment and the Dutch economy, for decades to come. Of course such predictions are ideological fictions and reflecting hegemonic ideas in economics, they base themselves on the theories of neoliberals like Milton Friedman.¹³

Despite their claims of scientific objectivity, the CPB's calculations of course favor then those programs that are based on similar ideological presumptions. It's no surprise that it declared the VVD's proposals of harsh austerity and liberalization would generate the most jobs.¹⁴ The predictions about the Dutch economy decades into the future are a farce, but since few question the principles underlying those predictions, they are accepted as hard scientific fact by many people. The CPB's findings are reported as such in the media and have an important impact on elections. After the CPB's released its evaluation of the SP proposals, it turned out that the institution had been asked to base itself on the assumption that after 2020 the pension-age would be raised. The party had silently given up on its resistance to this reform. Shifts like these hurt the image of the SP as a principled, reliable party.

The new government will include the PvdA and the VVD, like the Purple coalitions in the nineties. It will continue with austerity measures. Some of the suggested measures include increasing the cost of health care and abolishing of study-grants for all students. With a government of the VVD and PvdA and trade union leaders prioritizing "a seat at the table," the Dutch political landscape looks very much as it did in the nineties – with the exception of

the economic situation. In the nineties, "Purple" was propelled by economic successes and promises of a trickling-down of wealth. Instead of promises, neoliberalism now only has threats; "austerity or else..." To defeat the post-2008 zombie-neoliberalism and recover from the disappointment of 2012, the SP needs to take a step back from the perspective of government responsibility in the near future. What is needed is a new long-term vision for society, grounded on rebuild social movements and ideological struggle. That will be long-term project: neoliberal ideas that have been dominant for two decades won't disappear by themselves.

NOTES

1. Willem Schinkel, *De Nieuwe Democratie. Naar andere vormen van politiek* (Amsterdam: *De Bezige Bij*, 2012).
2. Arie van der Zwan, *Van Drees tot Bos* (Amsterdam: Balans), 162.
3. Koen Haegens, *Neem de Tijd. Overleven in de to-go Maatschappij* (Amsterdam: Ambo, 2012), 59.
4. Servaas Storm and Ro Naastepad, "The Dutch Distress," *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 139.
5. The name "Party" is somewhat misleading for this organization. The PVV is not an organization with members and congresses. Formally it is an association with only one member: Wilders himself. This gives him unquestioned control of what the program is, who the candidates are, and even whether they are allowed to speak to the media..
6. The SP has catalogued the votes of the PVV in two brochures: *'De Gebroken Beloften van Geert Wilders. De Politieke Keuzes van de PVV sinds het Aantreden van de Regering-Rutte'* and *Nog meer gebroken beloften van Geert Wilders*.
7. For example, Bhaskar Sunkara, "Double Dutch," *In These Times*, accessed October 19, 2012, http://inthesetimes.com/uprising/entry/13678/double_dutch, looks forward to a 'collapse' of neoliberalism. Leftward Tilt, *The Economist*, August 25 2012, www.economist.com/node/21560915, describes the SP as 'far-left'.
8. Sjaak van der Velden, *Links. PvdA, SP en GroenLinks* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2010) surveys the history of leftwing political parties in the Netherlands.
9. Membership figures of the SP and the PvdA are based on *ibid.*, 222 – 224.
10. Maina van der Zwan, *Van Onderop & Samen Sterk. Argumenten voor een Democratische en Strijdbare Vakbe-*

weging. (Amsterdam: LeesLinks, 2012), 21.

11. Another issue is the SP's complicated relationship to Dutch nationalism which leads some of its members to claim that they, before Fortuyn, were the first to point out "the failure of multiculturalism." For background, see for example Kees Slager, *Het Geheim van Oss. Een Geschiedenis van de SP* (np: Olympus, 2009).

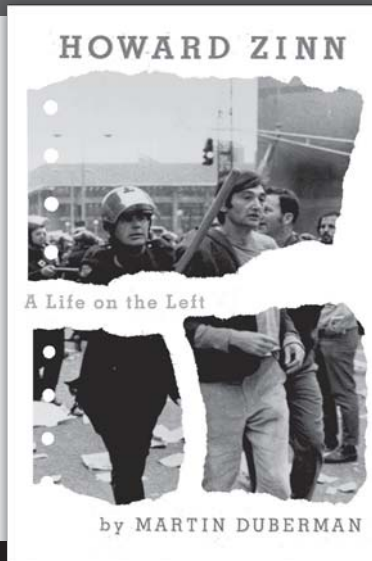
12. 'De vereniging stelt zich ten doel het verwezenlijken van een socialistische maatschappij in Nederland, een maatschappij waarin de menselijke waardigheid, de gelijkwaardigheid van mensen en de solidariteit tussen mensen daadwerkelijk gestalte krijgen.' *Statuten van de SP*, accessed 24 October, 2012, www.sp.nl/partij/theo-

rie/statuten. The 1999 statement of principles, *Heel de Mens* ('The Whole Human Being') abandoned earlier demands of workers' self-control and nationalization of the means of production. A "change in property relationships" is suggested as a way to deepen democracy. *Heel de Mens. Kernvisie van de SP, zoals vastgesteld door het 9e congres op 18 december 1999*, 10.

13. Leo de Kleijn, "CPB, hoe 'wetenschappelijk' is dat eigenlijk?" *Grenzeloos*, June 1, 2010, www.grenzeloos.org/artikel/viewartikel.php/id/1682.html.

14. Merijn Oudenampsen, "Naar een nieuwe ideologiekritiek," *Flexmens*, September 18, 2012, www.flexmens.org/drupal/?q=En_de_winnaar_van_de_verkiezingen_is...

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The Left in Europe: From Social Democracy to the Crisis in the Euro Zone

An Interview with Leo Panitch

ADANER USMANI

Leo Panitch is Canada Research Chair in Comparative Political Economy and Distinguished Research Professor of Political Science at York University, as well as long-time contributor to and editor of the *Socialist Register*. He is the author of several books, including *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (2001), an incisive assessment of social democracy's degeneration. Most recently he has co-written, together with Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism* (2012), which is an attempt to explain the pivotal role of the US state in the architecture of global capitalism. Leo sat down with Adaner on September 21st in New York for an interview.

ADANER USMANI: I wanted to begin by asking you about the history that precedes the crisis, and specifically about the evolution of European social democracy. On the one hand we have seen social democratic governments in Greece, France and elsewhere entirely complicit in the evisceration of the welfare state, and in the imposition of austerity. On the other hand, the tradition of which they're a part brought many benefits to Europe's working classes. The welfare state is a real achievement, after all, and it's arguably held up better than many radicals argue. Certainly there's a strong current of academic literature, known as the Varieties of Capitalism (VOC) school, which argues that its degeneration has been overstated.

This is a horribly broad question, of course, but how would you assess the legacy of social democracy?

LEO PANITCH: Well, there's no question that

the reforms that social democracy secured in the post-war period were substantial reforms that have had very positive effects for the working-classes. No question.

That said, it depends where you're coming from. If what you're looking for is reforms within capitalism, fine. But these were parties that, initially, and in fact in their constitutions until the late 50s, were all committed to getting out of capitalism.

What the welfare state did — and here Gøsta Esping-Andersen has it backwards — is increase commodification. Yes, of course, the welfare state provided a certain level of job security, but it didn't free people from the obligation to sell their labor. The way the welfare state was structured was largely designed to facilitate a mass, high-wage proletariat for the consumption of commodities. In this sense, social democracy was complicit in the deepening of capitalism. By the time of the Godesberg Program in the late 1950s, they were explicitly

Adaner Usmani is a PhD student in the NYU Sociology Department and is a member of the New Politics editorial board.

saying that they were in for a more humane capitalism.

The other dimension of this, however, is that they thought that they had done much more than they actually had to shift the balance of class power, and the relationship between states and markets. For example, in his famous *The Future of Socialism* (1956), Anthony Crosland argues that anybody who derides Marx is an intellectual pygmy, and that it was sensible to be a Marxist through the 1930s. However, he continues, since then there's been a fundamental shift of power away from financial capital, a fundamental shift in power in favor of labor vis-à-vis industry, and a fundamental shift in power towards the state. That, in effect, the state is now autonomous.

You look at that today and you think, "What!?"

So, in short, it depends. I certainly agree that it's not that easy to dismantle the welfare state, as the VOC school argues. That said, there's no question that the reforms have been reversed. Most people are less dependent on the welfare state, because it's not doing what it used to do. The country that has had the greatest increase in inequality over the neoliberal period, and I believe in the OECD, has been Sweden! And yes, Sweden still probably has the highest level of benefits. Nevertheless, you see the shift.

So my line has always been that there was this realization inside social democracy, by those who remained socialists (who were inspired by Tony Benn, by the student movement of the 1960s, by the social movements) who argued that unless we now move to go beyond capital, to actually institute reforms that take power over investment decisions away from capital, we are going to lose those reforms. Lose may have been too strong a word. But those who remained socialist were all defeated.

AU: Can we talk about this history a bit? This is what I found most insightful about the article that you wrote in the Socialist Register's 1985 issue on

the future of social democracy, in which you offered your assessment of why those efforts floundered. Because, as you're saying, there was this incipient radicalization — not just workplace-based in the 1960s and 1970s, but also these shifts to the left within the structure of Social Democracy itself. Tony Benn, but then also in France, Germany, Sweden,

The country that has had the greatest increase in inequality over the neoliberal period, and I believe in the OECD, has been Sweden! And yes, Sweden still probably has the highest level of benefits.

even Greece. Why did they lose?

LP: Well, my fundamental answer to that, which goes back to my being a graduate student at LSE in the late 60s, and the first article I ever published in Political Studies on ideology and integration, is that it has to do with the strong tradition within all these parties (most explicitly the British Labour Party, but implicitly in the Second International Social Democrats from at least 1902-1903 on) that it was not class struggle but class harmony that was their goal. The Fabian goal of educating the ruling class to socialism. That largely became the German trade union federation's goal as well, which is what Rosa Luxemburg was railing against by 1905.

So when that challenge came out of the growing mobilization of the 1960s and the crisis of the 1970s, from the left inside Social Democracy, the establishment of those parties had as much right as the left, maybe more, to deny that their tradition was a socialist one. The left was always saying that the party needed to return to what it had stood for. But the right

could accurately say that the tradition of the party was class harmony. Furthermore they could argue that what the left was proposing the capitalists would not play with.

AU: Which was true?

LP: Which was true. Even with the Meidner Plan, which involved tremendous mobilization on the part of the LO [the Swedish Trade Union Confederation]. I knew Meidner, and spent time talking about this with him, and he told me very explicitly that he was called in by Olof Palme, who asked him, “Why the hell are you doing this? They won’t cooperate with this. We’ll give you the best health and safety regulations you can ask for — even better than what you are asking for. But call this off! Because this kind of thing they will never tolerate.” It’s not that Palme was an idiot. He was right!

After the LO convention passed the proposal to introduce the wage-earner funds, which represented a gradual commitment to continuing wage-restraint in exchange for passing profits over to trade union funds, it was proposed that it apply only to firms with over 100 employees. The radicals amended this, and it was applied to firms with only 10 employees, which included many more firms, and many more workers. And they all got up and sang “The Internationale” for the first time in 20 years at an LO convention.

But the effect of this was to create an alliance between big capital and small capital. By the early 1980s, despite the fact that the plan had already been watered down by successive Social Democrat governments, you’ve got mass demonstrations by business against the Meidner plan.

AU: Isn’t there a very sobering implication of that fact, which is that the conditions for the success of the left within the left, in that time period, were absent?

LP: Well, I think the terrible conclusion one has to draw is that you cannot change these parties into socialist parties without splitting them apart. And I don’t mean into insurrectionary

parties, but into electoral socialist parties. And if you do split these parties, you lose elections. And in the face of a crisis and an assault by the right, the left then gets accused of bearing the burden. It is the one that always backs off, because it has a greater concern for solidarity — more easily guilted, always. The right is prepared to split, as you saw in the case of British Labour Party. It’s a catch-22. A game theorist would have a field day.

AU: There’s that, certainly — the difficult implications of splitting. But it seems to me that the political independence of the left wouldn’t have solved the challenges of that conjuncture. Because one of the other things you argue in that article is that you needed a mobilized and politicized working-class if you were to confront the employers’ offensive and the right, and you didn’t have that. Nor was it up to the left to generate that — even as an independent left. Isn’t it partly, as you argued in that article, that the absence of working-class mobilization was itself the product of the long legacy of social democratic institutions?

LP: Absolutely. And here one has to say that it’s never just a matter of the parties, it was then certainly a matter of the unions. So in the British or Swedish case, even in the German case, the unions passed radical stuff at conventions, put out various political programs, but they would not educate and mobilize their membership behind them, at all. At all.

This is what really impressed me about Tony Benn. I should say that at the time, when I was in England, I was very skeptical of the Labour left. I always felt there was no way they could win without splitting the party, and that they would therefore lose. But when I went back and started studying it, I realized that the remarkable thing about Benn was that he was going to trade union conventions in 1972 and saying that the members needed to be educators. He asked who was talking to their neighbors and to their children about what unions are, what they might be, what solidarity is, what the

potential of the working-class is.

So, again, they would pass these resolutions as means of leveraging something out of a Labour government, but in terms of developing class capacities, they were scandalously bad. And they've gotten no better; in fact they've gotten much worse.

AU: This is maybe a bit of an aside, but still. There's a larger argument that's often made—and this applies not just to Europe, but to the advanced capitalist world—that the decline of working class politics is rooted in objective facts about capitalism's trajectory—in deindustrialization and the decline of manufacturing employment, most obviously. But is the decline actually political, at its core?

LP: Not entirely, though it's an important point.

One has to recognize the transformation of capitalism, no doubt. Certainly one could argue that these objective shifts make things more difficult.

But there are other dimensions that one can point to, having to do with the shift to service employment, or more knowledge-employment. There's greater flexibility involved. I'm not convinced that a creative working-class couldn't have done better than the traditional working-class (and I grew up in that milieu), which has very old-fashioned notions of respectability. Gramsci had glimpses of this; certainly Mann did. In the 1920s, what does a working-class person aspire to? He aspires to having a knock-off furniture set that looks like the bourgeois furniture set that he could never afford. He wants a dining room table and sideboard that would look like it. This notion of working class respectability carries with it a lot of very conventional and non-revolutionary culture.

So, I don't know. I don't think it's impossible for mobilizations to occur with the kinds of working classes—and here I'm defining working classes very broadly—that were emerging by the 1960s. But it would had to have been based much less centrally on doing a deal with unions in order to win very limited, corporatist

reforms—the sorts of reforms that so impressed the VOC school.

You know, what strikes me about the VOC school is that they live in a world in which they don't notice the capitalist air that they breathe. So they're left-wing in the sense that they'd like a more equal society, but they don't appreciate that this is a capitalist world, with all of the destruction of the soul that accompanies selling your capacities for a wage, however good.

AU: Back to this, just briefly, before we get to the present-day crisis. So assessing the left within the left, the argument that you made was that the people staffing the structures of social democracy—the parties and the trade union officials—are responding to a real dilemma, but a real dilemma that's of their own making. A dilemma that is a consequence of...

LP: Of a long form of adaptation to similar dilemmas.

AU: Right. But then the rapid degeneration of social democracy from the 1980s on—with the rise of the Blairites, and the like—that came at a cost to these organizational interests, particularly to the trade unions. Social democracy's subsequent trajectory hasn't been favorable to many of these actors. So how do you understand the success of someone like Blair at taming the trade unions? The more general version of that question is: how do we understand the success with which neoliberalism has colonized social democracy?

LP: It's an important and complex question, and I've thought about it a lot.

The first condition for it was the defeat of the left inside the social democratic parties. And they were not only defeated, but also derided. They had brought these parties to the brink of losing elections. Thatcher was not going to get re-elected, despite the Falklands, but the divisions inside the Labour Party helped her. As she said, "How can you vote for them? They're totally divided."

People like Michael Foot, who was an established British leftist and had been an anti-Cold Warrior, and Neil Kinnock, who was

made by Foot, became the scourge of the left — the scourge of the trade union militants. They started describing the left as if they were in thrall to the “Trotskyist crazies” in Liverpool. Which they weren’t, but Foot and Kinnock managed to present the left as controlled by them.

So the left gets derided by a former left, now aligned with the center-right in the party. And it’s eventually thoroughly defeated, even inside the party. The trade unions see Thatcher re-elected. Since they are always pragmatists, they suddenly decide that they can get more out of Brussels than they’re going to get out of the Thatcher government. They start looking for a limit to Thatcher’s “reforms” through Europe. They very naively think — as does the VOC school — that European corporatism is going to continue, and that it will withstand the ideological onslaught from the right, and the general drive towards competitiveness. But it doesn’t.

One of the things I’m proud of is that I was pointing to the contradictions in corporatism as early as the 1970s, and it unfolded as I thought it would. Largely, capital grew uninterested. You didn’t have to have a right-wing government. Capital wasn’t very interested, even when social democrats were in office. The kind of wage-discipline that allowed for “socialism within one class,” in the case of Sweden, begins to break down.

It also had to do with a tax revolt on the part of the working-class, which starts to see less and less for itself in the welfare state. Respectability leads this segment to increasingly deride that working class we now call the precariat. And many of them opt — and the unions aren’t able to stop many of them opting (to some extent they’re even complicit in it) — for the \$200 a year they can save by voting for a government that offers them less taxes. A portion of the working-class opts for that. And the left was complicit in it when it opposed, for example, the sales tax. One needed to say and should be saying that Sweden’s value-added tax is 23

percent. You can’t have a welfare state without it.

A very important element in this was the reinvigoration of the American Empire, also, through the 80s and 90s. For all of the arguments that Anglo-American capitalism doesn’t work, and that European coordinated capitalism is actually more efficient, it wasn’t true. If you look at growth rates, productivity growth, exports, and the like, American capitalism was restructured through the 1980s and 1990s in a very successful way. And all of Europe wanted to emulate it.

And I don’t just mean that they wanted to emulate Clinton, though they were doing that ideologically, but they wanted to emulate American practices through the 1980s and 1990s. It was Jacques Delors, for example, who was open in his admiration of American free capital movements. He argued that Europe could hold on to the welfare state only by creating an open capital market in Europe. They were enormously admiring of, above all, American finance. Sure, they would say nasty things about “shareholder value,” but in the context of saying that they preferred stakeholder value (which simply meant having union pension funds involved).

AU: So these were the conditions in which the EU project became neoliberal?

LP: Exactly. Led by social democrats. Now the left, again, saw it. So Meidner, who opposed Sweden joining the Euro zone, understood that the effect of it would be to allow financial capital into Sweden, which had already deregulated finance in the mid-1980s and had its first big financial crisis in 1991. He understood that this would give finance very big allies in the balance of forces inside Sweden.

The interpenetration of capital across the Atlantic is a big element in the story. The varieties of capitalism school totally miss this, by the way. They treat each country as a watertight compartment, except for noting that everyone

has to be competitive.

AU: This is a good segue into the discussion of the EU crisis itself.

There are some standard assessments, on the left, of the economic causes of the crisis. It was obviously most immediately a consequence of the global crisis. But it has been exacerbated, clearly, by the structure of the EU and the monetary union. There's also been a fair bit written on an intermediate factor — namely, that the competitive strategies of Germany have forced the periphery to the brink. Heinrich Flassbeck, to take just one example, has been on The Real News quite frequently arguing that one of the central problems has been wage restraint in Germany, and the inability of other countries in the EU to achieve the same discipline. Those three things, it seems to me, are relatively uncontroversial. But you and Sam Gindin do have a distinctive understanding of the global crisis that preceded the EU crisis. Is there anything in particular that you would add, to this account?

LP: Well, maybe. Maybe it's not quite deep enough.

A lot of people on the left and on the right expected that the neoliberal era of globalization would come to tears due to American imbalances, due to its trade deficit and the enormous capital inflows. They were saying that Japan or China might pull out, which would lead to a crisis of the dollar, which might lead to an economic crisis.

And that of course isn't what triggered the crisis. It wasn't American imbalances: it was financial volatility inside the United States. Above all in the housing market. A market into which the working class was drawn. And this included its poorest sections, the black working class, which had never had full access to the American dream, the center of which was to own your house. They were drawn into it very heavily during the Clinton years. The Clinton treasury decided it would be able to sell these mortgage securities around the world, as people were desperate to buy them. And this

became all the more so under Bush, as every shyster was let into the business. The German Landesbank — the great example in the VOC literature of coordinated capitalism — was buying mortgage-backed securities that had been cut and pasted in a million different ways. The Deutsche Bank held most of the mortgages in the black areas of Cleveland, for example, when the crisis hit.

Now when that crisis hit it meant, of course, that German finance, and European finance more generally, were affected. Immediately. And the imbalances within Europe revealed weaknesses inside the European financial system, which in turn made the crisis much, much worse. Above all there's the fact that, with fixed exchange rates, you are operating in something like the gold standard, where there's no room for currencies to carry any of the costs of a crisis.

So in the case of the United States, immediately when there's the crisis, the world's capital piles into the dollar, knowing that the American state is the ultimate guarantor of property. That's hardly the case in most European states. What had been happening since the Euro was struck was that the spread between Greek or Spanish or Italian bonds, and German bonds was enormously narrow. Not that there was no spread. But given that they were all operating within the framework of the ECB the spread had narrowed, a lot. People hadn't thought through the question of whether the Greeks might default. The imbalances, in particular, made that a weakness, given the effective, enormous trade deficits.

Now that alone didn't have to precipitate a sovereign crisis. In fact, some countries had issued a lot of public debt, like Greece, but other countries hadn't.

The banking system had operated on a simple basis: Germany would export to Spain, say, and then lend that money back to Spanish banks. And when Spanish banks took a hit, well, it was the Spanish state that had to step in, and start issuing public debt in order to bail out Spanish banks. And you got the problem of

public deficits, and the consequent fear of bond markets.

We need to remember that institutional investors loom large in all this, and also remember how many of those institutional investors are trade union pension funds. Financial capital, remember, isn't this thing out there. Even labor is structured into financial capital, and dependent

I think the terrible conclusion one has to draw is that you cannot change these parties into socialist parties without splitting them apart. And if you do split these parties, you lose elections.

on the returns for their own pensions.

Now, the imbalances were well understood by some people. In particular people like Riccardo Bellofiore in Italy, who really nailed it — he's kind of a post-Keynesian. They understood that a general reflation, which is what the left and most left economists were calling for, would not itself do the job. It would in fact increase the imbalances, given that Germany, for the reasons you already laid out, had maintained its export success on the basis of getting the very powerful shop stewards in IG Metall [Industrial Union of Metalworkers, in Germany] to go along with labor flexibilization and wage restraint. This is what made German exports do very well through the decade.

AU: I want to talk much more about the response of the left to this crisis, but before that I'd like to ask you a prior question. What in the world are the elites of the EU thinking?

On the one hand there are a whole swathe of

left-liberal economists who can't for the life of them understand why elites aren't willing to sponsor some sort of return to Keynes, and deficit-spend their way out of this crisis. On the left, I think, some people share that puzzlement. On the other hand it's been argued that for many elites austerity has made perfect sense. It's resulted in a recovery of profit rates, and that, ultimately, is all that concerns them. What do you think about this? What are the Germans thinking? They can continue to demand that the clock be rolled back in Greece and the rest of the periphery, but don't they then have to be worried about what's going to happen to their export markets?

LP: Well, here one does need to speak about varieties of capitalism, but in the exact opposite way that the VOC school has. What has been distinctive about German capitalism is that the German financial elite — as embodied, above all, in the German Bundesbank — was never Keynesian. They never accommodated to Keynesianism. As has been said, "When the rest of the world was reading Keynes, the Germans were reading Hayek." That goes back to the late 40s. They actually used the term neoliberalism, although it was more often called ordoliberalism. They maintained an absolute commitment to balanced budgets, and even more strongly, a commitment to preventing moral hazard in the financial system.

Partly, of course, this was a reaction to the inflation of the 1920s, with all its horrific effects. That had a general cultural impact.

It is more than that, though. There was also a certain disdain for speculative capital. The Germans, every time there was a financial crisis after Bretton Woods, had to be pulled, kicking and screaming, by the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury into taking responsibility for the global economy, and not letting the global payments system come to an end. The first case was the Herstatt Bank collapse in 1974. The Germans were prepared to let it go under. And, as a result, the New York payments system almost collapsed. Under the auspices of the

Bank for International Settlements the Americans dragged the Germans into what became a fifteen yearlong process of finally agreeing on a set of capital adequacy standards, which didn't prevent crises but provided a certain framework, which would at least contain them when they occurred. This was also very true of Japan.

On the other hand the U.S. state, from 1940 on, saw itself as responsible for the spread and reproduction of global capitalism. Sure, this is rooted in self-interest — in a concern for the sanctity of U.S. capitalism if European capitalism was challenged. The Germans and Japanese didn't play that role. The Germans began to play that role vis-à-vis Europe, but even then, on terms which required the rest of Europe to take a German attitude towards finance. They agree to turn the mark into the euro on the grounds that the European Central Bank would look like the German Bundesbank, and behave like it.

So, when this crisis happened it's not surprising that it was Geithner and Bernanke who were openly putting enormous pressure on the European Central Bank (and they know that behind it sits the Bundesbank) to engage in monetary easing. I mean they did coordinate a fiscal stimulus—one should remember that before the austerity there was a coordinated fiscal stimulus, which was massive, and was very important in preventing this from turning into the Great Depression. It's been hamstrung by the fact that the United States hasn't been able to do it since the 2010 elections, given the make-up of Congress.

So if there's a variety of capitalism it's one that's not so admirable as the academic left thinks, in the German case.

AU: I wanted to move to assessing the implications and lessons for the left. Not just of the economic crisis, but then in the developments that have been, arguably, its result. I'm thinking both of the incipient electoral gains for the left, most notably in Greece, but perhaps also in France, even recently in Holland in the early stages. And also there's been, more

widely, expression of that sentiment on the streets, again particularly in Greece, but also in Spain and Portugal, most recently.

We can take them in turn, if you'd like. What have you made of these developments?

LP: The first thing that one has to say is that what's significant about this crisis is that unlike the crisis of the 1930s, you haven't had a conflict between states. You haven't had a conflict between financial and industrial capital. You've had a conflict within states, between popular forces, and the elites, if you want to call them that. That's the form it's taken.

For the most part, it is very significant that it has taken the form of quasi-anarchist mass insurrections and protests. And I think partly that is a reflection of the legacy and institutionalization of the anti-globalization movement. But partly it has been spontaneous.

AU: Well, and partly isn't it a result of the fact that this crisis has occurred — certainly this contrast works best in the case of the United States — in a context where the left infrastructure of an earlier age has disintegrated?

LP: Well, yes, I was going to say: the whole reason it takes this quasi-anarchist form — and why the zeitgeist of the time for so many people is quasi-anarchist — is because of the failures of working class institutions. This is a very old story, dating to long before this crisis. I mean you need only think of their failures to energize generations of youth in the 1950s; by the 1960s that generation thought that social democracy and communism were already finished as the future of the left. So, yes, there's no channeling of that sentiment into the traditional working-class parties in Europe. It fits into our previous discussion.

Moreover, there's also the fact that where social democratic parties are in government they find themselves burdened with actually administering the crisis. This means that they're doing things that make them the immediate targets of popular outrage.

So you get this explosion, and it indicates a substantial crisis of legitimacy. This is not new; it's already been around, at least since the late 90s. Neoliberalism has had very little ideological purchase. Davos, remember, was spending its time trying to prove that the rich would engage in anti-poverty programs, rather than simply pushing free market ideology. After the World Social Forums in 2002 and 2003, Davos had to respond.

So ideologically it is already in trouble. Nevertheless, what you've seen is a reinforcement of neoliberal forms. There's now enormous pressure for austerity, even in the rich countries. And that has effects, which are very, very interesting, I think. And pregnant with possibilities.

The problem is that it isn't easy in liberal democracies, even if they're structured with proportional representation, to displace any existing parties. It's not impossible, but it's very difficult. It's very, very difficult. And you'd have to look at each particular case. But it's striking how difficult it is to make a breakthrough.

You saw it with Mélenchon. There you get an alliance between the CP, which still has a very large membership, the old Trotskyist left, and a portion of the Socialist Party left which came out of the alliance they formed to defeat the European constitutional referendum in 2005. But even there, even if they make a breakthrough in the first round, it proves not enough of a breakthrough. They end up supporting the Socialist Party, which then reproduces the Socialist Party as an institution. It's very difficult.

I think it's tragic in the German case that Die Linke have not made a breakthrough. Partly this has to do with internal divisions within them, which coincided with the moment of the crisis...

AU: And then also the fact that the crisis hasn't been as severe, in Germany?

LP: Yes, I think that's probably true.

Anyway, so the one breakthrough has come in Greece. And that has very much to do with

the fact that the Eurocommunists in Greece had already established a strong institutional base through the 1990s — certainly by 2004. That had very much to do with the dynamics of Greek politics; it can't be generalized. Perhaps above all it had to do with the trajectory of PASOK, which got elected on a very radical program in the 1980s (as radical as Mitterand in 1981), under Andreas Papandreou. It had absorbed a good part of the Greek left. Some had been suspicious of it, but people in general were very happy in 1981. They weren't quite the celebrations that they had at the Polytechnic when they brought down the dictatorship in 1974, but they were close.

What happened very quickly was that PASOK was absorbed into the clientelism of the Greek state. What one has to say about the Greek state is that it's not a Weberian state. Very few of the states that came out of the Ottoman Empire look like a bureaucratic-rational state. So, for example, the Greek state does have a problem collecting taxes. Votes are bought through a clientelist system of a kind that certainly Canada and the United States have known, but not quite since the 19th century. It is terribly blatant in Greece. The logic is "I'll give you and your family jobs if you ensure that we get the votes in this village."

PASOK very quickly accommodated itself to that form of Greek state — very, very quickly. So you got a break, by the end of the 1980s, by Eurocommunists who were modernizing forces. The CP was utterly Stalinist, and although it entered very pragmatically into a coalition government in 1991, it became more and more entrenched in its Stalinism, especially after the Gorbachev experiment failed. It's very openly Stalinist, it's quite staggering, really.

As a result there was a big institutional void, and that was eventually filled by the most impressive forces in Greece—by the coalition which became Syriza, which grew out of the largest party that had broken away from the Communists, which was SYNAPSISMOS,

together with various social movements.

It's all very impressive. Take, for example, its economic program, a four hundred-page document written in consultation with the social movements, in 2008. It's like the kind of program Greg Albo, Sam Gindin, and I wrote about in the last two chapters of *In and Out of Crisis*. Something like a transitional socialist program to be carried out by an elected government—including, perhaps most importantly, nationalizing the banks and then socializing them, by which you're trying to say that they would no longer act as traditional banks.

So Greece is the one case where you saw that there was the requisite institutional capacity. They didn't know how much institutional capacity they had, at the time, but it turned out to be a lot.

AU: If you were to generalize the lessons from their success, then, what are they? Is the simple implication, then, that where you have infrastructure in hand, you are well placed to take advantage? And that, otherwise, the consequences of crisis are generally bleak?

LP: Yes. I say this and I believe it because it confirms the politics I have failed at for most of my life. Since the 1970s I and many comrades have been trying to found — and I'm in Canada, so I do it there, but I speak of it much more broadly — to found a post-Leninist, post-social democratic type of working class political organization. One which is non-insurrectionary but committed to social transformation. And my generation has failed to do that. There are others of my generation who have tried to build a better Leninism. And they were mostly Trotskyists, and that too has failed.

What's happened in Syriza is what I've always wanted to happen, and called for. I have always thought it is a very difficult and slow process. In this country, for example, I meet activists who agree that we need to get beyond localism. Who agree that we need to build a cadre right across the country who are commit-

ted to building a socialist organization. In fact I've seen more of them here in the United States than I see anywhere else. Certainly more than in Europe, and usually more than in Canada. They're often black activists out of these kinds of local worker action centers, or their equivalent.

AU: The challenge is to give that political coher-

At the moment, thankfully, the far right has not made enormous strides. There's a tendency on the left to try to look at how bad things are.

ence, is it not?

LP: To give it political coherence — in this specific case to make sure it's not laden with the odd, weak kind of third worldism that is so blatant on the American left. It has to shed traces of being enthralled with certain Leninist principles. But it's a long and slow process. People are quite right to ask, "Well, what about in the interim?" That's why they end up voting for Obama. It's a very long and slow process, but if we're ever going to get anywhere, we have to build those sorts of institutions.

AU: Just briefly I'd like to return to the issue of Syriza's economic program. You published a piece in the 2012 Socialist Register by Costas Lapavistas, which made the argument that the left needs to break with its Europeanism. The only true radical strategy, he argues, is a strategy of default. This is obviously not what Syriza was thinking. It was of course the source of much tension with others on the left, notably ANTARSYA. What do you make of that argument?

LP: I think Lapavistas is objectively right but

has no politics. So, I too felt that if the Greeks had only defaulted immediately they could have saved themselves tremendous hardship. It also would have been exemplary, in terms of exhibiting the necessity of introducing capital controls, not only in terms of inflows/outflows, but also capital controls in the sense of controls over investment.

But the problem is that most Greeks don't want it. Very genuinely the leadership of Syriza doesn't want it. There's a strong psychological and emotional attachment to being part of the Euro zone.

Moreover, any serious politician has to be aware of the costs. You know, in a way you're back in 1917. That is, the weakest link would break, but the question remains: would there be a shift in balance of forces in Germany, which would at least lessen the pressure on Greece? They after all have to secure imports, and the consequences of being frozen out of financial markets might well be severe. It's a real dilemma.

Now one should not at all be naïve, and accept the mendacious reporting of most of the bourgeois press: that what Syriza intends is to pull out. The danger is in fact that Syriza might accommodate in order to avoid pulling out. But if they are to be believed, and if the pressures inside the party are such that they hold their feet to the fire, I think they'd be kicked out for refusing to engage in these negotiations with the Troika. They would introduce the legislation that they promised, which would repeal the legislation that implemented the previous structural adjustment reforms. And it's not impossible that they then would be pushed out.

But one shouldn't have any illusions: the consequence of that would be very severe. For them not to be very severe they would then have to do some very radical things. But then the big question is whether they have the institutional capacity in the State to do those things.

AU: And whether they have the political capacity, as well.

LP: To mobilize the population, yes. But even if they did, I mean.

And there's a dilemma there, too. Because if they took the best cadre and put them into the state knowing that they need to reform the state desperately, the party would suffer. You would be taking the most honest people, the most capable people out of the party. So could the party, then, be doing the mobilizing that it needs to do? It's an old problem.

So this is a great dilemma. One should never look at this stuff with rose-colored glasses. The worst thing that the left can do — and I think it's really important now in the case of Syriza, because it is not unlikely that they'll get elected — is to do what they tended to do with the Workers' Party in Brazil, which is to romanticize the experience. One needs to look at developments from the point of view of the difficulties that the party will have, what contradictions they will run into, and not regard whatever as terrific because they're nice people.

AU: This is my last question. If we take a step back and look more generally at what the effects of the crisis have been politically, in Europe, it's certainly important to note there has been this incipient left radicalization, in some places, both electoral and street. And there's also been the rise of the right, in some parts. But then there's also been — and there are different ways of cutting this — a level of stability in bourgeois politics. The center is holding, in some ways, in many places. Do you think that says anything? About liberal democracy, maybe?

LP: I do. I think there's a great danger that we'll scare ourselves out of our wits if we point to Golden Dawn too much. At the moment, thankfully, the far right has not made enormous strides. There's a tendency on the left to try to look at how bad things are. That can only have the effect of producing a popular front politics again. Although that may be necessary in the long run, at the moment it's not. The effect of producing a popular front politics now would mean that you would have to accommodate to

that wing in the popular front that was furthest to the right. Which, of course, is the nature of popular front politics. When we need mobilization, socialist education, and the development of class capacities, this is not a path that we want to be on. So I don't think we should scare ourselves about Golden Dawn or other tendencies inside Europe.

And I think your point is therefore very important. What is very striking — while there is this enormous protest — is, as you say, the stability of the bourgeois democratic form. De-

spite, again, the reinforcement of the neoliberal form of economic rule.

And maybe that's fortunate, for us. Because we need time. If the catastrophists, of which there are a great many, are right that we've only got five or ten years, we're screwed. I mean, really screwed. Whether that's the ecological crisis, or before fascism takes over, or what have you.

If we're to be successful in the tasks ahead of us, we have to hope for a certain stability of the liberal democratic form.

CRUSADERS FOR JUSTICE



"My life is like a movie, full of dreams. I used to dream of becoming famous, to see my valley freed from the clutches of Taliban, to see girls flying like butterflies, free from any restrictions."

— Malala Yousafzai,
15-year-old activist for girls' rights and education,
upon receiving Pakistan's 2011 National Youth Peace
Prize, renamed the National Malala Peace Prize

Malala Yousafzai and her father are activists for the right of Pakistani girls to be educated. In the face of death threats, Malala wrote and spoke publicly about life under the Taliban's reign of terror, and vowed to "never stop working for education for girls." On October 9, 2012, Malala was shot by a Taliban gunman. She is recovering in an English hospital. The Taliban have announced that if she survives, they will target Malala again. Their actions prompted an outpouring of outrage around the world.

“Who Do You Protect, Who Do You Serve?”

The Struggle Against Police Brutality in New York

LICHI D’AMELIO

IN THE FIRST DAYS OF OCTOBER, NYPD Officer Kenneth Boss had his gun returned to him by Commissioner Ray Kelly after 13 years. Boss was one of four officers charged with the 1999 murder of 23-year-old Amadou Diallo. Diallo died in the vestibule of his apartment building in the Soundview section of the Bronx in a hail of 41 police bullets, 19 of which penetrated his body. Boss’s weapon was found to have fired 5 rounds.

Just as infamously as Diallo had been murdered, after an 11 month trial — and 2 days of deliberations — a jury in Albany acquitted Boss, along with officers Edward McMellon, Sean Carroll, and Richard Murphy, of all criminal charges and cleared them of any wrong-doing. The four officers, who were operating as part of the NYPD’s elite, plain clothed, Street Crimes Unit (SCU), claimed to have mistaken Diallo’s wallet for a gun.

The intensity and breadth of the outrage provoked by the verdict has left an indelible mark on the NYPD and the city — and the threat of another explosion lurks just beneath every incident of police brutality, racial profiling, and murder. Protests brought out tens of thousands of New Yorkers and led to the arrests over the following weeks of nearly 1,800 protesters, including celebrities, religious leaders, and pub-

lic officials. In the aftermath of the trial and the protests, the SCU, which had been functioning since 1971, was disbanded.

Much of this is well known. But, perhaps lesser known is the fact that Amadou Diallo was not the first Black man murdered by Kenneth Boss under incredibly dubious circumstances. In 1997, Boss, already part of the SCU, shot 22 year-old Patrick Bailey in Brooklyn and left him for up to 40 minutes with no medical attention, to bleed to death. While the police contend that Bailey, who was shot from behind, was armed, witnesses to his death say otherwise. Without a trial or a charge, Boss was found to have “acted justifiably” and remained on the force to kill again less than 2 years later.

Boss, in fact, is the only one of the four officers implicated in Diallo’s murder who remains in the NYPD to this day. His employment was interrupted only briefly in 2006, for a seven-month stint on a job where he was permitted to carry a gun — as a Marine in Iraq. Boss returned and continued his unrelenting and ultimately successful battle to get his gun back.

In a telephone interview from her home in Maryland, Kadiatou Diallo, Amadou’s mother, demanded an explanation. Her wounds, she said, had once again been re-opened by Kelly’s decision to go back on his word to her, and return the gun to one of her son’s murderers. “Now he has turned around and given back the gun. We want to know why. Why did he change his mind?”

At the time of this writing, an official an-

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swer by Kelly or NYPD officials has yet to be given. But Diallo's tearful question captures the seemingly contradictory place in which today's struggle against police brutality in New York City finds itself. On the one hand, a pronounced uptick in activism has intensified the spotlight shined on the NYPD. Yet, Kelly and his ilk, rather than softening up to avoid further scrutiny, have toughened their stance and continue to defend police excesses. For this reason, the timing of Kelly's decision is far more callous than it is peculiar. Still, it's worth examining why now.

The year is not yet over and, according to the Stolen Lives Project, the NYPD has already killed 2 women and 17 men. One of them was a young man named Mohamad Bah, a cab driver and student at Baruch College, who was mere days away from his 28th birthday. On September 25th, his mother, Hawa Bah, had called 911 when she had noticed her son was acting strangely and seemed highly distressed. After he had locked himself in his room, she became very worried that he might harm himself.

When the police arrived, they forced her out of the house despite her protests and, within minutes, killed her son, who they claim cut their bulletproof vests with a knife. While the *NY Post* headline described him as a "slasher" and the *NY Daily News* called him a "knife-wielding madman," Ms. Bah said that her son had been "suffering from depression. I called police to get them to help me open the door."

It seems more than reasonable to ask why it was necessary for fully armed and shielded officers to shoot and kill a man with a knife. Mohamad, like Amadou, was an immigrant from Guinea. And, almost unbelievably, their mothers knew each other. As the *New York Times* reported, "Ms. Bah and Ms. Diallo have been friends for years. They had lived near each other in Liberia and the two families socialized, according to Ms. Diallo, who added that the timing of Mr. Kelly's decision, on the heels of Mr. Bah's death, added a new layer of grief."

Only two days after newspapers were reporting on Kelly's decision, yet another mother lost her son to NYPD violence. In the early morning of October 4th, 22-year old Noel Polanco, son of Cecilia Reyes, was driving with two passengers on Grand Central Parkway next

"The number of stops of young Black men last year actually exceeded the total number of young Black men in the city (168,126 as compared to 158,406)."

to La Guardia Airport on his way home from his job at a hookah bar. After cutting off an unmarked police van, he was pulled over, and very soon thereafter fatally shot in the abdomen by Detective Hassan Hamdy of the NYPD's Emergency Services Unit.

Hamdy, who's been on the force for 14 years, claims that he told Polanco to put his hands up but that Polanco, instead, reached down towards the floor of the car. Diane DeFerrari, however, who was sitting in the passenger seat of Polanco's car, disputes the detective's story. She says that after her friend had been pulled over, officers surrounded the car "like an army" and gave Polanco no time to even take his hands off the steering wheel before Hamdy shot his gun — through the passenger side — barely missing Ms. DeFerrari's face. After killing her friend, and almost killing her, "then they had us put our hands on the vehicle, telling us 'Your friend shot himself.' I looked at the police officers and I was in utter shock," she said, describing the incident as a case of police "road rage." The other passenger, an off-duty police officer, says she was

asleep in the back seat and was awakened by the shot.

The fact that Polanco did not have a gun is not disputed. This detail, in itself, raises serious questions about Hamdy's claim that Polanco reached downwards in the first place. Forced to acknowledge that no weapon was found, police pointed to a small power drill under the driver's seat. Yet the implication that Polanco was reaching for this drill while a swarm of armed officers screamed at him to lift his arms beggars belief. The statements made to this effect seem a transparent attempt to excuse the insane over-reaction of a police officer to what amounts to a traffic violation, and to smear Polanco in the public's eye.

De Ferrari's story, as shocking as it is, casts serious doubt on the words and actions of the police officers involved. And, as we're learning day by day in this city, Polanco's murder is but one of many reasons that residents should have little faith in the men in blue.

IN THE FACE OF WHAT FEELS LIKE A POLICE Department gone rogue, today's movement against police brutality in New York City has actually seen some promising developments. Notably, the Stop Stop and Frisk movement has brought out into the open, often onto the pages of mainstream newspapers, the fact that police officers verbally and physically assault, harass, bully, beat, and otherwise violate the rights of (mostly) Black and Brown men in this city on a daily basis, and at an exponential rate. Increasing numbers of people are aware, for example, that nearly 700,000 Stop, Question and Frisks (SQF) were conducted in 2011, that 87 percent of those stops are of Blacks and Latinos, that nearly 90 percent of those stopped are innocent of any wrong doing at all, and that a miniscule amount of guns are found during these stops (about 0.1 percent).¹ Of course, Black and Brown women have not been able to escape this profoundly racist practice and, by virtue of their sex, are forced to endure another humiliating

aspect of police power — sexual intimidation, harassment and assault. But, as the SQF data shows, those stopped the most in this city are young, Black men between the ages of 14-24. This age group is so intensely criminalized that, according to the NYCLU, "the number of stops of young Black men last year actually exceeded the total number of young Black men in the city (168,126 as compared to 158,406)."

On Father's Day, an estimated 15,000 people in NYC participated in a "Silent March" against SQF. The National Action Network, NAACP, SEIU 1199, and a number of coalitions and community groups like Communities United for Police Reform, VOCAL-NY, the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow, Stop Stop and Frisk, and many others helped to build the march. The action was the first of its kind, and was testament to the fact that a growing number of people not only know about the damning numbers behind SQF, but that they are willing to take action to end it.

Adding to this momentum is the consideration by the City Council of the Community Safety Act (CSA), a package of four police reform bills introduced by Brooklyn City Council Member, Jumaane Williams. This package of bills aims to ban racial profiling, end unlawful stops, require officers to identify and explain themselves to all subjects of police activity, and would establish an Inspector General for the NYPD. On September 27th, nearly 1,000 people gathered at City Hall to protest SQF and to advocate for the passage of the CSA.

Activists very explicitly see this as a movement for racial justice. Moreover, because of the simultaneous spike in murders by police (not since 2003 have there been such a high number of police murder victims), they have been linking up with victims' families, which is helping to broaden and deepen the movement's roots.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of this is the case of 18-year-old Ramarley Graham, the fourth person to be killed by NYPD this year. Graham was murdered by Officer

Richard Haste of the Bronx Street Narcotics Enforcement Unit on February 2nd. After police officers broke into Graham's home in the Wakefield section of the Bronx with no warrant, Haste busted open the bathroom door and shot him at close range in the chest. Ramarley's grandmother and 6-year-old brother watched in horror as this unfolded before them.

What's more, instead of taking his grandmother to the hospital to be treated for shock and trauma after witnessing the murder of her grandson, officers took her against her will to the 47th precinct for seven hours of interrogation. Hours had gone by before Ramarley's parents discovered that their son had been murdered, and four days passed before the police would tell them where they were keeping his body.

According to the police, Haste was in "hot pursuit" of Graham because the officer was sure that Graham had a gun. But, according to the footage from a security camera outside of the house, Graham walked up to his front door at a leisurely pace and can be seen calmly unlocking his door. Minutes later, officers can be seen running up to the house, attempting to kick in the door, failing, and then going around the back.

Furthermore, another key part of Haste's story was never corroborated - no gun was found. Haste, much like Detective Hamdy, says that he repeatedly told Graham to show him his hands but that for some unknown reason he, as in the police's story in the Polanco case, reached down "towards his waistband." This convinced very few. The day after Graham's murder, an angry protest of a couple of thousand people marched from his house to the precinct, demanding answers. The murder of an unarmed Black teenager in his own home was too much for many New Yorkers to bear.

Richard Haste, who has been charged with Manslaughter 1 and 2, is the first and only NYPD officer to be indicted since the 2007 indictment of the officers who shot Sean Bell. Constance Malcolm and Frank Graham, Ramarley's parents, today seek the elusive con-

viction of an NYPD officer. While they are well aware of the difficulty of winning a conviction against the police, they have done everything in their power to get justice for their son.

Malcolm and Graham, who can today be found at every anti-police brutality protest around the city, began by launching a series of vigils to commemorate every year of their son's life and to invite others to join them in their struggle. Every Thursday (because Ramarley was killed on a Thursday), for 18 straight weeks (because Ramarley was 18 years old), Malcolm, joined by Graham, opened up her home to friends, community members, and activists.

Moreover, it was not lost on them that they were not the first or only ones seeking justice for loved ones killed by police, so they connected with people like Nicole Paultre-Bell, Danette Chavis, Juanita Young, and others who have yet to see justice for their loved ones, but who remain some of the strongest fighters in the movement. And as weeks and months have passed and they have caught word of newer cases of police murders, they have reached out to those families as well.

This past year, Malcolm and Graham organized Mother's and Father's Day-themed vigils as well, in which they gave these families a platform to tell their stories, too. All of these began with a speak out on the front porch of the house in which Ramarley was murdered, and ended with a spirited march to the precinct — only a few blocks from the house.

At some of the most highly attended vigils, hundreds of people would stand at the steps of the precinct chanting, "Richard Haste has got to go!" The house on East 229th Street served as a hub — a smaller version of Zuccotti Park, if you will — for racial justice activists. For those well-acquainted with the long history of police violence in the city, it became evident that there also existed, in response to it, a long history of struggle — crucially, a struggle that had been led by those directly affected.

This connection to other victim's families

has been an enormous source of strength and provides some clues about how to expand the movement. The family of 23-year-old Shantel Davis, for example, began organizing vigils of their own every Saturday on Church Avenue and 38th Street in Brooklyn. Davis was murdered by narcotics Detective Phillip Atkins on June 14th in East Flatbush. According to police,

“If Malcolm X had been killed at 23, he would have died a drug dealer and a pimp. Our kids today don’t even get a chance to grow into themselves.”

Davis was erratically driving an allegedly stolen car before crashing into a parked minivan. Atkins, a 12-year veteran of the force, entered the passenger side of the car with his gun drawn. Witnesses heard Davis, who was unarmed, pleading for her life but, within seconds, Atkins shot her at point blank range in the chest. He and his partner then dragged her out of the car and attempted to handcuff her as she lay bleeding on the pavement in broad daylight. Shocked onlookers took pictures of her dead or dying body as police frantically, but unsuccessfully, tried to confiscate them all.

When the story broke, the media focused on Davis’ “rap sheet”, implying that she deserved to be gunned down. While Atkins has had six civil rights lawsuits and numerous complaints for misconduct filed against him, he has not been indicted. Nor has a Grand Jury-investigation been launched into the death of Ms. Davis.

Her uncle, Harold Davis, who has spent the last four months advocating for both of those things spoke to a crowd of nearly 400 people

at the 18th vigil for Ramarley Graham and countered the media smears against his niece, saying, “If Malcolm X had been killed at 23, he would have died a drug dealer and a pimp. Our kids today don’t even get a chance to grow into themselves.”

While Graham’s family continues to connect with the families of Shantel Davis, Mohammad Bah, Noel Polanco, Reynaldo Cuevas, Tamon Robinson, Walwyn Jackson, Kenneth Chamberlain (from White Plains) and other victims to build awareness and win justice for their loved ones, Ray Kelly and Mayor Michael Bloomberg continue to dig their heels in.

In addition to the twisted symbolism of honoring the request of one of Amadou Diallo’s executioners — sandwiched between two fresh police murders — Kelly and Bloomberg remain intransigent in response to the criticism of SQF. This, despite the obvious and shameful racial disparities, the incredible 600 percent increase in stops since 2002, and the documented, unforgivable rise in police killings.

RECENTLY, in response to Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson’s decision to no longer prosecute trespassing arrests in public housing buildings “unless the arresting officer is interviewed to ensure the arrest was warranted,” both Kelly and Bloomberg came out swinging. This, despite the fact that Johnson’s decision was based on overwhelming evidence that many of these arrests were unjustified. Jeannette Rucker, the chief of arraignments for the Bronx DA, explained that her investigation into the arrests found that “in many (but not all) of the cases the defendants arrested were either legitimate tenants or invited guests.”² Stops in public housing account for somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of all SQFs in the city.

Ray Kelly has argued that Rucker was both wrong and exaggerating, writing in a letter to Mr. Johnson that her “estimation of the issue was in error and that she overstated her perception of discrepancies regarding criminal trespass

arrests in the Bronx.” Bloomberg, for his part, claimed that, “In terms of the allegations [that] in public housing some of the cops have been stopping [people] without having any justification, we’ve been unable to get one example as I understand it from any of the people that have complained.”⁽³⁾ Apparently, he hasn’t spoken with Rucker.

“If you want to bring crime back to New York, this is probably a good way to do it,” Bloomberg scoffed. This, again, offers as good a glimpse as any at the workings of the billionaire mayor’s mind. The notion that guaranteeing public housing residents the right of safe passage in their own buildings will drive up crime tells us everything about the attitude of this city’s elite to the rights of the poor.

As the scrutiny around SQF has heightened, Bloomberg and Kelly have spoken in churches in Brooklyn and Manhattan in defense of police practices. Kelly responded to the spike in street violence this summer by blatantly attacking activists. “Many of them will speak out about stop-and-frisk” but are “shockingly silent when it comes to the level of violence right in their own communities,” he said in July. The statement, it scarcely needs to be said, is thoroughly hypocritical. If the city’s establishment actually cared about “the level of violence” suffered by the very people that Kelly and his troops victimize, they would address rampant unemployment and make sure that there were well-paying jobs, fully-funded schools and after-school programs, affordable healthcare, subsidized childcare and all the other resources that would alleviate the pressures that lead to violence in the first place.

It’s clear, then, that Kelly and Bloomberg are ready and willing to do battle. And what’s more — they have the means at their disposal to steer public opinion in their favor. At the same time, their reaction makes it clear that activism around the issue is having some impact. What the movement needs now is to involve many more people across the city. Here there is reason to be hopeful. There is a growing and deepening

anger against police violence and impunity that goes far wider than what the movement has thus far been able to tap into.

The strategy for the months ahead has to center on building a collective political response to the iniquities of the NYPD. The passage of the Community Safety Act (CSA), for example, would be a tremendous blow to the practice of SQF. This is not because there’s any real expectation that the police would obey the laws’ restrictions, but because the inherent racism in policing would be publicly acknowledged, and attempts to prevent it would be codified into law. Thus, while the CSA would, of course, not resolve the profound and systemic problems with police and policing, the fight for it has the potential to grow the movement. Forcing the city’s establishment to make concessions could build tremendous confidence for the struggles ahead.

Moreover, a movement big and powerful enough to convict killer cops has the potential to shift the very terrain on which we’re struggling. The truth is that the “I thought he had a gun” defense works for police officers. And nothing proved that so publicly and so painfully as the Amadou Diallo case. Most of the time, though, police aren’t even put in the position of having to come up with a defense. Today, despite the welcome uptick in activism around police brutality, we find ourselves in a similar position. Kelly’s gesture towards Kadiatou Diallo was actually a clear message to the whole movement that he will continue to stand by killer cops.

We are not yet at the point where those in power feel that they would be taking enormous political risks by allowing police to continue to kill with impunity. It is up to us, now, to build a movement that can use campaigns such as the fight for CSA and the conviction of Richard Haste to tip the balance of forces in our favor, without losing sight of the goals of ending SQF and police violence once and for all.

It should go without saying that the struggle against police violence extends well beyond

the borders of New York City. Whether it's the murder of 18-year-old Alan Blueford by Oakland Police, 24-year-old Manuel Diaz of Anaheim, 15-year-old Stephon Watts of Chicago, or 22-year-old Derek Williams of Milwaukee (who, after being severely beaten by officers, can be seen in a horrifying video struggling to breathe, begging for help, and then dying in the back seat of the patrol car), the facts point to a persistent pattern of police violence and impunity. And, of course, the murder in Sanford, Florida of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a racist vigilante exposed the complicity of police departments when young Black men are murdered by people other than the police themselves.

And all of this horror, of course, is occurring on Obama's watch. Certainly, millions voted for him in the hopes that, as president, he would stand against the racism that has been a permanent feature of this society's history since slavery. Yet Obama has spoken only about the case of Trayvon Martin — and that, too, only after feeling the pressure from the explosion of anger and activism that followed the police's initial failure to arrest George Zimmerman. And his comments were tame, at best, suggesting that the country needed to do some "soul searching," and that Florida's criminal justice system

would handle the situation. This, coupled with Obama's non-response to the ongoing police murders of unarmed Black and Brown men and women across the country speaks volumes about what to expect from the president on the pressing issues facing people of color, today.

Expanding this movement, and sustaining the struggles this task demands, will require that activists maintain their independence from the political mainstream. And it demands, beyond that, that they articulate effectively a vision of an entirely different world — one which protects the civil liberties and economic rights of its most victimized, oppressed communities, one in which police and police violence are a distant memory.

NOTES

1. See "Stop-and-Frisk 2011: NYCLU Briefing," New York Civil Liberties Union (May 2012) www.nyclu.org/files/publications/NYCLU_2011_Stop-and-Frisk_Report.pdf.
2. See "In the Bronx, Resistance to Prosecuting Stop and Frisk Arrests," *New York Times* (September 26, 2012) www.nytimes.com/2012/09/26/nyregion/in-the-bronx-resistance-to-prosecuting-stop-and-frisk-arrests.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
3. See "Bloomberg blasts Bronx DA for not prosecuting trespassing arrests," *New York Post* (September 27, 2012) www.nypost.com/p/news/local/bloomberg_blasts_bronx_da_for_not_XpNrXv0fBpT6C46F-stTVxN

Race and Counterrevolution¹

STEPHEN STEINBERG

OPTIMISM IS THE PROZAC of the sociological imagination. Indeed, several of sociology's founders were disaffected children of Baptist ministers who substituted millenarian ideals with the secular version of a heaven on earth. The men of the Chicago school conceived of sociology as a secular eschatology that would be an instrument of social amelioration. What's wrong with that, you might be thinking? Nothing at all — except when it leads to a false optimism where we look upon the world through rose-tinted glasses. Where we are mesmerized with what might be, and turn a blind eye to what is. Where we extol “progress” but evade its antithesis: entrenched systems of domination and oppression. Or we forget Piven & Cloward's admonition that power only concedes as much as necessary to appease and to co-opt, and then retracts these concessions as soon as it is politically safe to do so. Finally, there is the dialectic of history — that revolutionary change sets the stage for backlash and retrogression, as the champions of the old order retrench and rally forth, often with revanchist fervor.

In racial matters, the tendency in sociological discourse has been to acknowledge the iniquity of the moment, but to take comfort in the fact that things are better than in times past. Thus, Jim Crow was bad, but at least blacks were not slaves. Or racial inequalities are deep and persistent, but at least blacks are not sitting in the back of the bus. Or affirmative action is

dead, but we got Obama in the White House. By this logic, the nadir for blacks was Middle Passage, and things have been getting better ever since! But to paraphrase James Baldwin: it is wrong to use the crimes of the past to justify the crimes of the present.

Albion Small, the founder of the Chicago School of Sociology, once wrote, “There is a pot of gold at the end of the sociological rainbow.” Indeed, the assimilation model, which was at the center of sociology's master paradigm, was predicated on an evolutionary optimism whereby the nation's constituent races would ultimately be incorporated into the body politic. A reassuring narrative, to be sure, and to cut Robert Park some slack, his precepts about assimilation were meant to counter nativist fears that “the new immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe were unassimilable. However, when it came to the dark races, assimilation theory had a perverse subtext. As R.W. Connell and Charles Mills have argued, assimilation theory embodied the logic of imperialism.² Only in its obfuscating terminology was sociology's pet theory different from the standard defense of colonialism, that it spread civilization as the “backward races” were assimilated into the cultures — and through miscegenation — the germplasm of more “advanced races.”

Optimistic teleology is not a problem only of mainstream sociology, but pervades Left thinking as well. In its master narrative, capitalism propagates the seeds of its own destruction, and oppressed groups develop a revolutionary consciousness, rise up in protest, and ultimately install a new and more just order. Unlike mainstream sociology, at least Marxists had a paradigm for grasping the nature and causes of black

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insurgency when it erupted in the Deep South in the late 50s and 60s. However, some leftists — Ralph Bunche, for example — pooh-poohed the civil rights revolution because it did not address the underlying political economy that lay

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at the root of racial hierarchy. Clearly, Bunche was wrong — the civil rights movement was a necessary stage in the black liberation project. But Bunche has also been vindicated by history. As important as they were, the Civil Rights Laws of 1964 and 65 were a reformist agenda that did not fundamentally alter the political economy that engenders and reproduces racial hierarchies. Remember, too, that these laws only restored rights that were presumably secured a century earlier by the Reconstruction Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. If this is “progress,” it is the progress of a people on a historical treadmill.

As with the first Reconstruction, we were given “bricks without straw” (to invoke the title of Albion Tourgée’s 1880 novel).³ Civil rights legislation was not backed up with programs of genuine reconstruction to redress the deep inequalities that are the legacy of slavery. And as with the first Reconstruction, it was only a matter of time before the enemies of the civil rights revolution mobilized a counterattack. I submit that we are in the throes of a counterrevolution that has systematically whittled away most of the gains of the post-civil rights era. With

ruthless determination, and with indispensable backing from conservative foundations, the Federalist Society hijacked the judiciary system from the bottom to the top (the Left could take a lesson from this feat of organizing from the bottom up). And once it had a conservative majority in the Supreme Court, through a series of rulings this counterrevolution has pounded every last nail into the coffin of the civil rights revolution. Not only are we witnessing a rollback of minority rights, but race and racism have been cynically exploited to buttress and reinvigorate the political Right, and to mobilize white voters behind a reactionary social agenda.

This began with a crusade against welfare and affirmative action — both entwined with race. But these were only dress rehearsals for a wider attack on the social welfare programs of the New Deal. And today, under the mantra of “states rights” — which was the battle cry of slavery and secession and lay at the heart of *Plessy v. Ferguson* — we see an even more far-reaching challenge to ripping up the social contract that was the legacy of the New Deal and the Great Society. We are left to wonder with Lorraine Hansberry who really won the Civil War.

In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois wrote: “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.” My contention is that we are witnessing a similar retrogression in the wake of the Second Reconstruction. Blacks are no longer in the back of the bus—indeed we’re in the White House!—but this has been manipulated, not to advance the cause of racial justice, but on the contrary, to camouflage the dismantling of affirmative action and antiracism policies generally. In 1963 Everett Hughes famously used his presidential address at the American Sociological Association to bemoan sociology’s failure to predict the civil rights revolution. There is maddening irony in the spectacle of social scientists gathering to contemplate “real utopias” or a postracial future at a time when we are witnessing the disman-

ting of the Second Reconstruction. Which is to say, when we are moving “back again toward slavery.”

WHAT BETTER EXAMPLE OF counterrevolution than the passage of Voter ID laws that are nothing more than an incarnation of the poll tax and the grandfather clause — race neutral on their face but patently racist both in their intent and their impact. According to the Brennan Center, these laws will effectively disfranchise as many as 5 million voters, disproportionately black and Latino.⁴ Add to this another 6 million impacted by restrictions on felon’s voting rights.⁵ So disfranchisement is back. And that’s not all. Convict labor is back, implicating major corporations who have found a reserve army of cheap labor in the prison industrial complex.⁶ Back, too, are vagrancy laws in new guise. In New York City, that famed citadel of tolerance, last year there were nearly 800,000 stop-and-frisk searches, 87 percent involving blacks or Latinos.⁷ Indeed, so is lynching. What else was the Trayvon Martin case if not Emmett Till all over again—an official license and cover-up for killing a young black man who crossed the color line?

The seeds of counterrevolution were planted even before the passage of the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Laws, and came to early fruition in the 1968 election when Humphrey won only 10 percent of the white Southern vote. (Obama won 20 percent of the white vote in the Deep South, a grim measure of “progress.”) As social scientists say in their prosaic fashion, this marked the beginning of “a political realignment,” as the “Solid South” turned solidly Republican. But let’s be clear at what is involved here: “Negroes” were granted elementary rights of citizenship, and within a decade the entire South *seceded* from the Democratic Party! What was even more ominous was George Wallace’s unexpected traction with white voters in the urban North. The handwriting was on the wall: as Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall wrote

in *Chain Reaction*, the Republican Party would emerge as the party of segregation.⁸

The 1968 election also marked the beginning of the loss of white voters to the Democratic Party in northern industrial states. Nixon wasted no time in rewarding his new electoral base: he nominated two outright segregationists to the Supreme Court, and although they were rejected in the Senate, this was unmistakable proof that the counterrevolution was in full swing. White supremacy was back. And thanks to the Federalist Society, future Jim Crow judges would be dressed in respectable judicial garb.

Thus, we are in the throes of a counterrevolution that aims to drive every last nail in the coffin of the civil rights movement. It is important to acknowledge the role that affirmative action played in spawning this counterrevolution, not only because it stoked white resentment, but also because it provided a rhetorical makeover for Conservatives who could now shed the image of being racist and anti-Semitic, and presented themselves as champions of the rights of the white working class.⁹

Affirmative action was by far the most important policy initiative of the post-civil rights era. It drove a wedge into the wall of occupational apartheid that had existed since slavery. And it achieved its prime policy objective by opening up avenues of opportunity — not only in the corporate world and the professions, but in major blue-collar industries as well. Without affirmative action, we would not have the black middle class as we know it, including the two people who occupy the White House.

Affirmative action had its origins in the Philadelphia Plan, which sought to desegregate lily-white unions in Philadelphia’s construction trades. The Plan was originally drafted in Johnson’s Department of Labor and shelved after Humphrey’s defeat. In 1969 the Plan was disinterred by Arthur Fletcher, the black Assistant Secretary of Labor, who has rightly claimed to be “the father of affirmative action.” But the other progenitors are Charles Shultz, Fletcher’s

boss, John Mitchell who successfully defended the challenge to the Philadelphia Plan in the Supreme Court, and Nixon himself, who not only gave the Plan his indispensable backing, but also risked a great deal of political capital in

The end result is that affirmative action has been eviscerated by a series of Court rulings.

heading off an attempt in Congress to kill the Plan.

There has been much speculation as to why Nixon, who won the 1968 election with his “southern strategy” and who nominated two segregationists to the Supreme Court, would give such resolute backing to the Philadelphia Plan. The prevailing view, which was held by Bayard Rustin (who was in the throes of his own regression “from protest to politics”) was that the Plan was Nixon’s perverse attempt to fragment the liberal coalition between blacks, labor, and liberals (read: Jewish liberals). I think there is a more convincing explanation for this apparent contradiction. Nixon found himself in the interstices of the shift from revolution to counterrevolution. This explains why he oscillated between appointing segregationist judges, on the one hand, to proposing liberal policies like Moynihan’s Family Assistance Plan that guaranteed a family wage (which horrified conservatives helped defeat in Congress), and appointing George Romney to head the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Romney was eased out of office after his plan to desegregate the suburbs evoked a furious backlash).¹⁰ In the case of the Philadelphia Plan, Nixon sought to appease headline-grabbing

protests by grassroots activists at construction sites in cities like Chicago, Detroit, and New York. At first it seemed as if he had nothing to lose by sticking it to Democratic unions, but when affirmative action was implemented and galvanized widespread protest, Nixon went into reverse gear and revoked the very “quotas” he had put into place.

However, the genie was out of the bottle and once affirmative action passed Constitutional muster in the federal courts, it was extended to all government contractors, including universities. This aroused widespread resistance, and the professoriate responded with what they do best: erudite studies that provided the anti-affirmative action forces with intellectual legitimacy. By the mid-eighties, after Reagan had appointed O’Connor, Scalia, and Kennedy to the Supreme Court, and had elevated Rehnquist to Chief Justice, the new conservative majority wasted no time in reversing Court rulings of only nine years earlier. So much for *stare decisis*. The end result is that affirmative action has been eviscerated by a series of Court rulings, and pending the mercurial vote of Justice Kennedy, the upcoming case of *Fisher v the University of Texas* is poised to drive the last nail in the coffin of affirmative action.

Indeed, the three pillars of antiracist policy — school desegregation, affirmative action, and racial districting—have all been eviscerated or gutted altogether. This was the ignominious achievement of the conservative majority on the Supreme Court who cynically cloaked their rulings in the 14th amendment, refusing to acknowledge the difference between racist practices driven by racial animus and the use of race to remedy those very injustices. Like the First Reconstruction, we are left with “bricks without straw,” which is to say, with empty rhetoric and false promises. The gutting of affirmative action is particularly calamitous, in that it will slowly erode the social-class gains that blacks made during the post-civil rights era. We are left with the specter of blacks walking briefly in the sun

and moving “back again toward slavery.” Not despite Obama, but arguably with his help, and not only his silence and acquiescence, but often with active complicity. For example, his “race to the top” uses the false promise of “education” as rhetorical cover for his failure to address the economic crisis that besets black communities, at the same time that it abets the reactionary crusade for school privatization and disinvestment in public education.

Counterrevolution is built on the fragments and shards of revolution.¹¹ The losers — the beneficiaries of white supremacy — do not fade quietly into the penumbra of history, but they retrench and mobilize to restore their power and privilege. After the Civil War, it took only 28 years from the passage of the 14th Amendment to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which passed in a 7-1 decision. Affirmative action was enacted as policy in the 70s and rescinded by Court decisions in the mid-80s. Note that in both cases counterrevolution was enacted by the Supreme Court, reflecting a political realignment fueled by racial backlash.

Let me close with a brief comment about Obama. The first thing that needs to be said is that his election provided stark proof of why blacks were disfranchised through virtually all of American history. Obama owes his election and reelection to the unprecedented turnout of blacks, and the fact that the two-thirds of Latinos who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2008 primaries, voted for Obama in the 2008 (this number increased to 71 percent in 2012). One figure speaks tons: 89 percent of Romney votes came from white non-hispanics. Put another way, in 2008 57 percent of whites voted for McCain; in 2012, the percentage voting for Romney actually increased from 55 to 59 percent. In other words, if only whites had voted, McCain and Romney would each have been elected by a landslide. This explains why Republicans have resorted to voter suppression (effectively restoring the three-fifths principle in the Constitution whereby southern states

could count slaves as three-fifths a person for purposes of apportionment in Congress and representation in the Electoral College). It also explains why racial undercurrents and coded racism abounded in the campaign discourse. This was on full display when Romney used his appearance before the NAACP to proclaim his opposition to Obamacare and signal to his white supporters that “the rights revolution” was dead.

With Obama in the White House, Republicans can have it both ways. They shamelessly tap the reservoir of racism to discredit Obama, to deride national health insurance as “Obamacare,” tagging any social welfare policy as stealth reparations for blacks who exist as freeloaders on the public treasure, and now to unconscionably transgress democratic principle by restoring Jim Crow subterfuges to suppress

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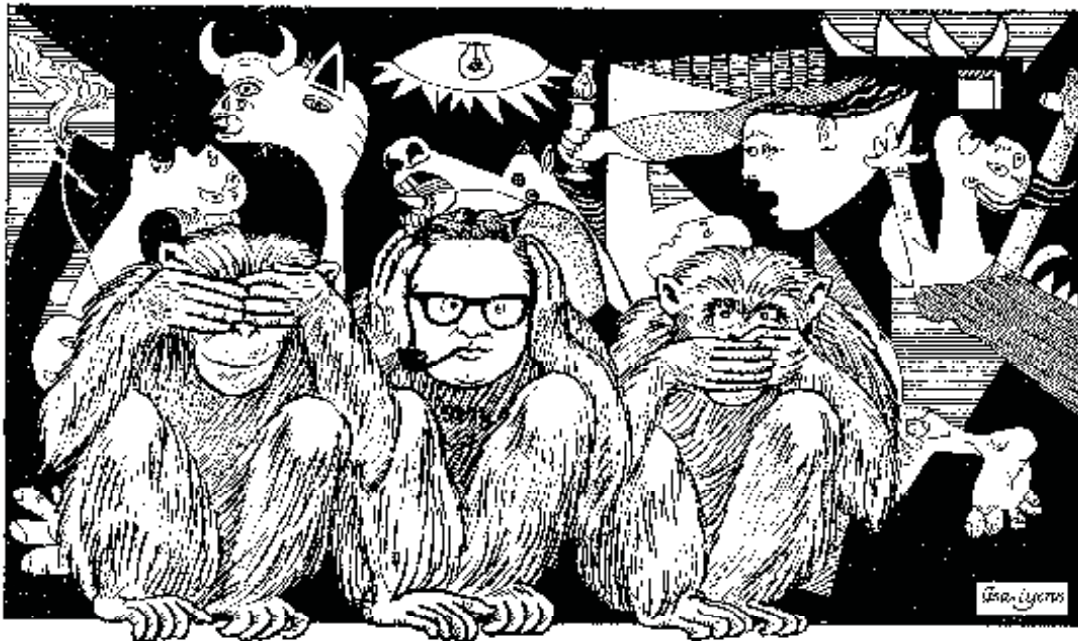
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black voting rights. At the same time, Republicans reap the advantage of having a President who puts a black face on neoliberalism at home and imperialism abroad. To borrow a nugget from Malcolm X: we've been *snookered*, first of all by our own false optimism and utopian reverie.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2012 Meetings of the American Sociological Association.
2. R.W. Connell, "Why Is Classical Theory Classical," *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (May 1997): 1511-57 and Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
3. In her introduction to a recent edition of Tourgee's *Bricks Without Straw*, Carolyn Karcher writes: "Grimly chronicling the 'counterrevolution' that so swiftly eliminated the rights the freedpeople had won with the help of their white supporters, he excoriates the northern public for succumbing so credulously to the white supremacist propaganda campaign against Reconstruction. In the process, he articulates insights as relevant to the present as to the past."
4. www.alternet.org/story/156252/not_again!_how_our_voting_system_is_ripe_for_theft_and_melt-down_in_2012/?page=entire
5. Michele Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012).
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7. www.nytimes.com/2012/06/12/opinion/the-scars-of-stop-and-frisk.html
8. Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1992): 62.
9. Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006): Chapters 6 & 7.
10. In *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (New York: Oxford, 2004), Terry Anderson writes (p. 119): "Promoting affirmative action was another demonstration that the president flirted with liberalism during his first two years on office."
11. For a penetrating analysis of the concept of counterrevolution, see Stephen Eric Bronner, "Notes on the Counter-Revolution," *Logos*, vol. 10:1 (2011), available at www.logosjournal.com/notes-counter-revolution.php.



ESTABLISHMENT SOCIOLOGY KEEPING COOL IN A TIME OF SOCIAL CRISIS

President Obama and the Crisis of Black America

An Interview with Cornel West

DAN LA BOTZ

PROFESSOR CORNEL WEST is one of America's outstanding social critics, a powerful voice of the African-American community, and a leading figure in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).¹ During the last two years, he has become an outspoken critic of President Barack Obama saying that, "He's rightly associated much more with the oligarchs than with poor people."² Prof. West asked that this interview be dedicated to his pastor Willie P. Cooke, the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Sacramento, California who had recently passed away. He talks about the impact of Pastor Cooke on his life at the end of this interview.

West is Professor of Philosophy and Christian Practice at Union Theological Seminary and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. He has also taught at Yale, Harvard, and the University of Paris. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton. He has written 20 books and has edited 13. He is best known for his classics *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*, and his memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*. He appears frequently on the Bill Maher Show, Colbert Report, CNN and C-Span as well as on his dear Brother, Tavis Smiley's PBS TV

Show. He is also co-host of the popular radio show "Smiley & West" heard on PRI around the country. The co-hosts have recently co-authored the book titled *The Rich and the Rest of Us: A Poverty Manifesto*. West made his film debut in *The Matrix*: and was the commentator (with Ken Wilbur) on the official trilogy released in 2004. He also has appeared in over 25 documentaries and films including *Examined Life*, *Call & Response*, *Sidewalk*, and *Stand*.

Finally, West has made three spoken word albums including *Never Forget*, collaborating with Prince, Jill Scott, Andre 3000, Talib Kweli, KRS-One, and the late Gerald Levert. His spoken word interludes were featured on Terence Blanchard's *Choices* (which won the Grand Prix in France for the best Jazz Album of the year of 2009), "Cornel West Theory's Second Rome," Raheem DeVaughn's Grammy-nominated *Love & War: Masterpeace*, and most recently on Bootsy Collins' *The Funk Capital of the World*. Cornel West has a passion to communicate to a vast variety of publics in order to keep alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. — a legacy of telling the truth and bearing witness to love and justice.

New Politics interviewed Prof. West on October 4, 2012, a month before the national elections.

NP: For four years we've had an African-American president, and that has led some people to argue that we are living in a post-racial society. What do you think of this argument?

CW: I think they're using election of a black president to make extravagant, exaggerated claims. Certainly the election of Barack Obama means that we are less racist than we were 30

years ago when it comes to electoral politics; there is no doubt about that. But unfortunately, sadly the legacy of white supremacy is still quite vicious; it's still very overt at times. It's overt in terms of the stop and frisk policy. It's overt in

We're dealing with a situation which is clear for all to see: that capitalism has failed poor and working people, especially of color.

the differential treatment of black or brown poor people in regard to the war on drugs. So that you end up with two very contradictory realities: less racist in terms of electoral politics but deeply racist in terms of practices and policies as it relates especially to people of color who are poor.

If you keep track only of the election of Barack Obama, or the black heads of Fortune Five Hundred companies, or black professors in Ivy League Schools, you think that, lo and behold, we're living in a new age, a post-racial age. But if you actually have your feet on the ground, you understand the ways in which gentrification is setting in, the vicious attack on public education, and the privatization of public education, that is in many ways an attack on poor children of color. We saw it in the Chicago Teachers' strike, right — and we were with them in deep solidarity. Six-hundred and eighty-four schools — only one out of four schools have arts and music programs. Six-hundred and eighty-four schools — and 200 nurses for all of those precious children, over 80 percent of them black and brown and over 87 percent of them poor or near poverty. So the issue of race — racism, white supremacy — is still very, very much alive and doing damage to people's lives. If you keep track only of the breakthroughs of black faces

in high places you're going to think that it's a different post-racial age.

NP: You've already referred to some of the issues, but I wonder if you could expand on the question of the state of African-Americans today after four years of the Barack Obama administration?

CW: When it comes to the black poor and working class, we're in a catastrophic situation. We've got Depression levels of unemployment and underemployment. We've got dilapidated housing and disgraceful school systems that have been out of control for a long time. We've got guns and drugs and in the community, devastated lives and too many people dead, especially young people dead. We've got, of course, crack houses and liquor stores, and deeply conservative churches on every corner, the signs of people searching for hope, faith, a refuge.

For the middle classes, of course, there's been a tremendous blow. Fifty-six percent of black middle class folk lost their wealth when they lost their homes or the value of their homes as a result of the housing bubble. As for the black well-to-do, they're doing very well, all slices.

We're dealing with a situation which is clear for all to see: that capitalism has failed poor and working people, especially of color. It has not worked for poor and working people, especially of color, and yet it's quite enticing for the upper middle classes and above.

NP: How do African-Americans today reconcile the situation? That is, we have on the one hand the election of an African-American president which represents a tremendous change in our society, and yet at the same time a catastrophic situation for the black poor, working class, and many in the middle class.

CW: Right now there is utter confusion. You have a shameful silence on the part of most black leaders. The elected officials won't say a word even though they resonate with what brother Tavis Smiley and myself have been doing with the Poverty Tour. But they won't say a word, because if they did, they wouldn't be

reelected, given the fetishizing of Barack Obama that has taken place in black America, and that's very real. Criticizing him means you can be demonized.

NP: Why do you think there is this "shameful silence," as you call it, among the black leaders?

CW: I think that black leaders found themselves making this thick wall of protection around a president who had no serious loyalty to them. It's quite ironic that he's been loyal to Wall Street, but Wall Street is not loyal to him, but black people have been loyal to him but he has not been loyal to black people.

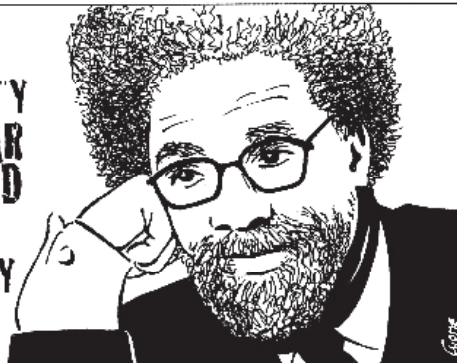
NP: Yet there are some more critical voices...

CW: Yes, that's right. We've had Glenn Lowry,³ Maxine Waters,⁴ Tavis and myself have been hitting it hard. And Glen Ford and the Black Agenda Report,⁵ and I applaud them, I salute them, because they tell some serious truths. I may not agree with all of it, but they are telling some important truths.

But I really don't want to put Obama at center stage. We've got to talk about the social forces behind this situation. We've got to talk about why he ended up with a Wall Street government. Why Geithner? Why Summers? Why Daley? We can go on and on in terms of advisors and secondary advisors, straight out of Wall Street. Wall Street gets bailed out; homeowners don't. Workers don't get bailed out; they've got to restructure their contracts—but they won't touch the contracts of Wall Street. Workers get layoffs and lower wages, but the auto industry gets new CEOs dictated by public officials. That fundamental bias toward the oligarchs and plutocrats fills me with righteous indignation.

How can Obama mention Martin Luther King Jr.'s name, with those drones dropping bombs on innocent people? And you've got Martin Luther King's statue up there and at the

**IF ONLY THE
WAR ON POVERTY
WAS A REAL WAR
THEN WE WOULD
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INTO IT.**



same time in the Oval Office, they've got to deal with killer lists every Tuesday.⁶ The legacy of that great freedom fighter has been besmirched by those who are running the empire.

NP: I recently saw an interview on public television with Prof. William Darity of Duke University who studies and speaks out on many of the same issues you do.⁷ He said that he was "sitting this one out," that he would not cast a vote for the office of president. His exact word were, "I'm going to vote for the other offices that are on the ballot, but I'm just not going to cast a vote for the presidency."⁸ Yet if I understand your position, and correct me if I'm wrong, you would not share Darity's position; you would despite your strong criticisms advocate voting for Barack Obama? So I wondered what you thought of the position that Darity has taken?

CW: I resonate with that, I really do. When you put together the war crimes, when you put together the Wall Street government, when you put together turning its back on poor people and so much of black America — how could I justify voting for him?

The only thing I have left, is what Bernie Sanders told me, which is that if a Romney government were to come in, there would be just so many more actual deaths as well as damaged lives under a Romney administration as opposed to an Obama administration. It's a choice between catastrophe (Romney) and disaster (Obama)—and a disaster is better than a catastrophe.

A lot of it has to do with what state you live in. If you live in Ohio (as you do) or in Florida you have a much harder choice than those of us who live in New York or California. But Darity is from North Carolina, it could go either way in North Carolina.

I really do think that if my vote were the tipping point between Romney and Obama—I'd vote for Obama in a minute. But, I would say that I am voting for a war criminal, extension of Wall Street; I'm voting for no backbone when it comes to the working class, or even the trade union movement and the Employee Free Choice Act, and so forth, but I do think the Romney administration would generate more deaths and more damage on the ground. That's still very real for me. That's just a moral issue in terms of each life being precious.

But that's a tough call. I have great respect for my comrades—such as the brothers and sisters of Black Agenda Report—who disagree with me and focus almost exclusively on the dark side of the Obama administration, because that dark side is very real.

NP: With the African-American community in such a terrible economic situation, I have been struck by the fact that the black community protests much more against criminal injustice than it does against economic injustice. We have the large spontaneous protests over the killing of Trayvon Martin and the huge demonstration in New York over stop-and-frisk, yet, while there are union strikes over wages and protests over foreclosures, we seem to see less of a movement for economic justice. Why is that?

CW: Historically black people have been dealing with such raw fear and trauma that we have more immediate responses and we even have better infrastructures to deal with the raw physical violence coming at us, rather than with the ugly economic exploitation coming at us. So when you actually have bullet-from-gun-of-police-into-black-body the immediate response is there—you have infrastructures. You can even get some ministers out. You can get a whole

lot of people out, who wouldn't say a mumbling word about some of the economic exploitation taking place. It's more visible, public, and we just have a longer history of responding to that.

And yet, we know that the two—criminal injustice and economic injustice—go hand-in-hand. You get the demonizing and criminalizing of young people, which means it's just open season on them very often, yet at the same time dehumanizing and devaluing is part and parcel of the fact that they can live in dilapidated housing. They can have Depression levels of unemployment for decades, and yet if it hits the mainstream it's a crisis.

NP: Yet, of all the issues facing us, facing both the African-American people in particular and the American population as a whole, you have chosen to focus on poverty with your Poverty Tour.⁹ Why is that?

CW: I think that if we make poverty a priority it would result in making massive investment in jobs with a living wage a priority, which is tied also to trying to strengthen unions as the countervailing force against the rule of oligarchs and plutocrats in our capitalist economy. That is a major first step. They all go hand-in-hand. Now of course we want massive investment in education and housing and infrastructure and bridges, and we can go on and on. That is the major reason that brother Tavis and I, building on the legacy of brother Martin King, put the eradication of poverty at the center on the domestic front.

Then, of course, we have the drum beat on the imperial front, which is the drones dropping bombs on innocent folks. Once you hit the drones, then you can begin to tell a story about U.S. policy past, the last 30 or 40 years that has been so tied to the corporations and geopolitical interests.

NP: Yet neither of the major political parties, neither the Republicans nor the Democrats, can or will do anything about this...

CW: No neither one, neither one.

NP: ...so I wonder, do you see the African-American people in particular and the other people, white, Latino, and other immigrants who live in poverty work for low wage and fight these wars because they cannot find another job, do you see them creating some independent political force? Can you foresee them creating a new political party?

CW: I think right now that the political system is so poisoned with big money, and the domination of oligarchs and plutocrats — and that includes both parties — that I don't think either party has the capacity to respond to the urgent needs of the masses of people. I think that if we engage, for example, in taking out big money, the campaign finance reform that people have talked about, and allow new voices to be heard, based not on the fact that they had big money but on the fact that they had broad and visionary perspective on the world, then there would be a very good chance of a third party formation, a very good chance of a variety of progressive voices in parties to emerge. I don't know if it would be just one party, but I think there would be a variety of different voices out there that would make a difference.

But I am much more tied to social motion, momentum and movement than I am to political parties.

NP: Yet, when we have had movements and great social upheavals, they have tended to be re-institutionalized. People talk about FDR and the New Deal, but they saved capitalism and captured the labor unions and the social movements. How do we ever escape this dynamic? Will another great social upheaval be able to find expression in independent political action, in a new political party on the left?

CW: That is the \$64,000 question. You know you've got the Frankfurt School and you've got Sheldon Wolin who write about "fugitive democracy" and that the best we can do is unleash the energy from below, and then it gets incorporated.¹⁰ Democracy is never an institutionalized practice, but it is a "fugitive moment." Each moment absorbed is incorporated and its

leaders refreshed, and you have to bounce back again. That's the cycle. That's the best we can do. Now I don't like to settle for that, but I do take that Wolinian view very seriously. If there's any truth to it, it just means that the social motion, momentum, and movement is something we've got to focus on, no matter which party's in power and fill the jails and the streets as often as we can.

NP: You and Tavis Smiley have just finished your Poverty Tour 2.0, what do you see as your next project?

CW: We are still working on the poverty issue. We're pushing the issue on our radio show, Smiley and West.¹¹ And Tavis is pushing it very hard on his show.¹² We're still going very, very strong on that.

The next project is going to be a matter of trying to connect the struggle around immigration, the struggle around stop-and-frisk, and the struggle for working class rights. We have to somehow bring together the struggles against the vicious legacies of white supremacy, against the legacies of class privilege from above — the trade union movement at its best — and of our Latino brothers and sisters dealing with the racist immigration policies linked to both parties. We're reflecting right now: how do we take it on the road and make the connection.

As you know, part of the challenge is the corporate media, multiplex. One of the things that Tavis and I have been blessed with is high visibility vis-à-vis the corporate media, the ability to raise these kinds of issues on the corporate media. The corporate media has various persons running things on MSNBC, CNN, C-Span and Fox News that will have Tavis and me on their shows to debate. We've got to use our platforms all we can before we go under to highlight these kinds of issues and hope that we can bring together.

NP: Is there anything else on your mind that you'd like to say before we end this interview?

CW: I'd like to dedicate the interview to my pastor Willie P. Cooke, the pastor of Shiloh Baptist

Church in Sacramento, California who baptized me 51 years ago. He just passed away. He was the kind of pastor who, if you were looking for the pastor, was usually up on the roof fixing the leaks. They wanted to buy him a house out in the suburbs, but he said, "I got a house in the hood; I don't need to go anywhere." He wouldn't allow any anniversary for fund-raising because he never would pad his pockets with the money of hard-working folk in the congregation. It was a very working class, proletarian church right there in the hood, in the ghetto of Oak Park, in Sacramento.¹³ Drove a VW his whole life as a minister. Never asked for a raise. He was a servant of the people. He had that kind of love. The funeral that we have, and, of course, I was blessed to be there as one of the speakers, it was a love feast. It was all about love and justice for everybody. On a deep moral and spiritual love that's where I come from.

It's a beautiful thing to have Marx, and a beautiful thing to have Walter Benjamin and Lukacs, Stanley Aronowitz and Jeffrey Faux, and Barbara Ehrenreich and Richard Wolff, who have given us these magnificent insights into the global class war — but my fundamental roots go back to Shiloh Baptist Church and Cooke, you see, who taught us "to be willing to live and die for the least of these," the prisoners of war, the orphan, the widow. And that goes back to prophetic Judaism as you know, goes back to Micah. And he means the world to me, and now he's gone.

NOTES

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11. Smiley and West at www.smileyandwest.com/
12. Tavis Smiley Show at www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/
13. Walking Tour of Oak Park neighborhood, Sacramento, California at www.cityofsacramento.org/ccl/history/pdf/exhibits/tours/Central-%20Oak-Park-Walking-Tour-Brochure.pdf

The Dilemma of Freedom of Conscience

Lenin on Religion, the National Question and the Bund

ROLAND BOER

LENIN'S NAME IS NOT ONE USUALLY associated with freedom of conscience. Was he not the doctrinaire sectarian who brooked no difference of opinion? Did he not trample over his own convictions in the callous quest for power? Careful consideration of his texts reveals a very different picture, one in which he struggles to articulate a radical freedom of conscience. The problem for many readers in our context is that freedom of conscience is automatically associated with a liberal agenda, predicated on the "rights" of the sacrosanct private individual. Lenin and those around him attempted to articulate freedom of conscience in a rather different fashion, asking whether it might be possible to delink freedom of conscience from the liberal project. How might it be rethought from very different, collective situation? I explore this question in three instances, concerning religion, the national question and relations between the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) and the Bund, or the General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. Here we find that Lenin struggles with the question of freedom of conscience, occasionally glimpsing a more radical, dialectical form only to fall short once again. Indeed, it seems that those around him pushed the internal

logic of his arguments to their natural conclusion. In many respects, the project of a radically collective freedom of conscience remains an unfinished project.

Before I proceed, a word on my approach to Lenin's material: I do not succumb to the fetish of context, seeking to explain all by reference to the twists of events. Among the many problems with such a position, the ability of texts to transcend their contexts, both in the time of those contexts and after they have passed, indicates the limitations of the interpretive cage of context. Instead, I focus on the actual texts by Lenin, seek their internal workings, tensions, insights and false turns. In this way, we may explore at a deeper level the workings of his arguments, with both their problems and promise.

Religion

"This is another instance of God
(if he exists, of course) ..."

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE first comes to the fore in Lenin's texts with respect to religion. Despite all his castigating of religion as both result of and contributor to suffering, as a feature of human existence that would be overcome through revolution and education, Lenin had to deal with a central platform of European Social Democracy. As the Erfurt Program of 1891 stated, "Declaration that religion is a private matter [*Erklärung der Religion zur Privatsache*]." This position was held even by those on the far Left that would form the Spartacus Group in Germany. For example, Rosa Luxemburg argues vehemently in *Socialism and the Churches*

ROLAND BOER, *when not voyaging on freighter ships, researches and writes in the areas of Marxism and religion (based at the University of Newcastle, Australia). His most recent publications include Criticism of Earth: On Marx, Engels and Theology (2012) and Nick Cave: Love, Death and Apocalypse (2012).*

from 1905:

The Social-Democrats, those of the whole world and of our own country, regard conscience [*Gewissen*] and personal opinion [*Überzeugung*] as being sacred. Everyone is free to hold whatever faith and whatever opinions will ensure his happiness. No one has the right to persecute or to attack the particular religious opinion of others. Thus say the Social-Democrats.

Lenin was a great proponent of arguing vehemently and openly, for this produced a healthy party.

For Luxemburg, the reasons for such a position were self-evident: opposition to the state's efforts to control one's political aspirations, let alone religious affiliations (the tsarist autocracy persecuted Roman Catholics, Jews, heretics, and freethinkers), and resistance to the church's attempt to demand allegiance, especially by using a judicial system saturated with religious laws, means that one does not seek to impose the same type of control as a socialist.

Often Lenin repeats this position, yet he also offers some qualifications. Distinguishing between state and party, he argues that religion must be a purely private affair in regard to the former. By this he means that religion must be separated in all respects from the state — an end to state support of the church, to the possession of lands, state-derived incomes, church schools, even government positions for clergy. In sum, “Everybody must be perfectly free, not only to profess whatever religion he pleases, but also to spread or change his religion.”

Yet when he turns to the party, he argues that the party must not make religion a private

affair. Given that religion is both the symptom of economic oppression and one of the contributing factors to its perpetuation, the socialists should fight, publicly, against such oppression. Advanced fighters for the emancipation of the working class “must not be indifferent to lack of class-consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs.” Now we come across a curious twist in this position, for one may well expect that atheism is an explicit requirement for party membership. Yet Lenin makes it perfectly clear that atheism is not a prerequisite for membership. Even more, no-one will be excluded from party membership if he or she holds to religious belief. As Lenin put it forcefully in response to the Bund, “Organizations belonging to the R.S.D.L.P. have never distinguished their members according to religion, never asked them about their religion and never will.” More than one person among the various shapes of the right wing, let alone the workers and socialists themselves, were astounded at such a position, asking “Why do we not declare in our Program that we are atheists? Why do we not forbid Christians and other believers in God to join our Party?”

One may identify three reasons in Lenin's texts. First, opposition to religion actually strengthens the reactionary elements within religious organizations. Lenin cites Engels, in response to the ultra-Leftist Blanquist Communards and their war on religion, to Dühring's proposal that religion should be banished in a socialist society, and in relation to Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, waged against the German Roman Catholic Party (the Center Party) in the 1870s. In each case, the struggles directed everyone's attention away from political issues and toward religion, thereby steeling the resolve of those attacked.

Further, attacking religion is a red herring, argues Lenin, for it diverts attention from the central question of opposition to economic subjugation. The reason: if the yoke of religion is the product of the economic yoke, if, in other

words, religion is a secondary, idealist phenomenon, then an attack on religion misses the mark. Should one achieve the hypothetical aim of abolishing religion, then nothing would change, for the bosses would still grind workers into the dust. Yet even with this argument, one might still be able to argue that the party should hold to an atheistic platform, while acknowledging the secondary role religion plays in the economic struggle. So now Lenin deploys his third argument, stating that any focus on religion splits the united front of the proletariat. The Right knows this full well, attempting to break up the proletariat on religious lines, urging allegiance to the church and claiming that socialism has a program of godless atheism, dividing workers along religious and anti-religious lines, and fomenting anti-Semitic pogroms (especially at the hands of the “Black Hundreds”). So also does the bourgeoisie, which wavers between anti-clericalism in its struggle with the old order for political control and reconciling itself to religion. For these reasons, the party does “not and should not set forth” atheism in its program. Or, as Lenin puts it with one of his characteristic images: “Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.” In other words, a united front is needed, drawing the line not between believer and atheist, but between workers and the owners of capital, whether landowners or the bourgeoisie. People who still hold to a religious position are welcome in the party, as long as they take part in the struggle:

Jews and Christians, Armenians and Tatars, Poles and Russians, Finns and Swedes, Letts and Germans — all, all of them march together under the one common banner of socialism. All workers are brothers, and their solid union is the only guarantee of the well-being and happiness of all working and oppressed mankind.

All of which raises the question: was Lenin

consistent in his dealings with religion? At first sight, he appears remarkably inconsistent: the party may systematically seek to educate everyone concerning the deleterious effects of religion, yet it refuses to make atheism a platform, accepting religious believers in a united front against the capitalists and landowners. Did Lenin, then, wage a revolutionary war against God and yet offer sops to religion, playing up to workers in a cowardly fashion so as not to alienate new members? Critics certainly thought so, particularly among the anarchists, who wanted a more consistent line. As may be expected, Lenin argues that the position is entirely consistent, invoking both the dialectic and the pedigree of Marx and Engels. The key is that the economic and political struggle is primary, while the issue of religion is secondary. In this light, the complex party platform in relation to religion — both a firm position against religion and the refusal to require atheism as a pre-requisite to party membership — begins to make sense.

Yet Lenin does fall short on what may be called the dialectic of collectives, for here he is not dialectical enough. Behind his treatment of the party’s explicit platform on religion and the acceptance of a believer within the party lies the distinction between collective and individual approaches to these matters. In effect, he asks: do we operate from the basis of the private individual, allowing full reign to individual freedom of conscience even within the party, or do we begin with the collective and see what the ramifications are? This question is implicit in the statement, “We allow freedom of opinion within the Party, but to certain limits, determined by freedom of grouping.” If the collective has come to agreed-upon positions, through open debate (Lenin was a great proponent of arguing vehemently and openly, for this produced a healthy party) and congresses, then those who join need to abide by those positions. At various times, he attacked Mensheviks, liquidators, the Bund, and many others, not because of his supposedly dictatorial ambitions, but because they did not

abide by collectively-agreed positions. The same applied to religion.

In “The Attitude of the Workers’ Party to Religion,” Lenin provides three examples: one of a priest, the other of a worker, and the third of the God-builders. The case of the priest is not an accident, for it both sharpens the issue and was a common question at the time, especially in Western Europe. In contrast to the unqualified affirmative usually given, Lenin states: if a priest affirms the party program, if he shares the aims of the party and works actively to achieve them, then of course he may join. And if there is a tension between his religious belief and communism, then that is a matter for him to sort out alone. But if the priest sets out to proselytize within the party, actively seeking to persuade others to his religious point of view and thereby not abiding by the collective position of the party, then he is not welcome and will be stripped of his membership. The same principle applies to a believing worker, who should not merely be permitted to join, but who should be actively recruited. All the same, should he too attempt to persuade others of his views, he will be expelled. So also with the God-builders, albeit with a twist: here he uses the same principle, pointing out that if someone says “socialism is my religion” for the sake of addressing workers, for the purpose of getting the message across, then that is no reason to censure such a person. However, if someone propagates God-building by whatever means possible — by argument, in the press, through a school such as one on Capri in 1909 — then that is unacceptable. Note here, however, that he does not state that such a God-builder should be expelled from the party; he or she is to be censured. Why? The God-builders, especially Lunacharsky and Gorky, were close comrades and Lenin was keen to keep them in the party. Indeed, he was notorious for working closely with those whom he attacked in print.

At first sight, this argument seems quite reasonable, since anyone who joins a political organization should subscribe to its platform.

Otherwise, why join at all? But is this a fully collective position? If we stay with the minimal notion that a more or less democratically agreed platform is binding on even the minority who disagrees, then it may be regarded as collective. Yet this approach hardly distinguishes the communists from any other political party in (capitalist) parliamentary democracies. For this reason, I suggest that we may go a step further: within a collective movement the imposition of one will over another is anathema. A collective will is not the assertion of uniformity from above, not even the vote of a majority over minority, but a collective agreement that arises from the complex overlaps of beliefs, aspirations, even foibles that are given full and open expression. Only when these many-colored expressions are allowed full rein, pursuing all manner of possibilities until they collapse in dialectical exhaustion, does a collective will emerge. Or rather, the very act of enabling such free expression and freedom of conscience is the embodiment of such collectivity, the result of which turns out to be a collective will. In short, a completely collective approach is the best guarantee for full freedom of conscience. The problem is that Lenin did not make that explicit argument.

The National Question

“Sometimes closer ties will be established after free secession!”

DOES HE MAKE THAT ARGUMENT in the case of two closely related matters, concerning the national question and religious minorities? Time and again, Lenin returns to what was called the national question, namely the issue as to how the many and varied ethnic groups would relate to one another in a proposed communist state. These debates came to a peak in the mid-teens of the twentieth century, when reshaping Russia became a real possibility after the 1905 revolution. Would the communists follow a tsarist policy of subordinating all of the linguistic and ethnic variety of the Russian empire to an

enforced “Great-Russian nationalism”? How would they respond to pushes for local languages to be taught in schools, to political autonomy by places from Ukraine to the Far East, from Tatars to Samoyeds?

Time and again, Lenin reiterates the same position: “Whoever does not recognize and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality is not a Marxist.” It may concern the question of history in schools, the language of instruction in those schools, or the official languages used by governments, or indeed the nature of such government itself; it may arise in proposals by local bishops, in response to Right-wing attempts to foster patriotism and anti-minority sentiment; it may come up in the context of debates in the Duma and even in bills proposed by the Social-Democratic representatives. But the response is the same: self-determination, national autonomy, linguistic freedom, no imposition of one nation over the other, and no annexations in any peace treaty, all of which was to be embodied in incontrovertible legislation. Or, as one draft of the proposed national equality bill put it: “All nations in the state are absolutely equal, and all privileges enjoyed by any one nation or any one language are held to be inadmissible and anti-constitutional.”

The reasons Lenin gives for such a position are remarkably similar to those put forward in defense of his position concerning a believer who wishes to be a member of the party. To begin with, the imposition of one language, one ethnic identity and one system of education comes from both the reactionary defenders of autocracy and the bourgeoisie, inevitably supported by the church. Second, the focus on national issues is, like the focus on religion, a distraction from the central issue of economic oppression. Matters of language, ethnicity, education, and even the identity of states are strictly secondary concerns that should be subordinated to the primary one of economic and class struggle. And that brings us to his third point: nationalism splits

the working class in terms of these secondary concerns. Indeed, these divisions are actively fostered by the ruling classes to drive a wedge between workers. By contrast, the working class is inescapably international, for economic exploitation and class conflict cut across national lines, uniting workers (and peasants). Workers of all languages, cultures, and ethnicities need to come together in a united front, for class is always primary — precisely the same argument used in regard to religion.

But now Lenin encounters a question unique to the national question, although it will turn out to be a question that brings him close to my argument for a radical freedom of conscience (for which I criticized Lenin for not being dialectical enough). If one espouses complete self-determination of peoples within a communist system, does that provide the right to secede at any time? Lenin is guarded. On the one hand, self-determination should permit room to secede from any coalition of states; on the other hand, secessions are not desirable for the good of the communist cause. In Lenin’s words:

We are in favor of autonomy for all parts; we are in favor of the right to secession (and not in favor of everyone’s seceding!). Autonomy is our plan for organising a democratic state. Secession is not what we plan at all. We do not advocate secession. In general, we are opposed to secession.

He begins by reiterating the standard position: autonomy for everyone. But then he extends this point to state that every part has the “right to secession.” Note the subtle shift: autonomy appears without a qualifier, but secession is a right. The parenthetical comment clarifies what that right means: everyone may have the right, but we are certainly not keen on everyone exercising this right, for if they all seceded, the whole project would be immeasurably weakened. Realizing he has perhaps let the cat peek a little too much out of the bag, he attempts to push it back. Well, autonomy is part of our

plan, but secession is not really part of that plan, even if it is consistent with autonomy, even if you have a right to secede. In fact, secession is not in the plan at all; or rather, it is in the plan, for we are opposed to it.

Has Lenin come full circle and undermined the standard position on self-determination and autonomy? Perhaps realizing the implications of his argument, he now adds a crucial qualifier: "But we stand for the right to secede owing to reactionary, Great-Russian nationalism, which has so besmirched the idea of national coexistence that sometimes closer ties will be established after free secession!" In our current context, he says, in which tsarist nationalism and chauvinism have so alienated different groups, in which the Russian empire has systematically oppressed minority languages, peoples, and religions, the right to secession is needed. Now appears the first glimmer of a dialectical moment: in fact, closer ties may sometimes develop if everyone is allowed to secede. He is not quite certain at this point, his "sometimes" leaving the observation serendipitous. A few years later, however, the uncertainty of the earlier formulation dissipates and the dialectical nature of his argument comes to the fore. In the heat of events in 1917, Lenin reasserts the crucial positions concerning the renunciation of annexations and the real right to secession. But now its dialectical outcome is stressed with equal determination. Given that communism will be strengthened by greater cooperation, if not as large a state as possible, it endeavors to draw peoples closer together, yet it does so not through violence but through the free union of working people throughout the world. Or in a sharp dialectical formulation: "The more democratic the Russian republic, and the more successfully it organizes itself into a Republic of Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, the more powerful will be the force of voluntary attraction to such a republic on the part of the working people of all nations."

One may compare a worker who is con-

stantly harassed by her boss, micro-managed in order to ensure she acts as she should. The result is that she works badly, takes sick leave whenever possible, has low morale, and looks to escape at the first opportunity. However, should she be allowed to do things her way, to work in the way she sees best and without interference, preferably without a boss at all, it may actually turn out that she does a far better job, is happier, more efficient, and willing to become part of the larger whole. The closeness of this position to my earlier dialectical argument concerning radical freedom of religious conscience in a collective context should be clear. The more we encourage radical freedom, whether of national self-determination, of religious expression, or whatever, the more will it foster a deeper and longer-lasting collective experience.

Lenin and the Bund

"For the sake of all the gods that be."

ALL OF THE ABOVE came to its sharpest expression in relation to religious groups, especially the Jews. More specifically, the question of the Bund's relations with the RSDLP pushes the dialectical position I have argued above to its next step: if full autonomy does take place, and if those who have pursued their own distinctive agendas do come back seeking a united front, then what do you do? Do they retain their autonomy in the new arrangement, or does one move past autonomy to a new level of unity? The first may be characterized as the Bund's position; the second was Lenin's preference.

One of the most persistent themes in all of Lenin's writings is the RSDLP's opposition to anti-Semitism. Again and again he attacks the tsarist and right-wing "pogrom-mongers," who attempted to whip up sectarian hatred, split the working class, and divert people's attention from economic and political problems. On a number of occasions, the social-democratic representatives in the Duma proposed clearly-worded bills stressing that position. Jews, along with other religious and ethnic groups, would not be dis-

criminated against and would have full equality before the law. For instance, the bill proposed in March 1914 points out that of all the many peoples in Russia, the Jews are subjected to the harshest discrimination and persecution. In particular, states the preamble to the bill, Jewish workers suffer under the double burden of being both workers and Jewish. So the bill stipulates that no one in Russia, regardless of sex and religion, is to be restricted in any way on the basis of origin or nationality. More specifically, "All and any laws, provisional regulations, riders to laws, and so forth, which impose restrictions upon Jews in any sphere of social and political life, are herewith abolished."

However, when it came to the Bund and its relations with the RSDLP, Lenin took a different line. The Bund repeatedly requested that it become part of the RSDLP, but that it should be accepted as an autonomous group within a federated party. At the many party congresses, the Bund was nearly always present, repeatedly asserting its position, engaging in lengthy debates and negotiations. Yet, although the RSDLP accepted the Bund at the first and fourth congresses, Lenin persistently refused their unrelenting push for autonomy. Is this not an outright contradiction with his position concerning national autonomy in a Soviet state? Not immediately, especially if we keep in mind the earlier distinction between freedom of conscience in regard to the state and in respect to the party. In regard to the former, Lenin clearly stresses the point that the Jewish question in Russia is a particular instance of the national question, sharpening the issue in light of the persecution of the Jews. Thus, as with all groups, the Jews should have all the freedoms of any other religious and ethnic group in the new state. By contrast, the Bund's membership of the party should follow the same guidelines for individual believers and even priests. They may join by subscribing to the party platform, but they are not permitted to advocate any position that is contrary to that platform — in this

case an autonomous membership. The reasons given for this position are the same as those with respect to members with religious beliefs and the national question: the need to avoid a diversion that splits the working class along religious and

The more we encourage radical freedom, whether of national self-determination of religious expression or whatever, the more will it foster a deeper and longer-lasting collective experience.

ethnic lines, and thereby the need for a united front that cuts across those lines.

Now we come to the core of the differences between the Bund and the RSDLP. For the latter, class was the key and solidarity must be formed on class lines; all else is secondary, no matter whether it is religion or ethnic identity. For the Bund, anti-Semitism was the core issue, for anti-Semitism is a universal phenomenon that leaps across class lines. The case for autonomy was made by references to workers who had participated in pogroms, indicating that anti-Semitism had taken root among the proletariat. Not so, replies Lenin: anti-Semitism cannot be universalized, for it has specific class features, belonging at this day and age to the reactionary ruling class and the rising bourgeoisie. And if workers do join pogroms, it proves not that they are anti-Semitic, but that they have been deceived by the pogrom-mongers (as in so many cases in which workers are split by the ruling classes).

At first sight, the case of the Bund is like that of the priest: join by all means, but do not

attempt to advocate a position contrary to the core of the party platform. At this level, Lenin appears perfectly consistent with the position, outlined earlier, in regard to party membership. A closer perusal reveals that the situation is not the same, for the primary issue with the priest or indeed worker is religious belief, while the key issue for the Bund is membership with autonomy, on the basis of a universal notion of anti-Semitism. Now the situation of the Bund begins to leak into the national question, where Lenin articulates a clear position on self-determination and yet holds back at the last minute on the question of secession. To recap, groups have full autonomy and the right to secession, but secession is not part of the plan at all. I would suggest that the Bund's request pushes over into this territory, straddling both party membership and the structure of the state.

Earlier I criticized Lenin for falling short of a fully dialectical position, in which complete autonomy, pushed to its dialectical extreme, may well produce a far deeper unity, a stronger collectiveness — although he did glimpse such a dialectical approach in the declaration after the October Revolution. How does this apply to debates with the Bund? In many respects, the Bund pushed Lenin's position to its logical conclusion, continually asserting the desire for membership with autonomy. In response to this persistent request, Lenin seems to have fallen short, at least in part, resisting this push in the name of avoiding diversions and building a united front. I wrote "in part," since in one respect at least it seems to me he was correct, for persistent and unrelenting autonomy leads inevitably in a case like this to Zionism: "you will turn the regrettable isolation of the Bund into a fetish, and will cry that the abolition of this isolation means the destruction of the Bund; you will begin to seek grounds justifying your isolation, and in this search will now grasp at the Zionist idea of a Jewish 'nation,' now resort to demagoguery and scurrilities."

Is this the outcome of the resolute isolation

of the Bund? Now the situation becomes interesting, specifically through the Bund's refusal to join on existing terms. Throughout the long and fractious relationship with the RSDLP, the Bund took many positions. At times they argued; at times they broke off negotiations and stormed out; at times they came to an agreement for a united front that broke down sooner rather than later. However, it was less through their explicit arguments than their acts that the Bund realized the full extent of the dialectic of radical freedom of conscience that I have been pursuing. In order to see how this act-based realization unfolded, let me fill out this story with a few details.

The General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia was established at a conference in Vilno in 1897, out of various Jewish Social-Democratic groups. At the first congress of the RSDLP, the Bund became members while maintaining autonomy in regard to questions pertaining to the Jewish proletariat. By the time of the second RSDLP congress, the Bund left the party after the rejection of its insistence on autonomy and recognition as the sole representative of Jewish worker issues. By 1906, at the fourth congress (usually designated as the "Unity" congress), the Bund re-joined, along with the Mensheviks. But the unity was short-lived and tensions continued through to the October Revolution and beyond. It is as though they took the RSDLP position on self-determination to heart and held to it.

Yet in 1921, after the October Revolution, the Bund dissolved itself and many of its members joined the renamed Russian Communist Party as full members, finally relinquishing their stand on autonomy. I would suggest that this act provides an unexpected answer to a question Lenin already asked in 1903: "Is this isolation to be preserved, or a turn made towards fusion?" Let me misinterpret Lenin slightly and push his question further, since we now begin to move beyond my earlier argument in relation to autonomy and the national question, where

Lenin glimpsed the possibility of full collective autonomy: if you grant, in the name of a deeper collective, autonomy free reign and if it then achieves the dialectical result of thoroughly collective unity, what do you do then? Do you continue to allow autonomy for the sake of that unity, or is there a moment when the autonomy fades away, having achieved its task? Is the Bund's joining with the party in 1921 the answer to that question? We may cite all manner of other reasons, such as the practical realization that they would be able to do far more as party members, that the new Soviet state required as united a front as possible. But I would suggest that the Bund in its own way, perhaps unwittingly, lived out the logic that lay at the heart of Lenin's position.

Conclusion: Radical Freedom of Conscience

ON THREE OCCASIONS, Lenin faced the question of freedom of conscience in relation to collective issues. On religion he argued that one may join the party if one is a religious believer, but that one must abide by the party platform and not propagate alternative positions within

the party. Resolving the tension between one's own faith and the platform is entirely one's own concern. On the national question he went further, advocating self-determination and the right to secession, but then arguing that although one may have the right to secession it is certainly not in the interest of the new state for everyone to do so. Yet after the October Revolution, he glimpsed the potential of a radical and potentially risky freedom of conscience in which its full expression would lead to a deeper and voluntary collective identity. On the relations with the Bund it was less Lenin's own explicit observations or indeed those of the Bund that realized this dialectical possibility. Instead, I suggested that the Bund's own acts, in terms of a long history of alternately joining the party, leaving, and then finally dissolving itself after the revolution, may well be read as a realization of the internal dialectical logic of Lenin's own position — one that he was wary to entertain to its full extent.

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Marxism Today: Some Observations

PAUL BUHLE

A NEW EDITION OF *MARXISM IN THE U.S.* seems to have come at a propitious historical moment not only for global society but also for phenomena that can still, with many reservations, be called Marxism, Marxist ideas, Marxist-based projects. The particular crises at hand, economic, social, political, and ecological, are so numerous and fast-breaking that headlines are likely to overtake specifics even before words reach print. But crises they are. Hence, the return to a subject that appeared, according to dominant liberal and conservative narratives, to have been dead and gone, following the collapse of the East Bloc and the transformation of China into a global capitalist giant.

The “rediscovery of Marx,” not only in the United States but in many corners of the world, is bound to be a most intriguing development for new, especially young, readers. Whether this rediscovery is rooted only in the spreading catastrophes, often more acute for the young than the old, or in the perception that hardly any place remains on the planet unconquered by capitalism, may not matter much for our purposes here. Nor do we know very well, at this writing, what the future, near as well as far, will do with the rediscovery. My main effort is to make some rapidly disappearing history available to the reader, but also to point out that large

chunks of this extended history keep happening, and that they count. It was my own intent, in the launching of the New Left magazine *Radical America* in 1967, to foster a Marxism worthy of the challenge of U.S. society, neither dogmatic (we used to say “mechanistic”) nor sour, but exuberant, creative and linked directly to social movements and activists themselves. Things never work out simply and sometimes they seem not to work out at all. Still, here we are in an explosive new decade yearning for radical, useful interpretations.

All this is so obvious that, at first glance, the absence of a Marxist revival would be more mysterious. The Marxism of today is overwhelmingly a critique of an uncertain, often staggering economic and social system, a central but no longer an altogether self-confident, dominating force within a severely troubled global system. The anti-Hegelians who long ago argued for a Marxism without teleology seemed to have had their point made for them. Except that without teleology, Marxism tends to flatten into a lukewarm social democracy surviving as a political force only by giving up the goal of transcending the system and with it, the social relations of the work that, so far, goes on through one technological development after another, alienated as ever.

The premise of *Marxism in the U.S.*, as I began to pore through old newspaper files during the New Left years of the later 1960s — turning, a decade later, to interviewing octogenarian survivors — was the role of Marxist thinkers in relationship with actual mass movements. The political place where I started, struggling to answer or at least reframe questions bearing immediately upon the creation of a campus an-

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tiwar movement, led me slightly beyond straight intellectual or political history where theorists have always had difficulty finding their way or at least their audience. A laconic leftwinger of the 1910s quipped that writing books had ruined more socialists than had drink, though each had taken its share. The United States has produced few great Marxist theorists but many effective organizers, popularizers, and strategists of the kind who formulated and developed the unique vision of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Stumbling forward myself from a collapsed New Left, trying to understand the deeper histories of the Left in immigrant communities that continued speaking their native tongue, I discovered a creativity of adaptation, from the earliest days in blue collar neighborhoods to the civil rights era and beyond.

In part, I had been conducting a study all along, often unbeknownst to myself, of what we might call cultural sediments that made the Left real within sections of working class life. German blue-collar neighborhoods of the 1860s-70s, as well as workplaces, had been the source of a briefly powerful socialist and anarchist (or rather, "Social Revolutionary") movement, as did the emerging Jewish, Slavic, and other newer immigrant neighborhoods at the end of the century. The Popular Front, thirty or so years later, depended upon these neighborhoods and their children, as well as upon kinds of culture already different from the cultures of the ethnic clubhouse and union headquarter. To the familiar charge that these groups held "foreign" ideas, they were indeed "foreign" to much of mainstream American culture and society, but responding very much to the conditions in front of them.

I was keenly aware of time running out on my reaching the remnants of historic leftwing movements. The day of the old time editors and of mostly self-taught Marxist intellectuals was passing, although it had not quite yet passed. I quickly learned that even the works written within private libraries (more often, in

public libraries or the back rooms of leftwing newspapers) and cramped apartments had once carried the prospect of reaching thousands of activists in organized branches of parties or at least sympathetic to them. The writers of these works ventured on speaking tours among fellow

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oldtimers, meeting devotees until the end. By the early 1990s, the memory of this kind of role had faded badly, even while the histories and legends of leftwing thinker-activists in other parts of the world became more thoroughly documented by new generations at home and abroad. To say that these assorted developments have offered me conceptual as well as research problems for the current edition of *Marxism in the United States* would be a considerable understatement.

Still, there are many items of new as well as renewed interest. When a twenty-something activist — returning to graduate school when a phase of well-paid, unionized blue collar worker ended with the job — emailed me somewhat sheepishly that only attractive leftwing websites held his attention, he captured a bit of the persistent reality. Behind the paucity of grand theory written on these shores has been a rank-and-file reality. Tomes and theoretical journals, from the early years of the century onward to the 1960s, mostly went unread even by party members loyal enough or ambitious enough to buy them.

True to the leftwing past, activists of Students for a Democratic Society, including those

avowing their Marxism within the doctrinaire circles of assorted Leninist factions, were rarely deep readers, nor were the successor cadre-style activists of the 1970s, before that movement faded. Socialist conferences such as the annual events in New York and Chicago up to the present time offer bite-sized theory to good effect, but may possibly measure the depth of understanding for most listeners. An impressive raft of books has indeed appeared since the New Left, created by veterans of the 1960s movements; their connection with ongoing social struggles remains a problem for discussion.

Then again, there is the question of how even the most influential efforts of the American Left have been understood by the outside world. Radical journalist John Nichols performed a remarkable turnabout of the current right wing slogans with *The 'S' Word: a short history of an American Tradition... Socialism* (2011). Nichols did not wish to claim that Marxist or socialist doctrines had ever taken much hold in national policies in their own name, but rather that at least from Marx's little-understood (until recent work, that is) correspondence with Lincoln, and arguably earlier, reform notions owed much to the socialist tradition. It would be difficult, indeed, to parse the egalitarian triumphs, separating out the imperial projects abroad that accompanied them, from Andrew Jackson's war on Indians (simultaneously on the Bank of the United States) to Harry Truman's GI Bill and onward through the last great burst of reform, during Lyndon Johnson's tenure, not to mention gay marriage and drones, policies twinned under Barack Obama. Nichols' point was made for him (and all of us) when the use of "Socialism" as a hate word prompted large numbers of Americans, asked in recent opinion polls, to say that they would probably like socialism better than capitalism! Not likely, however, the socialism of any older version.

The giant change from the Marxist past is, obviously, that a now largely absent, bemuscle industrial proletariat long considered destined

to seize the factories, is obviously not going to Make The Revolution. At least, not in the United States. Technological workers in every sector, likewise health workers, certainly can shut down the system, but this is something different. The backup to the often defeated and disappointing domestic class struggle has forever been the struggle far away. Major candidates in the fall political season have dropped "working people," let alone "working class," entirely, for "middle class"; more amazingly, so have union functionaries urging their favorite candidates upon the public. Today, the renewed presence of a global conflict along class (as well as other) lines, is often marked by tactical innovation, but also by the current absence of some vast and connected, international movement for socialism along with a credible "socialist homeland," notwithstanding Cuba, Venezuela, etc.

Snapshot of a moment: At the Left Forum in New York, April, 2012, the crowd is more young than old (a distinct change from a decade earlier), the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has something like the cult-prestige accorded to Jean Paul Sartre a half-century earlier (with perhaps a similar degree of verbal mystery), and while "Marx" and "Marxism" are not heard in every panel and workshop, their presence is undeniable. Indeed, the workshops outflank the panels (with its famous members) by sheer numbers of participants, overall. People wish to learn what to do, how to do it, quite as much as they are looking for deep, theoretical meanings. What could Marxism look like, in only a few years, amid occupations, the global struggle for an end to wars and toward a radical democratization and ecologically sustainable economy? That is a query worth posing, if answers remain beyond what we can securely grasp today.

SOME AVENUES WERE NOT FOLLOWED in the first and second editions of *Marxism in the U.S.*. Much useful scholarly effort since 1990 has been devoted, as the careful reader will note, to the extension of Marxist ideas into various

areas as history, literature, ecology, economics and so on, as more books (and journals) on these subjects have included Marxists and related leftwingers as subjects. To take a case in from my own subsequent work: I could not, before extended research and interviewing on the subject of the Hollywood Blacklistees, have appreciated the Hollywood Quarterly in its reddish-pinkish-golden years (1945-49). The dive into film history at large, and television history that followed was by no means mine alone. But the idea that screenwriting and other work on films — marking a real struggle over the content of the single most significant cultural or artistic media of the day — actually had a significant Marxist history in the United States with leftwing writers, directors, actors, and technicians of all kinds in dialogue, was a revelation.

Now that I look back from a further distance upon the 1960s-70s, I see better what I had only begun to glimpse: the power of the trailing penumbra from the Popular Front milieu, as a key trend within popular culture and its study, even as the counter-culture seemed to pose a wholly different kind of challenge to the reigning system. The Popular Front's severe cultural critics, when not vulgar red-baiters, have mostly been, historically, aesthetes who view themselves as radical avant-gardes, treating film as a species of literature and convinced of the corrupting power of popular culture. They naturally would not see film-making from the inside, as a set of socialized work relations with the struggles of a variegated, partially radicalized workforce. The later development of auteur criticism pointed up the artistry of film but often removed the context and history, with similarly stifling results. More recent studies in folk music and jazz, modern dance, and theater have produced a similar scholarship of nuance, highlighting the accomplishments (emphatically including interracial milieux and movements) along with the obvious limitations of the Popular Front impulse.

There are other areas in which the two earlier editions of *Marxism in the U.S.* also came up significantly short. The exploration but also the popularization of the criticism of Soviet Communism's degeneration and the resulting effects upon the global Left fell, at least in a Marxist sense, mainly if by no means only to the Trotskyist movement and its leading intellectuals during the 1930s-40s. Socialist and liberal anticommunists for their part largely abandoned Marxist critique wholly and often explicitly. Defense of liberal capitalism and the U.S. role in the world had become their destiny and for a large number, their occupation as well.

During those two crucial decades, making Trotsky's own texts available and glossing them could be described as the real contribution of such an indefatigable intellectual and agitator as Max Shachtman, translator and popularist, group leader, stirring orator and inveterate factional in-fighter. In several important ways, Shachtman followed a favorite of mine, Louis C. Fraina, first U.S. publicist of the Russian Revolution by way of a documentary classic, in 1918. Trapped within the factional brawl of the day, Fraina never reached readers the way John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, and as noted below, his pioneering work sank quickly into obscurity. Shachtman for his part wrote, translated, and edited even further against the grain: most leftwingers did not want to hear what he had to say or judged it to be self-serving (a criticism at times painfully accurate) by those whose wild imaginations projected their small factions to replace the Communist Party and lead the proletariat to victory. Meanwhile, the intense followers of Trotsky notoriously fell out among themselves on a regular basis.

The tragedy of Max Shachtman was more than personal, and concerned more than Trotsky or Trotskyism alone: by the time his own creative intellectual work had consolidated, he had slipped so far rightward that "Communism" had become a great bogeyman to be fought with the help of any allies available. He had

turned, in his last years, into a supporter for George Meany, the most conservative leader in American labor history. Some of his last disciples became leading neoconservatives, while others led socialist groups that still survive and

The nation-wide “Occupy” movement seemed to create a new and yet different constituency for change, and actually shifted the national debate from Democrat versus Republican to the one percent versus the ninety-nine percent.

are robustly leftwing. Shachtman and his ilk obviously outlived their own time, a thought that weighed heavily upon me, a middle aged radical penning *Taking Care of Business*, a study of U.S. labor-bureaucratic history with a continuing backstory as strange as that of the deeply conservative Sam Gompers’ youthful Marxism.

Within this general milieu but hanging onto socialistic ideals, Michael Harrington, whose oratory prompted me to join Democratic Socialists of America in 1984 (seeking to build a branch in Providence, Rhode Island for some years following), was described briefly, but his larger influence partially neglected. Harrington gave his best efforts to the global movement of a temporarily revived Socialist International, joining hands with Scandinavians and others in a vision of egalitarian, global social democracy. His work supporting Jamaican socialists alone would have been a worthy accomplishment, no matter that Michael Manley’s best efforts were thrown off and out by the power of the U.S. State Department and its pawn, the Jamaican Labor Party. This moment is remarkable mainly

because European social democracy happened to be in its last phase before going down and out as a threat or even a moral challenge to capitalism. A moment frozen in time, barely remembered but worthy of recollection, this prospect of a different hemispheric Left, a different view of life, remains alive in the music of Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley.

Harrington’s books, with the exception of *The Other America*, had a short life. Yet he was the last American socialist of the century to have the degree of respectability to be treated sympathetically in the pages of the *New York Times*. Radical figures like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, not to mention Edward Said, outside but not too far outside the realm of Marxist criticism, remained beyond the pale, perennially convicted of disloyalty.

On another site of the small leftwing intellectual world, I mistakenly neglected one Jack O’Dell, African-American Marxist and appropriate symbol of the late Popular Front. Nikhil Pal Singh’s 2010 collection of O’Dell’s essays brings back a crucial figure connecting the Left with the civil rights movement and its successors, all the way to the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign of 1988. A leading Black Communist during the 1950s, when the CPUSA was effectively underground, briefly a key strategist and aide to Martin Luther King, Jr. (until pressured out by the FBI’s squeeze on King), O’Dell went on to work and write unsigned editorials for *Freedomways* (1963-87) during most of the years of the journal’s existence. O’Dell’s keen analyses, Marxist in quality without any doctrinal claims, pointed to the building of coalitions, seizing historical opportunities, and working simultaneously inside and outside the Democratic Party, inside and outside Pan-African movements.

This edition of *Marxism in the U.S.* was, it may be noted, prepared against the background of the Wisconsin Uprising, a massive movement February-April, 2011, and the long months beyond. For perhaps ten weeks, near-daily demonstrations occasionally growing to more than

a hundred thousand featured large American flags side by side with “General Strike!” banners and hilarious satirical posters, pre-union chants, tractors, and other times motorcycles circling the capitol in protest, and of course the weeks’ long occupation of the capitol building itself. The crowd fused a “union” message with defense of the social state. “Marxism” was invisible, but what to make of the surge of class-consciousness posed within social-consciousness, on a scale not seen in generations?

What avowed Marxists in groups did make of it was, in large part, overly familiar. Leftwing groups based in New York, Chicago and Detroit, came to explain to Wisconsinites what should happen now, and how they were letting down the cause by giving in to popular sentiment supporting the fourteen Democratic state senators who fled to Illinois, or giving in to the labor federation that discussed a General Strike in its press, but lacked the means or will to carry it out.

Behind these deeply sincere complaints aimed at a kind of vindication after decades of disappointments, lay the difficulty of outsiders seeking to grasp the unique traditions of the state (beginning with the traditions of Robert M. La Follette, who had established the Recall provisions now deployed) but also the changed

nature of the workforce, by this time state government employees, disproportionately women in teaching and healthcare. The horny-handed proletarians on hand, adding an old time flavor to the struggle, were very often union retirees of industries now gone forever. The labor chorus that sprang up and became a key force continuing the public spirit, in and around the Wisconsin State House, of the struggle across the long months from August, 2011 to the June, 2012 election (and defeat) recalled something like a Pete Seeger or La Follette view of American democracy, with civil rights and feminist updates.

Leftwing Wisconsin joined a population more determined than ever to fight for the real gains made in social welfare, education, and the environment. “Solidarity” was sounded in a new key, the enemy attacked and ridiculed with new means and a new sense of humor. The nation-wide “Occupy” movement, inspired in part by and following the events in Wisconsin (as ours was inspired by Tahrir Square and the Arab Spring), seemed to create a new and yet different constituency for change, and for an extended moment, actually shifted the national debate from Democrat versus Republican to the one percent versus the ninety-nine percent. Under police attack and unable to go further,



Occupy evidently faded as well. But the face of the struggle against austerity, across wide parts of the world, had been clear, with every age, every race, and gender represented. How Marxist? The future would tell.

PERHAPS READERS WILL NOT MIND if I add a word more to the story of the personal pre-origins of this study, before my engagement with the local civil rights movement and that living museum known as the Socialist Labor Party. After age sixty, as is well known, childhood memories tend to grow closer. The first hardback book (not comic book) bought for me, at my own request, happened to be a pictorial history of the Civil War, almost certainly because my mother's great grandfather was an Abolitionist farmer who marched with Sherman through Georgia, a strategic campaign dooming the Southern cause and slave system. In her childhood, he lived for a time with the family and with his nephew, an erstwhile drummer boy for the Union troops, reminisced by the hour. Similarly, my only and favorite musical "album" (literally, four 78s) was a Johnny Appleseed musical drama, all parts sung by radio personality and Irish tenor Dennis Day, treasured in part because a great aunt of mine claimed to have on her farm an apple tree "planted by Johnny" (in rural Illinois, this farm might actually have received apple seeds from John Chapman, in Ohio or Indiana, although admittedly many such claims have existed). I wanted a past different from the one presented in movies, magazine and radio. Perhaps I was already destined to publish, one day, a journal titled *Radical America*—although I suspect that an African-American, eighth-grade teacher of mine named Wilborne Bowles also planted the specific love of U.S. history into my head.

One more point in memory, this one largely borrowed. After I joined the small congregation of social historians seeking to tackle the working class and radical story in more than one culture and if possible, more than one language, I had

another experience or two plunging me in the direction of this book. By marriage, I had come into contact with, and in a removed sense joined, a mostly Slavic, blue-collar community at the northern tip of Illinois, near the Wisconsin border.

Here, most amazingly, the remnants of "Cooperative City," as Waukegan, a home of Little Steel, had been known by since the 1910s by its activists, still existed in recent memory. By the end of the Second World War, nearly half its residents were in one kind of coop or another, milk to banking. The Slovene Hall, less than a block from the Slovene Church but with little overlap of membership, contained a library with portraits of Marx and Ivan Molek. Interviewing oldtimers while visiting in-laws in 1981, I found the aging leader, who entrusted me with the printed history of this socialistic institution (he had been waiting, he told me, for someone to ask). My wife, in her childhood, had performed her piano recitals there. Like the nearby Croatian Hall whose leaders had leaned more toward communism than Slovene-style social democracy, but shared the Slovene enthusiasm for Tito, they were part of a left-leaning blue collar scene that slipped out of existence within decades after the war. As of 2012, the very setting is abandoned, surrounded by neighborhoods of houses with doors boarded.

It did not last very long, this world, but it had been a real world of labor activities and secular radical education for several generations. With as good a claim on "American Marxism" as any other, it has remained, for me, an imperishable memory. As with the erstwhile immigrant Jews, Hungarians, Italians, Poles and other immigrants, the equally aged African-Americans, hayseed rural radicals and others who were kind enough to spend time with me, they were my windows into the lost age. Their lifetime dedications (in Yiddish a "shayner, besere velt," a more beautiful and better world) have become mine.

Traitors, Spies and Military Tribunals

The Assault on Civil Liberties During World War I

ERIC CHESTER

ON DECEMBER 31, 2011, President Barack Obama signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2011. Tucked into the bill providing the military with hundreds of billions of dollars were provisions authorizing the President to indefinitely detain in military jails those charged with providing “substantial support” to al-Qaida or the Taliban, and to prosecute these individuals in military tribunals. These provisions could easily be used against those who raised funds for an organization controlled by Islamic fundamentalists with ties to al-Qaida. In addition, the wording is so imprecise that it could lead to the detention of anyone who helped to organize a demonstration, or hosted a website, that promoted the views of Islamic fundamentalism as propounded by al-Qaida.

In signing NDAA (2011), Obama issued a finding stating that he would not detain any U.S. citizen in a military prison as authorized by the bill. In fact, his finding is not legally binding, and the statute remains on the books as enacted by Congress. Furthermore, any future president would not be bound morally or legally to the finding, and would be free to utilize its provisions.

The bill denies U.S. citizens fundamental

rights guaranteed by the Constitution’s Bill of Rights. The right to a trial by a jury of one’s peers in a court of law that adheres to due process is an essential prerequisite to a genuinely democratic society. In enacting NDAA (2011), Congress and the President have taken a significant step toward military rule.

This is not the first time that the question of military tribunals has been raised. Indeed, the struggle to prevent military courts from claiming jurisdiction over civilians has been repeatedly fought since the United States was first founded. The issue has often become acute during times of war, when those in power are eager to sacrifice basic rights to the expediency of the moment. A critical episode in this continuing struggle came during World War I, when the federal government initiated a sustained campaign to quash dissent. As a result, fundamental civil liberties were trampled upon in the rush to jail radicals, pacifists, and militant trade union activists.

In the midst of this wartime hysteria, key members of Congress, with the support of military intelligence, pushed hard to expand the jurisdiction of military tribunals to include opponents of the war. This effort triggered an intense debate that foreshadowed the current controversy concerning NDAA (2011). In the end, President Woodrow Wilson blocked the move, and dissidents continued to be prosecuted within the civilian judicial system, where they were accorded a jury trial. A close examination of this debate can help us to better understand the dangers inherent in NDAA (2011).

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The British Experience

SHORTLY AFTER BRITAIN'S DECLARATION of war on Germany on August 4, 1914, the Liberal government of Herbert Asquith moved to erect an elaborate legal apparatus to crush any opposition. Three days later, on August 7, 1914, the government introduced the Defence of the Realm Act. In its initial version, the Act banned any action hampering the war effort at docks

IWW leaders remained in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, a brutally rigorous maximum security prison, for more than four years after the war had ended. Many of them never recovered from the harsh treatment they received as prisoners.

and railways, and authorized the government to issue regulations to ensure this goal. Those accused of violating the statute or the regulations would be tried by courts-martial, that is military tribunals.

Three weeks later, the government returned with a revised version of the Act. The revised statute extended the zones in which British citizens could be tried before a military tribunal to include any area used for the "training or concentration" of British troops. The Army and Navy high command then declared that the coastal areas of southern and western England, as well as the entire coast of Scotland and Ireland, were covered by the revised statute.

The first two versions of the Defence of the Realm Act sailed through Parliament with minimal discussion and little opposition. In No-

vember, 1914, the Asquith government returned to Parliament with a new version, and found itself embroiled in a volatile debate. This time anyone, including British citizens, could be tried by a military tribunal for allegedly violating the statute, or the regulations issued to enforce it, anywhere within the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the death penalty could be levied against those who were found to be acting "with the intent of assisting the enemy."

Debate on this provision in the House of Lords was extensive and heated. Peers were dismayed with the willingness of the Liberal government to nullify a key mainstay of British liberty going back to the Magna Carta of the 13th century. Richard Haldane, as Lord Chancellor and government spokesperson, admitted that "the principle of trial before a jury is a principle which is very deep" in British jurisprudence, "and one which we should all respect." In the course of this debate, the government agreed to come back to Parliament with a revised version of the statute. In accordance with this agreement, the government proposed the fourth and final version of the Defence of the Realm Act, which was approved by Parliament in March, 1915. The revised Act permitted British citizens charged with violating the statute or the regulations to choose which court system would be utilized to try them. Needless to say, civilians opted to be tried in a civilian court. One clause of the 1915 legislation gave the government an escape valve. An official proclamation could mandate courts-martial for British citizens violating the regulations "in the event of invasion or for special military emergencies arising out of the present war." This section was never invoked in Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), but such a proclamation was issued for all of Ireland in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Uprising of April, 1916.

The regulations issued by fiat to enforce the Defence of the Realm Act proved to be as dangerous threat to civil liberties as the Act itself. Indeed, even after the 1915 legislation limiting

the jurisdiction of military tribunals, the military still exercised tremendous power over civilians. The regulations permitted military commanders to ban anyone from a specified area, forcing the individual to move to another part of the United Kingdom. Another regulation authorized the military to raid any house or office to search for printed material that could “cause disaffection” from the war effort. Printing presses seized by the military during a raid could be destroyed to ensure that they were not used to produce seditious literature.

These and other regulations gave the military immense powers to police dissidents within the United Kingdom. In the United States, President Woodrow Wilson was unwilling to grant the military such sweeping authority. Instead, the federal government relied on one regulation, Regulation 27. In addition to banning “false reports,” or “statements likely to cause disaffection,” it also prohibited statements or reports “likely to prejudice the recruiting, training [and] discipline” of the U.S. military. This wording provided the basis for the Espionage Act of June 1917.

Warren and the Espionage Act

DURING THE FIRST MONTHS following the decision to enter the war, U.S. authorities relied on the British experience in developing a strategy to suppress dissent. President Wilson, through his confidante Edward House, turned to William Wiseman for advice. Wiseman headed the U.S. operations of the Secret Intelligence Service, or MI6, the British equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency, but he also cultivated a close working relationship with House.

In January 1917, Wiseman began “working with federal authorities” on legal strategies to counter and disrupt the anti-war opposition. In doing so, he not only gained access to detailed information on the activities of U.S. intelligence agencies, but he was also able “to some extent [to] influence their actions.” Wiseman quickly discovered that “various state and federal police

authorities” were “at loggerheads, and without proper cooperation.” He therefore “drafted a report showing [the] necessity for cooperation and much fuller powers.”

According to Wiseman, this report convinced the administration to formulate a “Conspiracies Bill” for Congressional approval. Wiseman also provided the Department of Justice with a complete copy of the Defence of the Realm Act, including the many regulations that had been issued to enforce it. He reported to his superiors that U.S. authorities had then “based their bill on it.” Wiseman was not engaging in idle boasting.

Charles Warren was the Assistant Attorney General assigned to draft the proposed legislation. A Harvard graduate, Warren had been involved in Democratic Party politics before joining the Justice Department in 1914, where he specialized in enforcing the Neutrality Act during the first years of the war. In October, 1917, Warren sent a copy of the Espionage Act as approved by Congress that June to Rufus Isaacs, Lord Reading, who had recently visited the United States as a special emissary of the British government. Warren pointed to the Espionage Act as a key indication of how “far this country has gone in the direction of your Defence of the Realm Act.”

Title I, Section 3 of the Espionage Act provided the federal government with the legal grounds to incarcerate hundreds of anti-war activists and radical union militants during World War I. Those convicted of violating this section could be imprisoned for up to twenty years. Its provisions closely followed key sections of the Defence of the Realm Act.

The most frequently used provision of Title 1, Section 3 of the Espionage Act provided that anyone who “shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service” of the armed services during wartime would be in violation of the law. In 1918, dozens of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) leaders received sentences of ten to twenty years in maximum-security

federal prisons upon being convicted of violating this provision, in large part because the union's newspaper had printed editorials criticizing the draft.

The actions of the federal government during World War I represented the most sustained assault on civil liberties in the history of the United States. The IWW was left in shambles, and the Socialist Party was a shell of the mass party it had once been. Nevertheless, prominent figures such as former president Teddy Roosevelt insisted that the Wilson Administration was too lenient, and that harsher measures were needed. This position found influential supporters within the federal government as well.

Traitors

ALTHOUGH CHARLES WARREN had drafted the Espionage Act, and initially oversaw its enforcement, he was convinced that it provided an inadequate basis for the total suppression of radical dissidents and anti-war activists. Warren believed that it was essential to move the trials of dissidents from the civilian judicial system to military tribunals, which would be authorized to impose the death penalty on those convicted. The President disagreed, believing that the Espionage Act provided a sufficient basis to effectively quash any organized opposition to the war, and he therefore opposed the drive to expand the jurisdiction of military tribunals.

Warren vehemently objected to the President's decision on this critical issue, so he continued to press for more drastic measures. He was convinced that two key flaws in the existing system would undermine government efforts to repress dissidents. Warren's first objection was that some of those convicted of violating the Espionage Act were released on bail pending final disposition of their legal appeals. In fact, federal district judges usually set such high bail terms that the great majority of defendants charged with violating the Espionage Act remained in prison while waiting their trial or appellate reviews. Still, a few well-known figures, such as

Eugene Debs and Bill Haywood, were released on bail and remained free for months before their verdicts were upheld. Cases such as these incensed Warren.

In addition, Warren was convinced that activists would not be deterred by the lengthy prison sentences being imposed on those convicted under the Espionage Act. Dissidents would risk prison sentences convinced that they would be granted presidential pardons once the war ended. In the end, most political prisoners did not serve their full sentences, although IWW leaders remained in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, a brutally rigorous maximum security prison, for more than four years after the war had ended. Many of them never recovered from the harsh treatment they received as prisoners.

In Warren's view, only the death penalty could deter radicals from engaging in activities that might obstruct the war effort. Obviously, there could be no presidential pardon for those executed. Furthermore, a few executions would provide a signal warning to everyone who was thinking of joining an anti-war group.

In the spring of 1917, Warren developed a double-edged legal strategy to meet these perceived failings in the Espionage Act. He began by arguing that those who actively opposed the war, organized militant strikes, or engaged in sabotage were guilty of treason and should be executed. His original brief supporting this argument does not seem to be extant, but other sources, including a law review article, provide the essential points.

Charges of treason were frequently hurled at anyone who opposed the war. Sensationalized articles in the tabloid press spuriously claimed that dissidents were funded by the German government. These arguments were even made by members of the Cabinet. Postmaster General Albert Burleson categorized the anti-war press as "traitorous," thus defending his decision to bar socialist newspapers from the mails. Nevertheless, Warren was moving much further, proposing that dissidents be tried as traitors,

and, potentially, executed on that basis.

Treason is the only crime specified in the Constitution, with the wording derived from a British parliamentary statute of 1351. Article III, Section 3 of the United States Constitution specifies that treason is either the “levying of war” against the federal government, that is armed revolt, or “adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort.” The authors of the Constitution were concerned that this section could be misused, and thus they specified that a person could only be convicted of treason on the basis of two witnesses who would testify that the defendant committed an “overt act” to further the conspiratorial plot.

Throughout U.S. history, very few individuals have been convicted of treason. Indeed, the federal courts have narrowly limited the scope of the actions that can be defined as providing “aid and comfort” to an enemy in time of war. Already in 1806, Chief Justice John Marshall in writing a prevailing opinion acquitting Aaron Burr had held that treason “should not be extended by construction to doubtful cases,” and that, instead, “crimes not clearly within the constitutional definition should receive such punishment as the legislature in its wisdom may provide.”

The Espionage Act, which Warren had drafted, had been enacted to do exactly this. Nevertheless, Warren sought to vastly expand the scope of the treason charge to cover a wide range of activities including sabotage and organized opposition to the war and the draft.

The charge of treason had been devised to deter the citizens of a combatant nation from providing assistance to the government of an enemy nation. During the period from the start of World War I in August 1914 to the U.S. entry into the war thirty months later, German agents carried on an extensive program of sabotage directed at facilities in the United States that were producing goods for the British war effort. German agents also initiated rather meager attempts to finance pro-German propaganda,

and to incite strikes in factories producing munitions for the British. After the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, U.S. authorities, with the aid of British intelligence, quickly rounded up and detained most of those suspected of cooperating with German agents.

Warren’s belief that the Espionage Act was inadequate did not stem from his fear of the activities of German agents, or those who cooperated with them. Instead, he focused on those on anti-war activists and radicals. In the summer of 1917, the federal government felt especially threatened by the Industrial Workers of the World, which had organized militant strikes in the timber camps of the Pacific Northwest and the copper mines of the West. In a letter to Attorney General Thomas Gregory on August 7, 1917, Warren denounced the IWW strikes as “treasonable.”

The federal government viewed the IWW as a significant threat because it had shown its ability to coordinate effective strikes involving tens of thousands of workers. Still, prosecutions initiated on this basis would have represented a political disaster. Instead, the Department of Justice pointed to acts of violence that caused property damage to recalcitrant corporations. Over the years, the IWW had been vocal in its support for sabotage as a valid tactic in the class struggle, although it had been generally vague in specifically defining this tactic. Once the United States entered the war, and the IWW became a target of government repression, the union publicly disavowed the use of sabotage. Nevertheless, there is credible evidence that Wobblies committed acts of vandalism against strikebreakers during the timber strike that spread throughout the Pacific Northwest in the summer of 1917, and that union leaders sanctioned these tactics.

Thus, the broader issues became focused on the narrower question as to whether those alleged to have committed acts of sabotage could be prosecuted for treason. Warren understood that a charge of treason would be dismissed un-

less he could counter the guidelines set forward by Marshall in the Burr case. He therefore argued that the destruction of property being used “for the successful prosecution of the war may equally constitute treason, and giving aid and comfort to the enemy.” Such actions were covered when “performed with the intent” of aiding the enemy. Warren insisted that in determining

Congress can authorize the military to indefinitely detain anyone, including a U.S. citizen, who provides “substantial support” to al-Quaida and the Taliban.

intent a defendant “must be held to intend the direct, natural, and reasonable consequences of his own act.

Warren was making use of a legal standard of proof that allowed the government to gain convictions on the basis of a minimum of evidence. The “bad tendency” argument is rooted in British common law in relation to libel. A person can be prosecuted for statements uttered or printed that have the “tendency” to encourage listeners or readers to violate the law. The U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that the First Amendment did not protect statements that violated this rule.

Warren was stretching the net cast by the “bad tendency” argument even further than previously. He was proposing that defendants be convicted of treason, that is of assisting the enemy, because their actions objectively aided the German cause. Thus, the prosecution did not have to prove that defendants intended to help the enemy, or even that their actions had resulted in any impact, as long as the govern-

ment could establish the “natural and reasonable consequences” of these actions. This was an argument similar to that used by the government in prosecuting opponents of the war under the Espionage Act, but it required a further jump in the argument to infer a link between those charged with treason and the German government on the basis of the potential results of their actions, even when no evidence of such a link had been uncovered.

Warren had a difficult time finding any precedents for such a vast expansion of the scope of the charge of treason in U.S. case law. Instead, he turned once again to the British legal precedent. Specifically, he cited a ruling by Rufus Isaacs, who had presided as Lord Chief Justice over the trial of Roger Casement, an Irish nationalist involved in the Easter Uprising in Dublin in April 1916. Isaacs had held that any British subject who commits an act “which strengthens or tends to strengthen the enemies of the King in the act of the war against the King” is thereby giving “aid and comfort” to the enemy, and is, therefore, guilty of treason. Casement had been executed on the basis of this ruling. The wording provides such sweeping grounds for prosecution that virtually any opposition to the war, or any strike, could be considered an act of treason.

Attorney General Gregory was prepared to expand the range of the treason charge to cover sabotage, holding that “the destruction of human life or property for the purpose of aiding the enemy” constituted a treasonous act. Nevertheless, the Attorney General rejected Warren’s legal strategy, as it related to the IWW and sabotage. He was convinced that the treason statute failed to provide an effective basis for “dealing with the willful destruction or injury of war supplies or war industries.” Treason was such a high crime, and the penalty for its commission so severe, that “the hostile intent” had to be “clearly demonstrated.” This represented an implicit rejection of Warren’s argument that intent could be inferred from the “natural and

reasonable consequences” of an allegedly treasonous act.

Warren’s proposal to levy the charge of treason against IWW leaders and anti-war activists never moved beyond the Department of Justice. The Administration believed that the death penalty was not needed, and would be unnecessarily provocative. In spite of Warren’s objections, dissidents continued to be prosecuted under the Espionage Act throughout the last months of the war.

Martial Law

IN CONJUNCTION WITH HIS PLAN to widen the scope of the charge of treason, Warren also proposed that Congress impose martial law throughout the United States. Those accused of treason would therefore be tried by military tribunals, and could be executed upon conviction. In a military court-martial, a defendant has far fewer rights, and appeals to a higher authority are far quicker. Furthermore, the judge in a military tribunal is not independent of the prosecution, but rather is an officer acting under orders from the same commanding officers who are directing the government’s case.

Martial law nullified the fundamental right of habeas corpus, that is a defendant’s right to request a review in civil court, before a civilian judge, where the prosecution has to provide credible proof that the accused has committed the crimes specified. Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution guaranteed the right to seek a writ of habeas corpus, and guaranteed that Congress could only suspend this basic right “when in case of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it.”

A declaration of martial law, backed up by Congress, would have granted the armed forces enormous powers, while depriving citizens of fundamental rights. Fortunately, both Attorney General Gregory and President Wilson were wary of moving in this direction, so Gregory commissioned James Proctor to examine the precedents and evaluate the current situation

within that context.

Proctor concluded that the prevailing conditions in 1917 made it “impossible” to declare martial law in any zone within the United States, and, in addition, neither the President nor Congress had the authority to suspend the right of habeas corpus. Although the United States was then engaged in fighting a total, global war, the country itself was peaceful, with “neither invasion, nor threat of invasion, nor any interference with the administration of law by the courts.” Furthermore, martial law could not be imposed, and those charged with treason during time of war still maintained their right to a judicial review of their detention by seeking a writ of habeas corpus in a federal district court.

Proctor was relying on a key Supreme Court decision in interpreting the Constitution on this issue. During the Civil War, the military commander of Union troops stationed in Indiana declared martial law, although the state was not a battle zone. In 1864, Lambden Milligen and four others were charged with plotting an armed attack on a prisoner of war camp holding Confederate soldiers. All five were tried by a military tribunal and sentenced to death. This verdict became a test case for the limits of the military judicial system in the midst of the Civil War.

In 1866, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the judgment of the military tribunal by a unanimous vote. A majority of the Court used the opportunity to issue a sweeping decision upholding the right of civilians to be tried in a civilian court even during a wartime emergency. Military tribunals established in areas “in which the federal courts were open” and in “unobstructed exercise” of their operations “had no jurisdiction” to try civilians from states that had not joined the rebellion for “any criminal offense.”

The majority decision went on to explicitly reject a key prosecution argument. Attorneys for the prosecution had contended that martial law could be imposed anywhere in the United

States since the entire country was mobilized for the war effort, and saboteurs were operating behind the battle lines. In this context, every state had become “in a military sense” a “theater of military operations.” The majority opinion rejected this position even though the judges recognized that Indiana had been threatened with an invasion in the recent past, and might be in the future. Nevertheless, martial law could be imposed only when Confederate troops actually invaded, or when there was a credible and immediate threat of invasion. Until then, the fundamental right to a trial by jury remained intact and irrevocable.

The logical implication of the Milligan decision, as Proctor correctly understood, was that martial law could not be declared in any region of the United States during World War I, and that federal courts therefore maintained their exclusive jurisdiction over civilians charged with any wartime crime, including treason. Warren attempted to circumvent this argument by insisting that World War I posed a set of challenges to government authority that were significantly greater than those posed by the Civil War. Indeed, “under the new organization of warfare introduced by Germany,” which involved “enlisting the services of hosts of civilians” to “cause all the injury possible by undermining propaganda” or committing acts of sabotage, “the question arises whether the whole country has not become a part of the zone of operations of the war.”

In a total war, Warren argued, the economy of the entire country is mobilized to produce the munitions, armaments, and supplies required to supply an army of millions of soldiers. Any activities that might restrict output, whether by organizing strikes or distributing literature criticizing the government, provided a direct threat to the war effort and must be stopped. The imposition of martial law, followed by the execution of targeted dissidents, would crush the opposition and ensure that the war effort continued without disruption.

Supporters of the military tribunal sections of NDAA (2011) have advanced a similar argument. During a Senate debate on the bill, Senator Carl Levin, chair of the Armed Services Committee and a Michigan Democrat who acted as one of the key sponsors of NDAA, insisted that the entire United States had “been made part of the battlefield without any doubt.” Indeed, “on September 11, the war was brought here by al-Qaida.”

This argument, as formulated by both Warren and Levin, is not persuasive. The Civil war was also a total war, albeit not a global one. Furthermore, the Confederates engaged in sabotage throughout the North, and encouraged “peace Democrats” to press President Lincoln to initiate talks leading to a negotiated settlement. Nevertheless, the Milligan case had upheld the basic constitutional right to a trial by jury in a civilian court operating in accordance with the due process of law, and this right prevailed even in the midst of World War I.

Gregory was not swayed by Warren’s brief, and Proctor’s memorandum continued to set the parameters for federal policy throughout World War I. Warren responded by attempting to circumvent the Department of Justice by winning the support of key members of Congress. In January, 1918, Senator Robert Latham Owen, an Oklahoma Democrat, an ally of the Administration and a zealous supporter of the war effort, wrote to the President suggesting that Attorney General Gregory draft “a law authorizing the trial by court-martial” of “citizens of the United States detected in conspiracies involving treason.”

Woodrow Wilson firmly rejected Owen’s suggestion as “a very serious mistake.” Such a move would undercut the civilian judicial system by giving “the impression of weakness,” thereby sending an implicit message of no confidence in the courts. Although Wilson’s definitive rejection of a proposal to expand the jurisdiction of military tribunals to include civilians was made in the context of the charge of treason, he

would maintain a similar position when Warren advanced a new rationale for bringing anti-war activists before military courts-martial.

Spies

BY AUGUST 1917, Warren had abandoned his effort to greatly widen the range of actions covered by the charge of treason for a new legal theory. Bypassing the touchy questions of treason and martial law, Warren argued instead that those who opposed the war, or committed acts of sabotage, were engaging in espionage. In his view, “owing to changes in the conditions of modern warfare,” specifically the efforts made by Germany “to attack and injure the successful prosecution of the war” by a variety of covert means, anyone guilty of violating any section of the Espionage Act in wartime would be tried by a military tribunal as a spy and could be sentenced to death upon conviction.

In drafting the Espionage Act, Warren had already equated opposition to the war to spying. Title 1 of this statute was headed Espionage and its first two sections targeted the usual activities of spies, obtaining secret military information and transmitting it to an enemy nation. Section 3, on the other hand, contained several broadly phrased prohibitions, clauses that were used to prosecute a wide range of radicals and anti-war dissidents. Warren’s new legal theory went a great deal further, holding that those who opposed the war should be tried as spies by military tribunals.

Warren understood that the Milligan case would be cited in opposition to his new proposal. Although Warren recognized that the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Milligan case had limited the times when martial law could be imposed, the ruling did not “necessarily limit” the “application of military law to civilians.” The right to impose martial law arose “out of strict military necessity,” while the authority of Congress to institute military tribunals derived from a very different source, the Constitution.

The first article of the Constitution had

authorized Congress to “declare war,” “provide for the common defence,” and “make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces.” From these general guidelines Warren argued that Congress had the power to override the basic rights guaranteed to citizens of the United States in the Bill of Rights when it determined that the risk to the armed forces of “the inherently dangerous effect” of certain acts “upon the military situation” required such legislation. Thus, he concluded, the Milligan decision had not limited the “power of Congress to legislate under Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution.”

Congress had already enacted legislation holding that civilians could be tried as spies in military tribunals in times of war. In 1806, Congress had held that “all persons not citizens of the United States” who were found “lurking as spies” in the vicinity of military installations could be tried by military tribunal and executed if convicted. In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress had amended this act to include “all persons” found “lurking” near fortifications. This marked a significant extension of the scope of military justice, but it does not seem that anyone was actually prosecuted under the provisions of the amended act. Instead, Union generals relied on courts-martial created on the basis of martial law.

Warren argued that Congress had already asserted its right to determine who could be tried by a military tribunal for spying, and thus it could determine what acts were covered by the charge of espionage. The Constitution gave Congress “the power today to subject to court-martial civilians who commit acts just as injurious to the members of our army and navy” as those who spied on military fortifications.

In 1919, after the war had come to an end, Warren wrote a law review article defending the proposition that Congress could authorize military tribunals to try civilians for acts of sabotage, thereby greatly restricting the range of actions included in his argument. This time

he also conceded that espionage had a clearly defined scope, which did not encompass acts of sabotage, but he nevertheless insisted that the Constitution had given Congress the authority to permit military tribunals to punish “the acts of the destructive enemy agent.” After all, saboteurs might prove to be “more dangerous than spies.”

Warren’s argument in this article comes very close to that advanced by those supporting the relevant provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act. The damage caused on September 11, 2001 was sabotage writ large. The NDAA (2011) does not include a rationale for its sweeping provisions, but implicitly the argument holds that under the provision of the Constitution that gives Congress the responsibility to “provide for the common defense” of the United States, Congress can authorize the military to indefinitely detain anyone, including a U.S. citizen, who provides “substantial support” to al-Quaida and the Taliban. Such individuals, goes the argument, represent a significant threat to the national security of the United States during a time of hostilities, and thus are not protected by the Bill of Rights.

The argument that the Milligan decision did not limit Congressional authority to extend the jurisdiction of military tribunals to civilians is tenuous at best. The decision to overturn the conviction of Milligan could have been made on narrow technical grounds, but Judge David Davis used the opportunity to write an opinion intended to establish broad guidelines on the entire issue. His opinion held that “it is the birthright of every American citizen when charged with crime to be tried and punished according to law.” The controversy concerning the jurisdiction of military tribunals is grounded in “the struggle to preserve liberty and to relieve those in civil life from military trials.” Furthermore, the Constitution “is a law for rulers and people equally in war and peace.” The argument that the fundamental rights embodied in the Bill of Rights “can be suspended during any of the

great exigencies of government” is “pernicious,” and “leads directly to anarchy or despotism.” Although the Milligan case arose out of a trial held under martial law, Davis was making arguments that were designed to restrict the power of military trials at any time and whatever the legal rationale.

The Chamberlain Court-Martial Bill would have greatly increased the power of the military, and would have marginalized the Department of Justice in the effort to quash dissent during World War I. Neither Attorney General Gregory nor President Wilson was prepared to move in this direction, and the issue soon led to a tense confrontation between the President and members of Congress.

The President Responds

WARREN DID NOT JUST DEVELOP a legal theory justifying the use of military tribunals to prosecute civilians as spies for opposing the war and the draft, he sought to bypass the Department of Justice in order to win Congressional approval for his plan. In August 1917, Warren met with Senator Paul Husting of Wisconsin and Wheeler Bloodgood, an attorney who headed the Milwaukee County Council of Defense. Husting was eager to have anti-war activists tried by military courts. Wisconsin had a large population of German heritage, while Milwaukee was a bastion of the moderate wing of the Socialist Party of America. Husting and Bloodgood were incensed that the *Milwaukee Leader*, the newspaper of the Socialist Party of Milwaukee, was still being printed two months following the passage of the Espionage Act. Victor Berger, the editor of the *Leader* and the leader of the right-wing of the Socialist Party, criticized the war as an imperialist venture, and yet he also urged his readers to obey all the laws, to register for the draft, and even to buy Liberty Loan Bonds to fund the war. Husting and Bloodgood realized that the war remained extremely unpopular in Wisconsin. They were worried that Berger’s cautious critique could still

present a threat therefore to government policy, and they were, therefore, anxious to establish a repressive apparatus that could immediately silence the *Leader* and dismantle the Socialist Party. Warren proposed his new legal theory under which opponents of the war would be tried as spies in military tribunals as the solution to this problem. Convinced, Husting and Bloodgood persuaded Warren to write a memorandum providing the legal rationale underlying the proposed legislation.

Warren was undermining administration policy on an important and sensitive issue, while continuing to occupy an influential position of responsibility. Attorney General Gregory was quick to respond. In mid-September, 1917, Gregory met with John Lord O'Brian, a prominent attorney in upstate New York with close ties to the Republican Party. As a result, a new division of the Justice Department was created on October 1, the War Emergency Division. As head of this new division, O'Brian supervised and coordinated the entire array of programs within the Justice Department aimed at suppressing radicals and disrupting the anti-war opposition. Warren was displaced, confined to prosecutions targeting those who violated the Trading with the Enemy Act.

Obviously, Warren had been demoted in retaliation for his persistent advocacy of a policy that would have stripped the Justice Department of its leading role in the suppression of anti-war activities. Nevertheless, he remained an Assistant Attorney General, and he continued to promote the ideas formulated in his memorandum.

The issue finally came to a head in the spring of 1918. Once again, events in Milwaukee appear to have provided the spur to the conflict. A year earlier, soon after the United States had entered the war, Bloodgood had approached Mayor Daniel Hoan, who had been elected on the ticket of the Socialist Party, to probe his support for the war effort. Hoan reassured Bloodgood that he "did not favor" the

anti-war resolution that the Socialist Party had recently passed at an emergency convention in St. Louis. Hoan pledged that he "was ready to assist the Defense Council" in its work, and, indeed, Bloodgood reported, Hoan had provided "active and very helpful assistance" along these lines. In public, Hoan dodged the issue of the war, but with municipal elections approaching in April 1918, Hoan, under pressure from Berger, signed on to the Party's platform criticizing the U.S. entry into the war, and calling for a quick end to hostilities and a negotiated peace.

At the same time as Milwaukee's municipal elections were scheduled, a special state-wide election was called to fill the seat vacated by the death of Senator Husting, who had been killed during a duck hunting trip in October, 1917. Berger stood as the socialist candidate on a platform urging immediate negotiations leading quickly to a peace treaty based on the principle of "no annexations and no reparations." His campaign attracted considerable support beyond the Socialist Party's Milwaukee stronghold, thereby demonstrating a widespread belief that the war should be brought to an end as soon as possible.

In March 1918, Bloodgood returned to Washington, incensed at Hoan's public, albeit reluctant, opposition to the war, and deeply worried by the possibility that Berger could be elected Senator. Of course, the Administration shared Bloodgood's concerns. A month earlier, Berger and four other Socialist Party leaders, including Adolph Germer, its national secretary, had been indicted for violating the Espionage Act.

Bloodgood was convinced that the approach taken by the Department of Justice would be ineffective, and Warren agreed. In Warren's view, only the death penalty could successfully intimidate the anti-war opposition, and thus safeguard the war effort. He insisted that "the moral effect of one man arrested and tried by court-martial was worth a hundred men tried by the Department of Justice in the criminal

courts.” Warren suggested to Bloodgood that Congress enact legislation mandating the Army to “deal with enemy activities.”

At Bloodgood’s urging, Warren began circulating his memorandum. The memorandum, and a bill implementing its argument, were soon in the hands of Senator George Chamberlain, an Oregon Democrat and the chair of the Senate Military Affairs Committee. A few days later, Warren sent a draft to Chamberlain of a proposed bill embodying the legal argument formulated in the memorandum.

On April 16, Senator Chamberlain filed the proposed legislation, claiming that the United States had been “allowing treason to run riot.” He then proceeded to hold hearings on the bill before his committee. (Chamberlain may have been particularly eager to sponsor a bill extending the jurisdiction of military tribunals because Oregon had felt the impact of an IWW strike that had shut down the lumber industry of the Pacific Northwest for several months beginning in the late spring of 1917.)

Initially, Chamberlain received the support of a majority of the Senate Military Affairs Committee for his bill. Supporters of the bill specifically cited the success of Victor Berger’s campaign for a Senate seat as a reason that a more draconian repression was essential. The proposed legislation specifically mandated that those charged in military tribunals under its provisions would be denied bail. According to Chamberlain, “the privilege of bail” had “been used in furthering spy plots.”

The Chamberlain Court-Martial bill, as drawn up by Warren, established a wide definition of espionage in time of war. Those who violated the Sabotage Bill, which would be signed into law by the President a few days after the Chamberlain bill had been introduced, were included. In addition, a provision of the bill barred the “spreading [of] false statements and propaganda.” This replicated the Espionage Act, but Chamberlain went further by holding that those who printed and distributed literature

that undermine the morale of those in the armed forces or that “oppose the cause of the United States” in the war were spies, and, thus, could be tried by a military tribunal. Those convicted of any provision of the bill would “suffer death.”

Warren testified in a closed, executive session during the first days of the Committee’s hearings, voicing his dissatisfaction with the methods being used by the Department of Justice to suppress opposition to the war. This closed session was followed by a series of open hearings. Bloodgood appeared before the committee, expressing his dismay with the situation in Wisconsin. Colonel Ralph Van Deman, the chief of the Army’s Military Intelligence Division, testified it was essential to have tribunals that could “give quick and summary action” to quell those who opposed the war. Since civil criminal courts were “tied up with forms and red tape and law,” military courts were necessary.

Van Deman did not refer to one aspect of the proposed legislation. MID agents tended to view liberal opponents of the war as at least as much of a threat to the government as the IWW and the radical, left-wing of the Socialist Party. As a result, John Lord O’Brien and the attorneys at the War Emergency Division generally disregarded these reports as unreliable. If military tribunals, operating under the auspices of the War Department, supplanted civil courts, the Army’s Military Intelligence Division, and Van Deman, would largely determine who would be prosecuted for their opposition to the war.

Van Deman’s willingness to openly testify in favor of legislation in blatant contradiction to Administration policy is telling. It is hardly likely that he would have agreed to appear in public without the support of some of his superior officers. Woodrow Wilson understood that his authority was being directly challenged, and he moved quickly to meet the challenge. Warren was forced to resign from the Justice Department on April 19, only days after his testimony in executive session. Van Deman was quickly replaced as chief of the Military

Intelligence Division, and then transferred to General Pershing's headquarters staff in Paris. Van Deman's career as an intelligence officer was over, although he remained an Army officer until 1929. His replacement, Marlborough Churchill, followed similar policies, but he did so more discreetly.

Clearly, the Administration was embarrassed and angered by the Committee hearings on the Chamberlain Court-Martial Bill. It therefore moved forcefully to prevent the Chamberlain bill from being further considered by Congress. Attorney General Gregory sent an open letter to Representative William Gordon categorizing the bill as "exactly contrary" to the policy adopted by the Department of Justice. Furthermore, Gregory insisted that Warren had sent his brief and the proposed bill to Congress "without the consent or knowledge of the Attorney General," and without his approval.

On April 20, President Wilson sent his own public letter to Senator Lee Overman, insisting that he was "wholly and unalterably opposed" to the Chamberlain Court-Martial bill. The bill was "unconstitutional" and its passage "would put us upon the level of the very people we are fighting and affecting to despise." Confronted with the imminent threat of a Presidential veto, Chamberlain reluctantly withdrew his bill from consideration. Warren's drive to vastly expand the scope of military tribunals had finally been thwarted.

In the end, the Justice Department retained the primary responsibility for prosecuting anti-war dissidents. The federal government did not lessen its efforts to quash dissent, but it did so within the formal procedures set by the judicial system. Indeed, utilizing of the Espionage Act hundreds of activists were jailed for their opposition to the war, or for initiating strikes, and served lengthy sentences in federal penitentiaries.

Conclusions

WORLD WAR I was intensely unpopular among millions of Americans, especially those in the Western states. In order to silence the opposition, the federal government imposed draconian measures that left the First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech in tatters. The assault on basic rights was more drastic during World War I than in any other period of this country's history. Nevertheless, as severe as the repression became, influential voices sought to make the repressive measures even harsher, to greatly expand the role of the military in suppressing domestic dissent. Only President Wilson's intervention blocked the passage of legislation greatly widening the jurisdiction of military tribunals.

The NDAA of 2011 placed into law many of the provisions that were advocated by Charles Warren during World War I. Citizens of the United States charged with a crime will be stripped of rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and will be subject to trial by a military tribunal. Only the vocal objections of an aroused populace can force the federal government to abandon its assault on basic rights. Understanding past debates on this vital issue is an important part of this process.

Although the United States likes to present itself as a model of democracy, the historical record is very different. Those who are dismayed by the erosion of civil liberties since the destruction of the World Trade Center in September, 2001 need to consider these recent developments in the light of events in past times of crisis.

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

The Church and the Critical Left in Cuba

SAMUEL FARBER

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC Church in Cuba is growing, a recent and unanticipated development. Why? Has there been a big religious revival that has filled the Church pews? Not really. So, if there has not been a major increase in Catholic religiosity, why has the Catholic Church become important? For entirely political reasons. In contrast with the sometimes open warfare that existed, in the sixties, between the Catholic hierarchy and the revolutionary leadership, the relationship has evolved in recent years into a growing partnership. Thus, the Cuban Communist leadership welcomed the Church and the Spanish government's participation in the negotiations leading to the release, in 2010 and 2011, of most long-term Cuban political prisoners. During the same period, Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, the head of the Cuban hierarchy, traveled to the United States and Europe to act as an unofficial diplomatic bridge between the Cuban government and Washington as well as with the European Union. In return, the Cuban Catholic hierarchy has obtained a substantial number of institutional concessions from the Cuban government. Most have involved the discretionary concession of rights that would be taken for granted in any democratic polity, such as organizing a nation-wide religious procession

in honor of the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre. The Cuban government has allowed the Catholic Church to establish twelve websites and seven electronic bulletins and, more important in light of the limited access to the Internet in the island, to publish dozens of small parish and group publications and forty-six bulletins and magazines that reach about a quarter of a million people directly or indirectly. Although of limited circulation — well below 5 percent of the adult population — these publications constitute the one significant exception to the Cuban government's monopoly of the media in the island. The government has also granted corporate concessions to the Church, such as providing material help for the construction of the new Catholic seminary near Havana. The inauguration of the new seminary was attended by Raúl Castro and other high-ranking dignitaries, and Cardinal Ortega publicly expressed his gratitude to the Cuban government for its contribution.

The Church as Mediating Reformist Agent

THE GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE of the Catholic hierarchy can, in part, be attributed to the shift that it made from being a critic of the government — even if mild, cautious, and reformist — to becoming more of a mediating reformist agent between the Cuban government and forces opposed to it, be it Cuban dissident groups or foreign imperialist governments and, in a sense, with discontented elements of the population at large. The Catholic hierarchy, with the support of the Vatican, has had much to gain by this shift, as demonstrated by the conces-

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sions it has obtained. It is less clear, however, what the Cuban government has gained from having encouraged the Church into becoming an important, if not yet central, role player in the island's politics. Cuba is not Poland, and Cuban Catholicism has been, even before the 1959 Revolution, among the weakest in Latin America. Clearly, the government had no need to accommodate the Church because of its growing popularity in the island. Instead, Raúl Castro has chosen the Church as a negotiating partner to implement his foreign policy designs, and he has done so because the Church is an established Cuban institution that is simultaneously part of an influential international organization. In addition, while it cannot be said that the Church enjoys overwhelming popular support, it does have a certain degree of moral authority that the government may attempt to harness to buttress its own power, as the political support for the regime declines, especially after both Castro brothers — Fidel being 86 and Raúl 81 — inevitably pass from the scene.

The Catholic hierarchy's newly acquired role as reformist mediator has important consequences. It means, first of all, that the Church has to "split the difference" between the political premises of both the government and the opposition. But the opposition is very weak in Cuba. There is no underground movement fighting the government — the punishment administered by U.S. imperialism to Cuba is an entirely different matter — much less a mass opposition movement in the style of Polish Solidarnosc. The moderate and right wing dissidents and the nascent critical democratic left are weak. The Church is, in a certain sense, filling a vacuum, although the clearly unbalanced relation of forces sometimes pressures the hierarchy to incline itself somewhat more in the direction of the government. Cardinal Ortega's speech at Harvard University in April of 2012, attacking the dissidents who occupied a Havana church as delinquents and even as mentally unbalanced people, may have reflected,

at the very least, a lapse in judgment, but it also reflected the structurally unbalanced equation of the power relations just mentioned. It is very telling that well before the Harvard incident, the Cuban Catholic hierarchy had already disciplined and isolated its more militant priests, like José Conrado Rodríguez, and laymen like

The new relationship between the hierarchy and the government, particularly since Raúl Castro assumed power, has led to some improvements in the political climate.

Dagoberto Valdés, who dared to go beyond the hierarchy's very mild and diplomatic criticisms of the government's dictatorial practices. The sudden death of Catholic dissident Oswaldo Payá, perhaps the best-known dissident in the island, who often sharply criticized the conciliatory politics of the hierarchy, will help to cement the hierarchy's hegemony and marginalize the broad dissident camp, especially its Catholic sector.

It seems that for the Cuban Catholic hierarchy, supported by the Vatican, tactical collaboration with the Cuban government is part of a patient, long-term strategy to exert its influence in the context of a decaying regime, and to play an important role in shaping the agenda of a transition. In 2011, the government allowed the Catholic Church to open the Félix Varela Cultural Center, one of the very few public spaces where critics and opponents of the government can publicly express their views. The Center has embarked on a quiet but very ambitious and multi-faceted program

of activities which, if allowed to go on without government harassment, is bound to greatly increase Catholic influence, particularly in light of the absence of any significant political and ideological competition outside, of course, the overwhelming apparatus of the ruling Communist Party and its official mass organizations.

The Félix Varela Cultural Center has been dedicated to influence Cuban society and politics, and the future Cuban transition, in certain specific directions. The Center has committed itself to the training of self-employed workers and is host to a Masters' of Business Administration program run in association with the Catholic University of Murcia (*Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia - UCAM*) in Spain. Father Yosvany Carvajal, the director of the Center, was quoted as saying that "Today businessmen are viewed as contributing to society and the economy, but with what tools? We are going to provide those tools...how to start and run a business, marketing and the like." The curriculum for the MBA degree, focused on medium, small, and micro-enterprises, seems to accurately reflect Father Carvajal's ambitions. Its Master's Program for Enterprise Management for the 2012-2013 academic year is structured around the following subject matters: Economic Environment; Marketing; Organizational Behavior; Enterprise and Strategy; Organization of Production; Business Ethics; Economics of Finance and Accounting; Master Degree's Final Paper.

The Center is not simply planning to intervene in the "practical" world of business education, which of course has an overarching ideological component involving an implicit, if not explicit, view on political economy. It also seeks to provide instruction in humanistic and explicitly value oriented fields, as Father Carvajal was further quoted to the effect that "the MBA is just the first course [that] the centre's new Institute for Ecclesiastic Studies will offer, mainly in the humanities and theology, for example psychology, in conjunction with foreign

universities and Cuban professors." He even expects to grant, with the authorization of the Congregation for Catholic Education, degrees in higher education equivalent to those of any European university. It is worth noting that Father Carvajal said nothing about the Cuban government having a say regarding those degrees.

The journal *Espacio Laical*, previously the organ of the Lay Council of the Archdiocese of Havana, and as of January 1, 2012, an official project of the Center, announced the creation of the Laboratorio Casa Cuba, designed to carry out social and juridical research that will place a special emphasis "on the most relevant aspects related to the necessary updating of the models of socio-political management in our country." As its first activity, the Laboratorio initiated a course on "The Cuban Constitution: past, present and future." Coated in an academic tone and content, the course outline nevertheless deals with a number of politically controversial issues, such as exploring what is and is not democratic in the Cuban electoral system, and with the Laboratorio presenting "proposals for democratization."

These projects and activities are oriented by an overall political philosophy and strategy that clearly defines the Cuban Church as a reforming and negotiating mediator rather than an even moderate opponent of the regime. In what portends to be a major document, in the sense of reflecting the politics of the Church in the present conjuncture, Lenier González Mederos, the deputy editor of *Espacio Laical*, clearly rejects the position of the critics who want Cardinal Ortega to adopt "a 'hard' posture towards the Cuban government... and to insert the Church in the reproduction of a political logic based on the annihilation of the 'other.'" González Mederos insists that it is the spirit of political realism and pragmatism that made possible for a consensus to develop between the government and the Church thereby transforming certain areas of conflict such as religious freedom and

the defense of national sovereignty, into areas of cooperation. In the process, argues González Mederos, spaces have been gained for the expansion of freedom of expression, assembly, and religion without their becoming associated with a logic of internal destabilization. The deputy editor of *Espacio Laical* ends by expressing his hope that “a reinvention of Cuban socialism” is not to be limited to the achievement of economic efficiency, as suggested by Marino Murillo, the Minister of Planning and Economy, but that it also will welcome and integrate “the growing plurality of Cuban society.” This, according to the document, clearly implies a proposal for the radical redesign of state institutions and of the current architecture of the Cuban Communist Party so it can effectively welcome into its ranks all of the country’s diversity, although it is very telling that it does not say a word about abolishing the one-party state. Yet, González Mederos tries to exercise some pressure when he expresses concern that time might be running out for the country’s current leaders, headed by Raúl Castro, to facilitate an “orderly and gradual transformation of the Cuban system.”

At a higher level of abstraction, González Mederos advocates a Catholic nationalism where the Church, instead of aiming at getting secular power — which would place it in absolute opposition to the government — chooses to join with all Cubans, regardless of their ideology and religion, in the double path of “personal transformation” and the dream of building a Fatherland “for all and for the good of all.” This Catholic nationalism envisions the nation as a house — CASA CUBA — where the fraternity among its dwellers signifies the elimination of all types of exclusion, thereby rescuing a communitarian sense for the nation. One could say that is how the nation would be converted into a true home. In this new national cosmos, supporters of the revolution at home and exiled Cubans abroad would have at least the possibility of recognizing themselves as part of a unique and indivisible whole. The

Catholic theoretician fails, however, to explain how his construction of a single national Cuban community could concretely overcome sharp differences in political, class, and racially based power.

To historically legitimate this Catholic Nationalism, Father Yosvany Carvajal, the director of the Félix Varela Cultural Center, asks the Cuban people to accept a highly distorted account of Cuban history under Spanish colonial rule and of the role that Catholicism played in it. Eliding the difference between the cultural formation of a nation and the struggle for political independence, Father Carvajal claims that the Catholic Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio (in whose original building the Félix Varela Cultural Center is presently located) was the birthplace of Cuba as a nation, an idea that according to Carvajal was originally conceived by Catholic priests. Father Félix Varela, who was himself a product of the Seminary, is justifiably put forward as a Cuban Catholic hero for his role in the development of pro-independence sentiment during the first half of the nineteenth century, although Father Varela developed his pro-independence ideas while he was an exile in the United States and not in the Seminary. Neither Father Carvajal nor any other Catholic spokesperson has acknowledged the Catholic hierarchy’s militant support for Spanish rule, particularly during the last War of Independence (1895-1898). One cannot help but notice the similarity of this historical whitewashing with another major example of a highly distorted redefinition of history: Fidel Castro’s attempt to convert Cuba’s Founding Father José Martí (1853-1895) into an advocate of the one-party state and through this into a precursor of his own rule.

What is the upside and the downside of the Catholic hierarchy’s mediation role? It is undeniable that the new relationship between the hierarchy and the government, particularly since Raúl Castro assumed power, has led to some improvements in the political climate. The

release of most long-term political prisoners has clearly been one of those improvements. Perhaps a more substantial long-term gain emerging from that new relationship is the opening of some spaces for a substantially broader political debate than had been previously possible in

The Catholic Diocese of Havana
issued a scathing denunciation of
what it saw as the government's
campaign to promote
homosexuality, transsexualism
and "sexual diversity."

liberal Communist social science organs, such as the journal *Temas*, whether in the Félix Varela Cultural Center itself or through Catholic publications such as *Espacio Laical*. This, in turn, has likely led to a higher degree of political relaxation, particularly for artists and intellectuals, although the new government policy of large-scale but short-term arrests of dissidents has put this into question. Many right-wing dissidents disdain any political relaxation that may reduce the rationale, false as it is, for U.S. aggression, which is in fact their preferred vehicle to attain their political goals. But for left critics and left opponents of the regime, political relaxation and the creation of more spaces for a freer discussion can facilitate the emerging of democratic movements from below that can help bring about a real political and economic democratization of Cuban society.

At the same time, it is in connection with the potential emergence of such democratic movements from below that the current collaboration of the Catholic hierarchy with the government may become an obstacle. First

of all, because the Church, in exchange for its negotiating relationship with the government, has explicitly accepted clear boundaries to its own political positions, which include an at least implied commitment to the government's permanence. Second, because as part of the Church-government relationship, the hierarchy has been able to obtain institutional concessions likely to incline the Church against taking any risk. The Polish Catholic Church before and after the emergence of the Solidarnosc movement in 1980 offers a good lesson in this context. By the 1970s, the Polish Catholic Church had established a satisfactory *modus vivendi* with the Communist government of Edward Gierek. Contrary to a widely accepted myth, when shipyard workers on the Baltic Coast went on strike in August 1980 demanding the right to form independent trade unions, Primate Cardinal Wyszyński urged them to go back to work without having won their demands. Although liberal Catholic intellectuals, like Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Jerzy Turowicz, actively supported the strikes, the Church as a whole largely kept its distance. Later, after Solidarnosc was founded, the Church did support it, but remained wary of the radical democratic spirit that inspired it at that time. It is not far fetched to assume that the Cuban hierarchy would react in a similar fashion to any comparable movement in Cuba, especially when it has already made clear that its conciliatory approach is incompatible with any clear opposition to the regime.

Future Perspectives

ALTHOUGH THE CUBAN CHURCH does not have either the deep nationalist roots or the popular support enjoyed by the Polish Church at the time of the Solidarnosc movement in the eighties, it does have the great advantage of being the only really important established Cuban institution outside of the state sphere. Its institutional strength and its negotiations with Raúl Castro's government has allowed it to gain significant ground, which may place it in a

particularly favorable position, in the context of a Cuban post-Communist transition, to “send a bill” to the Cuban people to collect on its past services on behalf of reform. The Church may not be strong enough by then to make a pitch for political power through the mechanism of a Christian Democratic Party, although such a party already exists in exile and is bound to obtain some support when it is established in the island. But what is more likely is the prospect of the Church pressing for, and obtaining, restrictions of existing social rights.

Cardinal Ortega’s socially conservative views are well known. In his pastoral letter of February 25, 2003, the Cardinal claimed, in the absence of any factual or scientific basis, that “experience demonstrates that sex, alcohol and drugs are dangerously intertwined.” Several years later, Ortega lamented the moral decadence of Cuban society in more general terms. Once again mixing up different issues, he denounced “the unbridled sexual life, the lack of social engagement, the deafening music disregarding neighbors, the abuse of alcoholic beverages, or the murder of a priest in order to steal from him,” (an allusion to the killing of a Spanish priest in July 2009.) The Catholic Church also vigorously objected to several activities by the CENESEX (*Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual*) led by Mariela Castro Espín, a daughter of Raúl Castro, as well as to the broadcast on Cuban television of *Brokeback Mountain*. The Catholic Diocese of Havana issued a scathing denunciation of what it saw as the government’s campaign to promote homosexuality, transsexualism and “sexual diversity.”

The Catholic Church has historically also expressed its opposition to divorce and, especially, to abortion. Legal divorce was established in Cuba in 1918, many decades before the Cuban Revolution. Because of its deep historical roots in the island, it is very unlikely that the Church would choose to campaign on that issue in the future, although it cannot be ruled out that the Church may advocate some restrictions

to the current ease with which divorces can be obtained. Abortion was widely practiced in the island, although it was formally illegal and occasionally prosecuted by the authorities until 1965, when the revolutionary government, for unknown reasons, decided to allow it. As in many other Communist countries, abortion has been used as a method of birth control given the irregular availability of birth control and inadequate sexual education. It reached its highest point of 97 abortions per 100 births in 1986, and then it declined to 52.5 in 2004, although this is still a high figure by international standards. Abortion is clearly not a preferred method of birth control, which makes it vulnerable to Catholic attack.

Although agitation over social issues such as these has not been at the center of the Cuban Church’s current concerns, that could likely change in a post-Communist transition. The example of the Polish Church is instructive in this regard too, because in spite of its different historical roots and degree of influence on the population, it shows a common method of political intervention that Catholic hierarchies have pursued aimed to have their social agenda implemented through the mechanism of government action to affect the entire population, not only Catholic believers. Thus, shortly after the collapse of Polish Communism, the Polish Church pressured Prime Minister Mazowiecki’s first nonCommunist government to agree to its request for the reintroduction of Catholic education classes in public schools and for very substantial administrative restrictions on abortion rights. Catering to the Church’s preference, the government carried out these measures without public discussion or a parliamentary vote (legislation covering the whole area of abortion was brought before Parliament only later.)

The Nascent Alternative Hegemony of the Catholic Church

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS QUICKLY filling the

spaces granted to it by the Cuban government, and is implementing a project to establish its ideological and political hegemony, alternative but not counter to the hegemony of the state, through its activities at the Félix Varela Cultural Center and its various publications. The Church's hegemonic efforts are greatly facilitated, as suggested earlier, by the weaknesses of the moderate and right wing dissidents and of the nascent critical and independent left.

These leftists find themselves in an unenviable position. They depend, to a degree, on the spaces provided by a Catholic Church that does not share their fundamental values and that might sooner or later turn against them. What happened in Poland is instructive in this context. In the seventies and eighties critical leftists in that country confronted a situation that had several elements in common with the current Cuban situation. This included a Communist government that had reached a *modus vivendi* with the Catholic hierarchy, although perhaps not to the same degree as in present day Cuba, and a nascent critical left that had broken with Communism and had to figure out its own attitude towards the Church. It was in this context that Adam Michnik, who was to become a leader of *Solidarnosc*, the movement that eventually brought down Communism in Poland, published an influential book on the subject of the Polish left and the Church in 1975-76. Born in 1946 to veteran Jewish Communist parents, Michnik grew up in a leftist milieu critical of the Communist authorities. He was much affected by the 1968 events in Poland, where the student protests were not only physically repressed but led the government to engage in a campaign against the intelligentsia that included jailing students, firing professors, and blaming the trouble on Jews, forcing most of them to leave Poland. The events of that year showed the Communist Party drawing on Fascist repressive traditions while sectors in the Catholic Church went all the way out to defend the students. Afterwards, authors that were banned by the

government, many of them Jewish, could only publish in the Catholic press. While sitting in a prison as a result of his involvement in the 1968 events, Michnik began to revise his political ideas about the Church, which he eventually articulated in his *The Church and the Left*, where he proposes a dialogue between the secular left and the Church, which according to David Ost, an expert on Polish affairs, was to "mediate differences... accepting the truth on both sides... [and] work toward a common goal."

Michnik's acknowledgment of the contributions of the Polish Catholic Church in the context of Polish Communist repression is as understandable as the attitude of Cuban critical leftists who, today, find a space inside Catholic institutions. However, Michnik's notion of dialogue with the Church turned into a virtual surrender to that institution. In his book, he rejects what he describes as the left's traditional unqualified hostility to the Catholic Church, and affirms that the enemy of the left is not the Church but totalitarianism, and "that the old distinctions [left vs. religion], formed in conditions of bourgeois democracy, are now obsolete." Michnik's change towards the Church assumes a political method suggesting that there can be only one political enemy at a time. This is an old pragmatic political approach preceding Michnik, which has a close affinity with notions such as "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." It ignores the fact that the manner in which struggles against oppression are conducted one day has a great influence on future political outcomes. Thus, while it is certainly true that an oppressive state, Communist or otherwise, is the principal enemy to an active opposition and resistance, this opposition movement can compromise its central goals by how it relates to other present and potential oppressors. It is ironic that while Michnik criticizes and distrusts the international Communist movement, and accuses them of following the maxim attributed to Montalembert: "When weak I will demand freedom from you, for that is your principle;

when strong I will take freedom from you, for that is my principle," he does not even entertain the idea that the same may also be applicable to the Polish Catholic hierarchy.

And so, Michnik goes on to justify the teaching of religion in the public schools arguing that because the prohibition of public religious teaching was a first step, by Communism in power, to completely abolish the religious training of youth. He also defended the Church's call on the Polish people to refrain from reading atheistic books, because it was a way to refuse to participate in the official public life of the totalitarian state. In a critique of the Enlightenment traditions of the left, Michnik criticizes as arrogant those who "know the true path of progress and reason," and claimed that the "implementation of such plans for the New Order and the Kingdom of Progress necessarily lead to contempt for people, to the use of force, and to moral self-destruction."

In the late eighties, however, Michnik modified his views, distancing himself from the Catholic Church and going so far as to warn that the "Iranization" of Poland had become a distinct possibility. Given that Michnik's virtual surrender to the Church did not work out, and that in fact contributed to the Church's hegemony, what can the critical independent left in the island turn to in order to rethink the relationship with the Church?

In a democratic society, the Catholic Church should be considered like other religious, political, and civic organizations and groups and enjoy the same rights as they do. The fact that Catholicism has historically been the most important religion in Cuba, and that even today it has more followers than any other single religion, does not entitle the Catholic Church to any privileges or special standing in the public realm. If, like any other organization, the church, instead of remaining in the purely spiritual realm, makes pronouncements on controversial public policy matters joining the fray of political conflict, it becomes a legitimate target of those

who disagree with its public positions, especially if the Catholic Church attempts to impose on society at large norms and rules that it would otherwise have the right to ask its own members to voluntarily observe (like to avoid the use of contraceptives and the practice of abortion.)

The Cuban government has granted concessions to the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church, like any other institution in the island, has no legal or political rights that the government is obliged to respect. A democratic approach involves converting practically all the concessions that the Church has obtained from the government into religious, social and political rights like the right to organize religious processions, to train future priests and nuns, and ministering to prisoners (a concession that was granted to all religious denominations in 2009). Like any other significant non-state associations, the Church hierarchy is also entitled to a "systematic space" in the mass media, a demand from the Church that the Cuban government has so far refused to grant.

Far more problematic from a democratic point of view are the Church's demands involving the religious education of children. This demand can mean a number of quite different things. It can refer to the provision of religious education to children in facilities owned by the Catholic Church during vacations, weekends, or after public school sessions, to which there can be no possible objection from a democratic point of view. But it can also mean the establishment of religious schools as an alternative to public schools based primarily on the argument that parents alone should decide on the education their children receive. This is premised on an exclusively liberal individualistic perspective that excludes any consideration of the critical role that a democratic public education (not that of the present one-party state) can play in shaping the new generation and society as a whole. It also ignores the role of public education in terms of social integration and the promotion of class and racial equality.

Full time private religious and secular schools were common and accepted “facts of life” in the class and racially segregated education of pre-revolutionary Cuba. They were, in fact, the training ground for the upper class and an important part of the middle classes. But the Cuban Catholic hierarchy was not satisfied with the situation, and throughout the history of the Cuban Republic (1902-1958) repeatedly and unsuccessfully lobbied for the teaching of religion in the public schools. Even shortly after the victory of the revolution, Archbishop Enrique Pérez Serantes of Santiago de Cuba attempted, without success, to persuade Fidel Castro (whose life he helped to save after the unsuccessful attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953) about the virtues of teaching religion in Cuba’s public schools. So far, the Catholic hierarchy has been rather coy about this issue. However, Orlando Márquez, the official spokesperson for Cardinal Ortega, recently advocated for private religious education on a number of grounds including the savings it would create for the government. At the same time, he tactically conceded to the possibility, already being implemented in at least one Cuban church, of imparting Catholic education as a complement to, but not as a substitute for public education.

Besides religious education, there are a number of other areas that portend considerable friction between the critical left and the Catholic Church in the future. The first involves the strict separation of church and state that has been under attack all over the world. Article 35 of the respected Cuban Constitution of 1940 unambiguously stated that “the Church shall be separate from the State, which cannot subsidize any cult.” Will the Cuban Catholic Church respect that strict separation? There is also the matter of marriage. Historically, the left has viewed marriage as a voluntary union from which either partner should be able to withdraw without facing undue legal obstacles, except for the provision of maximum financial and other

kinds of protection for women and children. Sexual freedom is another area of likely conflict including the rights of LGBT people to be married and adopt children. Abortion is clearly going to be an arena of contention. Today’s left demands abortion available on demand and without charge, but not as a substitute for the irregular availability of contraceptive methods and the inadequacy, and even absence of sexual education. Other issues important to the left today include the notion that scientific activities should be informed by ethical and humanistic concerns but not be blocked by religious considerations, as in the case of stem cell research. Government censorship is another area of potential discord where the critical democratic left seeks its abolition whether on the grounds of political content or of artistic expression, which may be regarded as pornographic by the Church.

There is no reason for the nascent critical and democratic left to avoid friendly and constructive dialogue with Catholic rank and file parishioners and with progressive Catholic intellectuals, who agree that a truly democratic society means that they have no right to impose their beliefs and practices on others. This dialogue does not require that any of the sides adopt the liberal relativistic attitude “that all beliefs and practices are equally valid” since if people did not believe that their beliefs are more valid they would not hold them. In addition, this dialogue is not to be construed as an exercise in bargaining where one part gives up a little so the other can also give up a little. Instead, it is an exercise in mutually respectful persuasion, which may or may not lead to agreement or to the successful persuasion of one side by the other. But this process of articulating reasoned arguments to try to persuade the opposite party can lead to clarifying and distinguishing misunderstandings from real disagreements, thus making it possible to collaborate on areas of real agreement. In the end, the true test will be whether progressive Catholics end up joining

with the critical democratic left in any movement that may develop in the island in pursuit of a truly democratic socialism.

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Economic Recovery from Below

Notes on the Insufficiency of “Taxing the Rich”

BARRY FINGER

TAXING THE RICH has a venerable tradition on the left. It is, after all, one of Marx and Engels’ ten transitional demands in the *Communist Manifesto*, later to be declared antiquated in their 1872 preface to the document. If this demand appeared to these revolutionaries as dated, it was largely attributable to the fact that this working class proposal had, in principle if not in fact, been largely incorporated, however reluctantly, as a premise of industrial capitalism. For most of the past century, the only question debated was precisely where the bar should be set. If Marx and Engels had once harbored the belief that this demand — particularly in isolation — was transitional to socialism, it had, as they eventually acknowledged, been overtaken by the plasticity of a capitalist reality facing down a dynamic and ever more confident working class movement in the late Victorian era.

This concession, which had arguably attained nearly universal consensus, has now clearly fallen into utter disrepute among capitalist elites. It is discredited in an arena of crisis where the working class is already profoundly demoralized and dispirited, a context whose predicate was set by decades of class defeats. The wealthiest 1 percent had, after all, captured three-fifths of all income gains in the country between 1979 and 2007. Given that, the vehement ruling class opposition to any minimal augmentation of taxes on the wealthy remains all the more remarkable considering how successful

they have also been in diluting tax progressivity through loopholes and special exemptions, not the least of which were embodied in the Bush tax cuts.

Liberals and leftists therefore predictably rejoiced at the prospect that the Democrats have raised the demand to tax the rich, oblivious to the profoundly dishonest and disorienting context in which this demand has been hijacked. For the Democrats’ purpose is not to reverse the upward distribution of income — as the left might have it — but to render the sale of austerity more palatable. The Democrats have been relatively clear that their intention is not to strengthen a tattered safety net, nor to expand government outlays and employment. It is rather to manage retrenchment, pay down the debt, and convince its working class and impoverished constituencies that these can be done more equitably and at a less reckless speed than that proposed by the viciously reactionary Ryan budget proposals, an approach exploited by the Democrats to misdirect their own constituencies from the politics of austerity. The Statutory Pay as You Go Act that Obama signed into law mandates that any new spending be offset with spending cuts elsewhere or by increased revenues. It effectively precludes an expansionary role government role. When economist Jeffrey Sachs ran the numbers he concluded that Obama would cut federal spending from 22.6 percent of GDP to 19.3 percent by 2020, while Ryan would reduce spending to 17 percent. Sachs went on to conclude that these cuts would be especially severe for discretionary programs in education, environmental protection, child nutrition, job

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re-training, transitioning to low-carbon energy and infrastructure. The entire civilian discretionary budget will amount to only 2 per cent of GDP, or less, as of 2020, in the budget plans of both Obama and the Republicans. Obama is a budget hawk who has repeatedly stated his dedication to “reforming” Social Security and Medicare. And this despite the fact that the “crushing” interest on the national debt amounts to only about 1.4 percent percent of GDP, about as low as it has been in the past 65 years.

The point is that taxing the rich, in the hope of reducing their personal and corporate savings, only makes sense for working class purposes if these revenues are reapplied to sustain and expand public employment and social services. It makes no sense if applied to debt reduction. Yet debt reduction is precisely the purpose and the only purpose that the Democrats have any stated intention of pursuing with these added revenues. So even if the Republicans lose, austerity still prevails.

But don't such taxes make belt tightening more equitable? Doesn't this lead to “shared” sacrifices? For the Democratic administration, taxing the rich to hold down the growth of debt simply entails swapping out tax revenues against government securities held by the wealthy. Part of the debt will no longer be rolled over. Its likely effect, in other words, is simply to change the composition of elite portfolios, reducing the holdings of interest-yielding treasuries relative to cash and securities. The Republicans prefer a less circuitous route to the same ends. They opt to dampen debt accumulation directly through a marginally slower growth of federal spending than the Democrats. They favor an expansion of the government spending below its historic pace — something Obama has, in any case, already accomplished though not to the satisfaction of the right. And they favor doing so by shifting the tax burdens towards workers. Both parties would rebalance future spread sheets of the wealthy in favor of cash, but the Republicans would also redistribute resources upwards.

So, while there is clearly an additional loss to the working class if the Republicans prevail, there is still no net gain to the 99 percent should the Democrats implement their alternative program.

We should be clear. This entire debate is waged on a terrain antithetical to socialist purposes. And to the extent that the left is

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retrenchment,

endorsing Democrats because we may superficially share a common demand, we do so under a mistaken premise for utterly dissimilar ends. Reducing government outlays while “taxing the rich” means worker layoffs in the public sector and induced private sector redundancies; a reduction therefore in aggregate working class incomes, and living standards. It is not our purposes that will be served should the Democrats prevail. In partnering with the Democrats we are not only deluding ourselves but also mis-serving the class whose political interests we seek to advance. The effect of “taxing the rich” in the context of a Democratic victory will mean, paradoxically, further unemployment, further upward redistribution of incomes, a further impoverishment of working class living standards, further erosion of savings, but all at a slower pace than the Republican alternative would promote. The Democratic approach signifies the shared sacrifice of a robber who takes your wallet, but leaves your watch.

The entire federal debt problem would, in any event, be entirely manageable no matter

what the interest obligations, or the ratio of debt to national income. Debate at this level is, here and abroad, simply nonsense on stilts. Nation states that retain a monopoly on the issuance of their means of appropriation — money — and can pay their foreign obligations in their own currencies are not constrained in their operations by the tax base from which they can potentially tap into or the pool of available funds from which they may borrow. The federal government can expand aggregate demand and finance its debt obligations simply by making an electronic entry into the bank accounts of the private firms it has contracts with and the holders of treasury securities it needs to service. Managing aggregate demand is a matter of political will, not an objectively insurmountable financial firewall. Because the federal government first spends and then by law is obliged to swap treasury bonds on a dollar for dollar basis against all outlays in excess of taxes, deficit spending always places net assets (either dollars or interest bearing treasury bonds) into private hands. The private sector has “lent” — if that term is to have any meaning — exactly nothing to the state, for it is the state which first placed the very monetary resources into the private sector that it later “borrows” back. If anything “debt” issuance on the part of the federal government is another form of welfare for the one percent, since it obliges the government to pay interest on assets exchanged against monies that the state first created.

These bonds are always marketable by the state, and usually at any interest rate that the government selects, precisely because they are always serviced by the self-same government monopoly over money. That is why treasury obligations are a safe harbor for cash, including the excess dollars held by Chinese exporters. For them it represents the wisdom of holding funds in an interest bearing savings account rather than a checking account. The federal government, on the other hand, can no more run out of money than a bridge tournament can run out

of points. The rating agencies can downgrade (federal) government debt to “worthless” and these downgrades would have not an iota of impact on the ability of the state to finance its operations. Nor would it disabuse any sensible foreign entity from safely squirreling its dollar surpluses in treasuries. The threats of rating agencies are simply a timely reminder and practical demonstration of precisely how worthless these credit rating entities actually are. These are the same sources of market insight whose collective sagacity was most famously exercised by their idiotic proclamations attesting to the health of collateralized debt obligations and the derivatives wagered on them.

And if the mechanics of state debt financing were all that was all that was in question, the way out of this recession would be clear. The state could presumably spend capitalism out of its slump. But capitalist crises are no more caused by a lack of adequate demand than flat tires are caused by the sudden and forcible loss of air. This is not an insight, but a tautology. Both are the effect of latent structural weaknesses that have become suddenly acute. Inflating a flat tire without patching the hole, and — in the case of capitalism — expanding aggregate demand without restoring conditions of profitability only allow the vehicles in question to sputter along indecisively and unpredictably, from bubble to bubble as it were.

The system can set itself aright only by purging the excess claims on profit and by expanding that portion of the collective working day appropriated by capital. Assets acquired through leverage, whether by corporations or by individual households (real estate), have to be serviced at their purchase price regardless of their current worth. Debt embodied in productive capacity that is no longer generating adequate profit has to be paid down; mortgages that exceed current sales prices still have to be paid off. Until this overhang of deficient profit-inducing business debt is purged and deflated assets sold off to those who can make profitable

use of them at newly discounted prices, the system as a whole cannot restructure and revive itself. Until consumer debt is made manageable and savings restored, working class spending cannot be revived.

Because spending equals income in the next round, any leakages from spending (net savings) leads to a downward spiral of incomes. If these leakages are not offset by sufficient government dissavings (deficits), the savings plans of business and workers cannot both be fully satisfied. Eventually incomes must fall beneath the point in which private net savings are still possible. The inadequacy of state spending has already effectively wiped out the savings of the working class and a huge swath of non-corporate business. If the state should actually pull the rug from under the system by drastically reducing not merely the rate of growth of its spending but the absolute level of its outlays, as tea party-ers propose, the level of business and personal bankruptcies would avalanche into a full scale 1930s contraction.

On the other hand, any robust program of government spending would delay the restructuring process. It would restore tight labor markets that break down industrial discipline. It would lay the predicate for “excessive” wage demands and mass union recruitment drives. It would threaten profitability from below. State spending can bend the shape of the downturn, but it cannot secure and uphold the general conditions of capital accumulation. It is for this reason that state spending holds little attraction to ruling class elites.

Equally crucial is this. Any growth in state spending adequate to induce full capacity utilization, would also sabotage capitalist restructuring at the other end. It would pump up asset prices without patching the profitability hole. The wave of bankruptcies, buyouts and reorganizations needed to reshape the capitalist anatomy would be aborted. The absolute mass of profits realized, it is true, might well expand to or even beyond their pre-recession levels.

But so too would the underlying asset prices in the face of rising demand. And, insofar as the relationship between capital and profits was already precarious, the system would arise from its wreckage no stronger than when it collapsed.

And perhaps, in a larger sense, considerably weaker. For much of the additional output coaxed out of the system by state spending would be absorbed by state services. That slice of output would, in other words, lose its capitalist character. The expansion of the market would be ever more separated from the process of capital accumulation. Because capitalism, left to its own devices, can sustain an adequate level of profits only by ramping up the rate at which surplus value is capitalized, state spending would induce a tradeoff between maximizing the use of existing capacity against expanding the mass of its productive apparatus. There would, to put it otherwise, be a more intensive use of current plant and equipment, but at the cost of smaller net additions to the value of the capital stock. Without the type of fundamental shakeout that only the market itself can perform, a revival based on state expansion would subordinate capital to the state by weakening the links that connect profit realization to capital formation.

It is doubtful that capital perceives this threat directly in such terms. Rather, big business simply sees the crisis as a unique — once in a generation — opportunity to massively and suddenly re-concentrate and centralize existing property relations. It sees the crisis as the moment for an internal shock therapy; a massive purge of the weakest components in the market place that, under normal business conditions, might otherwise be the work of decades. And it is eager to seize this opportunity to wipe out the last remaining vestiges of organized working class power and resistance. This is seen as a grand opportunity, if managed “purposefully,” to restore American capitalist preeminence on the world market. All competing national elites have fallen in line, with the same barbaric consequences, for fear that failure to do so would

leave them at competitive disadvantage once the crisis is resolved.

THE GROWING FINANCIALIZATION OF capitalism, the tendency to appropriate through rent seeking, rather than through actual investment in production — both a symptom and a cause of the underlying profit-generating weakness of capitalism—lends added ruling class urgency to its drive for public austerity. Because financial activity is no longer aligned to manufacturing, the financial sector tends to expand claims to surplus value without adding to the very apparatus that generates surplus-value. That is, finance no longer channels savings largely back into the production process. It directs savings into financial innovations such as mutual funds, derivatives, credit default swaps, collateralized debt obligations, etc. Subsequently, the financial sector does not exact a surcharge from the growing pool of surplus value whose enlargement it might have otherwise contributed to. Rather it strips incomes from wages through credit gouging; from the industrial sector by exacting monopoly rents on real estate and commodity inputs; and from the local public sphere through asset stripping and privatization. All other employers are in turn forced to defend their position by squeezing wages and benefits and by seeking tax relief, while private sector workers, for whom exploitation is not an option, can defend their positions only by tax remediation. Wage cuts and profit squeezes from on high cause ever-greater dependency on credit. Demand and profit margins supported by credit are unsustainable without an ever-expanding productive base.

An expanding economic base is ever more imperiled by the siphoning of profits to the financial sector. The cascading form of upwards redistribution creates an unbroken loop. It sweeps all private sector components against the public sphere and those inordinately dependent on the public sector while enhancing the vulnerability of the public sphere to the financial wolf

pack.

It should therefore be patently obvious why the tea-party guppies, including swaths of the white working class, are susceptible to recruitment to the viewpoint of the Koch-brother sharks and Wall Street jobbers. The fear is drilled into them that massive government outlays today correspond to crippling taxes tomorrow. Ideological prisoners of that cracker barrel wisdom that sees the logic of government finances in terms of the individual household, the public is relentlessly inculcated into seeing state “profligacy” as a form of national dissaving. Just as overextended businesses and households must tighten their belts, so too — it is argued — must the federal state. Otherwise, “we” face a disaster akin to the Greeks or the Spanish.

But this seemingly commonsensical alibi for austerity gets the economics of the problem utterly inverted and warped. The imminent victims of this debacle are feted by the call to restrict state demand as if this serves their immediate benefit and that of future generations. Fearing having their pockets picked by the state and redistributed to the undeserving below, they are blinded by their own market idolatry from seeing how the actual forces of competition are realigned to squeeze them from above. The result is that huge swaths of the exploited, that might otherwise wish to see a government that addresses fundamental social needs and economic inequities, have been demoralized by the belief that the state lacks the financial wherewithal to do so. They simply see in a state that taxes their diminished incomes as one throwing good money after bad. A state unable and unwilling to be useful to the working class may as well be as small as possible. It is this understanding that cements the appeal of right wing populism, an appeal built directly upon the material structure of the current crisis.

And the unfortunate truth is that Obama and the Democrats, the second party of capitalist austerity, have done precious little to offer a counter narrative needed to disabuse them of

these dismal expectations.

The left has no electoral alternative to offer. What it can present is a realistic program for resistance; demands that neither transcend capitalism nor oblige socialists to take responsibility for capitalism, but nevertheless offer an actionable basis for shifting the burden of the crisis back to the ruling class.

But traditional calls to “nationalize the banks” that are the stock and trade of the socialist left rest on multiple, anachronistic misconceptions. Historically this demand arose in a period in which industrial capital, specifically in Germany at the turn of the 20th Century but to lesser degrees elsewhere, was controlled by the private banking system. A socialist government that could nationalize finance capital would have in one fell swoop also annexed large swathes of the productive apparatus of society. This demand also rested on the specific historic limitations of a means of circulation backed by tangible commodities (gold and silver). To nationalize the banks was to seize the national hoard of metal so that the socialist state could finance its economic operations and suppress other, alien, forms of accumulation and social activity, such as equipping and paying counter-revolutionary armies.

Finance capital today does not so much control industrial capital as it restrains and pillages manufacturing by diverting resources from the accumulation process. And the state has long severed the connection between money and metal. It enforces the acceptance of fiat money as a means of circulation — and therefore as a measure of value and store of wealth — by the demand that taxes be paid in this form and in no other near monies or forms of wealth.

More important, the call to nationalize banks was a revolutionary demand made by credible political agents. This is precisely what American socialists today are not. A capitalist state that answered that call would most likely hold failing banks in receivership until such time as they could be profitably transferred

back to private investors. At best, state ownership of commercial banks would prevent banks from jeopardizing depositor monies through speculative activity. Socialists raising the call to “nationalize” the banks are in effect taking responsibility for depositors and are seeking to confine, to some small extent, access by finance capital to other gambling resources. While this

The Democratic approach signifies
the shared sacrifice of a robber
who takes your wallet, but leaves
your watch.

demand may have radical roots, this elimination of “moral hazard” is small-bore progressive politics, not a platform for class struggle. Above all — and painful as it might sound to socialist ears — the assets of bank investors are in themselves insufficient for the scale of intervention needed to reshape the economic reversal.

Taxing the rich has to be placed in a proper context. Socialists favor confiscatory levies on wealth and income derived from property ownership for two essential reasons: to sanitize the political process against the influence of capital and to reshape economic priorities, to the extent that markets remain a tool in the allocation of resources, commensurate with social needs rather than elite priorities. But these are on both counts the work of socialism in power.

Socialists who make this the centerpiece of their demands on the capitalist state undoubtedly understand that this is not fully actionable under the present organization of society. They may well believe that the slogan nevertheless serves a worthy heuristic purpose. It foreshadows our vision of an egalitarian, humane, and

fully democratic social order. But it also does something else entirely. It suggests that social entitlements are fundamentally conditioned not by the productive capacity of society, but by the extent that capitalist liquidity can be clawed back to “finance” such programs. Reactionaries have always had a field day calculating the precise date that any given society marches off the fiscal cliff once their wealth has been squeezed dry or effectively redistributed. Socialists indulge this by linking the state’s ability to access productive capacity with the existence of a pool of untaxed and therefore untapped financial wealth. Without offering an effective counter-narrative, the left participates in this sociological misdirection. It requires a rebuttal. There is always a liberal argument for social cohesion based on a more egalitarian capitalist society, and taxing the rich plays an obvious role here. But that proposition is best left to progressives. It is not our case and it is not our rebuttal. And it serves no enduring purpose to argue that the present rate of taxes on the wealthy is at a historically low point or that state borrowing costs are currently negligible. These are entirely beside the point because they are of a piece with the wholly errant dominant social narrative.

What socialists should emphasize is that the ability of the capitalist state to decommoditize vast swathes of the social surplus relies in the first instance on its monopoly in creating purchasing power *ex nihilo*, not on its ability to tax and borrow. The ultimate need to tax has nothing to do with financing such programs at the federal level. Taxing is required to carve out space for the appropriation of additional capacity to meet social needs and to cool inflationary pressures as they arise. Progressive taxation is about suppression of elite demand, preventing competition from above for goods and services and the concomitant diversion of resources to accommodate elite demands that this would otherwise entail. It is not about how the state finances its purchases. Demand management with a growing public sector comes invariably

at the expense of the ruling class. It can and should be made a cost of doing business.

It is on the basis of the outline above that a program for struggle can be consistently waged on an analytically coherent basis. The capitalist state has within its present capacity the ability to offer public sector employment on demand and a guaranteed minimum level of income support for those who need to retrain, relocate, or retire or who are unable — or unwilling (think worker burnout with a universal sabbatical model) — to work for any reason. Public sector employment is generally labor intensive and public services are generally green jobs. Because public sector employment primarily takes place at the state and local level, where governments cannot issue their own currency, the insane competition of cutting corporate taxes to attract business cannot be permitted to continue as a slide into austerity. The states and municipalities should be relieved entirely by the federal government of their need to tax. Their financial obligations should be replaced by revenue sharing supplemented federal taxes on wealth and property that are returned to the states as a part of such revenues. Without this fiscal restraint, local governments can democratically determine their own needs fully supported by a federal government.

Finally, we should demand a quantitative easing from below. If the Federal Reserve can purchase mortgage backed securities and place them on its balance sheets, it can also distribute vouchers to workers and students that can be swapped against debt accrued through educational loans, mortgages, and credit card purchases. There is no difference in principle, except this. Quantitative easing from below does not depend on the creation of a wealth effect. A rising stock market is not needed to reassure consumers that they can dampen their rate of savings and still meet retirement and contingency targets. Instead, it immediately and directly frees income from debt service to augment aggregate demand and buoy employment.

The point is that the effective management of aggregate demand is within the grasp of the capitalist state. An ideological barrage has been unleashed to deny this and the left has largely fallen sway to that narrative. Socialists may capitulate to it because it reinforces our understanding that there is no alternative beyond the fundamental overhaul of class relationships. But

this would be a tactical mistake. The emerging “austerity state” is the means by which capitalism seeks to resolve its profitability crisis at the expense of workers. We can offer a convincing counter narrative demonstrating how capital, within the limits of its own social structure, can be made to pay for its own crisis.



ELECTION 2012

THE RULING PARTY WINS AGAIN

A Visit to Bikernieki

JOHN HALLE

BIKERNIEKI FOREST on the outskirts of Riga is where the three to five thousand Jews who had managed to survive starvation, the freezing cold, and random executions of the Riga Ghetto were put to death in 1941. Not long after, the same fate would be met by some 30,000 additional Jews from numerous cities in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia who had in the intervening months been transported there to be temporarily warehoused in the newly vacant ghetto.

One might expect that many would be interested in commemorating this tragic history, in particular, the large number of Jewish tourists who we saw at sites associated with the vibrant pre-war Riga Jewish community the week prior. In fact, aside from a few dog walkers and small groups out for weekend constitutionals, members of my family, including my father Morris, himself a Riga Jew, were virtually alone there on a sunny day in early August this year. This is not, apparently, unusual; according to most accounts, Bikernieki receives relatively few visitors.

One part of the explanation has to do with little effort having been made to clearly identify the location of the site or make it accessible. It is most conveniently reached by car, and while the forest appears on maps, no road signs point to the memorial within it, with the result that we spent a good thirty to forty minutes driving around the boundaries of the forest before

noticing two black granite markers:



Adjacent to these was a parking area sufficient for no more than a few cars with a narrow path leading to the memorial bordered by a series of pillars. These are inscribed with one of three symbols: the Star of David, a crucifix designating not just the comparatively small number of Christian victims but civilian casualties in general, and what turned out to be a crown of thorns memorializing the political dissidents targeted by the Third Reich.

The three commemorative inscriptions carry with it the implication that Jews should be viewed within a broader class of victims, namely,



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as the more or less official Latvian history of the period would have it, among the victims of the two occupations of Latvia from 1941-1945 and 1945-1990. This is a problematic perspective to

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next to these without feeling
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be sure, which I will return to, though it (arguably) marks an improvement over the previous memorial erected by the Soviets in the 60s, a plaque mentioning only that 45,000 "Soviet citizens" had perished in Bikernieki — technically true, but plenty misleading, needless to say.

The path winds its way through rather dense forest, with the result that the main monument is entirely obscured from the heavily trafficked thoroughfares bordering the forest on all sides. Upon reaching it, most find it dignified, impressive, and moving. Described by its designer Sergei Rizh as communicating within a "concise language of architectural forms," it recalls the species of accessible modernism of the late Soviet period, better known (at least to me)



through musical works by Shostakovich (most notably Symphonies 13 and 14), Schnittke and Gubaidulina: a black granite cube inscribed with a passage from the Book of Job in four languages is surrounded by a quarter-acre mass of upended boulders representing individual lives.

These are divided into plots, each identified by a plaque with the names of cities of the victims of the two waves of the mass executions, Riga, followed by Prague, Berlin, Dortmund, and many others:



After entering the main monument, one notices retrospectively that the path on which one approached the site is bordered by concrete bunkers projecting a foot or so above the ground.

And at that point the appalling reality of where one is begins to impinge on one's awareness. For these were the pits into which Jews were consigned after having been force-marched



in herds to the site, those breaking ranks shot en route. The executions were carried out by copious rounds of machine gun fire, heard from early in the morning to late in the evening, with soldiers descending into the pits to insure with their revolvers that no survivors remained.

It is impossible to stand next to these

without feeling overwhelmed by the addled genocidal enormity of what lies under one's feet. I suppose the most common reaction is to try to reduce it to a human scale by imagining small episodes within the gruesome reality which transpired. Our seven-year-old son Ben was there with us, his presence recalling eyewitness accounts of parents desperately consoling their terrified children as they were led to their deaths. Morris, who in his childhood photos bears a striking resemblance to Ben, could very well have been one of these children, with my grandmother offering the false reassurance. They were the lucky ones — their immediate family among the very few to have escaped just days before the invasion. That they came so close to death under unspeakably horrific circumstances becomes more present, paradoxically, as the date recedes into the distant past.

The other response, which I imagine virtually everyone has, is to repeatedly ask oneself the one word question "why?" The answer which kept re-occurring to me was contained in William Brennan's statement to his Supreme Court colleagues that he would "no longer tinker with the machinery of death." Brennan was referring to capital punishment which has been a blight on our country for decades. While so far undertaken on a retail basis, its scale two and a half orders of magnitude below that enacted by Hitler, Brennan's phrase suggests a chilling commonality, which is why it functioned as a kind of silent ostinato for me during our walk through Bikernieki.

For what Brennan came to understand is that capital punishment necessarily entails treating the administration of death as an engineering problem — the most humane configuration of the gurneys and restraining devices, arrangements for last meals, and comparative effectiveness of gas, high voltage electricity, or high doses of barbituates in terminating life.

So too did the designers of Bikernieki devote considerable time and intellectual energy to tinkering with death's machinery, continually

addressing questions such as: were the methods used the most effective means of administering death at the scale necessary, was the harvesting of items of value from the bodies (articles of clothing, jewelry, gold fillings etc.) undertaken with the requisite efficiency, were the bodies disposed of in accordance with the best science available so as to minimize the chances of exposing the surrounding communities to infection or foul odors. Aside from complaints about the noise of the machine guns, there is little reason to doubt that Bikernieki was a very smoothly operating facility. But to ask these questions is "to tinker with the machinery of death" and to contemplate their answer, as Brennan understood, is to consign oneself to the moral sewer.

Insofar as this is so, it seems appropriate that, aside from the memorial, the only visible traces of the products of this debased intellectual labor — the massive, insane civil and human engineering project which was Bikernieki — are the 100 odd concrete death pits which line the entry path. And these are gradually becoming overgrown, to the extent that they will be, in a few years, entirely obscured from view.



BUT SHOULD THEY BE ALLOWED to become invisible? If so, this would seem to carry the implication that they can be forgotten as nothing more or less than any other tragic episode in the nightmare that is world history.

This is the perspective which would seem to inform the Latvian government's policy toward Bikernieki. They have, as noted earlier, committed only token funds to maintaining the

memorial and have made virtually no effort to make the site accessible or even minimally conspicuous. It may also, however, be a concession to right wing elements within the governing coalition. According to them, the Jews, while victims of the first occupation, were equally complicit in the second one. After all, Jewish Bolsheviks famously included Trotsky, Zinoviev, and even Lenin himself who was one quarter Jew — they will be pleased to point out. Even under Stalin, Jews continued to serve in official positions, including over 140 Generals in the Red Army. Indeed, the Soviet General Friedrich Segal prominently figures in the Riga Jewish museum exhibits of notable Riga Jews eliciting conspiratorial guffaws, one could well imagine, from the Latvian right. All this constitutes the twisted logic according to which the Latvian right wing views its murderous anti-Semitism and collaboration as a form of premature anti-Communism.

This variant of the denialist strategy should by now be familiar, with perhaps the best known example being the French National Front's attempts at rehabilitation of Vichy supporters on similar grounds. Fascist elements have also reappeared in the Hungarian governing coalition justifying their complicity along lines outlined by iconic neo-conservative Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who famously argued for the regrettable necessity to support "authoritarian" regimes resisting Communist "totalitarianism." While the resurgence of the European right would seem to make more urgent the reference on the granite blocks at the memorial entrance to the Nazis' "volunteer accomplices," this is clearly insufficient to remind Latvians of the right wing's historical legacy. That this is the case would seem to constitute strong grounds for maintaining the site and making it more, not less, conspicuous.

On the other hand, in doing so, one advances the agenda of another right wing nationalist project, namely Zionist expansionism for whom Jews' status as perfect victims has served

as a smokescreen behind which the crimes of the State of Israel, by now not unreasonably described as approaching holocaust proportions, have been effectively concealed. For them, no commemoration could ever be commensurate with the enormity of the crime perpetrated against the Jews. Those making any comparison to past holocausts — African-Americans in the Middle Passage, native populations in the Americas, Armenians on Mt. Ararat, and, most notably, the Palestinians in Gaza — to even identify these as such is seen as on a par with holocaust denialism.

The presence of the Holocaust Museum on the Washington Mall is perhaps the most visible indication of "never again" Judaism's success on claiming a monopoly on holocaust victimhood. It is, after all, just a few hundred yards from where the Dred Scott decision was reached and where the Native American holocaust was planned and administered. Understandably, albeit not justifiably, the only holocaust commemorated on the mall is one which the U.S. Government played at most a minor role in perpetrating, while those which it designed and implemented receive no official commemoration.

Despite the efforts of AIPAC, the ADL and others, recent history and recent opinion polls have demonstrated that "never again" has begun to ring hollow among its intended audience. The Israeli couple who, at breakfast with us that morning, described how, for many years running, they have made yearly pilgrimages to sites associated with the Shoah now seem merely out of touch. Increasingly, Jewish attitudes are likely to be closer to those of Morris, whose only effort to reacquaint himself with the cities of his youth would be a full seventy-two years after his departure: it was only in his 89th year, for the first and last times, that he visited Bikernieki Forest and the Shkeede Dunes outside Liepaja where his grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and childhood friends were put to death.

WHY ONLY NOW? While I have never discussed this with him, at some point, he must have consciously decided against defining himself with respect to his undeniable status as a victim, as have so many Jews. It would have been easy for him to do so: Morris's personal history involves not just the murder of most of his family in 1941 and 1942, but physical assaults from anti-semitic gangs on his way to school in the thirties, and two decades later, having the windows in our house in Newton broken the day after we moved in by anti-semitic Irish Catholic neighbors (many of whom became close friends, believe it or not.)

But these episodes only tell some of the story, another part of which consists of Morris having seen with his own eyes Jews enthusiastically involving themselves in the right wing movements from which National Socialism derived. Here is Morris at the Riga Jewish museum a few days before.



"[Jabotinski's] Betar actually wore brown shirts, Jewish brown shirts," he is saying to me here.

Morris also mentioned to me that, upon his arrival in New York City, he met Jews who expressed some sympathy for the National Socialist project, though they were critical on

the grounds that, according to Morris, "Hitler went too far" in going beyond targeting only the "bad Jews." Given these attitudes, which were, according to him, not all that uncommon among relatively privileged German Jewish emigrés such as himself, it would come as no surprise to him when, in the late 1970s, an alliance between the traditional domestic right wing and neo-conservative Jews would emerge, forming the bulwark of a reactionary political economy we are still struggling to dislodge.

Morris's refusal to revisit the tragic circumstances of his family should be seen as a continual act of defiance: oppressors have always recognized that their real victory resides in their victims viewing themselves as inalterably shaped and permanently scarred by the injuries they have suffered. And in the same way, in maintaining something approximating the socialist/utopian internationalist commitments of his youth, even while many Jews of his (and my) generation would veer increasingly rightward, was itself a repudiation of Betar who, as he remarked to me, directed their hostility not towards virulent anti-semitic elements in Riga, of which there were plenty, but almost exclusively towards left wing Jewish organizations which he belonged to.

The visit to Bikernieki was harrowing for all of us — most of all, of course, for Morris who, I am told by my cousin, was uncharacteristically silent for the next several days which they were to spend together. It is routine, albeit plenty vulgar, to describe such experiences in Opraesque terms as having "brought closure." In fact, it did nothing of the kind for any of us. Rather our visit brought the recognition that Bikernieki should be seen within a historical continuum, one more battle within a war which is still being fought, with the stakes now higher than ever.

After the Elections: Which Way for the Left?

THOMAS HARRISON

IN CONTRAST TO THE INTENSE EUPHORIA so widespread in 2008, the dominant emotion in the run-up to the 2012 election was fear, a well-founded fear of Republican savagery. Once the results were in, rather than entertaining hopes for a brighter future, most Democratic voters were probably just relieved. Obama was swept back into office chiefly by a coalition of blacks, Latinos, unionized workers, youth, and low income Americans — that is, by the very people who have suffered most from the policies of his administration. For them, as for almost everybody else apart from the one percent, a future determined by the policies of austerity, neoliberalism and war is a grim one indeed.

There were some important signs of a leftward shift in the electorate. Three states legalized same-sex marriage (a fourth, Minnesota defeated an anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment), and two voted to permit recreational use of marijuana. Tea Party Republicans took a beating, and every candidate but one that was endorsed and funded by the loathsome rightwing casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson went down to defeat — as did the outrageous misogynists Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock. The ultra-wealthy donors to Republican Super PACs are apparently devastated by the electoral results. Tammy Baldwin, an out lesbian and progressive, and Elizabeth Warren, who has a reputation for militant consumer advocacy

and sharp criticism of Wall Street, won election to the Senate. And it was encouraging that African-Americans and Latinos responded to Republican voter suppression efforts by turning out in impressive numbers.

The overall turnout was relatively high by U.S. standards — 60 percent. Despite that the “party of nonvoters” remains the largest; some did not go to polls because they live in solidly blue states: most are young and lower income, with a large proportion of Hispanics. Polls show that nonvoters lean left politically by around two to one.

But this shift to the left will not automatically affect government policy. In fact, without militant struggle by labor and social movements, Obama’s second term will doubtless look pretty much like his first. The far right will probably recover from its setback this fall and continue to grow in the absence of a leftwing alternative. Moreover, the Democratic Party will remain firmly committed to the interests of the one percent; the presence of Baldwin, Warren, and a few more progressives will have little or no effect on the Administration’s course. The White House and the Democrats’ congressional leadership — not to mention Democratic funders — regard the party’s left wing as a somewhat deranged nuisance that is, however, usually easy to contain. It will take the pressure of a mass upheaval from outside the party to wring any even moderately significant concessions to popular needs from this Administration.

Obama lost no time after the election was over to start negotiating a “grand bargain” with the GOP to cut the deficit at the expense of

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entitlement programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, in return for very modest tax increases on the rich. Any trade-off of this kind will be a grand swindle, not a grand bargain, because the idea of reciprocity

What is needed is a declaration of independence from the Democrats by significant segments of the progressive community, one that points the way forward toward a new, broadly-based political party of the left.

in a society riven by grotesque inequality is ludicrous. Its only purpose is to apply a patina of “fairness” to a brutally one-sided austerity regime, and austerity is Obama’s number one domestic priority.

There are probably few progressives who are naive enough to believe that Obama will now feel obliged to govern in the interests of those who returned him to office with their campaigning and votes. But is Glenn Greenwald right to predict that “inebriated with love and gratitude for Obama for having vanquished the evil Republican villains, they will follow their beloved superhero wherever he goes with even more loyalty than before” (*The Guardian*, “Obama and Progressives: What Will Liberals Do with Their Election Victory?” Nov. 7, 2012)? Or will progressives heed calls by *The Nation*, Paul Krugman, and others to “hold Obama’s feet to the fire,” to compel him to focus on jobs rather than the deficit, to resist any cuts to entitlement programs, to tax the rich?

Whether it was right to vote for Obama, if only to prevent a Romney presidency, or wrong, the question is, what are we going to do now? One problem with those on the left who urged

us to vote for Obama “without illusions” is that they usually resorted to minimizing his crimes — that is, to sowing illusions. An extreme example is Tom Hayden, who wrote: “History will show that the first term was better than most progressives now think” (“Saving Obama, Saving Ourselves,” *Common Dreams*, Nov. 17, 2012). Hayden goes so far as to criticize Paul Krugman for claiming that the stimulus was inadequate, and he accuses Obama’s leftist critics of “white blindness.” Hayden even defends Obama’s two-year timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan: “He knows that Afghanistan is a lost cause, though this cannot be acknowledged and dealt with during the election season.”

Hayden was not the only one to suggest that refusing to vote for Obama was a frivolous exercise in self-indulgence by middle-class white radicals. Bill Fletcher and Carl Davidson (“How the Left Can Become a True Political Force to be Reckoned With,” *Alternet Viewpoint*, Nov. 13, 2012) insisted that Obama’s policies were “not the issue” and characterized the election as a “referendum on demographics” (meaning not entirely clear), accusing those who might demur about voting for Obama of being “out of touch.” For them minorities and the poor are “realistic” to believe that they must stick with the Democrats. But how realistic is it for the most oppressed to vote for a party that almost abolished welfare, supports mass incarceration and capital punishment and pushes job-destroying globalization? Minorities and the poor have been more victimized than anyone else by Obama’s collusion in a grossly unjust system.

Obama’s Record

IN FACT, IT’S HARD TO OVERESTIMATE the damage caused by Obama’s policies, both at home and abroad. For one thing, the domination of financial elites over American society is now more absolute than ever. To the relentless grinding down of working people under years of Republican and neoliberal Democratic rule has been added the misery of millions, victims

of the Great Recession, who have lost their jobs and homes and been left by the government essentially to fend for themselves — that, and a vicious assault on public employees, enabled and sometimes spearheaded by Democratic officeholders at every level.

Writing in *Salon* (“The Progressive Case Against Obama,” Oct. 27, 2012), Matt Stoller charted the widening gulf since 2008 between corporate profits and home equity, the “main store of savings for Americans who have savings.” Under Obama, profits have recovered since 2008, but home equity levels have not — an unprecedented divergence. In effect, Stoller says, Obama has made property rights for the rich “immune from challenge or market forces,” while the property rights of debtors “increasingly exist solely at the pleasure of the powerful.” He shows that whereas under Bush 65 cents of every dollar of income growth went to the top one percent, under Obama it was 93 cents. David Bromwich observed (*Nation of Change*, Nov. 17, 2012), “redistribution of wealth and power more than three decades in the making has now been carved into the system and given the stamp of permanence. Only a Democratic president, and one associated in the public mind (however wrongly) with the fortunes of the poor, could have accomplished such a reversal with such sickening completeness.”

Arguably, U.S. foreign policy under Obama is even more militarized, more arrogantly imperial than it was under Bush. Bromwich, in the same piece, argues that Obama, together with Bush, has presided over a new historical stage in U.S. governance characterized by vastly increased “force projection” abroad and a powerfully enhanced national security state of secrecy, surveillance, “kill lists,” and indefinite detention.

Environmentalists know that the Obama administration has been aggressively indifferent to global warming. Obama endorses hydro-fracking, natural gas in place of coal, the tar sands pipeline, nuclear power, and oil drilling in both the Arctic and the Gulf of Mexico. As

Naomi Klein has pointed out, (“Capitalism vs. the Climate,” *The Nation*, Nov. 28, 2011) real solutions to the climate crisis—not merely recycling and buying green products — are antithetical to “free market” dogmas, to which the Democrats cling as much as the Republicans, albeit usually in a more temperate fashion. Klein explains that only collectivist measures might make a difference: heavy investment in rail transportation, large-scale development of renewable energy, and, above all, planning based on the common good, not profitability. That would mean a major assault on corporate “rights” and priorities, an assault that obviously would be fiercely resisted and probably could be overcome only by nationalization. The Obama Administration’s treatment of the banksters and hedge fund managers should make it pretty clear that a serious challenge to corporate prerogatives — let alone nationalization — is simply not on the table for the Democrats.

The policies of Obama and the Democratic Party cannot be understood in terms of “spinelessness” and “capitulation” to corporations and the military, nor as opportunistic bidding for the votes of conservatives and centrists. Democrats have been abandoning the politics of statist liberalism, of regulated capitalism, since the 1970s. Except for a small and thoroughly marginalized left wing, they have long embraced the elite neo-liberal consensus of free markets, privatization, reduced government spending, and low taxes on the rich. Democrats may eschew the explicit racism, sexism, and homophobia so rampant among Republicans, they may “feel our pain,” in the unctuous words of Bill Clinton, but they are as committed as their GOP rivals to the health and profitability of a heartless and massively destructive economic system — and they are equally certain that “There Is No Alternative.”

The bulk of the U.S. left continues to believe that there is in fact no alternative to its perpetual subordination to the Democrats, to the politics of lesser evilism. But if that is so, it may as well give up any hope of substantially

cutting bloated military budgets, ending the continuum of imperial interventions, reviving a strong labor movement, really addressing climate change, ending poverty, offering quality education to all children, establishing a national system of free medical care — or even saving the remnants of the New Deal and the Great Society. Things are bad enough already, but they will get worse unless and until the left takes the first steps down the road of political independence.

A Latent Third Party

THERE HAS BEEN NO SHORTAGE of evidence over the past couple of years that vast numbers of people are fed up and willing to fight back — the Wisconsin uprising, the Occupy movement, and the Chicago teachers' strike being the most dramatic examples. For a while, Occupy looked like an unofficial third party; it managed to electrify the nation and the world, winning the sympathy of many millions. It eclipsed the Tea Party and almost overnight forced the national debate to center on inequality, jobs, and housing rather than taxes and "Big Government." Occupy gave us a glimpse of the potential for bringing a radical critique of the status quo into the living rooms of millions of Americans and inspiring hope.

But Occupiers showed virtually no interest in helping to create that third party. Driven out of public spaces by massive police actions, apparently in coordination with the Justice Department, and undoubtedly undermined by the perceived imperative to reelect Obama, Occupy faded from the scene; by late 2012 very little remained of this once powerful movement. Had it survived as a major independent and critical presence in the months leading up to the election, Occupy might at least have prevented it from degenerating into an almost issueless contest. Occupy's dramatic intervention in the Hurricane Sandy crisis may have breathed new life into the movement; but grassroots outrage at the vicious inequalities exposed by the storm

cries out for radical *political* expression.

Jill Stein and the Green Party ran a highly principled campaign. Stein was arrested repeatedly for trying to get into the presidential debates, and she rightly refused to pursue a "safe states" strategy; real independence means that you must challenge Democrats (as well as Republicans, of course) wherever you can. The results — 0.3 percent — were disappointing but predictable. The Greens have performed the indispensable service of keeping the idea of independent political action by the left alive, but by themselves they cannot begin to mobilize the forces that are needed for a creditable third party movement.

Starting under the Clinton Administration, progressives' disgust with the politics of the New Democrats spurred a wave of third party sentiment, but that wave has ebbed considerably since Obama came into office. Difficult though it seems at this moment to once again raise the idea of an independent party of the left, however, we cannot simply wait for a new groundswell. The initiative needs to be taken now, not to immediately proclaim a new political party but to begin laying the foundation for it.

In the first place, as already noted, that means challenging the myth that supporting Obama and the Democrats is a practical way to defend the Ninety-Nine Percent and promote a progressive agenda. Even if they voted for Obama — and the overwhelming majority did, of course — a great many progressive Americans sense that the Democrats offer no way out and that lesser-evilism is a trap. Such people are probably not yet numerous enough to form a left electoral alternative to the Democrats that could win the support of masses of people. But their numbers are far from negligible.

One debilitating idea that independent-minded leftists should definitely resist is that elections, and especially presidential elections, do not matter. Related to this is the notion that electoral action is a pointless distraction from

the really important activity of building our movements.

The left should view elections not just in terms of immediately winning office, but also in terms of getting people to think about alternatives of which they may not have been aware, about raising consciousness and changing public opinion. Indeed, while radicals are still in a minority, it is the educational value of elections that counts most. Elections are, in fact, just about the only time when most Americans are paying attention to political issues at all. For the left to be simply absent at such a moment, as it surely was in this past election, is a disaster.

Electoral activity can be an invaluable opportunity precisely for the kind of political education that also builds social movements and fosters militant struggle. Unlike the right, the left needs to promote among its supporters a sophisticated critical understanding of history, social problems, and the structures of power. It cannot, like the right, simply declare its loyalty to existing conventions and traditions or appeal to prejudices and religious dogma; it must, to a great extent, swim against the stream, push against the enormous weight of deference to authority, passivity and fatalism with which we are indoctrinated from birth. Electoral campaigns would enable the left to get its message out, to make its case, to far more people than are affected by other kinds of movements.

On the other hand, relegating electoral activity to simply going to the polls in order to stop the Republicans, after which the same conservative trends continue whether or not the Democrats are in office, is profoundly demoralizing — making it harder to build strong social movements, to organize the unorganized into unions, etc. This, in turn, makes it less likely that the feet of Obama or any other Democrat will be “held to the fire.”

Another argument against independent left participation in national elections under the banner of a new political party is that we should focus exclusively on the local and the grassroots.

This may seem plausible, but while local elections and ballot initiatives are important, they cannot be a substitute for electoral initiatives that reach far more people and inspire them to feel part of a growing national alternative.

A democratic, movement-based electoral party would actually give deeper meaning and greater support to non-electoral activism. It could provide a continuous, nationwide political voice that would speak for movements, sustain them through inevitable ups and downs, and connect them to each other. It would enable movements to be more than pressure groups.

The First Step: A Declaration of Independence

WHAT IS NEEDED is a declaration of independence from the Democrats by significant segments of the progressive community, one that points the way forward toward a new, broadly-based political party of the left. With as much support as it is possible to garner from trade unionists and social movement activists, such a declaration would announce to the public that at least a portion of the left has decisively rejected the idea that progressive change can come from the Democrats and intends instead to challenge them, as well as the Republicans, for political power.

It should forthrightly state the need for political opposition to the Democrats, not just technical organizational independence in the manner of New York’s Working Families Party and other “fusionist” initiatives, which almost always end up urging their followers to vote for Democratic candidates either directly or on an independent ballot line.

We should be clear. Political opposition means, once a reasonable amount of popular support has been mobilized, running candidates against Democrats (and Republicans, of course). The natural constituency for a new party of the left would be workers and unions, minorities, feminists, the poor, LGBT people, antiwar activists and progressives in general —

those who have traditionally given their votes to the Democrats — as well as the millions of non-voters. In other words, a progressive third party can be built only at the expense of the Democrats, even if this allows Republicans to win in the short run.

The growth of the British Labour Party in the early 1900s had as a direct result the reduction of the British Liberals, who had traditionally won the bulk of the working-class vote, to a small third party, and a political realignment of class forces—with the bulk of the capitalist class lining up behind the Conservatives. Should a popular anti-corporate party emerge here, something similar would doubtless occur. Our *de facto* one-party system would become a two-party system in reality, with Big Business on one side and the majority of working people and their allies on the other. Then, at long last, we can have an open political contest between the right and the left in this country.

All the resources — money, phone banks, doorbell ringers — that labor, environmentalists, gay rights organizations and civil rights groups lavish on electing Democrats, in return for essentially nothing in terms of legislation or political support, could be devoted to a party controlled by these movements and their allies, a party from which corporate and financial elites were excluded.

It is often argued that the U.S. electoral system, with its ancient two-party system and its one-round, winner-take-all voting makes third parties impossible. But Britain, Canada and Mexico all have a similar system, and none of them have proportional representation or second-round runoff voting; yet all have had successful third parties. Proportional representation and instant runoff voting (IRV) are vital democratic reforms in their own right, because they would permit a much wider spectrum of

political opinions to be represented in government, and because they would immensely increase the odds in favor of third parties. But their absence is no reason to postpone creating a third party in the near future and no reason to believe it cannot be done. In fact, the pressure of an effective third party, able to mount protests and exercise political clout, is probably the only thing that can force the two-party duopoly to loosen its grip on the U.S. electoral system.

Of course, even many of those who have no illusions in the Obama Administration will still say that the right is so dangerous that this is “not the time” to consider political independence. The same thing was said in 2008, 2004, 2000 and for a very long time before that. But isn’t it almost certain that the Republicans will put up somebody as bad as, or more likely worse than, Romney in 2016, 2020, and so on? Because the Republicans will probably get worse, with the Democrats following in their wake, the prospect before us seems to be perpetual political enslavement to a rightward-moving Democratic Party.

This downward spiral must be stopped. There is, right now, a mass base, an implicit constituency, for progressive independent political action. Polls show that on such issues as universal health insurance, significantly increasing taxes on upper incomes, Afghanistan, and other matters of war and foreign policy, millions of Americans, not just a radical fringe, are to the left of Obama. Vast numbers of people are disgusted with corporate crime, with greed and excess, with mind-boggling inequality, and they sense that something is terribly wrong, terribly unjust about the system itself. In this restless climate, the message of a principled party of the left, with support from segments of labor, peace, and social justice movements can have significant appeal.

The Road Home: Bosnians' Return

ANDREA OSKARI ROSSINI, TR. JANET KILKENNY

“WHEN THEY BROKE THROUGH THE front line, up there, we only had 4 or 5 hours to leave the village. We left in a hurry, a bag on our shoulders, to save our lives.”

Duško looks up at the hill behind his house. On September 15, 1995, when Vozuća in the adjacent valley fell, he abandoned all his belongings and became a refugee. Over two million people, during the war in Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH), from 1992 to 1995, suffered the same fate.

Twenty years after the beginning of that conflict, no one knows exactly how many of them have gone back home.

“I came back on March 8, 2001, with the first group of 20 families. Till then we had been on the outskirts of Doboj in the Republika Srpska (editor’s note: one of the two entities BiH is divided into), about 50 km from here. Coming back was hard. Our farm was here — we depended on that. The barns were gone,” he says, showing an old heap of rubble, “and our livestock were destroyed.” Duško’s house, like most of the houses in his village, Bočinje, close to Maglaj, had been occupied by a family of *mujaheddin*, foreign volunteers who had fought alongside Bosnian Muslims in central Bosnia during the war.

“Here in Bočinje and the surrounding villages 145 foreign families had settled, plus a

few hundred families of Bosnian *mujaheddin*. They didn’t want to leave. At the end they were forced by the international community and local authorities to do so. Only those who had bought property legally before our return stayed on. We had some issues with them at first, not violent, but arguments. Over time, though, everything calmed down. And in the last three years a sort of cooperation has even begun between us, returning Serbs and the *mujaheddin*. I’d say at least half of the homecomers meet them to buy or sell produce or exchange goods.”

Bočinje is a village in rural Bosnia which, before the war, had about 4,000 inhabitants. If one considers the recent history of this local community and the fact that almost all its dwellings were destroyed, some in 1995 and the rest in 2001, when the *mujaheddin* left, the return process here can be deemed a success. Houses have been rebuilt in groups of 10 or 20, depending on the possibilities of the organizations involved in the reconstruction. As elsewhere in Bosnia, the funds were insufficient for repairing all the damage. Most people, however, have been able to come back, their property has been given back to them and, according to the residents, there are no more problems of security. Even so, many of those who came back have left again. Today little more than 600 people live in the local community of Bočinje — less than a quarter of the original inhabitants.

Sudden Bombardment

A FEW KILOMETRES NORTH OF Bočinje, along the course of the river Bosna, one enters in Republika Srpska. One of the first villages encountered by the river, after Doboj, is Kotorsko. Before the war, the village of Kotorsko was

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completely Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim). It still is today, despite now being within an entity with a Serb majority. Twenty years ago though, at the beginning of the war, the Bosnian Muslims of Kotorsko were forced to flee.

“On the first of May,” recalls Muhamed, “we were all together in Dobož with Serbs and

The people who had to leave the country during the war, or were displaced in other parts of Bosnia Herzegovina, number 2,200,000. The last census taken in this country, in 1991, registered 4,300,000 inhabitants. Over half the Bosnian population.”

Croats, celebrating the public holiday. Then, two days later, the bombing began on our village. We couldn't believe it. We defended ourselves as best we could, but on June 17th we had to leave our homes. We managed to get everyone out, but we lost everything.”

The speed with which ethnic cleansing went ahead in Bosnia, in particular in Republika Srpska, at the start of the war, has recently been evoked at the trial of the former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić by a demographic expert, Ewa Tabeau, a witness for the prosecution.

Tabeau says that around 300,000 Bosnian Muslims had to leave their homes in the very first months of 1992, and in some districts, for example Prijedor, their number fell by 97 percent between 1992 and 1997, while the Serb population increased by over 100 percent.

Muhamed's village, Kotorsko, was also occupied by Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims were only able to return in the year 2000. Part of the

village was destroyed and a part was still occupied.

“At first it wasn't easy,” Muhamed explains. “People had settled in the houses; there was some resistance. Then when they saw there was no other solution, gradually the Serbs left.”

International donations have not been enough to rebuild everyone's houses. Some, especially those who fled abroad, have had to manage by themselves. But, in spite of the difficulties, the story of Kotorsko seems to be one of success. All properties have been handed back, and return is a reality.

However in this village too, which pre-war had 3,600 inhabitants, there now live less than half. Over 2,000 are no longer there. Having escaped from the bombs in 1992, they have decided not to come back. They have stayed in Canada, Australia, the United States, or in other parts of Europe. If they do come back to Kotorsko, it's only for their summer holidays. For one thing, there's no work here. “Just a bit of trade or construction work,” says Muhamed. “The factories are no longer here — just bars.”

Trnovo Polje 1

AT THE FOOT OF THE HILL on which Kotorsko stands, on the bend in the great river which gives the country its name, the Bosna, there's a clearing. Here an agglomeration of houses has grown up without a proper layout — no infrastructure apart from a gravel road and the odd electricity pole. Not everyone has water, and the sewage system is non-existent. Its inhabitants call it Trnovo Polje 1. These are on the whole Serbs who had occupied the Bosniaks' houses in Kotorsko and who, after those houses had been given back, either didn't wish or weren't able to go back to where they had lived before the war. “Not everyone wants to return, especially those who lost someone in this unfortunate war,” explains Simo, a man of 50 years old. “I would have gone back, but my house was wrecked right down to its foundations. There's nothing left; it doesn't even seem as if there was a house there. I

asked for help with rebuilding, or compensation, but I haven't received anything."

For some years Simo occupied the property of a Bosnian Muslim woman in Kotorsko. When she came back from Germany, where she had fled during the war, Simo crossed the road and built a shack at Trnovo Polje 1. With time, and not without contention, that shack, along with numerous others, acquired walls, and a temporary solution has become permanent.

Back in the Federation, the part of the country with a Croat-Bosniak majority, we meet another group of returnees in Zeleče, in the district of Žepče. Živko, a Serb, complains of the complete lack of work. A Bosniak neighbor confirms that many returnees, after coming back, sold their houses and went away again.

In the long post-war period in Bosnia, refugees have taken different routes: some decided not to come back, staying abroad or in other parts of the country; others, however, tried to go home. But often the latter did not find what they expected and left again, setting off a second wave of migration after the one of the 90s. The effects of this second exodus have not yet been evaluated.

Official Data

MARIO NENADIĆ, civil servant at the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees in Bosnia Herzegovina, at present assistant to the Minister, has followed the return process from the beginning.

"According to our figures," says Nenadić, "the people who had to leave the country during the war, or were displaced in other parts of Bosnia Herzegovina, number 2,200,000. The last census taken in this country, in 1991, registered 4,300,000 inhabitants. Over half the Bosnian population, therefore, were forced to leave their homes."

Approximately one million, according to the Ministry, is the number of people who fled abroad. Slightly larger is the number of internally displaced, taking refuge in areas where their nationality was in the majority.

The Government data, in the spring of 2012, show that of these 2,200,000 people, 1,070,000 returned to their own homes. The families on the waiting list for the reconstruction of their own house number 47,000. Lastly there are 113,000 people in Bosnia Herzegovina who still have "displaced" status.

In 2010 the Ministry published a document entitled "Revised Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the Implementation of Annex VII Of the Dayton Peace Agreement", the part of the Peace Accords which established the right of all refugees to return to their pre-war homes. The strategy fixes 2014 as the date within which the right to return is guaranteed to those still wishing to do so. By the same date issues of compensation still pending for those with property destroyed will have to be resolved. A series of additional components including health, education, work, mine clearing, and infrastructures complete the document.

In describing the strategy, Nenadić underlines one of the successes achieved by Bosnia Herzegovina in dealing with the demographic tidal wave: the adjustment of the question of property rights, massively violated during the 90s. "In the course of these enormous shifts in the population," he explains, "illegally occupied properties amounted to 225,000. To date we have been able to give back 99.9 percent, that is, practically all."

The process of returning properties has not, however, been painless. Often someone who occupied a house and didn't want to or couldn't go back to his/her own, was transferred to temporary lodging, to leave space for the legitimate owner. These temporary lodgings meanwhile became permanent, and today in Bosnia Herzegovina more than 8,000 people still live in small or medium sized collective centres. Many of them are victims of evictions which took place when properties were returned to their previous owners.

Not all countries in the region have dealt with the issue of property rights in the same

way, moreover. Croatia, for instance, unlike Bosnia Herzegovina, denied refugees the right to take back their houses if they were socially owned apartments, a form of property quite common in socialist Yugoslavia. Consequently in Bosnia, and particularly in Republika Srpska, today there are still about 7,000 refugees from Croatia, especially from the Krajna region, who cannot get back the houses they lived in before the war. Many of them are in temporary lodgings or collective centers.*

The New Exodus

A SHORT DISTANCE from the Bosnian seat of government, on the other side of the Zmaja od Bosne, are the UNHCR offices. This is the organization to which Dayton assigned the task of supervising the return of refugees and displaced persons. The UNHCR estimates it has spent around 800 million dollars fulfilling its role in Bosnia. The amount spent on supporting the process of return is, however, certainly greater. No one has a complete picture of the situation though, given that funding has often taken bilateral forms through States or various international organizations, governmental and not.

Scott Pohl, Senior Protection Officer at UNHCR in Bosnia Herzegovina, substantially confirms the figures on return supplied by the Ministry. But, according to UNHCR, the million plus returnees could be subdivided into 550,000 who returned to areas where their nationality has the majority and 450,000 who went back to where today they are in a minority.

"In our view the majority returns were absolutely sustainable," states Pohl, "and we believe that those people remained in those

places. The minority returns were much more difficult. Some could have found it too difficult to stay in the place of return and decided to sell (after getting their property back), or could have decided immediately upon repossession that they did not want to stay there or they wanted to come back only on weekends. There was no comprehensive monitoring after the fact; the focus was on making it possible for people to make a free choice."

The next census, scheduled for April next year after long discussions between the main political parties of the country, could bring some surprises. The returnees, according to official figures, are a little over a million. If only half of these, 550,000, have really returned, Bosnia Herzegovina, which in 1991 had a population of 4,300,000 and had 100,000 losses in the war, risks discovering itself a depopulated country. Moreover, if the only effective returnees are those in majority areas, the census could give a photograph of a Bosnia officially divided in three ethnically homogeneous zones: one Serb, one Croat, and one Bosniak.

End of the Melting Pot

"THE PLAN OF ETHNIC CLEANSING has, unfortunately, been a success," maintains Srećko Latal, analyst at the International Crisis Group in Sarajevo. "The great melting pot that Bosnia Herzegovina represented before the war, especially in the urban centres, no longer exists. BiH today is a sum of prevalently monoethnic local communities, cantons and regions. Even the larger cities like Sarajevo or Banja Luka are essentially inhabited by a single ethnic group. Property was given back efficiently with almost 100 percent success. But then the owners, after getting their house back, often sold or exchanged it in order to be where they were in a majority."

Latal maintains the error was in the timing of the return process. "The first years after the war offered the most opportune moment — which was lost. After that first period, when

*A donors' conference in Sarajevo at the end of April has however set off a positive regional process which involves, besides Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. These 4 countries signed a Ministerial agreement which should allow assistance to 70,000 refugees, thanks to funds of 265 million euro, given mostly by the European Union, to help at least the most vulnerable cases, starting from autumn, 2012.

refugees had a strong desire to return, then other factors came into play, such as the possibility of finding a job. Those who had found work, abroad or elsewhere in the country, decided to stay there. Today, with unemployment at around 40 percent, more returns are unlikely, at least in significant numbers. About one million people have by now found a new life, a family, a job, somewhere else and come back only for the summer or winter holidays. Their lives and their children are unfortunately lost to Bosnia.”

“The problem,” explains Armin Hošo, assistant field officer at UNHCR where he has worked since 1993, “is that in 1996 and 1997 it was difficult even to mention the word ‘return.’ It was risky, especially in some communities, even for our staff. We had to take a step at a time. At Dayton they all agreed, with all three sides signing Annex 7, giving the right to return. On the ground, though, the situation was very different. Those same people who had been in power in the period of ethnic cleansing had assumed the position of mayor, police chief, and clerk in the council. It took 2 years just to begin implementing the property laws.”

Victory for the Nationalists

ONE OF THE MAIN AIMS of the nationalists during the war was to move people from one side of the country to another, using terrorism and ethnic cleansing. After the war, the aim became stopping the return of minorities and keeping evacuees where they were if they belonged to the majority in that place. Despite Dayton and the widespread efforts of the international community, in Bosnia the nationalists seem to have won both the war and post-war.

“It is understandable that the return took place only on paper,” emphasizes Vera Jovanović, director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sarajevo. “When people came back they often had to face terrorist attacks, bombs thrown at their car or their house. The plan was to scare them off, so they would not come back, or, if they did, make them leave again. To say the

least, returnees were received in an unfriendly manner. It has to be considered that they were trying to return to places they’d been driven out of, and where those who had committed the crimes were now living. The situation was particularly difficult in Republika Srpska, where the return today is extremely weak. But not only there. That’s why most people, maybe 80 percent, have applied for their properties only to sell them.”

Some politicians, according to Vera Jovanović, had a determining role in making the process of return fail in the years immediately following the signature of the Peace Agreement.

“I remember in 1996 Momčilo Krajišnik (then Serb representative in the Bosnian Presidential Office) organizing the transfer of the Sarajevo Serbs, convincing them even to move their cemeteries, explaining to them that it was not possible to continue to live there. He would walk round Ilidža and Vogošća (editor’s note: quarters of Sarajevo) getting them to leave the city. At the same time, Bosniaks were arriving from eastern Bosnia, organized in bus loads, occupying the empty apartments. I was the ombudsman at the time, and we who were working for human rights realized that there was an agreement, that ethnic cleansing was agreed between the so-called ‘mortal enemies,’ they were each interested in having ethnically clean territory.”

Colonies

AFTER THE WAR, all over Bosnia religious and national symbols were used, in particular crosses and flags, churches and mosques, to mark out territory and indicate allegiances. In some cases important public works programs were launched, in particular house building, to allow the evacuees to stay where they were in the majority, creating sorts of colonies.

Leaving Sarajevo from Grbavica, after crossing the Vraca Park with its monuments to WWII partisans, one enters the municipality of Istočno Novo Sarajevo, in Republika Srpska.

The Vice President of the Municipal Council, Vojislav Milinković, reminds us that even recently 2,500 new homes have been built for the Serbs of Sarajevo.

In the Bosnian capital, according to UN-HCR, almost 33,000 properties have been returned, about 90 percent of those which were occupied. But no exact figures are available for the number of returnees to the city. A frequent comment is that the capital of Bosnia Herzegovina would now be an almost completely Bosniak city. In an apartment in Marijin Dvor, however, not far from the city centre, we meet a lady of Serb nationality who contradicts the general picture, telling us her story.

Fight for Your Rights

“I WAS BORN IN SARAJEVO,” says Varja, “I’ve always lived here, in the center. After they bombed our house, on May 26 1992, my son left, then, some months later, I too, joining him abroad. I came back in January 1996 as soon as the war was over. I knocked on the door of my apartment, but they wouldn’t let me in — it was occupied. Since no one listened to me and the authorities wouldn’t support me, I decided to take everyone to court — the Council, the Federation, the State. It took 3 years, but in the end I made it. I never had any doubts: my city is my city, and I didn’t want to follow the fate of the Serbs who went away, giving up their homes.”

Asked about the present and future of her

city, Varja details her point of view: “I’ve always felt fine here, lacking nothing. Many of those who return for short periods complain; they have a different attitude, saying Sarajevo is not what it was. I say they are the ones responsible for this. They went away, and only came back to sell their homes and leave again. It was their choice and I don’t agree with it. You belong to a place, isn’t it so?”

Twenty years after the beginning of the war, Bosnia Herzegovina is a strange country. On the one hand the Dayton Peace Agreement has certified the ethnic divisions in every aspect of political and social life. On the other hand, Dayton has tried to reconstruct the demographic situation which existed before the war and recreate what Bosnia always represented for European history: union in diversity. That task, however, seems far from being fulfilled. This would be a reason for a new political class, capable of reforming the Constitution, and for a new society. Science fiction in the present Bosnian and European climate.

For the moment we have the example of who chose to return, people who have shown an extraordinary courage, as well as great devotion to their land. People like Varja, Muhamed, and Duško. Next year, with the first census of the population since the end of the war, we will know how many made the same choice. What Bosnia Herzegovina will look like in the future, largely depends on them.



Anarchist Economics and the Socialist-Anarchist Dialogue

GEORGE FISH

WITH THE EMERGENCE of anarchism as a significant ideology on the contemporary left, the idea of socialist-anarchist dialogue on political issues and socialist-anarchist alliance and cooperation on issues of mutual concern has gained significant currency on the socialist left. Socialist-anarchist alliance was raised rather gushingly by Ursula McTaggart in her article, “Can We Build Socialist-Anarchist Alliances? Revolution Meets Apocalypse,” in *Against the Current* 141 (July/August 2009), more realistically and soberly by Marvin Mandell in his book review, “Anarchism and Socialism,” in *New Politics* 47 (Summer 2009). I like to think I also contrib-

uted positively to advancing socialist-anarchist political dialogue and cooperation in my review of “Chomsky, Anarchism, and Social-

ism,” *New Politics* 49 (Summer 2010). Most appropriately, Mandell ended his review cited above by writing, “I think Marxists and Anarchists can learn from each other and, in fact, need each other.” Add to this literature on socialist-anarchist

dialogue another contribution, this highly substantive anthology of writings on anarchist economics from AK Press, *The Accumulation of Freedom*, edited by anarchist activist/scholars Deric Shannon, Anthony J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos.

Like Shannon, Nocella and Asimakopoulos, the contributors are a variegated mixture of activist/scholars, with professional academics rubbing shoulders with thoughtful grassroots activists and organizers. Indeed, the seriousness of approach, rigor of analysis, and level of documentation and bibliography provides ample proof that scholarship is not something

The Accumulation of Freedom:
Writings on Anarchist Economics
DERIC SHANNON, ANTHONY J. NOCELLA
II, AND JOHN ASIMAKOPOULOS, EDITORS
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that only properly-credentialed academics can achieve and aspire to; thus does the book stand, both anarchist- and socialist-like, as an exemplar of the democratization and ready availability of talent among “ordinary” people. This is a book of strengths, even though many of us who consider ourselves socialists (as well as many of those who consider themselves anarchists) will question

For the most part, the essays
are both deeply analytical and
thoughtfully reflective.

some of the analyses and approaches presented here; for there are a great variety presented, and not all authors agree with one another—yet a further strength to the book is that it does not present a uniform anarchist “party line.” And while critical of socialism and Marxism in many places, the contributors often show appreciation of socialist and Marxist sources, including even for Marx himself.

Where socialists are most likely to differ from anarchist economics as presented in this volume is in the impatience expressed throughout and the insistence on transformation now, action now; and many of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) proposals advanced will strike many a socialist as hopelessly utopian in their expectations. Yet in much of the economic analyses of the evils of capitalism presented here, socialists are likely to find themselves in ready agreement — indeed, the many parallels found here between Marxist and anarchist analyses of capitalism are striking. Another point of unity for socialists and anarchists is the acknowledgement of and appreciation for Occupy movements and the grassroots protest against austerity in Greece, as well as support for factory occupa-

tions in Argentina, that are integral to the book, and an important reason for its timeliness and ready immediacy. But, though the book draws on these contemporary events to illustrate the direct applicability and relevance of anarchist economic and political analyses to problems we face today, it is not a journalistic flash-in-the-pan, a throwaway mood-piece from a fleeting present; rather, it is much more substantive than that, and is a book for our contemporary era as a whole, encompassing recent decades past and foreseeable future as well as the kaleidoscopic turn of events of the immediate time. In short, this is a book for now that is not likely to become embarrassingly dated a few years later.

Most of the contributors here are communist anarchists, with a vision of a post-capitalist future that is not all that different from that of many socialists, especially Marxists, except, of course, in its denial of any role for a political state, and its emphasis on individual and collective freedom as ends in themselves. However, one of the contributors, Ian McKay, who writes “Laying the Foundations: Proudhon’s Contribution to Anarchist Economics,” is a self-evident follower of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, French “Father of Anarchism,” who stressed mutual-aid banking and credit cooperatives as the basis of the new society, and tied cooperative ownership of the means of production directly to occupancy and use.¹ Proudhon’s mutualism also infuses many of the analyses, descriptions and advocacy of direct action and DIY approaches given on a variety of subjects — from changing education to the youth culture of the punk-rock scene, from alienation and support for socialism to Puerto Rican self-determination.

And while anarchists have a reputation for being woolly-headed intransigents who want all or nothing, they can also be “realistic” and “reformist” in that good sense that’s often invidiously used against socialists by the ultra-left — as evinced by Robin Hahnel’s “The Economic Crisis and Libertarian Socialists,” which articulates a positive, timely, step-by-step

program for dealing with the European austerity crisis which many a militant non-anarchist socialist would fully accept. Another essay here that stresses a tactical approach, though, I think, with much less success than Hahnel, is D.T. Cochrane and Jeff Monaghan's "Fight to Win! Tools for Confronting Capital."

For the most part, the essays are both deeply analytical and thoughtfully reflective, though Abbey Volcano and Deric Shannon's "Capitalism in the 2000s: Some Broad Strokes for Beginners," despite a promising analysis, is more descriptive than analytical. Also disappointing for its overuse of rhetorical flourishes and hyperbole substituting for more rigorous analysis is Ernesto Aguilar's "Call It an Uprising: People of Color and the Third World Organize against Capitalism." But these are the only two essays I was disappointed in; the others I found to be enjoyable and enlightening reads, even though I didn't always agree with the authors. Indeed, once I began reading, I read it almost non-stop — I couldn't readily put it down!

THE BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO SIX SECTIONS, "History," "Analysis," "Critique," "Practice," "Resistance," and "Vision," which, while separating essays in terms of major subject, also overlap and intertwine. There is also an informative Preface by Ruth Kinna and a useful, informative Introduction by the editors, "Anarchist Economics: A Holistic View," an informative Afterword by Michael Albert, "Porous Borders of Anarchist Vision and Strat-

egy," and an ending Postscript by the editors, "Toward the Occupation of Everyday Life," written in November 2011 and clearly based on the Occupy Wall Street protest going on. These help make this book on anarchism an Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Anarchism (But Were Afraid to Ask)² tome for socialist tyros as well as one for anarchists and political specialists of any stripe. There are also Contributor Biographies and a well-done index, so this is a book well put together and very complete — for which both the editors and AK Press deserve credit.

The spread and limited success of Occupy has only enhanced the appeal of anarchism, which is destined not only to be around for a while, but also to fundamentally challenge established socialist thought on post-capitalist society and strategies and tactics for transformation. But we socialists should welcome the anarchist challenge, for we have something to learn from them — and they from us. All the more important for anarchists and socialists learning to talk to one another, and building united fronts in action that can actually achieve our mutual goals and usher in "the realm of freedom."

NOTES

1. And whose *The Philosophy of Poverty* inspired one of Marx's earliest polemics, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.
2. In the late 1960s psychiatrist Dr. David Ruben wrote a best-selling book, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask)*.

The Machete and the Pen

Literature and Revolution in Latin America

DAN LA BOTZ

IN *REDEEMERS: Ideas and Power in Latin America*, Enrique Krauze is interested in all of the most romantic figures of the modern left in Latin America, those who lived as militant missionaries, often died as martyrs, and were canonized by the left as saints, men like José Martí, Che Guevara, Subcomandante Marcos, and Hugo Chávez. He is also concerned with the authors, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa, who in their poems, novels, dramas and essays — and through their lives and political-literary debates — expressed this political temperament and often actually represented in their fictions the military dictators and the leftists guerrillas who fought for control of Latin America in the twentieth century.

The political leader as savior emerged from Latin America's experience under the political domination of the Spanish state and the Catholic Church, argues Krauze, as well as from the liberal revolutions of the nineteenth century and the populist and Communist revolutions of the twentieth. His political outlook provides a vantage point from which he criticizes relentlessly both the caudillo in Spanish America's history,

as well military dictators, populist demagogues, and Communist governments. His examination and critique of this literary-political culture produces a captivating intellectual history, though

its striking omission of women as political actors and writers — the only woman he discusses in one of the book's shortest chapter is Eva Perón — results in an incomplete picture.

Krauze is a self-described "liberal," though most Americans would

call him a conservative or a neoliberal. An intellectual entrepreneur who heads the successful publishing house Editorial Clío, edits the journal *Letras Libres*, produces documentary films, and appears frequently on television as a commentator on Mexican culture and politics, he has become both an economic and an intellectual force to be reckoned with in Mexican intellectual circles. His life experience and his interests lead him to focus on intellectual history, and though he does touch on them, he does not root his analysis in the continent's economic and social realities. He is interested in the flowers, not the roots, not the soil.

I had been fascinated by Krauze's first book *Caudillos culturales de la revolución mexicana* [*Cultural Caudillos of the Mexican Revolution - 1976*] about the "Seven Wisemen," the leading intellectual and political figures of the Generation of 1915, most important among them Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the Mexican labor official who became Stalin's man in Latin America, and Manuel Gómez Morín who

Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America

ENRIQUE KRAUZE
translated by Hank Heifetz
and Natasha Wimmer
New York: Harper, 2011.
538 pp., \$20.99 ppbk

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founded the conservative National Action Party (PAN) of Mexico. I found Krauze's *Mexico: Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996*, disappointing: a detailed history without a clear thesis. Consequently, I began *The Redeemers* with low expectations, but my doubts were overcome by the grand conception of Krauze's project, by the fascinating figures he had chosen to discuss, and by the depth of his knowledge of Latin American politics and literature and the relationship between them. Krauze opens *Redeemers* by setting the bar high, explaining that his book was inspired by Isaiah Berlin's *Russian Thinkers* and Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station*, that is, that he aspired as those authors had done for other times and places, to combine biography and history in such a way as to provide an overview and an analysis of the major intellectual and political currents of Latin America between the late nineteenth and the early twenty-first century. And so he has.

The book is a collection of essays on twelve major literary and political figures, all of them important in the continent's history, particularly in the history of the left, and several the subject of enormous controversy. They are: José Martí, José Enrique Rodo, José Vasconcelos, José Carlos Mariátegui, Octavio Paz, Eva Perón, Che Guevara, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Samuel Ruiz, Subcomandante Marcos, and Hugo Chávez. One might say that the theme of this book is the failure of these historical figures and the writers among and around them, despite their often insightful ideas and radical political proposals, to produce a viable social and political alternative for Latin America. Saints and saviors have led Latin America through a century that produced a series of political upheavals — Cuba's failed revolutions in the nineteenth century, the victorious Mexican Revolution of 1910 – 1940, the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, Peronism in Argentina in the 1950s, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Che Guevara's involvement in Bolivia

in the late 1960s, the Zapatista revolt in 1994 in Mexico, Hugo Chávez in the 1990s and 2000s in Venezuela, and many others—yet all of these, Krauze suggests, have led to the rise of caudillos,

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the foundation of one-party states, or simply to the perpetuation of a religious conception of politics.

Krauze's book begins with the intellectuals — Rodo of Uruguay, Martí of Cuba, Vasconcelos of Mexico, and Mariátegui of Peru—who strove at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth to create both an anti-imperialist consciousness and a Latin American self-identity opposed to that of the Protestant, capitalist, and expansionist United States. He calls them "The Prophets," and so they were recognizing the power and genius of the Colossus of the North, its drive to dominate the South, and the need to organize "Our America" (the title of Martí's great essay) to resist. Each in his own way attempted to give expression to what he saw as the essence of Latin American culture, society, and politics, variously emphasizing the Hispanic or the indigenous, the working class or the peasant character of the continent. Three of them, all but Rodo, were writer-revolutionaries who took up the pen to support those who had taken up the machete and the gun. Martí's legacy was claimed by both Castro and his democratic

opponents. Mariátegui's attempt to combine Marxism with Latin America's indigenous reality influenced virtually every current of radical thought in Latin America. Vasconcelos' writings and patronage of the arts as Minister of Education in the revolutionary government of Álvaro Obregón established the new nationalist ideology of Mexico. Their impact continues to be felt.

Krauze's remarkable ability to both identify with and to appreciate the men and one woman about whom he writes, even as he criticizes them, may be the result of his having wrestled with and reconciled himself to his complicated relationship with the poet and essayist Octavio Paz who was simultaneously his employer, mentor, friend, and perhaps even his literary ideal and personal hero. Paz hired the young historian Krauze at the age of 30 to join the editorial staff of his magazine *Vuelta* (meaning "turn," "return," or "revolution"). The essay on Paz, "A Man in His Century," which makes up a third of the book, examines the ambiguities of the famous poet's life and career, and shows Krauze's capacity for empathy.

Born into a family with a revolutionary history—his grandfather, a liberal revolutionary against the conservatives, and his father, a supporter of Emiliano Zapata—by the time he was a youth Paz, like his father, identified with Zapata and considered himself to be a socialist. Unfortunately he became a Communist fellow traveler, even though he knew better from his friends the Trotskyist Jorge Cuesta and the Russian dissident Victor Serge, and from the liberal democratic critique of Andrés Gide's *Retour de la URSS* [*Return from Russia*]. Paz only finally broke with Soviet Communism during the Cold War of the 1950s.

BREAKING WITH ONE REVOLUTION betrayed, Paz became the servant of another, serving as an ambassador of the Mexican government for two decades, years during which the Mexican government dispatched the army to fight

and crush the peasant movement led by Rubén Jaramillo and then to smash the Mexican railroad workers strike of 1959. Paz well understood the reactionary character of the government he represented, only finally resigning when President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's administration massacred the students at Tlatelolco in 1968. Paz's decisions to align himself with the Stalinists and later with the Mexican state were largely opportunistic, decisions that in the case of the former eased his way in Mexican cultural circles, and in the case of the Mexican government provided him with a sinecure that included being stationed in Paris and Delhi. In those years of the 1950s and 60s, Paz came to be considered Mexico's greatest poet, famous as well as an essayist and author of *The Mexican Labyrinth*. What Krauze appears to admire most about his mentor Paz was his ability to change his political position, his capacity for self-transformation. Krauze's appreciation of his mentor, with whom he frequently came to disagree about political issues, seems to have allowed him to become capable of identifying with other authors with whom he disagrees, but appreciates, even while criticizing.

Turning to what he calls the "Popular Icons," Krauze takes up Eva Perón, "The Madonna of the Shirtless Ones," and Che Guevara, "The Saint Enraged." These two chapters, together with those on Samuel Ruiz, "Apostle of the Indians"; Subcomandante Marcos, "The Rise and Fall of a Guerrillero"; and Hugo Chávez, "The Hero Worshipper," represent a political discussion of the role of the caudillo in modern Latin American history. Whether Evita on the right or Che on the left, whether we are talking about Marcos in Mexico or Chávez in Venezuela, the caudillo is a larger than life romantic figure who believes that he or she gives direct expression to the will and desires of the people. They live to uplift the people, and if they must act sometimes contrary to the will of the people, it is always for their own good. For leaders like these, democracy has no role, rights

have little significance, and others exist only to follow. The caudillo believes that he or she is right, sometimes believes that God, history, or the nation has called him or her to lead. Krauze's liberal, republican perspective provides him a lever with which to criticize the authoritarians of the left and the right, not only Perón but also the military dictators of the 1964-1985 period throughout Latin America.

Finally, in the section titled "Politics and the Novel," Krauze takes up the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez and the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa. While Krauze recognizes both as great writers, he loathes García Márquez for being, in the words of Vargas Llosa "Castro's lackey." At the same time he admires Vargas Llosa who though a socialist in his youth broke with the left, became an admirer of classical liberalism (conservatism in American terms), and stood as a candidate for president of Peru in 1990 as the neoliberal candidate. Krauze's accounts of the writing and the political activities of both men are fascinating portraits and wonderful explorations of the relationship between writers, their literature, and politics in Latin America.

The author dedicates no chapter to Mexico's most famous writer Carlos Fuentes, but this is not surprising considering that in 1988 in Paz's magazine *Vuelta*, Krauze had dismissed Fuentes as a "guerrilla dandy," "a foreigner in his own country," "an author who uses Mexico as a theme, distorting it for a North American public, claiming credentials that he does not have." Such a pseudo-Latin American would apparently not warrant inclusion in Krauze's most recent book. Though how in a book on Latin American politics and literature one could omit a discussion of the author and his *Death of Artemio Cruz*, as well as other of Fuentes' novels that take up the issues of concern to Krauze is beyond me.

Krauze's criticism of the Latin American left's anti-democratic culture and practice, especially that of the caudillos, hits the mark. What he fails to do, however, is to discuss the

relationship of the demagogues, guerrillas, and one-party states to the mass movements of workers, peasants, and the urban poor, movements which, though they all too often fall prey to the caudillos, have had their own independent social and political life. Where are the voices of those who while they are neither great political leaders nor great writers, contribute to the continent's political-literary intellectual history? One thinks, for example, of the testimonial literature of Latin American women writers who tell the story of these movements, such as the Bolivian miner's wife Domitila *If They Let Me Speak* or of Benita da Silva's *An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story*. Krauze has no interest in the democratic, independent, and revolutionary left, only in the various larger-than-life figures who emerged from it.

What else has Paz left out of this book? Who else is missing and why? One may be surprised to find that Salvador Allende, the Marxist president of Chile until the U.S.-inspired coup of September 11, 1973, is not here. Nor did he include a chapter on the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, a Communist who during the period of his worst poetry and his worst politics wrote a paean of praise to Joseph Stalin. Communist politics, almost entirely reformist throughout the Popular Front and the post-World War II period, hold no interest for Krauze. Allende represents a political and literary mentalité utterly alien to Che and García Márquez. Allende's elected socialist government was a study in gradualism, in reformism, without the romantic daring of Che and the guerrillas. (In Chile only the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, the MIR, has that sort of quality.) Similarly, Neruda's political poetry — as opposed to his brilliant personal poems — followed the Soviet line assiduously. It is clear why these two are utterly unattractive to Krauze.

What is also missing is Brazil, a country — practically a continent — with another history, language and political culture, and understandably Krauze has omitted it altogether. Had he

taken on Brazil, he might have included the story of Luis Carlos Prestes, the “Knight of Hope,” who in the mid-1920s led a Communist rebellion against the authoritarian government of Getulio Vargas. Prestes represents exactly the sort of political figure that intrigues Krauze. Then too he could have followed the fascinating story of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva and his remarkable transformation from labor union official and social democratic leader of the Workers Party to neoliberal president of Brazil. Yet, though da Silva led a workers’ revolt against the military dictatorship in Brazil, having settled down to preside over a typically corrupt capitalist state, he would have ceased to be attractive to Krauze. In any case, he had apparently ruled out Brazil.

Finally, with the exception of Eva Perón, women are missing from this book, particularly women writers. The gender imbalance — one woman and eleven men — is astonishing and distorts the book insofar as it gives a misrepresentation of the Latin American political and literary reality. Why did Krauze not include a chapter about Rigoberta Menchú, the Guatemalan whose controversial autobiography documenting her passage from Indian peasant to revolutionary leaders fascinates us? Why not a chapter on the women of the Plaza de Mayo whose peaceful protests demanding to know what had happened to their disappeared children helped to bring about the downfall of the Argentine military dictatorship? Krauze does not dedicate a single chapter to a woman writer and hardly mentions them. The Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska whose novels, such as *Tinisima*, a fictional biography of Tina Modotti in the early Communist milieu, *Massacre in Mexico* [*La Noche de Tlatolco*], about the 1968 student massacre, *Here’s to You, Jesusa* [*Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*], about a woman’s experience in the Mexican Revolution, and *El tren pasa primero* [*The Train Goes By First*], about the 1959 railroad strike, all deal with all of the political issues with which Krauze is concerned, and could easily have formed part of this book.

And given that Krauze dedicates two chapters to figures who emerge to importance in Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz and Subcomandante Marcos, he might well have made use of the novels of Mexican author Rosario Castellanos, such as *City of Kings*, *The Book of Lamentations*, *The Nine Guardians*, particularly *Oficio de tinieblas* [*Obscure Calling*] which deals with a revolution in Chiapas. Krauze, however, seems simply to have ignored Latin American women writers, even the Mexican ones such as these that he knows well. One cannot imagine a contemporary American author, or other Latin American authors, especially younger ones, writing such a book and omitting women writers. Krauze has a blind spot. Where others see women, he sees apparently nothing.

Krauze’s *Redeemers* may not equal *To the Finland Station*, but he has done an admirable job of providing a panoramic view of the leading figures of Latin America’s twentieth century political and intellectual world — with the exception of omitting women — and setting us to think about many of the important issues that confronted the continent. While we might want to see these conflicts better set within the economic and social reality of the continent, of the wealthy few and the millions of low-aid workers and poor peasants, while we might have preferred to his this intellectual history set in the broader history of the democratic and independent social and labor movements throughout the continent in the period he covers, we cannot deny that he has presented a good account of the literary conflicts and acrimonious debates among the writers — with the exception of his blind spot regarding females. We can agree with him about this: Latin America will not find its salvation through redeemers, but only through real politics. For Krauze those would be the politics of classical liberalism, republican institutions and the free market, yet every economic crisis suggests that they will be the politics of mass working class movements, independent socialist parties, and revolutionary upheavals.

A Step into America

The New Left Organizes the Neighborhood

MANFRED McDOWELL

IN JUNE 1966, protesting the shooting of James Meredith, the solo freedom marcher, Peggy Terry was among the crowds in Greenwood Mississippi who, in response to Stokely Carmichael's question "What do you want?," had roared "Black Power! Black Power!" While others were bewildered, Terry recalls "there was never any rift in my mind or my heart. I just felt Black people were doing what they should be doing. We reached a period in the civil rights movement when Black people felt they weren't being given the respect they should have, and I agreed. White liberals ran everything." The message for white activists, whom the Student Non-Coordinating Committee now moved to expel from its ranks, "organize your own," was one that Terry took home with her to uptown Chicago.

Uptown, in "Hillbilly Harlem," Terry was to become a lead organizer in JOIN (Jobs or Income Now). Sending student volunteers, some bewildered as in Mississippi, back to their campuses, Terry appropriated this early store-front

initiative of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as an opportunity "to turn to our own people, poor working-class whites, for direction,

support and inspiration, to organize our own identity, our own interests."

In recounting the story of Peggy Terry, and of other community activists, who while they may have gone through the schooling of the SDS, typically shared her blue-collar background and commitment, *Hillbilly Nationalists* follows in a

line of revisionist accounts challenging campus-centered narratives of Sixties radicalism. While college activists were taking to the streets to protest the war in Vietnam, poor and working class radicals inspired not only, like Terry, by the civil rights movement and by the Black Panthers, but also by the revolutionary polemics that characterized the last fractious years of the SDS, were engaging in neighborhood organizing struggles against inequality, racism and police brutality.

To appreciate their achievement, it is perhaps enough to acknowledge that Amy Sonnie and James Tracy piece together a story scarcely registered in the national media archives. Frustratingly, however, their narrative offers us little insight into the tensions that, by their own account, exhausted these store-front initiatives. We have too little of the internal debate to

Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times

AMY SONNIE AND JAMES TRACY

Brooklyn, Melville House 2011,
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understand how the collectives sought to relate the improvements in government services to which their organizing efforts committed them locally — getting the sanitation department to extend pick-ups, ensuring welfare checks arrive on time, cutting red tape at the unemployment center — to their radical ambition to subvert

Hillbilly Nationalists follows in a line of revisionist accounts challenging campus-centered narratives of Sixties radicalism.

and transform government nationally.

Organizers, we are told, “grappled with the limits of neighborhood politics.” Even “in cities as large and influential as New York, Chicago and Philadelphia,” it was “difficult to translate local reforms to more than citywide importance.” Yet “frustration with the slow progress of neighborhood organizing” had been a fate foretold. It had been well rehearsed within the SDS, and had developed as a caustic appraisal of the man in whose shadow the JOINers began knocking on doors in Chicago, the “father of community organizing” Saul Alinsky.

Organize Your Own

Susie stood on the balcony of the Union and looked out on a sea of cheering bodies. A twenty-foot banner proclaimed, “Happiness Is Student Power.” The Rolling Stones sang from speakers, “Time is on my side, yes it is!” . . . Jeff said over the microphone: “We’re giving notice today, all of us, that we reject the notion that we should be patient and work for gradual change. That’s the old way. We don’t need the Old Left. We don’t need their ideology or the working class, those mythical masses who are supposed to rise up and break their chains. The

working class in this country is moving to the right. Students are going to be the revolutionary force in this country. Students are going to make the revolution because we have the will.

This was not everyone’s recollection of politics on the Berkeley campus in the late 1960s, yet the picture drawn by Sara Davidson and her friends (*Loose Change: Three Women of the Sixties*, 1977) remains a familiar one. No longer able to hitch a ride on the freedom struggle of African-Americans, and frustrated in their protests against the escalation in Vietnam, those who had made student radicalism their game appeared to withdraw from wider social engagement and to content themselves with the theatrics of “movement.”

The view from the Union balcony is challenged by those who have been rewriting the history of the Sixties as the ethos of the SDS might itself have suggested, “from the bottom up.” Rick Perlstein notes that re-examining the New Left and the student movement from the experience of rank and filers rather than of the leaders (“typically refugees from either suburban ticky-tacky torpor or Old Communist Left families”) uncovers the creative, and indeed pioneering, role of “working-class folk,” of those who, save as “Joe Sixpack, the Movement’s archetypal proletarian spoiler,” had scarcely a walk-on part in the existing historiography/hagiography.¹

In this it was the Ohio National Guard that brought the Sixties to the blue-collar belt. But if student protest against extension of the war to Cambodia was to elicit a deadly response, Todd Gitlin argues in *The Sixties* (1987) it was not fortuitous that it should have happened at Kent State, this “heartland school,” “the very type of campus where Richard Nixon’s ‘silent majority’ was supposed to be training.” In *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (1995), Ken Heineman recalls that Kent Staters had been protesting for the right to organize on campus a full year before the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley

supposedly gave birth to white student activism, and that the Ohio school's first anti-war group was also a year ahead of the west-coast campus.

Active at the beginning of the free-speech and anti-war movements, first generation college students were also there at the parting of the ways in '68-'69 as the SDS debated and divided over the path to be taken in the wake of the assassinations and the failure to turn the Democratic Party against the war. There were Kent Staters, with the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) majority in the SDS national office, in the decision to effectively dissolve the organization ("marches and protests won't do it") in favor of a "white fighting force" that, in alliance with "the Black Liberation Movement," would "bring the war home."

Renouncing most of the Left and splitting into small cells, the Weather Underground followed its own tragic trajectory. However, a number of those taken up with the first heady intoxication with "armed struggle," such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz who found that she had to "drive the working rural Okie girl [in her] underground in order to be accepted by the Movement," and Steve Tappis, a non-college SDSer (he attended the New School in a later life) from blue-collar Brooklyn, sought to advance the RYM vision along what they may have imagined was a parallel path. Taking a "step into America," they become part of Sonnie and Tracy's story of JOIN and its successors the Young Patriots and Rising Up Angry in Chicago, of White Lightning in the Bronx, and of the October 4th Organization in Philadelphia.

The New Store-Front Left

"TAKE A STEP INTO AMERICA," an immodest proposal by JOIN organizers, urged the Left to make itself relevant to the everyday needs of everyday people. No matter how un-revolutionary it might seem to clean up garbage or address the need for health care, as issues around which working-class people would begin to organize,

they were not trivial. "Let's get it straight: all of us understand U.S. imperialism and we hate it. Those of us who didn't learn about it while sitting on the terrace at Berkeley . . . learned about it because we were organized."

JOIN, in 1963, had been one of the first initiatives of the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), conceived by SDS President Tom Hayden as a response to the gathering danger, as integration proceeded, of a white backlash. An alternative to "fascism," SDS organizers would strive to unite Black, Brown, and White workers around a common program for economic change. Within two years, JOIN's mother program was abandoned.

The potential pro-active community organizing, according to Hayden, was doomed by the war: "Once again the government met an internal crisis by starting an external crisis." With the rapid escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, SDS activists heeded the call of the anti-war movement, returning in many cases to the college towns from which ERAP had provided uncomfortable exile, to play a defining role in mass mobilizations and campus actions.

Others, "more blunt," judged ERAP a failure. After two years, certainly, there was little sign of an interracial movement that could end "exploitation and imperialism, collectivize economic decision making and democratize and decentralize every economic, political, and social institution in America." (Hayden's successor, Paul Potter was blunter still. The emphasis on "the problems of the dispossessed" had been a mistake. "It is through the experience of the middle class and the anesthetic of bureaucracy and mass society that the vision and program of participatory democracy will come—if it is to come.")

But in Uptown Chicago rent strikes, health and legal clinics, occupations and street protest appear to have developed a momentum and direction of their own. It was community mobilization with a potential intuitively grasped by

Dunbar-Ortiz, who was to draw on the JOIN experience for her own organizing efforts in New Orleans, and by Terry (the first person Dunbar-Ortiz had met in “the Movement” from “a rural poor white background” like her own) who, with other neighborhood members, decided to take JOIN’s step into America one step further.

In Uptown, SDS organizers may have believed that, finally, they were challenging their movement’s estimate of the readiness of poor whites for radicalism, but mounting tensions within the local organization suggested that some may have forgotten “one of the main tenets of participatory democracy: the outside organizer should be ‘a catalyst not a leader.’” In January 1968, shortly after the publication of the “Take A Step,” Terry and other local members asked the SDS students to leave. In a blistering critique of the SDS at its national convention, she announced that she and her neighbors would be relying on themselves, working only with those outsiders willing to live as part of the community, and “the working class,” for the long haul.

In the event, as a “Community Union,” JOIN did not long survive the break with the SDS. The changes JOIN had helped trigger Uptown, apparently generated their own tensions, not least over gender, regarded by many women student organizers as having been “as much an issue as class in the split.”

This is a subject on which we would have wished Sonnie and Tracy offered us a great deal more. From Sara Evans (*Personal Politics: The Roots of the Women’s Liberation Movement and the New Left*, 1980) we have the suggestion that such tensions were rooted in the original emphasis on unemployed youth. Disregarding the mother on welfare, who “is not considered, and does not consider herself, unemployed,” project workers had gone door to door looking for men. When confronted with the reality of a war-heated economy, in which “the only men left to organize were very unstable and

unskilled, winos, and street youth,” JOIN gave way to “GROIN (garbage removal or income now—the ‘nitty-gritty’ issues of daily life in the ghetto).” Springing “in cultural terms . . . from the women’s sphere of home and community life,” issues such as day care, schools, street lighting, housing, and welfare,” disconcerted and challenged a predominantly male leadership.

Yet the activist spirit of JOIN lived on. Experience gained on its Welfare Recipients Demand Action committee contributed both to the creation of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union, one of the oldest feminist organizations in the country, and, after a series of joint actions with welfare organizations in other states, to the building the National Welfare Rights Organization.

Locally, however, JOIN’s immediate successor and, viewed from the social and cultural distance of the Berkeley Student Union, its most startling, was the Young Patriots Organization—among its early leaders, Terry’s son, Doug “Youngblood” Blakey. Inspired by his experience of the Poor People’s Campaign summer encampment on the Washington Mall, “Resurrection City,” Youngblood argued that the student movement had got too far ahead of the people: “Because I have faith in people I am willing to walk, work, sleep, fight, and even die at the pace they set.”

Encouraged by JOIN in their protests against police brutality, the “Youngbloods” sought to create an organization that could build on both class and ethnic solidarity—“We are the living reminder that when they threw out their white trash, they didn’t burn it”—to push forward a range of social and political initiatives in cross-community coalitions. In their trade-mark denims emblazoned with the Confederate flag (adopted as a “symbol of Southern poor people’s revolt against the owning class” as well as “a blatant middle finger raised to the Student Left”), the Young Patriots paraded with the Chicago Black Panthers (from whose Ten Point Program for full employment,

decent housing, prisoner's rights, and an end to racism, they fashioned their own) and, from the neighboring Puerto-Rican communities, with the Young Lords Organization. Their pride, and longest-term commitment, was a community health care campaign, including a shop-front clinic, one of several across the city sustained by this "original Rainbow Coalition."

In Chicago the efforts of the YPO were complemented and broadened by another organization to which JOIN alum had gravitated, Rising Up Angry—among its leading lights, RYM veteran Steve Tappis. More conscious than the Patriots in positioning itself ideologically within the Left (its core members were asked to become "full-time revolutionaries") the city-wide collective was nonetheless cautious in raising an ideological bar to participation. Thus support for "our boys in Nam" did not exclude residents from neighborhood organization. Angry appreciated that the relationship of neighborhood youth and their families to the military could never be as simple as that of upward-bound college kids. Such concessions, however, did not detract from the conviction that "hassled by the pigs, fucked by bosses, channelled into bullshit jobs, drafted into the Army, lied to by politicians, and ripped off by the stores and businesses," white urban youth, and not least the gang affiliated, could join the vanguard of the revolution.

In other cities, independent initiatives drew, and expanded, on the Chicago experience. In the Bronx, the radical fuse for community organization was White Lightning, a group that had initially formed around ex-drug addicts who bought into the Panther theory of a drug-pushing police and intelligence agency conspiracy. In districts of Philadelphia where machine shops and factories sat interspersed between narrow row homes, the October 4th Organization (O4O) uniquely organized both workplace and neighborhood. In each case, "providing community services and organizing against racist policy, the 'war on the poor,' and

the seemingly endless war in Vietnam" sustained and developed a "small but notable cadre of white radicals."

"A Better Ghetto"

THOSE WHO ESTABLISHED JOIN's first storefront presence recognized that their "Step into America" had been taken by an earlier generation of radicals. Having opened shop, they crossed town to meet Saul Alinsky.

The JOINers would have been wary of the man described by William F. Buckley as "the pet revolutionary of the church people of America." But Buckley (who might not have been surprised to learn that Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* is today a Tea Party primer) was not alone in regarding Alinsky (1909-1971) as "something close to an organizing genius."

A veteran of numerous labor organizing drives across the country in the Thirties—repudiating "all dogma," but working with Communists at a time when, in his opinion, they were doing "a hell of a lot of good work in the vanguard of the labor movement and . . . in aiding blacks and Okies and Southern sharecroppers"—Alinsky had been drawn to community organizing in Chicago through his sociological study of gangs. Initially, it was to the Back-of-the-Yards (Upton Sinclair's *Jungle*). Here, with the help of the Chicago archdiocese, Alinsky succeeded in rallying a mix of otherwise mutually hostile Catholic ethnics (Irish, Poles, Lithuanians, Croats . . .) to demand, and win, concessions from local meatpackers, landlords and city hall.

The JOIN activists were to meet Alinsky as the founder/leading light of the Woodlawn Association. Through the association (comprising block clubs, local businesses, and churches), black residents on the South Side had taken on the redevelopment plans of the University of Chicago in the 1950s. Alinsky claimed Woodlawn was the first community group not only to plan its own urban renewal but, even more important, to control the letting of contracts to

building contractors. With the hiring of blacks a condition, Alinsky found it “touching to see how competing contractors suddenly discovered the principles of brotherhood and racial equality.” Similar “conversions” were secured

Alinsky’s opposition to large programs, broad goals, and ideology confused even those who participated in the local organizations because they find no context for their action.

from employers with threats of mass shop-ins at city department stores, and of a “piss-in” at Chicago O’Hare. Sonnie and Tracy record the “intergenerational confab” with Alinsky as “a disaster.”

As his *Rules for Radicals* (1971) is an address to their generation, we can imagine Alinsky’s take on the new Uptown organizers. Alinsky was more than willing to concede that the “liberal cliché about reconciliation of opposing forces is a load of crap.” “Reconciliation means just one thing: when one side gets enough power, then the other side gets reconciled to it.” But opposition to consensus politics does not mean opposition to compromise — “just the opposite.” “In the world as it is, no victory is ever absolute; but in the world as it is, the right things also invariably get done for the wrong reasons.” Revolutionary youth may have “few illusions about the system,” but they have “plenty of illusions about the way to change our world.”

As to the JOINers’ response to Alinsky, from Sonnie and Tracy we only have the charge that he was “stuck in the past,” and, perhaps, most cutting, unwilling to confront white racism. JOIN pushed whites on the race question “at every opportunity.” The group “even mobi-

lized members to support Rev. Martin Luther King Jr’s campaign to desegregate housing in Chicago in the summer of 1966.”

Alinsky had held aloof from the Chicago Freedom Movement. He had seen it as a vehicle for King and his southern leadership to meet the challenge of growing black dissent by demonstrating, in the course of a brief summer, an ability to score a “victory in the North.” For Alinsky, the suspicion was confirmed when, after failing to manoeuvre Mayor Daly into a sufficiently damaging confrontation, King balked at a march through the red-lined suburb of Cicero, “the Selma of the North,” and as his ticket out of town accepted a toothless open-housing deal.

Yet Sonnie and Tracy concede that JOIN numbers on the housing marches never exceeded a couple dozen, and they do not relate any other attempts to advance a distinctly integrationist agenda. JOIN was not an all-white organization. Its Welfare Union in particular has strong black leadership. Nonetheless, JOIN and its successor organizations announced their anti-racism, less through active integrationism, than through coalition with other groups in “other” communities with a sense—and typically an ethnic sense—of their own boundaries. Engaging in a class-wide struggle may have been the strategic goal, but as Panther Bob Lee remarked, the “code for class struggle” was the Rainbow Coalition.

This was a position that had been prepared within the SDS. Lenin, Mao, Castro, Che, and Cabral had been ransacked in the RYM battle to defeat and expel the Progressive Labor Party faction. Denying the legitimacy of Third World nationalisms (the self-determination of “oppressed colonies”) within the United States, the PLP had continued—Jeff’s “Old Left”—to argue for a unitary class-based movement.

But if, as Sonnie and Tracy suggest, leaders, “core cadre,” in many of these organizations continued to look to such scripture for theory, what else were they finding there, and how did it shape their attempts to formulate a radical community-organizing strategy that would

avoid the pitfalls of the Alinsky model?

In the summer of 1967, Frank Reissman summarized a case against Alinsky that was surely familiar to the JOIN activists. Seeking to explode “The Myth of Saul Alinsky” (*Dissent* 14), Reissman argued that rather than politicize an area, Alinsky’s organizational efforts simply directed people “into a kind of dead-end local activism.” Alinsky’s opposition to large programs, broad goals, and ideology confused even those who participated in the local organizations because they find no context for their action. As a result, confined to what might be secured by purely local initiative, they achieved, at best, “a better ghetto.”

Reissman insisted that it was for the “organizer-strategist-intellectual” to “provide the connections, the larger view that will lead to the development of a movement,” but adding, as Hilary Rodham (Clinton) notes in her outed 1969 college thesis on Alinsky, almost “as an afterthought,” that “this is not to suggest that the larger view should be imposed upon the local group.” But again, from Sonnie and Tracy we have little idea of how the “cadre” wrestled to square this circle—of how they saw the balance, however struck, between local initiative and national perspective, securing their organizing efforts against the hazards of co-optation.

Kirkpatrick Sale (*SDS: The Rise and Development of The Students for a Democratic Society*, 1973) recalls that the most dispiriting aspect of the ERAP experience was that however much they might talk at night about “transforming the system,” “building alternative institutions,” and “revolutionary potential,” staffers knew that their credibility on the doorstep rested on an ability to secure concessions from, and thus to develop relations with, the local power structures. “Whether JOIN or GROIN”, far from erecting parallel structures, projects were built “around all the shoddy instruments of the state.” ERAPers were caught in “a politics of adjustment” whose principal function is “to manipulate and control conflict.”

For Alinsky this was the “eternal problem.” Confronted by *Playboy* (“Empowering People, Not Elites,” March 1972) with Mayor Daley’s presence (and Wallace stickers) in Back of the Yards (with “the tendency of communities you’ve organized eventually to join the establishment in return for their piece of the economic action”), Alinsky explained that the life span of one of his organizations was five years. After that it was either absorbed into administering programs (rather than building people power) or died. That was something that just had to be accepted, with the understanding that “discrimination and deprivation does not automatically endow [the have-nots] with any special [moral] qualities” and that “all life is a series of revolutions” (perhaps he would move back into the area to organize “a new movement to overthrow the one I built 25 years ago”).

For Sonnie and Tracy, the doctrinal commitments of organizers in groups like Angry and O4O are simply taken as understood, and left to stand as a token of an enduring revolutionary politics that itself is the final explanation for the fact that by early 1970s much of this core cadre had moved on.

Left Exit

GIVEN THE REVOLUTIONARY OBJECTIVES they had sought to pursue through community organizing, Sonnie and Tracy suggest that “an ideology that promised a break from the one step forward, two step back pattern” was “a logical and necessary next step.” Having “grappled” for years with “the limits of neighborhood politics,” many of the original organizers turned to party-building efforts within the post-RYM New Communist Movement, to groups like the October League (Marxist-Leninist), and what was to become Bob Avakian’s Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). Few of the community-organizing groups survived the split over the party question (a fate Angry avoided only by dissolving itself in anticipation of the mounting tensions).

Other factors, Sonnie and Tracy concede, were moving in on the store-front left by the early 1970s. After years of struggle in which revolutionary change had been not just the goal but the expectation (for Tappis it had seemed that it would “only be a couple more years”), veteran organizers were beginning to think about family and careers. (Tappis went to college and later reinvented himself as a currency and commodities trader — “speculating” he insisted, not against working people, but against the banks”).

With the rise of the New Right, there may also have been the perception—the reverse of Hayden’s ERAP thesis—that the real danger, and thus the most urgent organizational work, was after all in the middle class. (This had been Alinsky’s parting suggestion: Nixon’s “Silent Majority,” living in frustration and despair, worried about their future, was “ripe for the plucking by some guy on horseback promising a return to the vanished verities of yesterday.”)

There was also the gathering repression. This may have been as nothing compared to the physical elimination of the Panthers, although the impact of this was certainly felt. In 1969, the killing (in his bed) of Chicago Panther Fred Hampton, mentor to the Young Patriots (and the occasion for the Weathermen’s declaration of a “State of War” with the United States), was traumatic. But the harassment, the red baiting, was persistent. Even the health clinics, raided by police and strangled by new licensing laws, did not escape. Facilitated as it was by increasing police infiltration, the impact on morale could be devastating.

(Sonnie and Tracy hint at, but do not explore, the possibility that the core-cadre model contributed to exploitable tensions within these organizations. From my own brief experience with a radical community-service organization in Boston in the 1980s, I recall the unease as some polemical slip by the leader/aka “coordinator” intimated that we off-the-street volunteers were recruits to some larger, undeclared ideological vision, strategy, and purpose, that there

was a hierarchy of initiates — that there was a manipulation.)

Certainly, the impatience “to get past incremental change and reach thousands rather than dozen of people,” which Sonnie and Tracy regard as ultimately decisive, was not a peculiarity of a “Maoist-influenced Marxism Leninism.” When in August 1968 JOIN suspended its local work, it was to take on one last campaign: Terry’s vice-presidential run behind Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver’s on the populist Peace and Freedom Party ticket. In 1970, the YPO also went national with a “Patriot Party” franchise. Nor is it the case that the vanguard splinter organizations to which Angry, White Lightning, and O4O veterans gravitated had any greater prospect in gaining real political traction — even if some of them have had staying power (the RCP, now offering Bob Avakian’s “BASics” in “a range of downloadable formats,” will soon be celebrating forty years).

Was “building a national movement” simply then a line of retreat from the projects? This is not how it was seen by those who took the party path. O4O’s Dan Sidorick insists that his commitment to the New Communist Movement (much as he regrets its debilitating sectarianism) responded to “a real need to think beyond the neighborhood and analyze how we might change the course of the nation.” There is also the possibility that, at least in part, this was a “need” learned from, and communicated by, the neighborhood itself.

Working in an ERAP project in Hoboken in the summer of 1965, Nick Egleson concluded that the lassitude he and his co-workers encountered was not necessarily because people “had no experience with community organization.” Rather it could be because people “have had just that experience” and because to a degree greater than they, “the hopeful organizers,” could allow, the residents appreciated “the smallness of the organization compared to the enormity of the problems.” For the organizers the challenge was that, from the outset, they were being con-

fronted and confounded on the doorstep with a common sense (however partial or ill-informed) of a bigger picture.

NOTES

1. Rick Perlstein, "Who Owns The Sixties? The opening of a scholarly generation gap," *Linguafranca*, Vol. 6, No. 4, May/June 1996. <http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9605/sixties.html>

An Essential Anti-capitalist Primer

VICTOR OSPREY

IT'S UNSURPRISING why Trotskyists were annoyed by this book. In one section it depicts a bearded and bespectacled leftist intellectual, in an impeccable illustration, lecturing protesters who are engaged in a confrontation with police that: "I've come to show you how to fight capitalism." Under his arm, is a book with "Trotsky" emblazoned across the front. In another section, it quotes an appealing looking Trotsky as saying: "The Soviets will be able to continue to function: Anyway, real power is already in the hands of the party. Workers' control over production should cease because of its inefficiency. In its place, we the state will name company directors." Of course, most open minded Trotskyists who are capable of being critical of their own tradition rightly reject this particularly unsavory attitude in favor of workers' democracy being central. And while Trotsky's ideas and legacy can't be reducible to a decontextualized quote, the illustrations and

text certainly gives vent to the all too common behavior of posturing leftist militants. However, the sheer quality of this little book far supersedes

the generalizations it must inevitably offer. To ignore it would be to miss perhaps the best book to convey shortly and succinctly anti-capitalist ideas in such an easily readable and understandable way.

Ezequiel Adamovsky is an Argentine political activist and historian, who has written numerous books, articles and essays, and much of his work can be accessed online in English at *Z Net*. His book *Anti-Capitalism* has recently been translated into English. It is illustrated by *Ilustradores Unidos*, a group of artists who are very much the co-authors in elaborating the ideas discussed, and who add a unique aesthetic flair. As the book describes, they "are visual artists who participate in the *Taller Popular de Serigrafia*, a group that formed during the intense upsurge of political and social movements during the popular rebellion of December 2001. They formed with the objective of "stamping images of support, artistic, and political accompaniment to all kinds of protests." As veterans of the December

Anti-Capitalism
EZEQUIEL ADAMOVSKY
Seven Stories Press, 2011
176 pages \$11.21

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2001 revolt in Argentina, this biography gives a sense of authenticity to their illustrations. It also encapsulates the ethos of this book, in that the artists and the author do not represent a political party or line, but are simply committed to supporting progressive struggles.

The book is divided into five sections, beginning with an analysis and disassembling of all the political, economic, social, moral, and intellectual justifications for capitalism. It describes capitalism as an oppressive, classist, imperialist, and globalized system which reproduces itself and its own ideology under the hegemony of the dominant class, the bourgeoisie. So far, so good. Karl Marx explains economic coercion, Mikhail Bakunin tells us that the state “is a fundamental instrument of oppression,” and Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and John Holloway, among others, pop up to give their opinions on a variety of issues. One particularly perceptive page, under the heading “a global and expansive system” elucidates: “Even though capitalism arose in Europe only five centuries ago, it quickly spread throughout the entire globe; its expansive logic seems to have no limit.” The illustration below then aptly summarizes these five centuries in the drawn black and white palette that is utilized throughout the book. It starts on a medieval sailing ship, with two figures in medieval frocks standing on the bow. One says: “We’re going to America to conquer new lands and bring back riches.” The other figure replies “and to conquer souls.” A few centuries later, the sailor on a steamship explains that: “We are bringing progress and civilization to Asia,” while a capitalist in a top hat replies: “and to trade with the natives.” And in the modern era, a USAF bomber says: “we are on a humanitarian mission in Eastern Europe,” while a fat cat capitalist with a cigar draws: “and we’re going to do great business.” The relationship between capitalism and the exercise of state power could not be made clearer. Indeed, as Adamovsky writes later in the book: “the State adopts the

form of the capitalist society that it belongs to.” Far from promoting democracy, capitalism undermines it. Adamovsky cites the example of the 1973 coup against democratically elected, socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende, as a historical example of how whenever elected representatives threaten the power of the dominant class, they are removed by force. In that case, it was organized by the U.S. government and local capitalists. From this, Adamovsky draws the conclusion that: “We can’t say that we live in a true democracy; really, we live in a dictatorship of capital in which we can choose representatives and make decisions regarding only minor issues.” This will resonate with many who feel little difference between the center-left and center-right political parties, as both adopt almost identical neoliberal programs.

The second section of the book is entitled “from resistance to anti-capitalism” which explores historical developments, pre-capitalist resistance struggles, the emergence of anti-capitalist ideologies, and political revolutions. In the pre-capitalist era, we are introduced to such figures as Thomas Muntzer. A German theologian, he was a rebel leader in the German Peasants’ War of 1524-1526, though he himself was captured and decapitated in 1525. The peasants who joined Muntzner in this revolt found inspiration in biblical stories, and “organized themselves into a sect and decided to collectivize property, so as to live life just as they imagined the early Christians had done.” After a brief look at the impact of the French and Industrial Revolutions, the basic ideas of socialism, anarchism, and Marxism are discussed. Among the ranks of the early socialists are the utopians Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, while the three main anarchist figures are Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Piotr Kropotkin, and, of course, Bakunin. Beneath a particularly fetching picture of a white bearded Marx, the Marxist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat is mentioned but not explained,

along with the hoped for ultimate disappearance of the state and inequality in a communist society. In terms of the legacy of Marx's ideas, Adamovsky trots out the familiar argument of blaming Friedrich Engels for distorting Marxist thought by presenting it as "scientific and flawless." A quote from Engels follows: "Marx is the Newton of social sciences; his socialism is the only scientific truth. The rest is nothing but utopian socialism." Adamovsky does concede that "Marxism inspired millions to fight for socialism," but that by then it had converted itself into a dogma, and found itself in difficulty to adapt to changing circumstances. While Marxists may take issue with some of these characterizations, clearly it is not the task of this book to get into the nitty gritty of Marxism and its historical legacy. Generally, it treats socialist and Marxist ideas fairly and seriously. On the very next page, the history of the First International is recalled. In an image sure to bring a smile to the lips of every socialist and anarchist, Marx and Bakunin, looking rather silly, yell insults back and forth at each other.

The Russian Revolution, "the first anti-capitalist revolution," as Adamovsky calls it, is examined sympathetically, starting with the activities of the soviets. The Bolshevik party is credited with gaining support "from the majority of sectors struggling for revolution." Adamovsky lists the immediate achievements of the Bolsheviks as treating national minorities in a far more egalitarian fashion, and new rights for women. It might have been pertinent to mention the Bolsheviks' most popular policy — removing Russia from the horrific conflagration known as World War One. Unfortunately, these achievements quickly disintegrated in the course of invasion and civil war, and Adamovsky sees the growing authoritarianism and brutality of the Bolsheviks as part and parcel with Leninism as much as anything else. He does not detail just how severe the impact of Tsarism, World War One, imperialist invasion, civil war, and

the backward development of Russia had on the aspirations of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, he does not relate the belief of Lenin that the only means to save the infant Russian workers' state would be a revolution in a more developed

Anti-Capitalism is the kind of book that deserves to become a classic of the Occupy movement, as it is easily digestible, quickly read, sharp in its criticisms.

country like Germany. As that failed, it doomed the Bolsheviks to failure. However, it should be remembered that both Lenin and Trotsky did make queasy theoretical justifications for centralization of power into the hands of the state, despite also elucidating ideas for human liberation and having a revolutionary and democratic rhetoric. To romanticize them in any way is to do them and history a disservice. It can't be denied that the Bolsheviks acted appallingly, at times, when they thought it served their interests — the real question is, were these inherent traits of Bolshevism, or the inevitable results of monstrous circumstances? Could the soviets have survived? Could any kind of socialism have existed in the conditions of the time? Did the non-Bolshevik socialists or the anarchists really pose any kind of successful alternative? To answer these questions, a closer examination of the period in other texts would be required. Democratic centralism is viewed by Adamovsky as contributing to how "Lenin's party ended up imposing on society its own centralized and hierarchical structures" which saw the rise of the bureaucracy which replaced capitalists as the dominant class, but was

just as oppressive. He then cites how there were similar results for other countries which implemented the communist model, “far from the ideals of equality and emancipation,” but does not mention the pernicious influence of Stalinism, colonialism, imperialism, poverty, and underdevelopment. Despite this, Adamovsky’s criticism is well founded, and effectively challenges assumptions while providing a quick history lesson.

Adamovsky is keen to make a distinction between the “traditional Left” and the “new anti-capitalism,” a somewhat amorphous term for a movement with amorphous qualities. Adamovsky does try to quantify some basic aspects that distinguish the “new anti-capitalism,” with particular regard to power and autonomy. Adamovsky judges that, historically, most Leftist traditions have had one common feature — that is, whether reformist or revolutionary, their aim was to “use the State as a tool to emancipate society.” The illustration below this text depicts a goateed male and a female with short hair and an eyebrow piercing, who represent the people emblematic of the ideas and values of the “new anti-capitalism.” The man explains that power is not only political and not just concentrated in the state, while the woman reinforces his point by questioning whether state power is really in the hands of nation-states. The man continues: “The state is a machine that divides, disciplines, and subordinates people. And one can’t create a new world with a machine like that.” A worthwhile and necessary observation, to be sure. Adamovsky clarifies his position through the proxy male figure: “The new anti-capitalism tries to avoid being taken over by power. It’s about creating social relations where power disappears or is limited. It’s more about “disempowering” the state than it is about “taking over” it. This has been labelled “popular power,” “anti-power,” or “counter-power,” and “refers to the struggle to extend autonomy to the oppressed.” As such, it has links to the ideas of

Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and Holloway especially. While Adamovsky’s aversion to state power is clear, he does take a nuanced position, explaining that elections and occupying the state can sometimes be useful, but it isn’t the overall political tactic. Autonomy beyond the state is the goal, and in that noble aspiration lie the seeds of a new world.

The last two sections explore contemporary anti-capitalist movements and some ideas as to how to change the world. The Zapatistas are prominently featured, along with illustrations and quotes from Subcomandante Marcos. Environmentalist, feminist, workers’ control, immigration, anti-privatization, and alternative media movements show both the ingenuity, diversity, and perhaps, most importantly, the scale of the struggles occurring worldwide. This is very important to express, as many activists often feel isolated, and this section shows just how much they are connected to a global movement. Helpfully, website links to these organizations are also provided. The ideas in the final section, which is the shortest in the book, shows ideas in action, and posits realistic proposals that can be fought for right now. Some are familiar, such as the “immediate cancellation of foreign debt and the abolition of the IMF,” an unconditional universal basic income, and global citizenship. Ideas about participatory and direct democracy are considered, as is non-commercial exchange, market socialism, libertarian municipalism, and anarchist Michael Albert’s participatory economy model.

The sheer level and scope of the history, concepts, and contemporary political debates that manage to be covered in this little book make it an invaluable resource. Not only is it useful to those beginning to become politically active, but it even manages to offer something for grizzled old veterans. Indeed, *Anti-Capitalism* is the kind of book that deserves to become a classic of the Occupy movement, as it is easily digestible, quickly read, sharp in its criticisms, and expands the horizon of anti-capitalist pos-

sibilities. In its rush to excoriate many ideas from the past, it may end up throwing off a cliff some excellent ideas that are still worthy of debate and consideration. It would have also been nice for Adamovsky to include in his book discussion of libertarian Marxist figures like CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and the constantly overlooked Anton Pannekoek. Indeed, Pannekoek is perhaps the best Marxist critic of Lenin and

Leninism, and his book *Workers' Councils* deserves to be as widely read as Lenin's *State and Revolution*. Overall, *Anti-Capitalism* is easy on the eyes, refreshing, and never dull. The book ends with the exhortation: "Bye. We'll see you in the struggle!" And it is in that struggle that the dreams inside our raised fists can finally be unclenched, and fly free.

Social Unionism Without the Workplace?

CHARLES POST

TEACHERS AND TEACHER UNIONS have been under neoliberal attack since the Carnegie Foundation's 1983 *Nation At Risk*. However, since the appointment of Arne Duncan as Obama's Secretary of Education they have been on the sharp-end of the neoliberal attack on working people. Teachers are routinely demonized as ineffective, privileged public employees who are virtually unaccountable. The teacher unions are portrayed as solely concerned with defending the "generous" salaries and benefits of their members, and obstructing attempts to make

teachers accountable for student performance. Tenure, due-process rights, class size limits and the like are all depicted as outmoded survivals of

a public school system more responsive to the needs of teachers than students. The solutions are simple — more privately run charter schools funded by taxpayers, more high-stakes standardized tests, teacher evaluations tied to student

test scores, and the effective abolition of tenure, due-process, and collective bargaining.

Most of us on the left, especially those who are active in public education unions, know the real root of the crisis of public education is the chronic under-funding of the schools, especially in the inner cities, and the endemic racism and poverty that undermines our students' ability to excel academically. The Obama-Duncan neoliberal agenda of creeping privatization/charterization, union busting and social service

Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights and the New York City Teachers Union

CLARENCE TAYLOR

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384 pp., \$55.00 cloth

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austerity will only exacerbate the problems, not fix them. What is needed is a movement of teachers, students and parents that can effectively struggle to increase funding, protect teachers' from arbitrary management, stop the privatization of public schools, and reduce poverty.

Unfortunately, the organizations we would expect to lead the fight against Obama and Duncan — the National Educational Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — are not up to the task. Both organizations are large, bureaucratic machines committed to “service unionism” — where union officials negotiate wages and benefits, administer the contract and provide various services (educational courses, etc.), and the ranks of the unions remain passive consumers. This model of unionism has gutted union democracy and eschewed alliances with other unions, parents and communities. Not surprisingly, teachers' wages, benefits and working conditions have declined. Rather than organizing their members to fight the attacks on public education, both the NEA and AFT have sought “cooperation” with educational officials at the local, state, and national level. The results have been the growth of charter schools (the AFT has actually organized its own charter schools), teacher evaluations tied to student test scores, and concessions on wages, benefits, and working conditions. The AFT and NEA bureaucracies' desire for “partnership” has culminated in an early endorsement of the re-election campaign of Arne Duncan's boss, Barack Obama.

For many teacher union activists, the alternative to the bureaucratic, service-union model is “social movement unionism” — a model rooted in the practice of the CIO unions in the 1930s and 1940s and revived for the contemporary labor movement by Kim Moody.¹ While Moody's version of social movement unionism is rooted in strong workplace organization that can contest working conditions, wages and benefits, for many it means an emphasis

on non-workplace organization and issues — community-labor coalitions that can contest issues of public policy such as funding for public education, health care, and defense of civil rights legislation.

Clarence Taylor's new book, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teacher's Union*, provides an historical account of an experiment in social-movement unionism. Before the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) won exclusive collective bargaining rights in the early 1960s, New York public school teachers were represented by a number of different unions and professional associations that pursued work-place grievances and organized for increased funding for schools and salaries for teachers. The largest and most important was the Teachers Union (TU), founded as a local of the American Federation of Teachers in 1916. Under the leadership of Socialist Party (SP) members Henry Linville and Abraham Lefkowitz, the TU shifted its focus from workplace organization and struggle to the now familiar call of bureaucratic teacher unionists for greater “professionalism.” While this included the demand for higher salaries, the social-democratic leaders of the TU definition of professionalism included “cooperation between employees and management, stressing ways to improve the craft of teaching.” (1) Hostile to organizing the growing ranks of substitute teachers and, during the depression, part-time and unemployed teachers, the TU rejected industrial unionism in the schools.

Rank and file teachers, led by members of the Communist Party (CP), began to build an opposition to the TU leadership's “professional unionism” in the late 1920s and early 1930s. While Taylor recognizes the deleterious effects of the CP's political subordination to the policies of the Soviet bureaucracy under Stalin, *Reds at the Blackboard* attempts to demonstrate that Communists prioritized the interests of teachers, students, and parents in their activity in the TU. The CP-led “Rank and File Group”

advocated an abandonment of professionalism for a militant, class-struggle industrial unionism. Prior to their winning a majority of the TU's Executive Board in 1935, the contrast between the Rank and File group and the social-democratic leadership of the TU was quite sharp:

The leadership emphasized professionalism, collaboration with management, and legislation as ways of improving the working conditions of teachers. The more left-leaning teachers, critical of the leadership, advocated a more militant program. They did not view teachers as professionals but as members of the industrial working class whose major objective was to take part in the struggle against capital. (16)

The Communist led opposition advocated organizing substitute teachers, mass demonstrations to pressure the Board of Education and New York State government to improve salaries and conditions, and more militant actions in the workplace. Not only did they condemn Lefkowitz's negotiation of a "payless furlough" for teachers with Mayor LaGuardia in early 1934, but they organized school based actions through their Classroom Teacher Group over "bread and butter issues" (21) such as salary, lay-offs, and classroom grievances.

Despite Linville and Lefkowitz' attempts to disregard union democracy to defeat their left-wing opponents, the CP-led opposition won a majority of the Executive Board in 1935. Unable to block the rank and file rebellion, even with appeals to anti-communism, the social-democrats left the TU and established yet another union—the Teachers' Guild (TG). The new TU leadership not only began to organize substitute teachers and build demonstrations for better salaries and funding, but embraced a broad progressive agenda in line with the newly adopted "popular front" orientation of the Communists, which fashioned alliances between leftists and liberals in the United States and across the world. The TU endorsed campaigns in support of the emerging industrial unions, against fascism at home and abroad, and for civil

rights for African-Americans and other racial minorities.

The TU, under Communist leadership, grew to almost 4,000 members by 1940, making it the largest local in the AFT. While red-baiting by the TG, various politicians, and New York and federal government investigative

The Obama-Duncan neoliberal agenda of creeping privatization/ characterization, union busting and social service austerity will only exacerbate the problems, not fix them.

bodies led to the revocation of the TU's AFT charter in 1940, the TU survived and grew as a CIO affiliate. During the Second World War, as the Communists became the most patriotic supporters of the war effort, the TU leadership attempted to use the war to press its anti-racist agenda. Communists in the TU argued that racism in the United States — legal segregation and disenfranchisement in the South; employment, housing and educational discrimination in the north—weakens the common struggle against fascism. The TU joined forces with the National Negro Congress (NNC), a Communist led civil rights group, and the more mainstream NAACP to challenge the de facto segregation of New York City schools, demand the hiring of more African-American teachers, and advocate the inclusion of Black history into the public school curriculum. Through the 1940s and 1950s, the TU made anti-racism — including the struggle against anti-Semitism — a central element of its union practice.

Having long faced accusations of disloyalty and subordination to the Stalinist regime in Russia, the Communist leadership of the TU came under sustained attack during the post-war anti-Communist witch-hunts. A coalition of anti-Communists in the New York state legislature and U.S. Congress, the New York City Board of Education, various right-wing Catholic organizations and the ostensible socialists in the TG condemned the TU and its leadership as “un-American” and “disloyal” in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The results of the anti-Communist crusade in the New York City schools were devastating. By 1956, 284 New York City teachers were fired because of their actual or alleged membership in the Communist Party and the TU was deprived of its right to represent teachers in discussions of grievances, pay, and benefits with the Board of Education. Although devastated by the loss of leading activists (including the suicide of one veteran teacher facing the anti-Communist inquisition) and their banning from the schools, the TU continued to agitate against school segregation, for more African-American teachers and for the inclusion of Black history in the school curriculum.

For Taylor, the emergence of the UFT—a fusion of the TG with elements of the High School Teachers Association (HSTA)—as the sole union representing New York teachers in 1960–61 was the victory of a narrow, bureaucratic business unionism:

The brand of teacher unionism advocated by the TU, social unionism linking community concerns, would be pushed aside to focus on improved working conditions, increased salaries, and benefits. With the UFT as the collective bargaining agency, issues that were critical to black and Hispanic communities—such as the practice of assigning the least experienced teachers to their schools and segregating the student body—would be marginalized. Just as important, black and Latino communities would lose a strong ally that, since 1935, had fostered ties between teachers and those com-

munities. (305)

Banned from the schools, the TU was marginal to the wave of workplace actions that swept the high schools in the late 1950s. Claiming that the newly formed UFT would not defend its members from administration retribution, the TU refused to support the 1961 strike that established effective collective bargaining for teachers in New York City. Faced with the UFT’s victory, the TU dissolved in 1963 and its members joined the UFT.

Although thoroughly researched and lucidly written, *Reds at the Blackboard* ultimately fails to analyze the roots of the TU’s defeat by the UFT. The author’s claim that the social democrats that led the UFT were “plain and simple trade unionists” interested solely in wages and working conditions is simply not true prior to 1965.² Albert Shanker and other SP members in the TG leadership shared much of the TU’s anti-racist, pro-civil rights agenda. With fellow socialist Bayard Rustin, Shanker and other UFT leaders played a major role in the first phase of the civil rights struggle, mobilizing members for the March on Washington in 1963 and for voter registration drives in the South in 1964–1965. The UFT’s campaign against the NEA for collective bargaining rights in 1961 included criticism of the NEA’s tolerance of “Jim Crow” locals in the South—which the AFT had decertified years before. Among the UFT’s contract demands in 1963 was increased hiring from the South, in order to boost the number of African-American teachers. The UFT was a crucial part of coalitions spearheaded by black leaders like Reverend Milton Galamison to push the Board of Education to end the de facto segregation of the public schools and increase the number of African-American and Hispanic teachers before 1966. The UFT also made class size a central issue in early negotiations, arguing that “what is good for students is good for teachers.”

The actual roots of the UFT’s success was the willingness of a new generation of TG leaders, in particular the AFT organizer David

Seldon, to enter into an uneasy alliance with militant, rank and file high school teachers in the late 1950s and early 1960s in order to pose a credible threat of a strike. Faced with declining real wages and deteriorating conditions, young, mostly Jewish, high school teachers revived the High School Teachers' Association and carried out a series of job actions, including illegal strikes, in the late 1950s. Seldon, Shanker, and Charles Cogen, the first UFT president, convinced the leaders of the HSTA to abandon their demand for higher pay for the high schools teachers and to join the TG in launching the UFT. The TG leadership hoped that the mere threat of a strike would force the City and Board of Education to grant the UFT exclusive recognition. However, it was militant rank and file high school teachers that forced the leadership to call the 1961 strike that won collective bargaining and the 1962 strike that secured their first contract—despite anti-strike legislation that was more draconian than the current New York State Taylor law. It took several years, culminating in the disastrous 1968 strike against community control of the schools, for Shanker to tame the rebellious rank and file and transform the UFT into the bureaucratic service union it is today.

Ultimately, the roots of the defeat of the TU's brand of social unionism can be found in their CP leadership's subordination to Stalinism. While not the mindless automatons (no less spies) portrayed by the anti-Communists, CP members were subject to strict political discipline—to following the basic outlines of the party's line that was shaped by the shifting diplomatic requirements of the Soviet bureaucracy. Especially after the Communists around the world adapted the popular front strategy in 1935, CP activists in U.S. unions, including the TU, abandoned workplace militancy that could threaten their alliance with liberal Democrats and "progressive" union officials.³ While the CP-led opposition in the TU campaigned against the social-democratic leadership's

"professionalism" and for militancy based in the schools, they took office as the party's line changed. Almost immediately, workplace organization and action disappears from Taylor's account of the TU's activity. Almost immediately, the new Communist leadership embraced the old leadership's notions of "professionalism":

To court broad support, the TU placed greater emphasis on professional concerns and did not limit itself to bread-and-butter issues. The new leadership announced a fresh focus on "educational policy." Professor Goodwin Watson, a leading psychologist at Teachers College, would head the union's Educational Policies Committee, promoting the "art of good teaching." The union declared that an "organization like ours cannot confine itself to a narrow line of economic activity only. Teachers, like other humans, do not live by bread alone." To keep the "creative impulse" alive in teachers, the Educational Policies Committee proposed a number of courses for teachers to enhance their knowledge. (43)

The only difference Taylor cites between the TU's "vision of professionalism" and "the middle-class version held by Linville and the previous administration" was that "the TU tied teachers to the larger working class by offering courses in working-class history and culture..." (43-44)

Taylor gives us no sense of what the TU's did in the schools. He describes how the TU leaders responded to attacks on teachers and public education with open letters, resolutions and public rallies — largely what the UFT does today. Did the TU in the schools mobilize teachers against supervisory harassment? Were they able to enforce limitations on the length of the working day in the pre-collective bargaining era when supervisors had the power to order teachers to work well beyond the conclusion of the school day? Nor does Taylor address the TU's practice in the workplace during the Second World War. As Nelson Lichtenstein⁴ has argued, the CIO's support for the wartime ban on strikes hot-housed the bureaucratic central-

ization of the industrial unions. The Communist Party's embrace of the no-strike pledge, and their role in enforcing work discipline during the war, undermined their credibility among militant workers in the CIO. Taylor waxes enthusiastically about how the TU leaders were able to wrap their anti-racist message in wartime patriotism, but says little about how their support of the U.S. war effort impacted their relations with rank and file workers and the Board of Education management. Clearly, the TU's wartime patriotism did little to protect them from the post-war anti-Communist purges.

The history of the New York Teachers' Union provides an important lesson for contemporary teacher union activists who want to build an alternative to the bureaucratic business unionism of the AFT and NEA leaderships. The embrace of a broad "social justice" agenda and coalitions with parents, other unions and social movement organizations is not sufficient if we want to transform teacher unions into organizations capable of defeating the neoliberal offensive against public education and teachers. Without strong, school-based organization, our broad social unionist agenda will appear to most teachers as, at best, worthy but unobtainable goals, and, at worst, as ignoring the deteriorating conditions most teachers face today. The

key to rebuilding membership activism — the only source of power for working people — will be a strategy that roots social unionism's broad political agenda in the day-to-day struggles of teachers around job protections, tenure, and pensions.

I would like to thank Kit Wainer, a long-time opposition activist in the UFT, for his comments on an earlier draft.

NOTES

1. *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso, 1988); *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy* (London: Verso, 1997)
2. Our account of the early years of the UFT are drawn from Mark H. Maier, *City Unions: Managing Discontent in New York City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 108-126; and Jerard E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 42-47.
3. For an analysis of the impact of the popular front on the activities of U.S. Communists in the unions and African-American freedom struggle, see Charles Post, "The Popular Front: Rethinking CPUSA History," and "The Comintern, CPUSA & Activities of Rank-and-File CPers," *Against the Current* 63 (July-August 1993) [www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/2363 and www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/2364]
4. *Labor's War at Home: The CIO During World War II* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple U. Press, 1983).

Italian Lessons

BHASKAR SUNKARA

AMID TWINKLING FINGERS and Guy Fawkes masks, few were pining for central committees. Occupy's emergence was welcomed. The movement galvanized radicals, bringing the language of class and economic justice into view. Yet an unwarranted arrogance underlined the protests. Occupy, in part a media event that mobilized relatively few, was quick to assert its novelty and earth-shattering significance.

"Our model worked" was the refrain, cutting short debate with representatives from the gloomy socialist left. A disconnect from the lineages of past movements — movements that energized more, accomplished more and were only half as self-congratulatory — was a point of pride. The posture was all the more tragic, because Occupy's potential went beyond the minuscule core that laid its foundation. It rested in the millions who saw in it their discontent with austerity regimes, wage cuts, unemployment, and financial abuse. OWS, now drifting towards irrelevance, lacked the experience and political strategy to rally these people to action.

Of course, no diverse movement emerges out of an apolitical era and latches immediately onto a unified and comprehensive critique. Politicization is a process.

In this context, the translation of Lucio

The Tailor of Ulm: Communism in the Twentieth Century

LUCIO MAGRI

TR.: PATRICK CAMILLER

London, Brooklyn: Verso, 2011,
\$59.95, 448 pp

Magri's *The Tailor of Ulm*, a history of the rise and fall of the Italian Communist Party, once the most powerful and influential one in the West, is perfectly timed. With the Commu-

nist movement long dead and Italian politics vacillating between the dry and technocratic and the bombastic and corrupt, that's an odd pronouncement. But the history of the PCI is the history of a vibrant and deeply political organization that in a

few short decades embedded itself within the Italian working class, attempting to chart a new course between Stalinism and social democracy. Its premature disappearance left that class in disarray. And today, Italy's anti-austerity movement is as weak and scattered as our own.

So Rome inspired no one at Zuccotti. Unlike, say, Athens. In Greece, the far left has come close to leading a governing coalition and a radical extra-parliamentary movement has been fighting for years to stave off the European austerity packages.

But it goes unnoticed that the Left's rise in Greece is a result of a unique history. Almost alone in Europe, Greece's unapologetically Stalinist Communist Party and its Eurocommunist splinters clung to life after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This tradition of working class organization, even in its ossified "Party" form, has fueled eclectic protests that make Occupy look like a tea party. Or the Tea Party.

"Eclectic" and "ossified" seem as if they don't belong together. Today, the Old Left is

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invoked as a convenient foil: humorless, militaristic, rigidly holding onto a stale ideology. It's a critique that has roots in the New Left. But the revolution danced before Emma Goldman, much less Abbie Hoffman.

AS MAGRI EXPLAINS, the Italian Communist Party incubated a social movement and a real community:

In the evening you went to a meeting on your bicycle or moped, where you would discuss the newspaper articles or membership campaigns; then you came back late to eat a plate of tripe or have a drink or two at the cafe attached to the House of Labor.

The web of solidarity made it possible for the unemployed to get by with no income and to feel a sense of belonging and power, whatever their personal ability or status. It was similar to the way the early German Social Democratic Party earned the loyalty of workers by filling the holes in the Bismarckian welfare state. Late night dances and sporting events were just as important as propagandizing.

But what made the Italian Communist Party, so different than the Soviet monolith it followed and then sparred with? Though he documents the Great War's disorienting effect on an ascending European workers' movement, the core of Magri's history starts in 1944, the year party boss Palmiro Togliatti returned from exile. The Italian Communist Party had long been a marginal force, with only a few thousand members throughout the fascist era. Its main asset was an intellectual inheritance from Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci critiqued Stalinist orthodoxy and grappled with the unique problems revolutionaries had to deal with in the West, where capitalist hegemony stood not just in the coercive power of the state, but within civil society.

But, for all his effort preserving Gramsci's prison writings, Togliatti was for most of his life an orthodox Stalinist. He was, however, also a skilled organizer who was able to position the

communists at the vanguard of a growing resistance movement. The PCI emerged from World War II with widespread popular support and a base so militant that it had to be restrained. The creation of a mass party capable of governing, after all, would require more than a putsch.

This so-called "Salerno turn," which dis-

But, for all his effort preserving Gramsci's prison writings, Togliatti was for most of his life an orthodox Stalinist. He was, however, also a skilled organizer.

armed Communist partisans was supported by Stalin, as well. But something unusual happened after. Togliatti set in motion a model that would pose an alternative, democratic road to socialism and challenge aspects of the Soviet model. His protégé Enrico Berlinguer, a father of Eurocommunism, would make the rupture between the PCI and Moscow absolute.

But in the immediate postwar period, the contradictions of an avowedly revolutionary party shoring up the state did not come to the fore. Italian conditions — war-ravaged, underdeveloped to begin with — favored this approach. The PCI played a major role in drawing up one of the most progressive constitutions in Europe and, despite being excluded from national government after 1947, ran local and state administrations efficiently, proving that it could also "make the trains run on time." Its success paid off. Within a decade, with membership well over one million, the PCI was not only the largest Communist party in the West, it was second only to the German SPD as the largest mass membership party in Europe. A little more than a decade before, the PCI was an isolated

Leninist vanguard composed of a few hundred, largely expatriated, anti-fascist intellectuals.

Most importantly, the party played a vital role in fostering civil society after Mussolini's long interlude. The Left presided across much of postwar Italian culture. To the PCI, cultural predominance was not meant to be an achievement in its own right, but a necessary prerequisite to power.

BUT PERHAPS CONFIRMING Max Shachtman's distinction between Stalinism in power and "official Communist" movements, this vibrancy was not a result of a break with the Soviet Union. The party received millions from Moscow annually until the 1980s and its leadership not only joined the Cominform in denouncing Tito, it supported the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, as well. As Magri notes, the PCI was neither a Soviet shill or completely independent during this transition period — and its leadership showed a parallel mix of rigidity and creativity.

After joining as a young man in the mid-1950s, Magri gravitated to the left-wing of the party. Critiquing an increasingly reformist leadership, amid the upheavals of Italy's "long 68," Magri and other dissidents created the journal *il manifesto*. Student and worker radicalization in the Sixties had taken the party by surprise. Amendola, an ex-resistance member and a leader on the PCI's right, saw streaks of anarchist nihilism in the protests. Other apparatchiks followed suit, fighting a two-front battle against the bosses and the "ultra-leftists." Pier Paolo Pasolini's sentiment on witnessing the Italian student movement, "*Poliziotti figli di proletari meridionali picchiati da figli di papà in vena di bravate*,"* was not unique.

But Magri saw potential in the new upsurge and thought the party's gradualist approach did not fit the moment. New contradictions had emerged over the past decade, he argued, and the conservative posture that might have made sense in the immediate postwar period no lon-

ger did now. The central committee had other plans. Under Berlinguer, the PCI distanced itself further from Moscow, but this distancing was under the banner of "Eurocommunism," not the quasi-Trotskyist leanings of Magri's group. Magri soon found himself, along with his co-thinkers, expelled from the party, a party that he still pledged allegiance to, seeing it as not only redeemable, but the Italian working class's legitimate representative.

As general secretary from 1972 to 1984, Berlinguer formulated the "historic compromise." In the same way the early capitalist class made peace with elements of the ancien regime and remade society in its own image, while keeping the symbolic trappings of aristocracy around, Communists, he postulated, could share power with capitalists, while cementing working class hegemony. Practically, it was a stupendous failure. The PCI ended up propping up a fragile Christian Democrat-led government which made concessions to them for their service. The uproar after the ultra-leftist Red Brigades assassinated that party's Aldo Moro put a quick end to the experiment. The PCI, a long target and frequent denouncer of the Red Brigades, received a public backlash after the killing.

WHAT WERE THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS doing? They had helped create a republic, had garnered the support of more than a third of the population, and governed major cities and whole regions, but had nothing to show for it at the national level. When there was finally working class militancy at the base, its reaction was to turn rightwards, help restore conditions for stable accumulation, and seek accommodation with the Right. Before long the party, still with a mass base and significant electoral support, would make the rightward turn official, dropping the iconography of October and embracing the language of social democracy in 1991.

But they did so at a peculiar moment. The crisis of the Western socialist tradition was two-

fold: traditional social democracy had withered almost as much as official communism. For decades, the center-left had tasked itself with the burden of governance, delivering welcomed doses of socialism within the capitalist framework. The crowning achievement of postwar

Near-full employment and a cushy welfare state made workers bold, not docile. They made militant wage demands.

social democracy, the welfare state, represented a high point in human civilization. The state was wielded, not smashed, and class compromise, not class struggle, fostered economic growth and shared prosperity previously unimaginable.

But social democracy faced the structural crisis in the 1970s that Michal Kalecki, author of *The Political Aspects of Full Employment*, predicted decades earlier. Contra Leninist predictions, near-full employment and a cushy welfare state made workers bold, not docile. They made militant wage demands. Capitalists were able to keep up with them when times were good, but when stagflation hit — the intersection of poor growth and rising inflation — capital suffered from a crisis of profitability. Neoliberalism's success came in curbing this inflation and restoring profits through a vicious offensive against the working class.

Social democratic parties that sought to administer advanced economies in the neoliberal age, especially with the pressures wrought by globalization, had to adapt their platforms to this new reality. It has often meant, such as in

the case of New Labour in Britain, betraying the principles and constituencies that these parties built their legacies around. But, at its best, it has yielded a “progressive neoliberalism,” with certain European nations, like Sweden, maintaining much of their social safety net.

The PCI's failures then can be chalked up to historical circumstance. It could have neither moved right nor stayed in its contradictory posture. But looking back at then leader Achille Occhetto's decision to push for the party to be renamed the Democratic Party of the Left, the remnants of the Italian far-left are less forgiving. They see it as an unnecessary action that dissolved decades of hard-work and organizing. Magri agrees, but he doesn't see the PCI's dissolution into social democracy and later social liberalism, as the natural result of a creeping reformism that first emerged at Salerno.

After all, the PCI's motive, finding a “third way” between Leninism and social democracy in Western European conditions, was not necessarily reformist. Even the term used by the Italians, “structural reforms,” was the same used by New Left theorist André Gorz: certain reforms short of revolution, short of smashing the state, not only improve the conditions of people in the present, they lay the terrain for more sweeping structural changes in the future. Attempting such a political strategy within the traditional “Party form,” was not unusual either, since that organizational structure predates Leninism, something that Lenin, self-consciously modeling the German SPD to clandestine conditions, would not have disputed.

Magri knows the last point and writes cogently about the early social democratic movement. He laments the dissolution of the PCI, while acknowledging objective factors that led to it — an aging membership, the onerous legacy of the Communist experiment. But his way forward is nothing more than left-wing “umbrellas,” organizations that can take scattered resistance and identitarian movements and rally them together. One, two, three World

*“Policemen, sons of proletarian southerners, beaten up by arrogant daddies' boys.”

Social Forums. It's an absurd facile solution for a man who was an unrepentant Marxist, aiming to abolish classes, a set of social cleavages that have existed since the Neolithic Revolution. It's a simplicity replicated in Occupy's stance towards finance and expertise: irreconcilable to democratic equality.

When activists energized by Occupy do look towards one of the few bright spots on the radical left — the rise of Syriza in Greece — they show a similar naivety, imaging that Greek “resistance” can be easily replicated domestically.

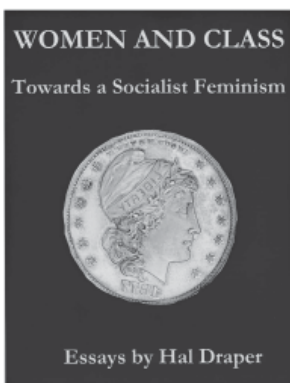
They fail to see the way in which serious, disciplined organizations, both social democratic and socialist, rooted in the Greek's working class, made this resistance possible.

Given the Left's lofty goals and the political impasse it finds itself in, a look back at the Italian Communist Party, despite its ultimate failure, is a strong reminder of the merits of conscious political work and of the path not taken between the horrors of state socialism and the bankruptcy of modern social democracy.

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

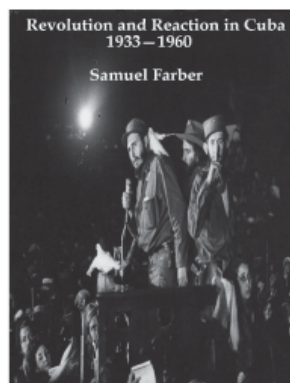


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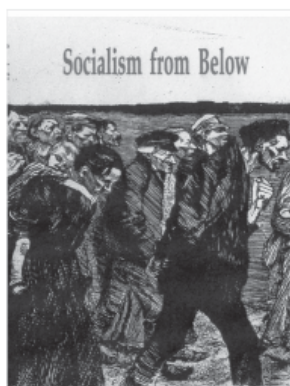


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From the Sixties to the Present

An Interview with Lisa Lyons by Kent Worcester

Which came first, your interest in politics or your interest in cartooning?

They actually began together, when I was 13 or 14, with a badly drawn, over-the-top, heartfelt diatribe against my mother's consumerism. Even though I was just a white, middle class teenager in Connecticut, I was indignant about inequality and injustice.

How did you get started as a political cartoonist?

My first political cartoons were published in 1963, when, as a junior at Carleton College in Minnesota, I drew for the official student paper and then for one of the first underground newspapers of the 1960s (the paper's name changed with every issue). The paper was the voice of a group of liberal, radical, and socialist students on the campus (including several *New Politics* readers) who engaged the Carleton administration



in a struggle against in loco parentis that anticipated the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM). After thirteen issues distributed to every student on campus, the administration finally suppressed the paper by threatening us all with suspension (but then gave up on in loco parentis



You didn't see us and we didn't see you, okay?

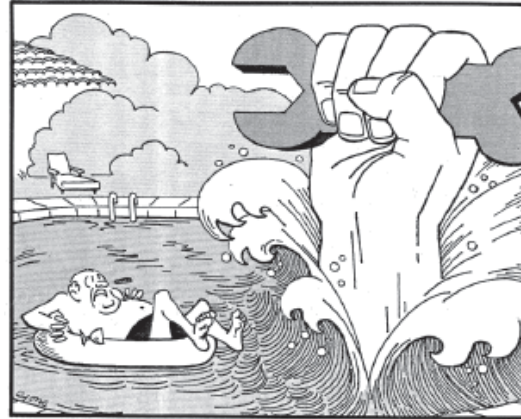
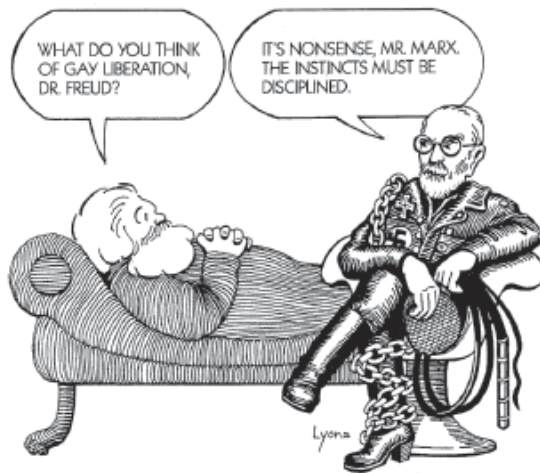


the following year). Great fun!

After my junior year I married a fellow plotter, Kit Lyons, and we transferred to Berkeley in the summer of 1964, where we participated in the founding of the Independent Socialist Club (ISC), just before the Free Speech Movement, FSM, exploded. Thrilling times. My first ISC



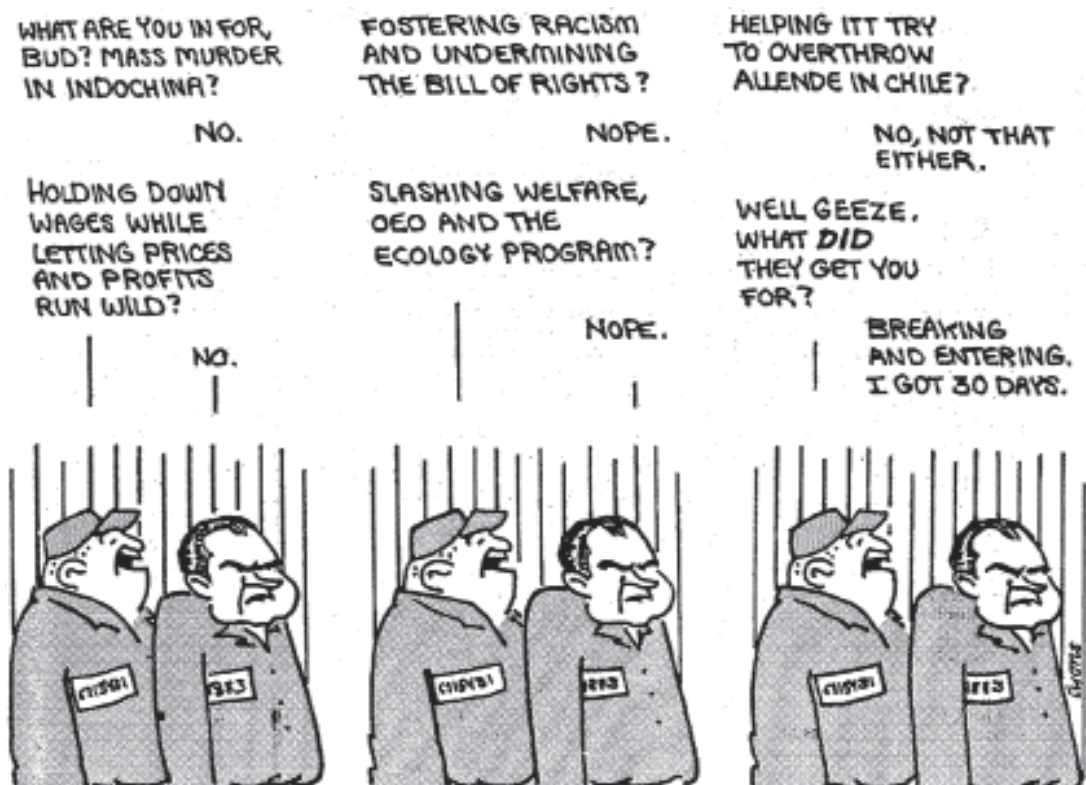
But Ronald Hood! You're supposed to rob the *rich* to give to the *poor*!



leaflets and newsletters were etched into mimeo stencils—lots of dancing Marxs, Lenins, and Rosa Luxemburgs. A wonderful, curmudgeonly Trotskyist printer taught me how to prepare art for offset reproduction.

I spent the rest of the 1960s working for a wide range of radical and movement

organizations—SDS, the Farm Workers, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Black Panther Party, and many others—and became a full-time staffer for the International Socialist (IS) newspaper *Workers Power* in 1969. My work appeared in Liberation News Service, the left's alternative to AP and UP. I illustrated Barbara





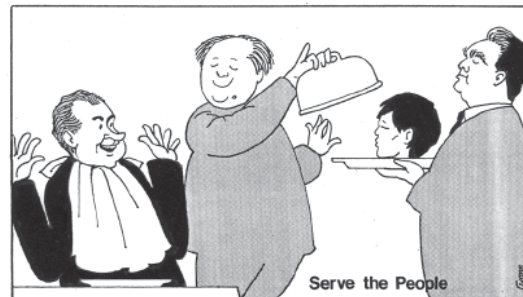
Garson's *MacBird*, which was translated into many languages, and went on to become a stage play. Most of my cartoons in the sixties and seventies were collaborations with Kit and other members of the ISC and IS.



Could you say something about your impressions of the underground comix world? Did you read the comics that people like Crumb and Shelton were producing? Were you offended by their sexism or inspired by their iconoclasm?

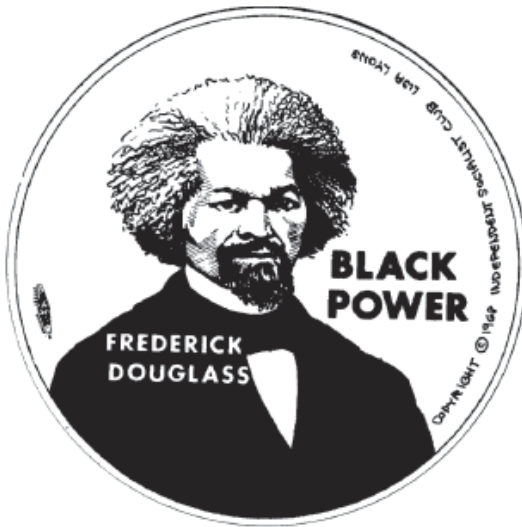
I loved the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers—the joyous, anarchic craziness of it. It was such a celebration of the anything-can-happen spirit of the times, especially in California. I hated

R. Crumb's depiction of women. There was so much open sexism at the time, which is why, of course, women's liberation was so... liberating. I tried to join the sign painters union, but was turned down because I "wouldn't be comfortable at the all-male meetings." On the other hand, a women's group I had just joined informed me, by phone, that they had voted to become lesbians. Was I in? I said I'd only been married (to a man) a little while, but liked it so far, so no.

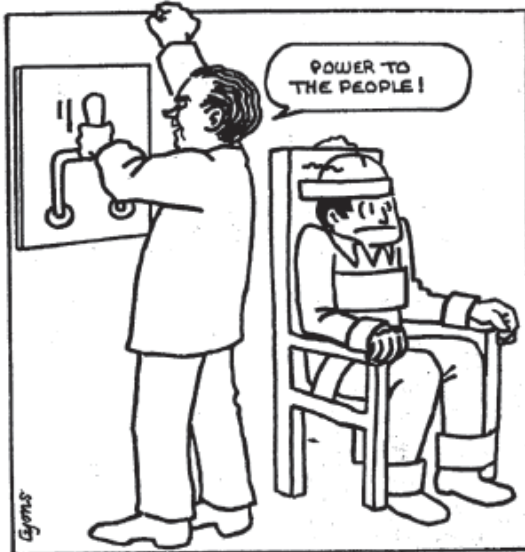


Who were some of your favorite cartoonists? Were there particular cartoonists who inspired you when you first started drawing cartoons for publication? I grew up revering Ernest Shepard, illustrator of *Wind in the Willows*—his wit, delicacy, and black and white line. Beardsley's dramatic black and white contrasts were a big influence, as were Hilary Knight's *Eloise* drawings, and Crockett Johnson's *Barnaby*. The French protest posters of 1968 influenced my style, as well as many of the other artists being published in *Liberation News Service*, and all the great political cartoon-





ists of the past — from Thomas Nast to Balfour Ker to Carlo of the Workers Party/Independent Socialist League. I love Phil Evans' British



breeziness, and Gilbert Shelton's Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers. Dan Perkins' *This Modern World* is just the best. Why he hasn't convinced everyone to see reason, I don't know.

What kind of comics did you create once the sixties were over?

It was a nice change from the tanks and guns to be invited to do a section in Trina Robbins' *It Ain't Me Babe* comic in 1970. Three of us in that group were pregnant, including me, and Trina had just had a baby. Sadly, just as I had

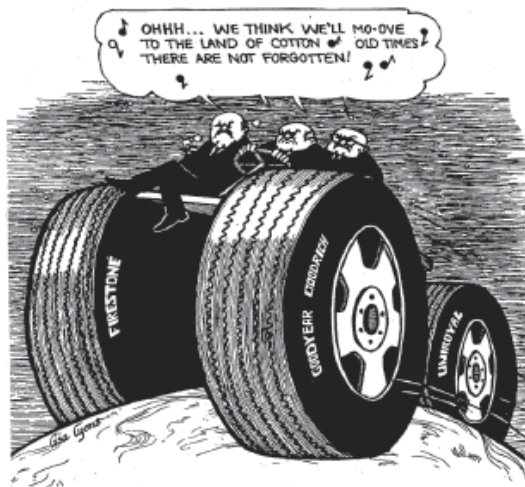


found an exciting women's group, we moved to Detroit, where I refocused on socialist and trade union cartoons and illustrations, and layouts for *Worker's Power*.

I was always able to do cartoons on subjects that I cared passionately about, including women's issues. In Detroit, our milieu was the International Socialists. Some members had

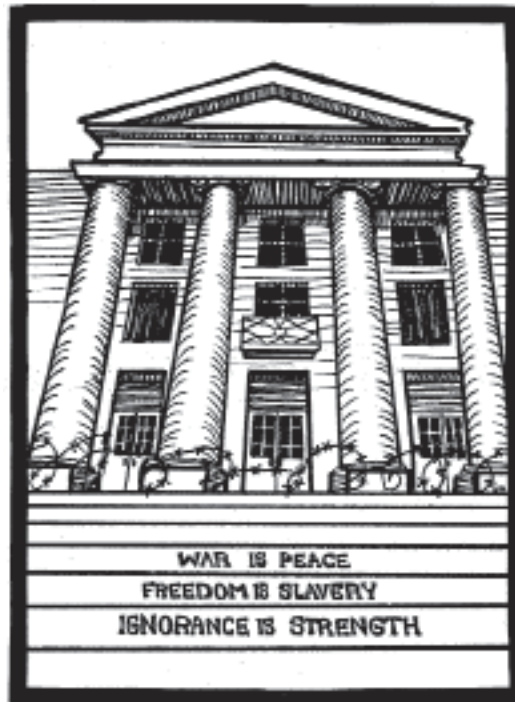


industrialized; Kit and I put out the newspaper, and did work for rank and file caucuses and other allied groups, as we had in Berkeley and Oakland.



It was a wonderful period, but by 1973 I was feeling burned out—politics overload—and got an MA in Art History from Wayne State, and went on to the University of Delaware in 1975. My interest was in women's art history; I began research at a time before there were any books on women artists, and almost no art by women was on view in museums. Women artists have definitely been an inspiration to me, Kathe Kollwitz in particular.

From 1975 to 2009 — a long time! — I was in grad school, raised three children, was a staff member at Sudbury schools in Maine and Maryland, and worked as a graphic designer, book designer, and illustrator. Kit and I haven't been very politically active since Detroit, although our politics haven't changed. In 2009 I retired from teaching, and contributed artwork to a book, *Vive La Revolution!: An Appreciation of Joel Geier*, and the publicity for an IS reunion, collecting old cartoons and doing some new ones. That led to being asked to contribute cartoons to *New Politics*, which I've been doing ever since.



I'm also currently working on a section in Paul Buhle's forthcoming book, *Bohemians*. My section is on nineteenth-century utopian communities, including the very funny, not-so-utopian Fruitlands. My involvement with this project and with *New Politics* has been an honor. It's exciting to be back from burnout, although the world seems even more messed up than before.



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IN THIS ISSUE

But capitalist crises are no more caused by a lack of adequate demand than flat tires are caused by the sudden and forcible loss of air. This is not an insight, but a tautology. Both are the effect of latent structural weaknesses that have become suddenly acute.

Barry Finger

ECONOMIC RECOVERY FROM BELOW: NOTES ON
THE INSUFFICIENCY OF "TAXING THE RICH"

Obama's "race to the top" uses the false promise of "education" as rhetorical cover for his failure to address the economic crisis that besets black communities, at the same time that it abets the reactionary crusade for school privatization and disinvestment in public education.

Stephen Steinberg

RACE AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

This kind of *Souffrance au travail* (suffering in the workplace), the subject of a startling book and TV documentary by a concerned psychiatrist Christophe Dejours, is the direct product of new destabilizing French management practices aimed at breaking the morale of the traditionally feisty French worker.

Richard Greeman

EUROPE AT A DARK CROSSROADS,
LETTER FROM FRANCE

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