
 TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITORS	5
IRAQ: THE DEMOCRATS TO THE FORE	6
<i>Barry Finger</i>	

IMMIGRATION

HIDDEN SLAVES	11
<i>Human Rights Center</i>	
SWEDISH LABOR AND IMMIGRATION: A DILEMMA	16
<i>Rikard Warlenius</i>	
THE IMMIGRATION RIGHTS MOVEMENT: BETWEEN POLITICAL REALISM AND SOCIAL IDEALISM	24
<i>Dan LaBotz</i>	

HOMELESS SHELTERS, A FEEBLE RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS	34
<i>Betty Reid Mandell</i>	
FINLAND IS SOFT ON CRIME	54
<i>Dan Gardner</i>	
REVOLUTIONARY UNIONISM, YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW	60
<i>Dan Jakobovic</i>	
ALICE IN IMPERIALAND	67
<i>Richard Greeman</i>	
LAWS AND INJUSTICE: FIGHTING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEXICO	74
<i>Chris Tilly and Marie Kennedy</i>	
RAUL'S CUBA	80
<i>Sam Farber</i>	
RETURN OF LIMITS	94
<i>Ashley Dawson</i>	
WHO'S AFRAID OF THE ICC?	106
<i>Laurie Calhoun</i>	
THE SOCIALIST CHALLENGE FOR BRITISH LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP: INTERVIEW WITH JOHN McDONNELL, M.P.	113
<i>Chris Ford and David Broder</i>	
THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND THE PERVERSION OF BIBLICAL ETHICS: UNCLEAR ON THE CONCEPT	125
<i>Russell Pregeant</i>	

(contents continued)

BACK OF THE BOOK

<i>Jackie Dee King</i> , ARMAGEDDON BLUES: REVIEW OF THE LEFT BEHIND SERIES	131
<i>Sherry Gorelick</i> , MARX'S MIXED LEGACY, A REVIEW OF MARIO KESSLER, <i>ON ANTI-SEMITISM AND SOCIALISM</i>	137
<i>Lynn Chancer</i> , IN MEMORIAM: ELLEN WILLIS	144
<i>Andrew Krivak</i> , LEAVING ASIA MINOR, A POEM	146
<i>Everett Frost</i> , NEW POLITICS, A POEM	148
<i>Kurt Jacobsen</i> , IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN, A FILM REVIEW OF <i>THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY</i>	149
<i>JAMES GILBERT</i> , A SOBER VIEW OF CAPITALISM, REVIEW OF NELSON LICHTENSTEIN'S <i>AMERICAN CAPITALISM</i>	153
<i>Michael Busch</i> , KILLERS FOR HIRE, A REVIEW OF ROBERT PELTON'S <i>LICENSED TO KILL</i>	157

WORDS AND PICTURES

KENT WORCESTER'S INTERVIEW WITH HARVEY PEKAR	160
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SILENT AUCTION

NOTICE: Silent auction for benefit of *New Politics* . . . The highest bidder will receive a week's vacation at a house on Cuttyhunk Island, MA during fall, 07 or spring, 08. Place bids at mmandell@curry.edu before deadline, August 1. Sunporch, deck, beautiful view of Vineyard Sound. Minimum bid: \$500

MARVIN AND BETTY

From the Editors

I believe in Michelangelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed.

— G. B. Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma*

ANYONE CAN MAKE A YELLOW BALL out of a sun,” Picasso is reported to have said, “but to take a yellow ball and make a sun out of it — *that* is art!” We believe that art should magnify, not trivialize humans. It should also magnify their language. In this age of dehumanization — of joylessness, of alienation — art’s purpose of celebrating life is crucial, perhaps sacred. Artists should not abdicate this calling. They should strive to show death-in-life without becoming dead themselves (or allowing their language to become so). They should also at least suggest the vital beneath the mask. “God has shown me a fair city,” Villon said. Surely that city is as real as the world we find ourselves in.

We believe that before being leftists, progressives, democratic socialists, we are humanists, that is, believers in the inviolability of the human personality. Kurt Vonnegut was honorary president of the American Humanist Association, but as we remember him in our Iowa days in the 60s, humanism meant more to him than simply not believing in a theistic god (as it does for many AHA members): it meant the preciousness of each person. Who can forget the *Sirens of Titans*’ intergalactic spaceship that needs a spare part, and programs the entire history of Earth — world wars, plagues, destitution, Inquisitions, holocausts — just so that the Earthlings can throw them that part en-

abling them to go to a distant galaxy and spread the word GREETINGS across the sky? Absurdity! Kurt was a master of the absurd because he knew what life could and should be like. “Life is no way to treat an animal,” Kurt’s alter ego, Kilgore Trout, wrote. Yes, Kurt believed passionately in Villon’s fair city, and he cried out against a world that, under whatever hypocritical mask, utterly devalued people.

Last year we asked Kurt to write for our journal. This was his response: “You are sure my kind of people, and I would be in the best of company if I could think of something really good to write for you. But at age 83 I find myself out of steam, clouds of which I set free years ago now. But in any case cheers and love from me today. Kurt.”

Goodbye, Kurt. We loved you and miss you.

In this issue our authors have tried to look below the mask at the critical problems we face in the new century: war, environmental destruction, homelessness, immigration, and injustice. But Dan Gardner offers real hope: read his article on Finnish prisons and learn how an entire society can live by Nicos Kazantzakis’ “Inside the most hardened criminal there is a saint who is weeping and waiting,” a society that treats criminals as human beings capable of change. Villon’s fair city lives, even today. We must keep it alive.

MARVIN AND BETTY

Iraq: The Democrats to the Fore

BARRY FINGER

IN HIS BRILLIANT SATIRE of the plight of the Palestinians as a captured nation, Emile Habiby introduced Saeed, the ill fated pessoptimist. His beleaguered hero explained his inability to differentiate between optimism and pessimism in this way: “When I awake each morning I thank the Lord he did not take my soul at night. If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was no worse. So which am I, a pessimist or an optimist?” In an analogous way, the Democratic Party, choking in the grip of power politics, has in short order revealed itself the ill fated pranti-war party.

The American military machine was able to topple the Baathist regime in short order, but American imperialism has been unable to pacify Iraq in the aftermath. Clearly, by the “metrics” that former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was so fond of employing, the war is lost. The American electorate understands this, and the Democratic base is fulminating to settle accounts with an administration seen as both electorally illegitimate and institutionally dishonest on an historical level that dwarfs the mendacity preceding the buildup to the Spanish American and Vietnam wars. The violence the occupation forces are supposed to be quelling has itself surged. Reconstruction has been an abject failure. The prison population has grown by a third since the Saddam era. More and more territory is out of the coalition's control. Instead of one big Saddam there are hundreds of little Saddams. Only 30 percent of Iraqi children can attend schools compared to the universal attendance under the old regime; and women's lives are ever more perilous since the

ascendancy of religious sectarianism in Iraq's stormy political life. Millions have fled the country or been displaced. The medical system, once a source of pride in the Arab world, is in shambles. The sectarian and ethnocentric government of Iraq is ever more notoriously distinguished by its abject incompetency in every arena save self-enrichment. As one Iraqi socialist so frustratingly summarized, after a scant four years of the American led occupation, “a society that was more like any western society in living standards, security, education, and many other fields than its neighbors (was) pushed back . . . to the Stone Ages.”

Most ironic were it not so damning and tragic is the effect the Iraqi war has had in ratcheting up worldwide terrorism by sevenfold, according to figures derived from the MIPT-Rand Terrorism database. This irony is of course of a piece with most capitalist wars. The “war to end all wars,” which was also the “war for democracy” resulted in more war with even greater carnage and even less democracy; the war to “stop fascism” culminated in a monstrous growth of totalitarianism. And so, the war against terrorism. American capitalism can marshal the public behind its imperial crusades only by appealing to some loftier ideal such as safeguarding the world from religious fanaticism by spreading democracy. American elites never, perish the thought, want “world domination,” they merely seek the benefits of world power that accrue from setting the errant world aright. Theirs is always a reluctant “internationalism.”

This has all worn quite thin of late with the American public. Those politicians such as John McCain and the congressional delegation led recently by him to Baghdad, who remain

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true believers in this intervention, are increasingly marginalized within the court of public opinion as intellectual cousins to the flat earth society and cargo cults. No sooner had they returned with glowing reports of progress from their recent visit to a Potemkin village in Baghdad, than the media was besieged by tales of horror from Iraqi merchants now fearing that the American visit will serve only to make that isolated market a more tempting target for insurgent attacks.

Neither has there exactly been a swarm of endorsement within the American establishment for Tommy Thompson's "generous" suggestion that the Iraqi people might perhaps be asked to deliver their opinion on whether American forces should stay. And for good reason. For as Steve Shalom and Gilbert Achcar recently pointed out in these pages, polls do exist and they reveal that not only do the preponderance of Iraqis wish us to leave, but a majority also endorse attacks on American and coalition military personnel. Then again, and on closer inspection, the good governor was really asking for the opinion of the Iraqi government as a surrogate for the Iraqi people. This, one might think, could provide an easy propaganda victory for the administration insofar as all as the ongoing presence of American troops guarantees that government's security to loot the oil coffers and smuggle the country's wealth and cultural icons abroad in preparation for their future in exile. Yet here too, such judgments would be premature. For whatever slender authority the various Iraqi political parties still enjoy rests in part on their anti-occupation planks. The administration is clearly not willing to wager that there are enough troops in all of Iraq to safeguard party leaderships should they repudiate this fragile reed which still links

A society that was more like any western society in living standards, security, education, and many other fields than its neighbors was pushed back to the Stone Ages."

them to their bases.

Still democracy clearly comes in a distant second to economic neo-liberalism, though both avenues highlight in their own way the wholesale contempt the administration and its allies have for Iraqi concerns. Emblematic is the occupation's recently proposed "hydrocarbon law," which, were it to be enacted, would pave the way for international investors such as BP, Exxon and Shell to hive off 75

percent of that country's oil production revenues for the next thirty years. Given that the oil sector represents the overwhelming source of existing and foreseeable public revenues, and that only 17 of 80 oil fields are in current operation, it is clear that Iraq is to be looted from within and without. The concept of production sharing agreements, which underlies this law, dates back five years ago as part of the Bush State Department's policy-development project entitled "The Future of Iraq" and was later embedded in Bremer's reconstruction plan. It was conceived in English, translated into Arabic and formally confirmed by Maliki's cabinet in early 2007.

The Iraqi General Union of Oil Employees has struggled against privatization plan and has taken an unequivocal stand against this legislation as well. In response to an earlier anti-privatization conference last summer and similar political activities, the occupation forces froze its bank accounts, arrested union members and terminated others from their jobs, a portent of the scale of repression that stands in the offing to all forms of resistance that seek to fuse the interests of class and nation.

Of this, of course, there's been nary a peep from the Democratic Party leadership. To the extent that they engage at all with the Iraqi

public, it is to issue warnings and admonitions about the American public's limited patience with their behavior. The Democrats are no more capable of imperial self-recrimination than their Republican rivals. It is not the United States that is to be condemned as an aggressor, insofar as an aggressor by any reasonable definition is one who seizes and rules another people's territory without provocation and against the expressed wishes of that people. Aggression committed by itself or its allies is never aggression. American foreign policy may be indicted only for being badly mishandled and poorly crafted, but it is always the United States which is seen in the eyes of the Democratic leadership as being the principal victim of the Republican debacle. Their populism may flirt with the idealism of its progressive base, but always with a knowing wink to American chauvinism. It is not the ongoing project of imperial intervention, including the Clinton era sanctions, that stripped Iraq of every bond of social solidarity down to the most primitive ties of blood and faith. It's not the divide and conquer tactics of the occupiers that brought a viciously cruel version of Islamic fundamentalism to the fore. No, these age old rivalries were always "just below the surface." From the heights of Olympian disdain and regal arrogance, Joe Biden for one, would simply allow "history" to reassert itself and let Iraq disintegrate as a nation into its three large religious and subnational constituencies.

All of which brings us to the most current episode of disgraceful behavior on the part of the Democratic Party — the Supplemental spending bill, otherwise known as the "Iraqi Accountability Act." Ostensibly, both the House and the Senate versions of the bill would set definite deadlines for the withdrawal of troops. The Senate bill would require withdrawal to be complete by March 2008; the House version would have it complete by August 2008. Both ostensibly ban torture. Both detail limits on how many days a soldier or marine may be kept in Iraq. The Pelosi bill demands of the president

that he report on progress made in Iraq. All very commendable, very responsive.

And as Retired Brigadier General Kevin Ryan argued, it is also very misleading. For the House and Senate bills also permit troops to remain in Iraq "as long as they are performing one of three specific missions: protecting US facilities, citizens, or forces; combating Al Qaeda or international terrorists and training Iraqi security forces." Altogether the number of brigades needed to perform these missions could reach between 12 and 20, which is a particularly curious "withdrawal." Particularly curious because it permits roughly the same number of troops to remain after the deadline as there have been for the past three years. It moreover studiously avoids calling for the dismantling of permanent military bases or identifying withdrawal with actually bringing troops home rather than merely redeploying them to nearby countries in the region. It allows the president to be the sole arbiter as to whether Congressional benchmarks have been attained. It appropriates all the funds the president requested for prosecuting the war. And it does absolutely nothing to block and forbid spreading the war to Iran.

The ban on torture, redundant — one might naively think — in any case given that the United States is a signatory to numerous international treaties that outlaw torture, and limitations on the length of tour duties are both eyewash, because both had already been tried by a Republican congress and simply nullified through presidential signing statements which announced the administration's intent to ignore and break the law. But rather than threatening that any future signal to abrogate the law would be met with the counter-threat of impeachment, the House bill permits the president to simply waive restrictions on tour duty limitations which is exactly what he has done. It is, not to put too fine a point on it, carefully cobbled to avoid any confrontation with the administration, which is a telling indication as to just how zealously the Democrats can also be expected to investi-

gate and punish acts of governmentally sanctioned torture.

And both bills, congressional and senatorial, *require* the Iraqi Parliament to pass its “hydrocarbon law,” ostensibly touted to the American and Iraqi publics as a means of equitably(!) sharing the (remaining) oil revenues among the various Iraqi regions. But by compelling Iraq to engineer and legitimate the foreign capture of its own oil, the Democratic party lends its authority to an act of brigandage that would reverberate throughout the region.

Representative Sam Farr explained, as if scripted by the late Habiby, the pranti-war soul of the Democrats. “This bill,” he stated, “brings our troops home.” But he also told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “They want to go gung-ho. They want to escalate in Iraq. So what would our ‘no’ votes mean?” Hillary Clinton, the scourge of the anti-war wing and Barack Obama, its rising star, agree in foreseeing, despite all that fashionable withdrawal rhetoric, “a remaining military as well as political mission” in Iraq for some time to come.

So the question remains: why, rather than refusing to take any moral or political responsibility for this fiasco, are the Democrats pleading in effect for co-ownership? Why instead of supporting the Iraqi working class are they once again cutting the floor from underneath it? And why, rather than embracing this thinly veiled offer at collaboration, is the administration resisting the blandishments of the Democrats? The simple answer is that to pull out of Iraq is to show weakness. To pull out is to lose. To be seen as the ratifier of that loss would open the Democratic party to the charge that they are less committed to the defense of the same social system, institutions, programs and privileges of American capitalism than the Republicans. Democrats seek collaboration to avoid the taint of irresoluteness in defense of elite interests, while Republicans seek to hang this failure in its final throes wholly on the next, and presumably, Democratic administration to make sure

they stay so branded for years to come.

One of the chief illusions about American society and its political forms is the myth that the two party system represented by the Democrats and Republicans is rooted in different do-

By compelling Iraq to engineer and legitimate the foreign capture of its own oil, the Democratic Party has lent its authority to an act of brigandage that would reverberate throughout the region.

mestic and foreign policy principles. They are in fact rooted in different constituencies and rule by different means; the Democrats primarily and wherever possible through concessions, the Republicans through repression, either state or free market based. But the Democratic party as it is comprised is as committed to a foreign and domestic policy dictated by the interests of the corporate elite as their rivals. On foreign affairs this tactical difference concerns secondary issues such as more generous foreign aid, a more protracted approach to negotiations and containment or invoking the UN, NATO or regional allies as international cover rather than flying solo and in the teeth of world opprobrium. But the Democrats only pursue aims which are consistent with the preservation of capitalism — domestically through an ever watered down commitment to a bare-bones welfare state and internationally through bribery and big power intimidation. The Democrats are, in short, a company union rhetorically and nominally representing society’s rank and file —including its anti-war constituency, but in actuality an instrument of its corporate financiers and power brokers. This is what prevents them from formulating and implementing a fundamental or basic critique of the aims

and purposes of American foreign policy. If the Democrats, nevertheless, eventually find their way to distancing themselves decisively from this war, it would be not for anti-imperialist reasons, but rather because the continuance of this utterly failed policy had finally proven an intolerable drag on U.S. global power.

The Democratic Party has by default become the symbol of popular appeal to mass sections of the American population alienated and frustrated by this war. But the same reason the anti-war movement is attracted to the Democrats, that is because it is the only realistic, i.e., *capitalist* alternative, is why socialists cannot support it. We, that is those who share this outlook, are for a democratic foreign policy, which is precisely what the Democratic Party as it is so constituted is incapable of offering. It is not with glee that we see our general analysis of the Democrats fulfilled in its current shameful performance. That is why we urge those who do not share our perspective and do not see the Democratic Party as a dead end and debilitating trap for progressives to fight uncompromisingly for a real democratic foreign policy. Nor do we insist that only socialists, or those who

agree in part with the socialist analysis of society are capable of championing a genuine democratic alternative. What we do believe is that only a party independent of the sway of capitalism is able to give priority to programs, proposals and actions that encourage and support the masses in every country to work and fight for their own emancipation. It is only a party with no organizational stakes or ideological commitments to the present structure of society that can also lend those independent forces in Iraq — its embattled trade union, feminist, socialist and democratic forces — the type of consistent support, free of the taint of imperialism, needed to restore that besieged nation, and similarly oppressed countries to national dignity and real democracy.

And when, as we fully expect, the Democratic Party candidate for president in 2008 is once again someone who embraces bipartisan imperialism, we hope this betrayal might become a signal for progressive politicians and their supporters — those who fervently share our desire for a decisive break with the foreign policy status quo — to end their crippling loyalty to the Democrats and seek a new path.

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Hidden Slaves

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER, U. CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

FORCED LABOR IS A SERIOUS AND pervasive problem in the United States. At any given time ten thousand or more people work as forced laborers in scores of cities and towns across the country. And it is likely that the actual number is much higher, possibly reaching into the tens of thousands. Because forced labor is *hidden, inhumane, widespread, and criminal*, sustained and coordinated efforts by U.S. law enforcement, social service providers, and the general public are needed to expose and eradicate this illicit trade.

Victims of forced labor come from numerous ethnic and racial groups. Most are “trafficked” from thirty-five or more countries and, through force, fraud, or coercion, find themselves laboring against their will in the United States. Chinese comprise the largest number of victims, followed by Mexican and Vietnamese. Some victims are born and raised in the United States and find themselves pressed into servitude by fraudulent or deceptive means. Over the past five years, forced labor operations have been reported in at least ninety U.S. cities. These operations tend to thrive in states with large populations and sizable immigrant communities, such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas — all of which are transit routes for international travelers.

Forced labor is prevalent in five sectors of the U.S. economy: prostitution and sex services (46 percent), domestic service (27 percent), agriculture (10 percent), sweatshop/factory (5 percent), and restaurant and hotel work (4 percent). Forced labor persists in these sectors because of low wages, lack of regulation and monitoring of working conditions, and a high demand for cheap labor. These conditions enable unscrupulous employers and criminal networks to gain

virtually complete control over workers’ lives.

The United States government has been a leader in recognizing and combating forced labor worldwide. The 2000 Trafficking Act embodies an aggressive, proactive approach to the problem of human trafficking and forced labor which

- *criminalizes* procuring and subjecting another human being to peonage, involuntary sex trafficking, slavery, involuntary servitude, or forced labor;
- provides social services and legal *benefits* to survivors of these crimes, including authorization to remain in the country;
- provides funding to support *protection programs* for survivors in the United States as well as abroad; and
- includes provisions to *monitor and eliminate* trafficking in countries outside the United States.

DESPITE THESE CONSIDERABLE advancements, the Trafficking Act has some notable shortcomings. The Act conditions immigration relief and social services on prosecutorial cooperation and thus creates the perception that survivors are primarily instruments of law enforcement rather than individuals who are, in and of themselves, deserving of protection and restoration of their human rights.

Furthermore, more proactive measures need to be taken to train law enforcement officers, particularly at the local level, to identify victims and forced labor operations; improve cooperation and information sharing on forced labor between federal and state agencies; revise procedures for the handling of survivors; and provide survivors with protection, benefits, and compensation.

By and large, victims of forced labor are reluctant to report abuse to law enforcement personnel because they fear retribution from their traffickers. Many victims have an inherent fear of police based on their past experience with corrupt authorities in their home countries and communities. To overcome these obstacles there is an urgent need to train law enforcement personnel at all levels to recognize and assist trafficking victims.

Trafficking is defined almost exclusively as a federal crime to be handled by federal authorities. This limited mandate has hindered coordination between federal and state law enforcement agencies that, in turn, has allowed perpetrators of forced labor to go undetected. Moreover, federal law enforcement personnel are often unable to protect survivors and their families from traffickers because authorities lack the necessary legal tools, assistance, and funds to provide them with secure and safe refuge. Taken together, these obstacles can impede a survivor's willingness to cooperate in criminal investigations.

Forced labor survivors are at significant risk of developing health related problems. Most survivors come from impoverished areas of the world where access to adequate health care is limited or nonexistent. Because forced labor victims often circumvent formal medical screenings for migrants, many arrive in the United States without proper immunizations and bearing communicable diseases. Once trafficked migrants reach their destination in the United States, they continue to face a variety of health risks as they begin working in dangerous and unregulated work environments. Those who work in the sex trade are especially at risk of contracting AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Perpetrators of forced labor frequently use violence or the withholding of food as a means of "breaking," controlling, and punishing their workers.

Victims of forced labor often suffer psychological assaults designed to keep them sub-

missive. Cut off from contact with the outside world, they can lose their sense of personal efficacy and control, attributes that mental health professionals have long considered essential to good mental and physical health. In such situations many forced labor victims become increasingly dependent on their captors, if merely to survive. While little is known about the specific psychological sequelae of forced labor, survivors often report feelings of depression, recurring nightmares, and panic attacks.

While the Trafficking Act has greatly amplified the federal government's role in investigating and prosecuting forced labor cases in the United States, the job of providing basic social and legal services to survivors has fallen squarely on the shoulders of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social service agencies. Yet fewer than half of these agencies are able to meet these needs. Social service agencies report that finding appropriate housing for survivors has been one of their greatest challenges. Housing that is safe and secure can protect survivors from their former captors. Yet, housing of any kind can be costly for social service agencies. Much would be gained if these agencies were provided with greater financial support so that they can provide survivors of forced labor with safe and adequate housing and other basic legal and social services.

Some Case Studies

THE CASE AGAINST KIL-SOO LEE: Sweatshop Workers in American Samoa: Kil-Soo Lee, a Korean businessman, recruited primarily women from China and Vietnam to work in his garment factory on the island of American Samoa from 1998 until the factory closed in late 2000. Kil-Soo Lee used employment contract fees and penalties to trap the workers into remaining with the company. He kept workers locked in the factory compound, withheld food as punishment, and authorized violent retaliation for resistance on the part of the workers. In February 2003 Kil-Soo Lee was convicted of crimi-

nal charges of involuntary servitude, extortion, and money laundering.

The Case against Lakireddy Bali Reddy: Sexual Exploitation in California: Lakireddy Bali Reddy, a local businessman, sexually exploited several young girls from his native village in India. Uncovered in January 2000, his sex and labor exploitation ring spanned fifteen years and operated in India and California. He repeatedly raped and sexually abused his victims and forced them to work in his businesses in Berkeley, California, including a well-established Indian restaurant. Reddy pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to immigration fraud and illegal sexual activity and agreed to pay U.S. \$2 million in restitution to several of his victims. In 2004, some Reddy survivors and their families received an out of court settlement of \$8.9 million in response to civil claims brought against the Reddy estate.

The Case against Victoria Island Farms/JB Farm Labor Contractor: Exploitative Farm Labor in California: California asparagus harvesters, numbering in the hundreds, were forced to harvest the high-priced vegetable in substandard conditions for virtually no pay on the property of Victoria Islands, an internationally known asparagus grower, during the 2000 growing season. Hired by JB Farm Labor Contractor, the workers, recruited mostly from Mexico, were powerless to stop the huge deductions for transportation and other “debts” the employer took from their weekly paychecks. Some escaped during the season. Some of the workers filed a civil case against JB Farm Labor Contractor and Victoria Island Farms that resulted in the defendants’ paying the workers the wage owed them.

The Case against R&A Harvesting: Forced Farm Labor in Florida: Florida citrus pickers endured abuse by R&A Harvesting, a farm labor contractor, between January 2000 and June 2001. The company used threats of violence to force as many as seven hundred Mexican and Guatemalan workers to labor for little or no

pay. After R&A Harvesting employees attacked a van driver suspected of assisting the workers, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a local community organization, pressured prosecutors to investigate the allegations of forced labor. The owners of R&A Harvesting, the three Ramos brothers and a cousin, were tried and convicted of forced labor charges in 2002. One of the brothers, Ramiro Ramos, was sentenced in 2004 to fifteen years in prison, fined \$20,000 and ordered to forfeit property valued at over \$3 million. Another brother, Juan Ramos, is being re-sentenced.

The Case against the Cadena Family: Forced Prostitution in Florida and South Carolina: Based in Mexico, the Cadena family members lured young girls and women to come to the United States ostensibly to work as waitresses and domestic workers. Between August 1996 and February 1998, the Cadena family brought between twenty-five and forty unsuspecting victims to Florida and South Carolina and forced them to work as prostitutes to service primarily Mexican migrant farm workers. In March 1998, several Cadena family members and their associates were brought to justice, receiving criminal sentences ranging from two to fifteen years imprisonment.

The Case against Supawan Veerapool: Enslavement of a Domestic Service Worker in California: In 1989 a Thai woman by the name of Supawan Veerapool, the common law wife of Thailand’s ambassador to Sweden, brought a domestic worker to Los Angeles to provide household support in her home. On arrival in the United States the domestic worker’s passport was confiscated and she was then forced to work twenty-hour days, six days a week until she escaped in 1998. Convicted on criminal charges in 1999, Veerapool was sentenced to eight years in prison.

The Case against the John Pickle Company: Forced Labor in a Factory in Oklahoma: Qualified skilled workers were recruited in September 2001 in India through the Al-Samit Inter-

national labor-recruitment agency and promised good jobs in a factory that manufactures pressure valves in the state of Oklahoma. On arrival, the workers were forced to surrender their travel documents and to live in the factory and work twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week, for well below the legal minimum wage. By February 2002, all of the approximately fifty workers had managed to escape and later filed a civil suit against their former employer. Subsequently, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency charged with investigating and filing cases of employment discrimination, filed a separate civil action against the John Pickle Company.

The Case against the Satia Family: Forced Domestic Servitude in Washington, D.C.: The Satias, two Cameroonian sisters and their husbands, recruited young Cameroonian girls, aged fourteen and seventeen, to work as domestics in their Washington, D.C. homes. The girls were recruited with the promise of studying in the U.S. in exchange for providing childcare and domestic help. Once in the U.S., the domestic servants were confined to the Satias' homes, working in excess of fourteen hours a day without remuneration and under threat of violence and deportation. The younger survivor escaped in 1999 after two years of captivity. A year later the older survivor fled, after having been exploited for five years. In 2001 the Satia sisters and their husbands were charged with forced labor. Found guilty, they received criminal sentences ranging from five to nine years and were ordered to pay their victims over \$100,000 in restitution.

Ending Forced Labor in the United States

FORCED LABOR EXISTS IN THE UNITED STATES because factors in the U.S. economy, the legal system, and immigration policy support it. Forced labor is a problem that is driven by a growing "informal economy" in the United

States. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines an informal economy as "all remunerative work — both self employed and wage employment — that is not recognized, regulated, or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks and non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise." Forced labor exists in both legal and illegal industries that are poorly regulated and fail to comply with U.S. labor laws. "Employers" in such industries are often criminal entrepreneurs for whom forced labor may be one of a number of illegal activities. Over time, such employees have found that forced labor can be a lucrative business made possible through the ready availability of free labor, better and more varied transport, new methods of secure communications, and the increased permeability of borders.

Exposing Forced Labor

U.S. nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) deserve the lion's share of credit for exposing the existence of forced labor in the United States. The first major bust of a forced labor operation in recent years took place in 1995 when labor rights groups uncovered a sweatshop operated by a Chinese-Thai family in El Monte, California, a small community near Los Angeles. The seventy-two workers, most of them Thai women, had been held in a compound behind fences tipped with razor wire and forced to sew garments in slavelike conditions. Outrage over the case fueled efforts of a relatively small group of advocates and government officials to end such practices. The U.S. Congress responded by adopting the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (Trafficking Act). One effect of this process is that policymakers and advocates have taken the lead in the struggle to end forced labor. The challenge now is to raise the public's awareness of the problem and to educate and equip state and local law enforcement to recognize and destroy forced labor operations.

Public awareness of forced labor is practi-

cally nonexistent in the United States. Occasionally the police or a group of rights advocates will expose a forced labor operation, and invariably the media will depict it as a single and shocking event. But rarely do such exposés educate the public about its place and function within the U.S. economy.

Like the public, U.S. law enforcement is largely unaware of or poorly informed about the nature of forced labor and the plight of its victims. Because most victims of forced labor are undocumented workers or illegal aliens, law enforcement often regards them as criminals rather than victims ensnared in an illicit trade. This is largely because trafficking into forced labor is considered a federal crime. As a result, state and local law enforcement personnel lack basic training on identifying the crime, protecting victims, and bringing perpetrators to justice. Ironically, treating forced labor victims as criminals only makes it easier for an “employer” to get away with the crime because prosecutions rarely succeed without cooperative eyewitnesses.

The Number of Victims

Our data suggest that at any given time ten thousand or more people are working as forced laborers in the United States. It is likely that the actual number reaches into the tens of thousands. Determining the exact number of victims, however, has proven difficult given the hidden nature of forced labor and the manner in which these figures are collected and analyzed. Data on victims of forced labor is further complicated by the U.S. government’s practice of not counting the *actual* number of persons trafficked or caught in a situation of forced labor in a given year. Instead, it counts only survivors (defined by the Trafficking Act as victims of a “severe form of trafficking”) who have been *assisted* in accessing immigration benefits.

By this definition, the U.S. government reports that it has assisted approximately four hundred and fifty survivors over the past three years. Moreover, while the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States each year, it is unclear how these figures were calculated.

Geographical Distribution of Victims

Our data suggest that forced labor operations have existed in at least ninety U.S. cities over the past five years. This figure was derived from a press survey of one hundred and thirty one cases of forced labor and a telephone survey of forty-nine service providers across the United States. The press survey located cases of forced labor in sixty-four cities within the United States and its territories of Saipan and Guam, while service providers reported forced labor in thirty-eight cities in seventeen states, with twelve cities appearing in both surveys. The survey of service providers also revealed that the length of time victims were held in forced labor ranged from a few weeks to more than twenty years, with the majority of cases lasting between two and five years.

Our data also suggest that forced labor operations are concentrated in the states of California, Florida, New York, and Texas — all of which are transit routes for international travelers. Cities where reported forced labor occurred also tended to be in states with large populations and sizable immigrant communities. Our data is consistent with findings of the U.S. government. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that in 2003, the largest concentrations of survivors of trafficking who received federal assistance resided in California, Oklahoma, Texas and New York. In 2002, the DOJ reports that survivors of trafficking who received federal assistance resided in Texas (31 percent), Florida (19 percent) and California (14 percent).

Swedish Labor and Immigration: A Dilemma

RIKARD WARLENIUS

The Polish Whore

THE ADS, SPREAD UP ON ADVERTISING screens all over Sweden, were meant to resemble a famous H&M (clothing store) Christmas ad campaign featuring Anna Nicole Smith wearing underwear, lying on her back with her legs stretched straight up. But if you looked closer, this time it was a man in the same position, a quite hairy, dark man, wearing a construction workers' helmet. The text read, in translation: "Exploited guest worker 39:90/h (regular price 137:00/h)."

The campaign by the powerful Swedish Construction Workers Union "Byggnads" was widely debated and criticized. The man posing on the picture was actually a professional trade unionist and social democratic politician, ethnically Swedish. That his look closely matched the common image of a Pole couldn't really have been coincidental, though. The message that Byggnads, in this odd fashion, officially was trying to get across was that people coming to Sweden to work should have the same wages, working conditions and benefits as everyone else here. But the obvious interpretation of the ad — of course denied by Byggnads — was that Polish workers come here and offer themselves cheaply. As whores.

My newspaper, *Arbetaren* ("The Worker"), confronted the press secretary of Byggnads with the subtext of antagonism between "us and them": shouldn't trade unions aim at organizing all workers, independent of their origin? Didn't this ad campaign rather accentuate splits and divisions between members of the same class? She summarized that "as long as 'they'

have strange names and go back home over the weekends there is no 'us and us.'"

We also talked to trade unionists from Solidarity in Poland, who cooperate with the Swedish national labor federation "Landsorganisationen" (LO) of which Byggnads is a part. They weren't too happy about the ad campaign.

This was early in the new millennium, in the spring of 2002, and the old debate about migrants threatening the bread and butter of ordinary Swedish workers had come to a new twist. The scapegoats were no longer the Turks, Greeks and Yugoslavians who came here in the decades after the war, recruited directly by big business — Volvo, Scania, SKF, Asea, etc. — and under the supervision of the National Labor Market Board. Neither were the fingers pointed at the refugees, who came from Latin America in the seventies, the Middle East in the eighties or Ex-Yugoslavia in the nineties, seeking asylum from war or dictatorship. This time, the debate was centered on people from the now liberal-democratic Eastern Europe — mainly the Baltic countries and Poland — who didn't intend to stay here for more than a couple of weeks or months: for the summer harvest, for the construction of a certain structure, for a period of cleaning in the fashionable suburbs. What drove them here was quite clear: a pay often three times bigger than at home, though still less than a third of the pay granted to Swedish workers.

While industrial production has been leaving the advanced capitalist countries gradually for decades, relocated to low-wage zones, construction and most services for obvious reasons cannot be moved. If companies in the service sector wish to enjoy those blessings of globalization — the wonderful rise in productivity and

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profit through world-wide competition of labor — they have to move the workers instead of the production sites.

For years, of course, “illegal” migrant labor has accounted for much of the cleaning and restaurant work, without a lot of noise from trade unions or anyone else. Having low status, being poorly organized and to a high degree female, no powerful groups were threatened by the presence of these workers. But construction workers in Sweden are among the best paid, with a high level of organization and one of the strongest unions inside LO. Now, even this stronghold of the Swedish labor movement was directly affected by the incoming forces of globalization.

In 2002, in southern Sweden — just a few hours by ferry from Poland — the local branch of Byggnads started to search for groups of Polish and Latvian carpenters working at mainly private construction sites. Since several hundred members of Byggnads were unemployed at the time, the foreign carpenters could hardly have received working permissions — “green cards” — since these are issued in consultation with the unions. So the union staffs asked the foreign workers for papers. And they went one crucial step further: they brought the police to the sites. That is, rather than trying to organize workers, the trade union started to do the job of the immigration authorities. An animated debate began, in which most voices from other unions would come out in support of Byggnads’ strategy. It was roundly condemned by an unholy alliance of leftist unionists and neo-liberals, the former raising the banners of internationalism, the latter eager for a pretext to bust some strong unions.

But not even the appropriation of the methods of the immigration authorities really solved the problem for Byggnads. Smart contractors come up with a brilliant new idea: bring over Polish or Baltic construction workers and let them work at Swedish sites, but don’t call them workers, and don’t give them an employment

contract. Instead you remake each of them into a fake small entrepreneur: then they don’t need a “green card,” and they don’t have to follow the labor laws or the conditions prescribed in

What drove them here was quite clear: a pay often three times bigger than at home, though still less than a third of the pay granted to Swedish workers.

the collective agreements. A lot of companies — of course professing to be mere brokers for small entrepreneurs, using fantastic names such as “Rent a Latvian” — suddenly started to pop up. So when Byggnads came to the sites and wanted to check the papers in order to get them out of the country, the workers henceforth claimed to be entrepreneurs with a legal right to stay. To try to organize them wasn’t really an option, because if their status was changed into that of employees, they wouldn’t get a green card, and thus they would be kicked out of Sweden the very moment they tried to join the union.

These events should have inspired a debate about how restrictions in migration not only protect the labor market but also tend to create double standards, through which the more or less “illegal” sector exacerbates conditions in the “legal” one. Instead, the arguments leaned either towards national chauvinism — protecting “Swedish” jobs — or class arrogance: one prominent liberal politician claimed Swedish workers had to become more efficient in order to be competitive. But at the construction sites, at least some workers realized that this sort of underbidding would continue until wages across Europe become more equal. In an article in *Arbetaren*, some Swedish construction workers came up with the idea of spending half the

income of Byggnads on aiding the unions in Poland and the Baltic countries.

This was the first attempt by Byggnads to deal with foreign workers coming here as a result of globalization and global inequalities. It didn't start off too well.

The Polish Plumber

SOON, SOME OF THIS WOULD CHANGE. On May 1, 2004, the European Union made its historic enlargement, absorbing large parts of the ex-“communist” Eastern Europe. The closer the enlargement came, the greater was the apprehension about what would happen to the employment and working conditions in “old” Europe as low-paid, largely unemployed Poles, Hungarians or Slovenians would be able, in accordance with the principle of free movement for labor, to go anywhere within the EU to work or settle down. This fear was widely spread on both the political Left and Right. In Sweden, for instance, the social democratic Prime Minister Göran Persson expressed fear for “social tourism” (his choice of term) meaning that East Europeans would settle here just in order to utilise the social welfare systems. He therefore suggested specific transitional rules, which would restrict the possibilities of citizens from the new EU countries to settle and work in Sweden.

Remarkably, the Swedish trade unions — with a few exceptions, Byggnads being one — came out in opposition to the proposal. The other parliamentary parties — both left and right of the social democrats — decided to turn down the government's proposition. In the end, Sweden and Ireland were the only two “old” EU countries that didn't adopt transitional rules. Before long, it transpired that the Prime Minister of Sweden and the other EU governments had worried for no reason: “social tourism” to Sweden has proved to be close to none. And after all, why would armies of foreign workers want to leave their homes and invade Sweden to exploit some benefits here? In hindsight, the

debate on “social tourism” appears as a clear case of fear-mongering.

But the enlargement — without transitional rules — changed the situation in one way. From now on, workers from Eastern Europe didn't need permission to work here. This scared some unions, like Byggnads, which thought that would attract more eastern Europeans to come here and dump wages. But LO and others were probably correct when they claimed that the rules of free movement would reduce the numbers of black market workers, since they now could come here legally.

The EU enlargement was praised by many, but also feared by ordinary workers around Western Europe, precisely due to the risk of dumping. Partly, this anxiety explains why the new European constitution was rejected in ballots in France and the Netherlands in 2005. In France, there was a heated debate about a symbolic “Polish plumber” working for a much lower wage than his French colleague. In reality, very few Polish plumbers did work in France, but it nevertheless became a strong symbol still used in this debate across Europe.

Another part of the constitutional debate concerned a new EU directive on services, presented by EU commissioner Fritz Bolkenstein, soon renamed “the Frankenstein directive.” He suggested, among other things, that the now valid Posting directive, which basically says that a foreign, visiting company has to pay the minimum wage and comply with the host country's rules on working conditions, should be replaced by a directive of origin, which means the opposite: even while working in a host country, a company can still use the wages and conditions of its country of origin.

The Bolkenstein or Frankenstein directive wasn't an actual part of the constitutional draft, but the anxiety and fierce critique it aroused heavily influenced the result of the ballots. Now, the constitution is in the freezer, and the directive of service was renegotiated and implemented in the end, but without the controver-

sial directive of origin. This must be regarded as a victory for the European labor movement in its struggle against social dumping.

Sin papeles

ALSO IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE NEW millennium people suddenly noticed that a global phenomenon previously absent from Sweden — at least, most of us thought so — had arrived: paperless workers, mainly from Latin America.

In southern Europe, in countries like France, Spain and Italy, there are hundreds of thousands of “illegal” immigrants. The official economy is truly dependent on the unofficial economy. How all of them came there nobody really knows, and sometimes amnesties are made, often by left-wing governments, in order to try to get control over the situation. But the immigration always continues.

This has never been the case in Sweden or the other Scandinavian countries, probably because the labor market here is more strictly regulated than in Southern Europe, but there is also a different political culture where systematic anomalies are probably more counteracted.

This is for good and bad. The number of paperless workers in southern Europe has created a *de facto* situation in which their presence and their needs can't be denied. In some countries, for example, they are eligible for hospital care and their children can go to school, even though they are not officially recognized as citizens or legal visitors. This is, of course, a blatant case of hypocrisy. They are obviously exploited as cheap labor, creating a double standard for the labor market.

The trade unions in southern Europe sometimes deal with the situation by defending only the rights of the regular, home-grown working force, ignoring the irregular workers. But many trade unions — the more radical ones, that is — try to organize the workers in the unofficial economy. This might seem somewhat contradictory, since the goal is to integrate all

workers into the regular labor market, so that every worker has the right to a collective agreement, insurances, pensions etc. But on the other hand, you have to start from where you are. Improving the conditions for the paperless workers is better for them — and for the regular workforce — than doing nothing.

In Sweden, on the other hand, there are no hundreds of thousands of paperless workers. How many there are is not accurately known. One estimation is 16,000 — the number of people who have come to Sweden for asylum, failed to get it, but disappeared before the police could expel them. But seeking asylum is only one way of getting inside the borders. From many countries you can come on tourist visa, which last for three months, but then stay as an “illegal.” Even if the real number of paperless workers is in the range of only 20,000-30,000, their presence is clearly visible, especially in Stockholm, and in branches such as cleaning, restaurants and heavy labor in particular.

Because of their relatively small number, the paperless workers don't make up a substantial or crucial part of the Swedish economy, with the exception of the mentioned sectors. But their work is hard, they have bad salaries, they are in the hands of usurers, they risk their lives without insurance — and their presence is an anomaly in the system in a country where anomalies are unwanted. This probably makes them even more vulnerable than their southern European fellows. If they're caught for a minor offense, such as going by subway without a ticket, they risk deportation immediately. So they never go without a ticket. This exposedness probably makes them the most law-obedient inhabitants of Sweden, in all senses but one.

Also in the eyes of trade unions, the paperless workers are an anomaly, an irritant, a thorn in the flesh. LO, after a long period of silence and passivity, was actually challenged in this respect by the much smaller, syndicalist or “wobbly” trade union SAC (“Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation”), which adopted the view

of the radical, southern European unions. SAC has started to organize paperless workers in the black market, in order to improve the conditions of fellow migrant workers and, at the same time, at least reduce their “dumping factor” — preferably by making black market work white, but that isn’t possible in the most cases. The risks associated with this strategy are either that employers report the paperless workers to the immigration authorities, forcing them to take the next flight back home, or, on a societal level, that the black market gets more institutionalized.

The dominant LO is not organizing workers without papers, and has, as we have seen, sometimes opted for cooperation with the police in order to keep the labor market “clean.” So far, we see no reduction of the number of paperless workers.

In 2005 LO came up with a new idea. “Illegal” immigrants should still be deported, but an employer caught hiring paperless workers should, according to the proposal, have to pay a substantial amount of damages to the person. It would, so the argument went, deter employers from hiring black market workers, and at the same time give an incentive to the workers for reporting their employer. But this incentive is probably quite minimal if it means you have to leave the country as soon as the authorities will know of the case, and no political party has adopted the idea. In the long run, it seems the way of the SAC will be more fruitful.

Go Home, Go Home

IN THE EARLY MORNING ON DECEMBER 13, 2004, a picket line was set up by Byggnads outside a school building in Vaxholm, a pretty little town in the Stockholm archipelago. When management and staff from the Latvian construction company Laval un Partneri entered the school, trade unionists chanted “go home, go home!” Later on, this incident became an important argument against the union efforts to keep the Swedish labor market under collec-

tive agreements. According to Byggnads, that chauvinist slogan was shouted only at the management, while the picketers tried to hand out leaflets in Latvian to the workers. But that version never reached the general public. It became a conventional truth that Byggnads had shouted racist slogans at fellow Latvian workers.

The battle of Vaxholm — with implications for the whole of Europe — had started already in the summer of 2004. It won’t really end until the EU Court of Justice makes its verdict, probably later this year.

In short, this is what it was about.

The municipality of Vaxholm hired Laval to build a school, Söderfjärdsskolan, and in the contract Laval promised to sign a collective agreement. When the work started in the summer of 2004, Byggnads followed their usual routines and approached the company in order to negotiate an agreement. Normally, a company agrees to sign an agreement rather than risk a blockade. The same year, Byggnads signed 98 agreements with foreign entrepreneurs.

But soon the Byggnads negotiators found that Laval didn’t intend to stick to the rules of the game. After just a few meetings, the company management was replaced by a Swedish lawyer. In what seemed to be financial madness for a small contractor, Laval was gearing up for a fight not just about this particular job, but about the “Swedish model” of labor rights as such. The last meeting was held on September 15. The day before, the company actually had signed a collective agreement — but with a Latvian trade union. The company’s lawyer said they would consider signing an agreement with Byggnads as well, but only if they were allowed to use the lowest possible wage within the framework of the collective agreements: 109 SEK an hour. The routine, however, is the other way around: first you sign the agreement, then you bargain over actual wages. Byggnads kindly informed Laval that the average wage in the area was 145 SEK, and this would probably have been their first bid. But Laval refused to sign

the agreement, so bids were never given.

Hence Byggnads gave notice of a blockade from November 2, and the battle started. A strike was impossible, since Byggnads had no members among the employed at Laval. When the Electricity Workers Union staged a blockade in sympathy from December 3, the situation became more troublesome for the company; they needed local electricians to be able to continue.

The conflict on the ground ended when the municipality of Vaxholm withdrew the contract, and Laval and their Latvian employees left Sweden. But Byggnads didn't proclaim a victory. The aim had never been to force the Latvian workers out of the country, the union said, but rather to make sure they worked under the same conditions as other workers in Sweden. And of course — even if not stated explicitly — to make sure those Swedish workers were not exposed to wage dumping.

But if the battle on the ground wasn't very dramatic, the public debate and the legal process were of great importance. Before, in cases like this, the companies had either signed an agreement or tried to wriggle themselves out of the situation, maybe being able to delay the signing until the job was done and the company was already out of the country. This time, Laval un Partneri deliberately stayed to take the fight. After a while it was revealed that the aggressive measures were backed up by the Latvian state as well as the Swedish Employers Association. It is the latter who pays the bill for the legal process, going all the way to the European Court of Justice.

The political debate was fierce. All the right-wing and neo-liberal parties condemned Byggnads for being more or less racist and using “mafia methods” against poor Latvian work-

ers. The Left parties — including the social democratic government — were united in defense of the action for collective agreements.

All the right-wing and neo-liberal parties condemned Byggnads for being more or less racist and using “mafia methods” against poor Latvian workers.

The Construction Employers Association was passive at first. On the one hand they needed to defend their own member companies against wage competition from companies without collective agreement; on the other hand, they were

tempted by the opportunity to bust Byggnads and by the prospect of cheaper labor. Eventually, they went for the latter.

The Swedish model, in this sense, consists of an almost 70-year-old understanding between labor, capital and state to avoid laws and promote voluntary agreements on the labor market. Since there is no minimum wage in Sweden, and no legal obligation to follow the working conditions agreed upon, the formal rights of trade unions and employers associations to take action are quite well secured. Partly as a result of that the labor organizations are strong but quiescent, integrated in a permanent partnership with their counterparts, and open conflicts are very rare indeed. For capital and state, this ought to be quite convenient, with few workdays lost in strikes, but in recent years the Employers Association has become more and more aggressive towards this model. They fight hard for weakening the rights of the trade unions to strike.

Soon the court rooms became the main battlefield of the Vaxholm conflict. Laval un Partneri claimed that Byggnads' blockade was breaking EU rules of non-discrimination of companies from other EU countries. In fact, there are several conflicting principles. In general, the trade union rights to negotiate and to strike are fundamental within EU. But non-discrimination is also a fundamental right. As

mentioned above, the EU Posting directive says that visiting companies from other EU countries have to follow the laws in the host country, which means paying at least minimum wage. The purpose of this directive is to counteract wage dumping, but at the same time make it fairly easy for companies to predict the wage costs in other countries. A further complication in the case of Sweden is that no legally inscribed minimum wage exists, in accordance with an agreement-based model, and one juridical issue is whether the lowest wage in a collective agreement is comparable to minimum wage. If so, Byggnads might have broken the rules by immediately refusing to accept the lowest wage in the agreement.

Then there is Swedish law. There is a law against one trade union taking conflict against a collective agreement signed by another trade union — with the exception of collective agreements signed with trade unions from other countries. The Swedish labor court therefore decided that Byggnads' blockade was in accordance with Swedish law; Laval's agreement with a Latvian trade union didn't matter in this respect. But this very law might be in conflict with the EU rules of non-discrimination of foreign companies.

So, in the end, Laval's lawyer had to claim not that Byggnads was violating Swedish law, but that Swedish law was violating European law! This made the Swedish labor court so uncertain that it decided, in April 2005, to pass two questions on to the EU Court of Justice. Is it in accordance with the rules of free movement and non-discrimination for trade unions to take action against a visiting company in order to make it sign a collective agreement, even if the host country lacks specific rules on wages and working conditions? And: is it in accordance with the same rules that Swedish law gives trade unions the right to take action against visiting companies with collective agreements signed with trade unions in their home country, but not with Swedish trade unions?

The matter is quite complex, but of vital interest. For Sweden, exactly these two issues were widely discussed before the ballot on joining EU in 1994; the EU commission then assured that the Swedish model wasn't violating EU rules, and after that LO decided to support a Swedish membership. After the Vaxholm case was sent to the EU court, LO hinted that it might withdraw that support and call for Sweden to exit the EU if the court doesn't dismiss the case: a sensational setback for any Swedish government were it to come true. For all of EU, the verdict might mean that the Posting directive becomes more or less worthless, if the trade unions can't take action against visiting companies dumping wages. Then the victory of trade unions and social movements that stopped the "Frankenstein directive" will be more or less wiped out by a court decision. The verdict in the Vaxhom case is therefore of vital importance for how the European integration will continue.

Generally, Western Europe is supporting Byggnads, and Eastern Europe is backing Laval. At least, that is the picture given in the media. But it's only valid if you listen to the opinions of the national governments. When Arbetaren interviewed several major Eastern European trade unions, a very different picture emerged. All of them supported Byggnads' case — including the Latvian construction workers union LCA, which signed the collective agreement with Laval. It was clear that these unions experienced the same problems as Byggnads. The new inequalities of globalization are not just a two story building, and while Polish plumbers seem threatening to French plumbers, Belarussian plumbers are the same threat to Polish plumbers. And so on.

According to the way the European-wide trade union movement evaluates this situation, competing with lower wages is a bad deal for every worker. It's not true in every individual case, of course, but it's the only reasonable political standpoint for a trade union.

A Winding Road

AS WE HAVE SEEN IN THESE EXAMPLES, Byggnads and the Swedish trade union movement's road to European integration and globalization is quite winding. There is probably no one in the movement that would oppose these fundamental positions: defending the comparably high wage levels in Sweden and other "old" EU countries is necessary, and to the benefit also of the workers in the "new" member countries. But still, you have to be critical of Byggnads for doing too little too late. Swedish trade unions have been absent in the international mobilizations against both EU proposals — as the *Frankenstein* directive — and corporate, neoliberal globalization more generally. They haven't reacted until the problem literally showed up in its own backyard. And even though the defense of the collective agreement in Vaxholm was excellent in deed, it could

have been made in a friendlier way (that is, towards the fellow workers).

In the other Scandinavian countries, there are examples of trade unions inviting migrant workers to common holiday activities and offering language courses, and establishing direct cooperation and information exchange with trade unions in the East. More financial assistance, as some construction workers suggested, could also be of great use. If nothing else, it would have been much more difficult for the Right to attack the trade unions for being chauvinist and racist if initiatives like these had been taken. Finally, such solidarity also has to be extended to the paperless, non-European workers.

Obviously, the road to a truly internationalist global union movement is long, and still winding.

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The Immigrant Rights Movement Between Political Realism and Social Idealism

DAN LA BOTZ

MILLIONS OF IMMIGRANTS took to the streets between March and May of 2006 in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and dozens of other U.S. cities in the largest social and political demonstrations in American history. As the immigrants left work or school to join the marches, in some areas the protests, dominated by Latino workers, had the effect of a general strike, shutting down local businesses and blocking traffic in the centers of major cities. Many carried signs reading, “We are workers, not criminals” and “No Human Being is Illegal.”

The massive demonstrations were disciplined and peaceful protests intended to pressure Congress to pass a new immigration law that would give millions of undocumented immigrants the right to live and work in the United States with a path to citizenship should they so desire. Yet a year and a half later the demonstrations have subsided, the movement is divided, and Congress debates liberal and conservative immigration reform laws, neither of which may be passed.

What happened to the immigrant movement? What does the future hold for immigrant workers and their rights? How will the immigrant workers’ movement affect the labor movement and progressive politics in the U.S. in the coming years?

DAN LA BOTZ is a Cincinnati-based teacher, writer and activist. He is the author of several books on labor in the United States, Mexico, and Indonesia, most recently *César Chávez and La Causa*. He edits Mexican Labor News and Analysis (www.ueinternational.org).

Before turning to the millions and the movement, to politics and programs, let’s consider one immigrant’s experience.

One Immigrant: Samuel

SAMUEL, WHO DARES NOT USE HIS LAST NAME, spoke to a Methodist church group in Cincinnati recently. Unable to find a job in Guatemala, he crossed the border illegally and alone as a boy of sixteen and came to look for work in the United States. He didn’t mention to the Methodists the corrupt and violent Mexican police, the chicanery of the coyotes, the robberies, beatings or sexual abuse that many immigrants experience, or the dangers of the walk through the desert. Always modest and understated he simply paused for a moment, raised his eyebrows and smiled and said, “It was dangerous.”

After a month or so he found work in a town in Indiana. There Samuel slaughtered and butchered turkeys twelve hours a day, six days a week for the minimum wage though he was never paid overtime, never had a day off or a vacation. The work was hard, heavy, dangerous, and disgusting. He worked alongside U.S.-born workers who did lighter work, were paid more, and treated better. When industrial accidents happened, the company took American workers to the doctor while it took injured immigrant workers to the gate and sent them on their way. So it has gone for Samuel for several years, one job like that after another; now he works two jobs at once, scrimping, saving and planning.

Handsome, always neatly dressed, able to

He speaks his native Mam (a Mayan language), fluent Spanish and rather good English, Samuel is an Evangelical Christian, a Pentecostal. He tells the Methodists, "I work hard and I pray to God that one day I will have my own business."

When time permits he participates in the Guatemalan immigrant association and in the

Coalition for Immigrant Rights and Dignity in Cincinnati, joining with other immigrants to demand the right to live and work legally in the United States. He has marched with other immigrants in demonstrations for immigration reform and on the Fourth of July proudly carried the American flag at the head of an immigrant group that marched for the first time in the Northside community parade.

Some of Samuel's Guatemalan friends have become active in the SEIU campaign to organize and win contracts for the janitors. Others have worked with UNITE-HERE at a local food processing plant. Some of the building trades unions too have come to see that they have to organize immigrant workers. But most immigrants work in non-union workplaces, often in circumstances that violate the wages-and-hours laws and at a pace that white, black or Puerto Rican workers who are citizens will not tolerate. Undocumented immigrants work harder than anyone else, desperate to hold on to their jobs, pay off their debts, send money home to their families, and save for the car, home, marriage or business that is their dream. The Latino immigrants often call the other workers lazy, while American workers sometimes see the immigrants as rate-busters. Employers encourage the competition, note the difference and often fire the American workers, particularly blacks, and hire more undocumented Latinos. Unions would make a big difference, create unity, establish justice in the workplace, but many undocumented immigrants are afraid to join. Often the unions, even

with the best of intentions, find it hard to reach and involve the immigrant.

In the last couple of years, things have gotten more difficult for Samuel and other immigrants in Southwest Ohio. Sheriff Richard Jones of Butler County put up billboards calling upon the citizens of the county to report "il-

legal aliens" and he has put up large yellow signs in front of the jail saying "Illegal Aliens Here." One can go on-line and send a message to the sheriff to turn in one's immigrant neighbors. Recently Jones applied to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for authority for his department's deputies to enforce federal immigration law.

The thousands of Latino immigrants who live in the many apartment complexes or work in the factories and warehouses in the area live in fear. When ICE conducts a raid at some factory or construction site in the region, or some police officer or sheriff's deputy appears at a workplace or in a neighborhood, then panic takes over. Workers don't show up for their shift, they avoid the Latino shops and restaurants, the family doesn't go to church, and children are pulled out of school. Like others who have no drivers' licenses and cannot get insurance, Samuel drives cautiously to and from work in Butler County, praying that he get there without incident.

Samuel's story, of course, is not unique. The Cincinnati metropolitan area, that is, from Florence, Kentucky to Hamilton, Ohio, has about 60,000 Latino immigrants, most of whom have been here less than five years. Nor are they alone in their immigrant experience. A recent meeting to celebrate Senegalese Independence Day was also used to organize the Francophone African community to defend their rights as immigrants. Cincinnati has 20,000 sub-Saharan African immigrants, most of them Muslim and French speaking, though they often pass below the ra-

Thousands of Latino immigrants live in fear.

dar since they are taken for African Americans. There are also thousands of Arab immigrants in Cincinnati from a dozen nations, various ethnic groups and different religions. East Asian and South Asian immigrants are found in smaller numbers, but they are here in Cincinnati too and growing. And this is in Southwest, Ohio, on the border between the Midwest and the South, far from the ports of entry and the great cosmopolitan cities of the coasts.

The Immigrants

SAMUEL IS NOT A TYPICAL IMMIGRANT because there are no typical immigrants. American immigrants are diverse millions whose only unifying characteristics may be that they are foreign-born and most are working people. Almost 12 percent of the U.S. population today is made up of the foreign-born, over 33.5 million people. Over half come from Latin America, a quarter from Asia, and most of the rest from Europe, with others from the rest of the world. We have more immigrants in our country today than at any time since 1910, the high tide of the great European immigration that began in the 1880s.

Who are all of the immigrants and on what basis do they come here? The United States, with a population of 300 million people in October 2006, accepts over one million legal immigrants every year, with the nations of Mexico, China, India Philippines, and Cuba providing 37 percent. However, in addition, an estimated 500,000 immigrants also enter the United States illegally each year, most coming from Latin America. The United States today has over 10 million undocumented immigrants, though nobody knows for sure how many. Over half, actually closer to 60 percent, come from Mexico, while almost quarter come from Latin American countries. About 10 percent come from Asia.

The rapidly growing immigrant population has contributed to a shift in the ethnic makeup of the country. Minorities now make up one-

third of the U.S. population. A language other than English is spoken at home in 50 million families, that is, among one-fifth of the population age 5 or over. The United States has the fastest growing population in the industrialized world at a rate of one percent a year, and half of the new growth is Hispanic. Twenty or thirty years ago Latino immigration was regional: Mexican immigrants were concentrated in the Southwest (California, New Mexico, Arizona and Texas), Puerto Ricans in New York, and Cubans in Miami. Today Latino immigrants, above all immigrants from Mexico have spread throughout the United States, with large numbers in cities like Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, Georgia. Latino immigrants can now be found throughout the Midwest, the South, and up into New England. Once considered a regional issue confined to the coasts and the southern border, immigration has become a national issue.

Latino Immigration

LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S., representing the greatest number of immigrants from any world region, has been driven by the great economic and political developments of the continent, above all the expanding power of American capitalism and U.S. military might.

Mexico sends by far the most migrants to the United States and the two countries have a long and complicated immigration history. The first Mexicans in the United States were not immigrants — they were a conquered people. The United States brought 100,000 Mexicans into the United States by force with the absorption of half of that nation's territory at the end of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1847. Conquest and forced incorporation were in many cases followed by Mexicans being dispossessed of their land and rights, leading to their retreat into segregated communities. As the Chicano movement said in the 1960s, "We didn't cross the line — the line crossed us."

Since then, Mexican workers have been

pumped into the country and occasionally pumped out depending on needs of the U.S. economy and the American military. The patterns of Mexican mass migration were laid down in two great waves during the period of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1934) during each of which about one million Mexicans moved to the United States. During the Great Depression (1929-1939), some 500,000 Mexicans, competitors for jobs and relief, were driven out of the country by state and local government agencies and American citizens. Then in the *bracero* era (1942-64), the U.S. wartime economy needed labor and some 4.2 million Mexican guest workers were brought to labor in the United States, accompanied by a parallel illegal immigration that also numbered into the millions. The United States' response to the illegal immigration of the 1940s and 50s was Operation Wetback, a policing operation that in 1953 and 1954, at the height of the McCarthy anti-Communist hysteria, deported almost two million undocumented Mexicans from the United States.

More recently, the weak Mexican economy has been the principal generator of mass immigration to the United States. Mexico entered into an economic crisis with the fall of oil prices in the early 1980s. The crisis led the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to adopt the open market and free trade policies pushed by the U.S., the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Mexico joined the GATT (the future World Trade Organization) in 1986 and negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which went into effect in 1994. That same year Mexico joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a symbol of its first world status. Mexico's leap into the global economy ended in a stumble.

The dismantling of the old nationalist economy, NAFTA, and an economic depression in 1994-96, had a devastating impact on

the Mexican economy. Small businesses and farms failed and farmers and workers headed north to the United States in search of jobs. During the 1990s to 2000s, Mexico had to create one million jobs each year to accommodate its expanding population, but it often created only between 200,000 and 400,000. Those without work crossed the border, usually without documents, to spread throughout the United States taking jobs on farms, in factories, and in construction, restaurants, and hotels.

More recent immigration from other Latin American countries has been driven over the last several decades by the political, military, and economic policies of the United States in Latin America. The United States supported repressive military dictatorships in the Southern cone between 1964 and 1985, leading to waves of political refugees and exiles. The U.S.'s wars against nationalist and leftist movements and governments in Central America in the 1980s set millions of migrants in motion. Then in the 1990s the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico and the United States, had a devastating impact on the Mexican economy, ruining poor farmers who also migrated to seek work in the United States. More generally, the Washington Consensus, the regime of neoliberal globalization imposed on Latin America by the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank resulted in a more or less continual crisis of their economies causing high unemployment and persistent poverty which has driven more and more farmers and workers to seek work in the United States.

Immigrant Workers

IMMIGRANTS HAVE BECOME A VITALLY important part of the U.S. working class. Half of all new workers in the 1990s were immigrants. The new immigrants are concentrated in low wage occupations where they make up a large percentage of all workers in some industries. Out

of the approximately 11.1 million undocumented immigrants, 7.2 were employed in March of 2005, making up 4.9 percent of the entire workforce. But all immigrants, legal and undocumented, make up 14 percent of the workforce and as much as 20 percent of workers in low-wage industries. Immigrants account for 17 percent of cleaning workers, 14 percent of construction workers, and 12 percent of food preparation workers. Immigrant workers work for lower wages, have fewer benefits, and often work in substandard conditions. The greatest concentration of immigrant workers is as wage earners in crop agriculture. DOL estimates that there are 1.8 million hired crop farm workers in the United States. Of those, 75 percent come from Mexico, 2 percent from Central America, and 1 percent from other countries. Some 53 percent of these hired crop farm workers were unauthorized.

Undocumented workers come to the United States through networks of family members and friends in a process called chain migration. Many of the most recent immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala are young men and women (some come alone at 14 years old) from rural, indigenous areas with low levels of education, perhaps third to sixth grade from Guatemala and sixth to eighth grade from Mexico. Many of the undocumented workers cross the U.S.-Mexico border with the aid of smugglers called *coyotes* to whom they may pay as much as \$2,000 for a trip across the desert or the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) river. They will often then make contact with a contractor who will hire them to work for private businesses or corporations, but to get hired they need documents. The undocumented workers spend hundreds of dollars to purchase false or stolen social security card numbers to get work and some buy counterfeit drivers' licenses for hundreds more so they can drive to and from their jobs.

Representing as they do almost a fifth of workers in some low wage industries, the organization of these immigrants workers is an im-

portant goal of American labor unions. Today immigrant workers tend to be unorganized, as are almost 90 percent of all American workers. Only 12.5 percent of all U.S. workers belong to unions, and only 7.8 percent of all workers in the private sector. New undocumented workers, many of them very young, without political rights, with few civil rights and limited labor rights, without knowledge of the English language, unfamiliar with the labor laws and the customary practices of the workplace are subject to particularly intense exploitation by employers. Immigrants may be paid less than the legal minimum wage, worked longer hours than the legal maximum, cheated out of overtime pay, denied rest breaks and lunch periods, and pushed to the limits of human endurance in jobs that are dirtier and more dangerous than those worked by native-born black or white workers. Yet without citizenship they are hard to organize because they can be easily intimidated by employers.

Guest Workers

IN ADDITION TO IMMIGRANTS, the United States government has guest worker programs, that is, programs for temporary workers from foreign countries who are not considered immigrants because they will be returned to their home countries at the end of their contracts. Employers seek these programs to maintain a labor surplus and keep wages low, to avoid the cost of mechanization, and to have a workforce unlikely to unionize. During World War I the United States permitted 77,000 Mexicans to come to work in the United States, about half of whom stayed on without permission after their contracts had ended. During the period from 1942 to 1964, to cover the labor shortages caused by the Second World War and the Korean War, the United States and Mexico cooperated to bring some 4.6 million Mexicans to work in the United States. Under the law, guest workers were supposed to receive free housing, medical care, transportation and the

prevailing wage. Some workers did not receive those minimum standards and others were abused; all were subject to deportation if their employers complained.

Tens of thousands of immigrant guest workers still work in agriculture. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) legalization program allowed any unauthorized worker who had done at least 90 days of farm work in the preceding year to become an immigrant. Altogether some 1.2 million foreign workers became SAWs and some 558,000 SAWs who worked on farms during 1989-1990 represented 31 percent of all farm workers. By 1997-1998 SAWs were only 16 percent of the crop workers. Once farm workers become legal, they generally leave farm work for less arduous and better paying employment. When the program was ended, employers returned to the use of unauthorized workers.

Still other programs provide temporary workers. In 2006 the United States State Department issued 372,254 H visas for temporary workers and trainees. In recent years the government has issued about 40,000 H2A visas for agricultural workers and about 60,000 to 90,000 H2B visas for non-farm workers. A recent study by the Southern Poverty Law Center, "Close to Slavery," found that many H2A visa workers were virtually held as captives, cheated out of their wages, living in squalid conditions, denied medical benefits, and with no protection of their rights.

An Immigrant Labor Movement

IMMIGRANTS HAVE THROUGHOUT the history of the United States been an important factor in the labor movement. Latinos in particular have well over a hundred years of involvement in labor unions in the United States. In the Southwest, in the Chicago area, and on the East Coast Latinos have for decades played a leadership role in the labor movement. During the last decade the AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win

unions, particularly the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), UNITE-HERE, and the Laborers (LAIUNA) have put much of their energy into the organization of low-wage immigrant workers, documented or undocumented. The SEIU campaign Justice for Janitors has won important victories for janitors in cities throughout the country.

Unions, however, have not always been sensitive to the immigrant workers' culture, conditions and needs, so immigrant workers and their allies have created Workers Centers both as vehicles for workers' and community struggles and as a bridge to the labor movement. In 2006 the AFL-CIO entered into a partnership with the Workers Centers, hoping both to strengthen the organizations and to bring them into a closer relationship with the union movement.

Immigrant workers also take initiative on their own with little or no relationship to the labor movement initially, especially when they have a strong community base and a powerfully felt need. Over the last few decades we have seen Latino and other immigrant workers create a movement of dry-wall hangers in construction, truck drivers who work in the West Coast ports, and in innumerable little strikes and job actions around the country.

Immigrant workers' huge numbers, their actual presence in the labor movement, and the tremendous potential that they represent provides much of the energy for the current immigration movement. Above all, the presence of more than ten million undocumented immigrants represents an enormous incentive: either these workers will be legalized and organized, or they will be forced to work for lower wages, without benefits, and in substandard conditions, thus dragging down the entire labor movement. The question then is, what are the vision, strategy and program that can organize these workers? Most now agree that one of the most important steps will be to legalize the immigrants now here.

Immigrant Politics

TODAY IN THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES and particularly among Latino immigrants, rival political visions, programs and strategies vie for leadership. On the one hand a coalition of the

Almost every major labor organization has now taken a position calling for “comprehensive immigration reform” meaning legalization and a path to citizenship for those now here and guest worker programs with legalization and citizenship provisions.

major religious, labor and immigrant organization pushes for the passage of the best possible realistic compromise on an immigration reform bill, while on the other hand grassroots community groups, leaders of some congregations, and some local labor unions push for more radical and confrontational strategies aimed at winning full civic, political, and labor rights for all now. The conflict within the Latino immigrant community between political realism and social idealism has deep roots.

The roots can be explained only by understanding the complexity of the immigrant experience. The place of immigrants in American society is complicated by the dozens of countries from which they come, ethnic groups to which they belong, and religions in which they believe. Latino immigrants alone are divided into 20 countries, speaking not only Spanish or Portuguese but also dozens of indigenous languages. Only their presence in the United States and the common problems they face here have made them Latino.

Equally important is the highly stratified

character of immigration, one cohort after another, layer upon layer of immigrants coming over many decades. Some are legal; others have no legal standing. Even legal immigrants can be legal for many different reasons — as legal permanent residents as refugees, as asylees — each with different laws and regulations governing them. Overtime, parts of the immigrant community gain legal status and become citizens, through their individual adherence to the immigration law, by having children born here who are citizens, by marrying citizens, by amnesty under the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act, and in other ways. While some immigrants gained legal status, others failed to do so, and each year about 1.5 million new immigrants arrive, about 500,000 of them undocumented. The interests of the different layers can be quite different, though most react together against the discrimination, racism, exclusion they experience in American society. To fight the latter, immigrants who became citizens organized for reform.

For as long as they have been in the United States Latino immigrants have formed organizations of a religious, civic, or political character, all of which attempted to represent Latino interests. Such organizations have adopted at different times and still adopt today positions that range from accommodationist to reformist to revolutionary. Most Latino organizations, however, have tended to fight for full legal rights for Latino immigrants within the context of America's capitalist democracy. While principles may be significant, political differences arise principally on the basis of alternative strategies.

The development of Latino organizations has paralleled in many ways that of African American organizations, with middle class leaders heading up the struggle for full civil and political rights, though sometimes challenged by nationalists and leftists offering alternative visions, principles, and strategies. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), for example, founded in 1929 and led by middle

class businesspeople and professionals, adopted legalistic and lobbying strategies in the style of the NAACP. The Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), founded in 1960, worked to promote the election of Mexican Americans to political office. The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), originally established in 1968 as a Chicano organization in the Southwest, became a national organization that incorporated immigrants from Puerto Rico and Latin American countries in 1972. If LULAC is the Latino movement's NAACP, then NCLR is its Urban League, with financial support from many of the largest multinational corporations.

All of these organizations tend to be supporters of the Democratic Party, believing that having the Democrats in power will be better for Latinos. With their base among Mexican Americans who were U.S. citizens and their emphasis on electoral politics, such organizations often ignored and sometimes intentionally distanced themselves from Mexicans and other Latino immigrants. Or we may say that they tended to become most involved in immigrant issues at that moment when immigration reform raised the possibility of immigrants becoming citizens and therefore voters and Democrats. Even more radical and independent organizations such as the La Raza Unida Party, an independent Mexican American party founded in Texas in 1970, focused on the Mexican American citizen.

Other models of Latino organization were put forward by the left, politics that represented a Latino civil rights movement, irrespective of citizenship. In the 1930s, the National Congress of Spanish-Speaking Peoples, led by the Communist Party, organized Latinos in the United States who were citizens, including both Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, who were immigrants from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Spain. "Unlike some of the moderated Mexican-American organizations such as LULAC, which at the time differentiated between Mexican-Americans and Mexican

immigrants, El Congreso opposed such differentiations and instead stressed the unity of all Spanish-speaking people, U.S. citizens or not. An attack on one Spanish-speaking group was an attack on all," wrote Bert Corona, a member of the Congreso.

This civil rights perspective appeared again in 1968 with the founding of CASA-HGT (Centro de Acción Social Autónomo-Hermanidad General de Trabajadores), led by Bert Corona and Soledad "Chole" Alatorre, which focused on the needs of "undocumented Mexican workers and their families" and brought to the struggle the "conjugation of a class base with social justice and liberation aspirations." The CASA newspaper *Sin Fronteras* (*Without Borders*) carried on its masthead the slogan, "We are One because America [meaning the continent] is One."

One could say that these represent two poles of the Latino movement: one that tends to focus on citizens, fostering citizenship, voting, and party politics and the other that focuses on immigrants' labor and social issues, includes citizens and non-citizens, even has an international dimension, and tends to become a social movement. The first alternative tends to promote a politics of political realism since its objective is the election of Democrats, while the latter tends to engender a more radical politics, even when not explicitly articulated, implicitly raising the goal of a society where all, irrespective of borders and citizenship, have freedom, rights, and political power. The former naturally works to focus all energy on political reform and partisan politics, while the latter tends to push for an activist social movement that puts forces in the street and looks to use the power of immigrant workers and consumers through the strike and boycott. The first aims at inclusion in America's capitalist democracy, the second, consciously or unconsciously, struggles to create a society which would be more democratic, more egalitarian, and more just.

The political struggle among the Latino or-

ganizations is complicated by the other big social actors, particularly the Catholic Church, the labor unions, and the Democratic Party. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops together with the Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops published in 2003 “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope: A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration.” Based on Catholic social teachings, the letter calls for Catholic organizations and individuals to show compassion and solidarity with immigrants and calls upon the government to legalize the undocumented immigrants in the United States. While “Strangers No Longer” represents Catholic humanism at its best, at the same time it is the document of what is one of the most conservative institutions in the United States. Like the mainline reformist Latino organizations, the Church seeks the integration of immigrants into American society, albeit with full respect for their civic, social and political rights. Yet in 2006 the Catholic Church withdrew as Latino workers’ power became manifest, and the Church opposed the attempt to turn the May 1 demonstrations into a kind of general strike.

America’s labor unions see immigration reform as essential both to organizing immigrants and revitalizing the labor movement as well as to winning greater political power. The U.S. labor movement, now divided between the AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win, has come out in support for the legalization of immigrants who are now here and with a path to citizenship. The AFL-CIO has been clearer and stronger in its opposition to guest worker programs than Change-to-Win unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), though again all of the unions have tended to move toward a position of rejecting guest worker programs that do not offer gradual legalization and a path to citizenship. Different unions within the AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win have different levels of commitment to the immigrants and undocumented workers, but al-

most every major labor organization has now taken a position calling for “comprehensive immigration reform,” meaning legalization and a path to citizenship for those now here and guest worker programs with legalization and citizenship provisions.

Within the labor movement, as within the immigrant movement, the motivations and emphases of the national leaders of the unions and the AFL-CIO and Change-to-Win are different than those of the local unions made up of and led by Latino leaders. The top union leaders want to pass an immigration reform law, and a labor law reform, that will make it more possible for them to organize the low-wage Latino work force, and in the end they will accept a compromise that includes as many of those workers as possible. To do so they are willing to accept conservative proposals to strengthen the border and increase internal enforcement.

The local Latino union leaders whose members are connected with the immigrant communities and their millions of undocumented workers want legalization for all workers now and reject the notion of compromises that would exclude their friends and relatives. They also oppose long delays, and reject exorbitant fees and penalties. And they reject a stronger border and have little sympathy with internal enforcement. SEIU’s Latino workers in California forced SEIU president Andy Stern to go to the West Coast and to reverse the union’s position on guest workers. A struggle goes on within the unions between some national union leaders interested in reaching a compromise that would legalize some undocumented immigrants and local leaders and members who want legalization for all now. The union leaders want to strengthen the unions as institutions while the local Latino opposition wants to build unions that are a civil rights movement as well.

Conclusion

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, the labor unions and

the mainline reform-minded immigrant organizations call for comprehensive immigration reform and now put their hopes in the STRIVE bill introduced by Representatives Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ). The STRIVE bill would strengthen border controls and internal policing, legalize nearly all workers now in the United States illegally and give them a path to citizenship, and create guest workers programs but with the possibility of establishing permanent residence and later citizenship. At the same time it would involve long delays and expensive fees and penalties.

The immigrant opposition and its labor and religious allies, more grassroots in character and more committed to direct action, argue that not only is the bill inadequate, but that in reality it is only a temporary negotiating position that the more moderate forces will permit to be eviscerated in the Congress. Militants such as Nativio V. Lopez of MAPA and Javier Rodríguez of the National May 1st Movement for Worker and Immigrant Rights have strongly criticized the STRIVE bill. Rodríguez calls it a “corporate monster” because of what he sees as long delays, high fees, and what he sees as a guest worker program. Moreover these radicals

reject the moderates’ tactics with the emphasis on calls and letters to Congress and call instead for returning to the streets.

The question is whether the grassroots base of the movement made up of hundreds of local church congregations, Catholic and Evangelical, hometown clubs whose members come from different towns, cities and states all over Latin America, local unions and their activists, and the radio announcers who both respond to and sometimes lead their millions of listeners will come out for political realism or again hit the streets for legalization of all immigrants now. Will the Latinos and other immigrants flow into the channels of institutional power, or will they create an independent Latino social and labor movement? Under pressure from the mainline Latino organizations, the Church and the unions, but also linked by family and friendship to vast communities of immigrants, filled with hope for themselves, but also concerned about their loved ones and their workmates, the Latino immigrants themselves will ultimately make their own decision.

Editors’ Note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website www.newpol.org

Homeless Shelters

A Feeble Response to Homelessness

BETTY REID MANDELL

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE SOMEONE to say to you, “Come with me into the bathroom? I want to watch you pee into this paper cup to see if you have been taking drugs.” That is what is happening in some shelters for homeless families in Massachusetts. Steve Valero, a lawyer at Greater Boston Legal Services, is indignant about this and has been telling shelters that it is an illegal practice. Some shelter directors claim they had no idea it was illegal. They thought it would be better to have all residents tested for drugs rather than singling out one person.

Valero said that he tells those directors they have it backwards. It might be legal to single out a person whom you suspect of being on drugs if that person was behaving as if she is drugged — for example, if she seems completely stoned and neglecting her kids. But to test everybody routinely is an illegal invasion of privacy.

One shelter resident said that she had to undergo drug testing every week for over 40 weeks, with a staff member watching her pee, even though she has never taken drugs.

The war on drugs has invaded shelters for the homeless, treating homeless people as criminals. In this article I discuss the causes of homelessness, how the shelter system, which was presumably a temporary response to homelessness, has become institutionalized as the dominant response, and how it is used for social control. I discuss the various approaches to ending homelessness, many of them distractions from the main cause — poverty.

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Structural Causes of Homelessness

ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN some homeless people, their numbers increased dramatically during the Reagan Administration. The federal government cut back on building houses and subsidizing housing for low-income people as well as social assistance programs. Urban renewal and gentrification forced people out of low-rent housing, and wages declined with deindustrialization and outsourcing. Cities used land use policies to help corporations and real estate interests squeeze out the poor.

A study by Harvard’s Joint Center for Housing Studies documents that as housing costs have risen, wages have declined, increasing numbers of people cannot afford housing (including the middle class), and more jobs pay low wages. Hurricane Katrina made matters worse for poor people:

In New Orleans, losses are estimated at over \$100 billion, more than 50,000 homes have suffered severe damage, and hundreds of thousands of residents are still waiting to return. . . . With the enormous political and logistical obstacles to rebuilding that now exist, it will be years before the Gulf region of the country works through the disruption to human lives and the destruction to the built environment.”

Even with low wages, many poor people could afford housing if they had access to government-subsidized public housing. However, the federal government has been cutting back on building housing and providing subsidies for housing since the early 1980s. There is a 10-year waiting list for Section 8 vouchers in Massachusetts, and no more are being given out. The federal government chose to subsidize private housing for poor people through Section 8 vouchers rather than build housing because it did not want to inter-

fere with private real estate interests. Real estate interests have decimated rent control in most cities, as rents continue to rise beyond the ability of low-income people, and even middle-income people, to pay them.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project documents federal cutbacks in housing:

- From 1976-1982, HUD (Housing and Urban Development) built over 755,000 new public housing units, but since 1983, HUD built only 256,000 new public housing units.
- From 1976-1985, a yearly average of almost 31,000 new Section 515 rural affordable housing units were built, but from 1986-1995, average yearly production was less than half that of the previous decade and from 1996-2005, Section 515 built an average of only 1,700 new units per year.
- In recent years, over 200,000 private-sector rental units have been lost annually, and 1.2 million unsubsidized affordable housing units disappeared from 1993-2003.
- HUD budget authority in 1978 was 65 percent more than its 2006 budget.

While the federal government has been cutting housing for the poor, it has increased housing subsidies for the affluent through tax benefits for home ownership.

Over the last 30 years, annual tax expenditures for home owner subsidies have grown from less than \$40 billion to over \$120 billion per year. Every year since 1981, tax benefits for home ownership have been greater than HUD's entire budget and have dwarfed direct expenditures for programs that benefit low-income renters. Those benefiting the most from this tax program may actually be banks and real estate corporations that make their largest profit margins on high-end housing.

As the federal government cut funds for housing, it increased military spending. "The U.S. government plans to spend more money on *one* destroyer than it spent on *all* 2005 capital expenses for public housing; more on *ten* F-22 fighter jets than on *all* 2005 operating expenses for public housing; and *twice as much* on a *single* submarine than on *all* McKinney-Vento Act

homeless assistance." President Bush proposed further cuts in housing funds in his 2008 budget plan, and proposed to increase the defense budget by 11 percent, an increase that does not include funding for the Iraq war.

Homeless Shelters

BEGINNING IN 1983, emergency public shelters for the homeless began opening in cities nationwide. Over the next couple of decades, shelters grew from being a temporary emergency response to become a permanent shelter industry. There were 62,000 homeless shelters in the U.S. in 2002.

Most homeless shelters for individuals allow people to stay only at night to sleep. A reason frequently given for not allowing people to stay during the day is that the homeless are expected to spend their days looking for work and housing. There are a few day shelters, such as St. Francis House in Boston, where homeless people congregate and eat their meals.

There are specialized shelters for victims of domestic violence, for teen parents, for substance abusers, and for persons with HIV/AIDS. Some shelters provide services, such as a soup kitchen, job seeking skills training and job training, job placement, support groups, information and referral services, substance abuse treatment, early intervention programs, parental skills training, training for the GED, playrooms for children and volunteers to staff them. Haley House in Boston, a shelter for individuals modeled after the Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, trains residents to be bakers and they sell their products to the public. Kip Tiernan, a radical feminist who founded Rosie's Place, a shelter for homeless women in Boston, also founded a shelter for women with AIDS, a woman's lunch place, and a homeless women's chorus that performs at fund raisers. There are flowers on the table at the women's shelter, reflecting Kip's belief that people need beauty as well as bread ("Give me bread and give me roses.")

Many shelters do not provide storage space for people's belongings. While I was doing outreach in a welfare office, I met a woman who was crippled with severe arthritis and had stayed overnight at a shelter for individuals. The shelter had no lockers, and she was carrying her belongings in a plastic bag. There was no guarantee that she would get a bed for that night because the shelter required people to line up at 4:30 p.m., and those who were first in line got priority for shelter.

Many homeless individuals will not go to a homeless shelter because they are crowded and dangerous. If there is no place to store belongings, they often are stolen. Some of the residents have emotional problems which are exacerbated, or caused by, their homelessness. To avoid these dangerous conditions, some people sleep in the streets, in parks, in their cars, RVs, or in train or bus stations. Some live in tents in the woods or build temporary shelters in out-of-the-way spaces in the city, which are often torn down by the city. Some homeless people prefer the freedom and privacy they have in their own encampments to rigidly controlled shelters.

Some families are lodged in hotels or motels. At one time Massachusetts paid motels \$100 a night to house families, but stopped that practice when legislators complained about the expense. The motels were costing the state \$36,500 a year for each family. For that money, the state could have rented three apartments.

The motels were located on highways where there was no easy access to grocery shopping and if there was a hot plate, families were prohibited from cooking meals on it. (Some did, however, as there was no other way to prepare hot meals for their family.) Some motels had roaches, lice, or rats. Couples on one-night

stands, as well as prostitutes and pimps frequented some motels. One woman complained that there were keg parties all night, and bang-

ing on the walls. Parents complained that it was an inappropriate environment for their children. Yet some parents preferred staying in the better motels rather than in a congregate shelter because they had more privacy and less inspection.

Some families are sheltered in private apartments, an arrangement called "scattered site shelters." Families prefer these to congregate shelters, although their freedom is restricted even in these apartments because they have strict rules, such as not allowing visitors, telling parents to keep their children quiet, imposing curfews, not allowing any alcoholic beverages, and making unannounced visits to check on housekeeping. During my outreach work at the welfare office, I met a man who lived in one of these apartments. He said, "They can inspect your apartment any time they want, without prior notice. They are very fussy about housekeeping. If you don't have the corners of your sheets tight, they can sanction you. After three sanctions, you have to leave." He was angry at the way he and his wife were treated, but he had to hold it in because there is no place else to go. He said, "They force you to save money in the shelter. When I was working I was earning \$800 a month, and they tried to force me to save \$500 a month, which was completely unreasonable." One woman who lived in a scattered site shelter was resentful about being constantly nagged about housekeeping. She said, "When I get my own place, I will leave it messy for a week, even though that's not my nature, just to celebrate not having anyone checking on me."

Access to Shelters

MOST SHELTERS FOR INDIVIDUALS operate on

While the federal government has been cutting housing for the poor, it has increased housing subsidies for the affluent through tax benefits for homeownership.

a first-come-first-served basis, although most refuse people who are drunk or abusing drugs. Family shelters have eligibility criteria that vary from agency to agency, and from state to state. In Massachusetts, the eligibility criteria stipulates that a family should have no more income than 130 percent of the federal poverty line (\$12,740 for 1; \$17,160 for 2; \$21,580 for 3). The legislature lowered it to 100 percent a couple of years ago, but advocates lobbied aggressively to bring it back up to 130 percent. If a family has \$1 over that amount, they are not eligible. The program is called Emergency Assistance, and is funded by the state Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA, a.k.a. Department of Welfare).

Undocumented immigrants are allowed access to shelters only if a child was born in the U.S. and is therefore a citizen. For legal immigrants to be eligible, at least one family member must be a citizen or a legally present immigrant. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which turned welfare over to the states and made it no longer an entitlement program, also made sweeping changes in the rules governing immigrants' eligibility for federally funded public benefits. The law denies most immigrants, including lawful permanent residents, access to many federal public benefit programs, and gives states the option to adopt similar restrictions for state-funded benefits.

A list of family shelters published by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless shows that some family shelters do not accept adolescent boys. The age limits they set vary from 12 to 18. Some accept women and children only. One shelter accepts women and children only, but no boys over age 9. The welfare department accepts men as part of the family only if the man is the father of the children. No boy friends allowed.

The application process for admission to a family shelter is grueling. Most family shelters in Massachusetts are funded by the state DTA,

and workers are obsessed with documents. Applicants must produce a document to prove they have no place else to stay. The goal is to keep people out, not to let them in. One worker told a mother to look through her high school yearbook and ask anyone she knows to give her a place to stay. Workers ask endless questions, some of them intimate.

One of the worst application interviews that I witnessed occurred between a stylishly dressed African-American worker and an African-American mother of five children. I was so outraged by the worker's insensitivity that I wrote a letter to the worker and the director of the homeless unit, also sending a copy to the director of the state DTA. The director of the homeless unit was angry at me for going over his head by sending a copy of the letter to the central office, but shortly afterwards the state director put an article in the workers' internal newsletter urging workers to treat clients with respect. The client thanked me for sending the letter and expressed her disappointment that a fellow African-American had treated her so badly, saying, "We're supposed to stick together." She said her children (who accompanied her to the interview) were shocked to witness such insensitive treatment of their mother. Here is the letter that I sent:

Dear Ms. (worker):

It was clear that you resented my presence when I accompanied Ms. X (client) to her interview with you. Ms. X told me that you advised her to not listen "to those people out there," as "they don't know what they are talking about."

I would like to establish my credentials for advocacy work. I am a retired professor of social work, having taught in several colleges including Bridgewater State College. I have co-authored a human services textbook, *Introduction to Human Services: Policy and Practice*, 6th edition. I have also written numerous articles on social work and social welfare. I attend the benefits trainings sponsored by Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, and I frequently consult the DTA Client Services Hotline, the DTA web site, and lawyers at Greater Boston

Legal Services, to keep up to date on regulations.

However, my credentials are not the issue. The real issue is that clients have a legal right to have an advocate accompany them to interviews. The advocate need not know anything about DTA regulations. A friend can accompany the client simply to provide emotional support. Anyone who asks for help at the DTA is in a stressful situation, and an insensitive interviewer like you makes it doubly stressful. We advise people to *always* take someone with them when they go to an interview.

In the interview with Ms. X, you took issue with my telling you that you have a responsibility to help the client obtain verifications. I suggested that since Ms. X did not have two of her pay stubs, you might call the employer to verify the pay for that period. While Ms. X initially seemed to agree with this, she later said that she did not want her employer to know that she was homeless, so in this case your refusal to call the employer was the correct action. Yet the way you refused indicated that you did not believe the worker has a responsibility to help the client obtain verifications. The client said you later told her, "I'm not going to fetch anything."

As evidence for my claim that you have a responsibility to help the client obtain verifications, I am enclosing page 84 from the *TAFDC Advocacy Guide* published by Mass Law Reform Institute and Greater Boston Legal Services regarding obtaining verifications. You told Ms. X that school records would not suffice as proof of the children's birth, and that she had to bring in either birth certificates or baptism certificates. According to the *TAFDC Advocacy Guide*, school records or a statement from someone who knows the family will suffice.

You told Ms. X that she was not eligible for food stamps, yet you did not explore her eligibility. I don't know whether she is eligible, but if she and her children live with her sister and she buys and prepares her family's meals separately, she would probably be eligible.

You told Ms. X that if she were placed in a shelter far away from Boston she very likely would not be able to get her children transported to their home school in Boston. When

I pointed out that the McKinney-Vento Act specifically insures the right of homeless children to remain in their school of origin, you brushed off this information as being more or less irrelevant, since many superintendents simply won't do it. You didn't tell her that there is an office, run by the Department of Education that is charged with the task of statewide implementation and enforcement of the McKinney Act. For your information in future work with clients, the number is 781-338-3000. I am enclosing some information on the educational rights of homeless children.

You told Ms. X that one infraction of shelter rules would result in her losing eligibility for Emergency Assistance. This is not what is said in State Letter 1247 of February 3. According to CMR 309.040, the EA assistance unit will be sent a warning notice if they are "cited for accumulating three or more violations of reasonable rules established by the temporary emergency shelter, other than a hotel or motel." For the first instance of non-compliance, "the EA assistance unit may be placed in another approved temporary emergency shelter as a result of the noncompliance." I am enclosing the relevant passages.

If you had looked at Ms. X during the interview, which you seldom did, you would have seen tears rolling down her cheeks. You conducted what sociologists call "a successful degradation ceremony." You seemed unable to feel anything in common with Ms. X and to identify with her situation as a fellow human being in need of understanding and some warmth. If one of your friends were homeless, would you treat her the same way you treated Ms. X?

One man living in a shelter had this to say about the application process: "When I was working I didn't want my boss to know I was in a shelter because he was a Bush guy, hard nosed and beer drinking. However, the worker insisted on contacting my former employer. It didn't matter at that point because I no longer had the job, but workers do what they can to humiliate you and take your dignity."

When a family has been accepted for shelter, they have to wait in the waiting room to find out what shelter they have been assigned

to. This can take hours. The wait to see a worker in order to apply can also take hours. One shelter worker told me that the hours of waiting for a family to be told which shelter they are going to is not necessary because shelters phone the central office of DTA at 10:00 in the morning to notify them of vacancies.

According to DTA regulations, families should be placed within 20 miles of their homes, but if there is no shelter available within that distance, they can be placed hundreds of miles away. If a closer shelter becomes available later, they are supposed to be moved to that shelter. A placement far from home means of course that they are removed from family and friends, from familiar or specialized medical care, from jobs, and from school. Victims of domestic violence are always moved far from home in order to escape the victimizer. Families with a compelling reason to stay close to home, such as need for specialized medical treatment, can be placed in a hotel or motel temporarily until shelter space opens up.

As part of the application process, mothers are required to be interviewed by a DSS (Department of Social Services) worker who assesses their situation in relation to the children's welfare. Mothers are terrified of this, fearing the possibility of having their children taken away and placed in foster care. I never saw a case where this interview resulted in taking the child away, but it always creates anxiety in parents, and gives them continued anxiety while in shelter about the possibility of being charged with child abuse or neglect. One mother who was applying for shelter told the DSS worker that she and the child had slept in a car last night. The worker said this constituted child abuse and could result in the child being placed in foster care. However, the mother was given shelter. (Many of the children in foster care have been placed there because the family had no home.)

Life in the Shelter

THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION applies mostly to

homeless shelters in Massachusetts. I have not studied shelters for individuals or battered women's shelters intensively nor have I studied shelters in other states. However, Massachusetts has the reputation of being one of the better states in shelter provision. Most of my information has been obtained through six years of doing outreach in welfare offices and from interviews with shelter staff and residents; legal services lawyers, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless staff, welfare staff, and observations of shelters.

Shelter programs are shaped by prevailing views of the poor, who are considered to be generally inadequate and incompetent and in need of reform. In "*A Roof Over my Head*," Jean Calterone Williams expresses this well:

By making many aspects of their programs mandatory . . . shelters give the impression that homeless people will not take the initiative on their own to look for work or housing, enroll their children in school, or keep their living spaces clean. They must be forced to do so. By mandating budgeting classes, shelters suggest that people become homeless in part because they are irresponsible with their money. It is in a sense a symbiotic relationship: shelter programs influence the ways housed people think about homelessness, the views of the housed public — whether ordinary citizens or policymakers — affect the formation of shelter programs and how such programs treat homeless people.

Once a family is placed in a family shelter under the DTA Emergency Assistance (EA) program, they must follow certain rules to retain shelter. If a family does not follow these rules, they receive a notice of noncompliance. A family is terminated from EA shelter after two noncompliances and they are not eligible for shelter again for a year. These are some of the expectations placed upon families after they enter shelter:

- *Develop and comply with a self-sufficiency plan.* Some of the goals included in self-sufficiency plans include housing search, work require-

ments, resolution of outstanding arrest warrants, and savings requirements. Parents are required to save a certain percent of their income for an apartment, ranging from 30 to 50 percent. When they are allowed to keep their food stamps, they are expected to save more toward an apartment.

If the family does not meet the goals in the self-sufficiency plan, they can lose shelter.

- *Accept any offer of safe, permanent housing.* A rejection will result in the family being cited for non-compliance, with a few exceptions.
- *Follow TAFDC (Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children) work requirements.* Families receiving TAFDC benefits must work or participate in a job or a “workfare” placement from their first day in shelter in order to avoid losing their TAFDC benefits, unless they have a “good cause” reason that prevents them from working, such as a disability or caring for a child up to the age of 2. Unless they are exempted from work requirements, parents of children 2-6 work 20 hours a week. Parents of children 7 or 8 work 24 hours. Parents of children 9 or older work 30 hours. Advocates succeeded in getting a year of housing search as well as a year of higher education to count for a year of work, but it has to be in a vocational program.

If teen parents up to age 20 do not have a high school diploma or GED, they are required to attend school for 20 hours a week, with few exceptions. Many are “sanctioned” for absenteeism.

- *Comply with shelter rules.* A family can lose shelter if it has broken three shelter rules. The family will not be terminated for rule violations until the second citation of noncompliance. DTA must provide an alternate placement for a family that has been asked to leave a particular placement but has not been terminated.
- *Maintain employment.* If a family has quit a job or reduced income while in shelter without “good cause,” they can be terminated from shelter.

Families can appeal unfavorable decisions

and sometimes win, although they lose more often.

Shelter rules vary, but all have curfews. The most lenient curfew cited in *Down and Out* was 9:30 weekdays, 11 on weekends. The strictest is St. Ambrose Family Inn, which has an 8:00 p.m. curfew every night of the week. When I asked a worker there why they weren't more lenient on weekends, she said that it is a dangerous neighborhood and it is not safe for people to go out at night. Unless the shelter gives permission, a parent is unable to work after these hours. Shelters allow overnight absences only with written permission. An unauthorized absence can result in losing shelter. All shelters require sobriety on the premises; one requires a minimum of 6 months sobriety before being accepted for shelter.

Most shelters require residents to help with housekeeping. In some shelters, women buy and cook their own food. Some shelters allow visits by fathers, but don't allow fathers to live there. Some shelters require residents to attend church on Sunday.

Here are some items taken from the 14 pages of rules in the “Family Guide” given to residents of St. Ambrose Family Inn in Boston, a shelter for 15 families run by Catholic Charities:

- Residents are required to give the following documentation to St. Ambrose upon entry to the shelter: DTA transfer/acceptance notice; Social Security cards; birth certificates; health insurance cards; physical exam records; TB test results. (Children may be given a TB risk assessment test); verification of all income; immunization records; school/daycare enrollment verification (if applicable).
- Residents are allowed two luggage items per family member upon entry to the shelter according to DTA policy.
- Personal belongings may be inspected prior to room assignment and at any time during residency at St. Ambrose.
- Residents may be required to copy their passport for St. Ambrose records.

- St. Ambrose will conduct a CORI (Criminal Offense Record Information).
- When applicable, drug-screening verification will be required.
- If a room becomes cluttered, the resident will be asked to remove any excessive items within 24 hours.
- Wall hangings are not allowed in resident rooms or bathrooms.
- Residents are not allowed to lie on or place their feet on the TV room couches or chair.
- A towel wrapped around a person is not appropriate. Robes with undergarments must be worn if a resident is walking from her bathroom to her room.
- Residents are not allowed in other residents' rooms at any time.
- Residents are required to attend all meetings with the Family Advocate or Case Managers as scheduled.
- St. Ambrose reserves the right to schedule a mandatory house meeting or training at any time.
- *Staff members are required by law to report any abuse or neglect of a child to the Department of Social Services. All residents and parents should be aware of this type of report, which is called a 51-A.* (Emphasis in the original.)
- All St. Ambrose Residents are required to leave the building and grounds from 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM Monday through Friday. Residents may return for lunch during the time period of 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM.
- All children are required to be off the first floor by 8:30 PM and all residents in their rooms by 9:00 PM seven days a week.
- By 9:00 PM everything should be quiet in the building. Noise should be kept to a minimum after this hour. Music, radios, and TVs should not be heard outside the rooms in which they are playing.
- FOOD IS ALLOWED IN THE DINING ROOM ONLY. FOOD IS NOT ALLOWED IN THE RESIDENTS' ROOMS, TV ROOM OR HALLWAYS. ONLY WATER IS ALLOWED IN THE RESIDENT ROOMS (NO JUICE, SODA, SWEETENED MILK, etc.) (Emphasis in the original.)
- Families are required to keep their rooms clean. The rooms may be inspected daily by the St. Ambrose Shelter staff.

- It is recommended that residents not lend money to or borrow money from other residents who live at the shelter.
- Shelter staff is not allowed to lend money to or borrow money from a resident.

Any failure to the above may result in a written warning with the possibility of termination of shelter placement at St. Ambrose. *A resident is allowed three written warnings before restrictions are imposed and/or termination procedures from St. Ambrose may be put in place. A resident may be terminated at any time for Health & Safety reasons. Copies of all warnings are sent to the local DTA office for review.* (Emphasis in the original.)

In other words, anything that makes you feel at home is forbidden.

During my outreach work in the welfare office, I heard a variety of opinions about shelters from the residents and ex-residents, ranging from “It’s like a prison” to “It’s pretty good.” Here are some of the comments, taken from my log:

- One woman told me that shelter staff threaten mothers with filing a petition of abuse against them for minor things such as letting a baby sleep in a baby swing. Her toddler had a minor fall on his bum and the staff said she had to take the child to the emergency room; even though there was not even a bruise. The doctor ridiculed her for bringing the child into the hospital when there was no evidence of injury.
- A woman is living in a Christian shelter. She has two young children. She fears that her children will catch an infection or get lead paint poisoning. Another resident sued the shelter because her child ate lead chips, and the director of the shelter asked all the residents to sign a statement saying they won’t sue them. This woman refused to do it. The shelter is very controlling, won’t let anyone go out of the house unless a staff member goes with her. The woman works and says they can’t control her. The only thing she likes about the place is the prayer meetings. She is here to request another shelter.
- A woman in the homeless unit had been kicked out of the shelter in the YMCA because she was in the hospital in a coma and

hadn't been able to call them. She said, "I couldn't even call myself; I was in a coma."

- A woman has been kicked out of a shelter for burning some toast in a microwave. Another was kicked out of a shelter a year ago and can't get into a shelter for another several months. She hadn't realized that you couldn't get help for another year.

- A woman is in Pine Street Inn (a shelter for individuals). She has a 14-year-old son but they couldn't find a shelter that would take her son. She is on the waiting list for one, but has to find someone to take care of him soon because her sister can't do it any more.

- A young woman was in a teen shelter and was sanctioned because she didn't attend school daily. She couldn't attend daily because she had various appointments to keep, and because she was depressed. Being homeless made her more depressed. (Studies show that a large proportion of shelters residents and welfare recipients are depressed.)

- A woman said that being in a shelter is like being in prison. They keep checking up on you, criticizing your housekeeping, the children's noise, etc. They treat you like a child. She has had to move several times, and this isn't good for the children. Yesterday she was running around all day looking for furniture, getting documents, etc., and she is exhausted. She is lucky in having a good support group, including good doctors, and relatives that help her out.
- A man with a boy about 8 or 9 wanted to talk with me privately so other people wouldn't hear. Although he is not the father of the boy who is with him, he has custody. The child was sexually abused in a shelter and is terrified of going back to any shelter. He does not want to live with his mother because the mother has abused him and her boy friend smokes crack. He lived with his grandmother for a while but his uncle, who lived there, used heroin. Both the court and DSS are involved. The DTA worker said they want to place him in Springfield, but the boy needs to stay in the Boston area because he is disturbed and is in counseling and is also in a special school. He has attention deficit disorder. The worker also offered to place him in Stoughton, but that won't work either.

- I accompanied a woman appealing termina-

tion of her shelter to her hearing. The DTA worker and DTA lawyer were also at the hearing. The woman had asked to have 3 nights off to stay with a cousin in Brockton who was in the hospital. She was under the impression that the shelter granted permission, but they said they had not. DTA terminated her EA (shelter).

The woman said that after visiting her cousin she was unable to return to the shelter when she expected to because the ride she had coming to Brockton wasn't able to take her back. When she went back to the shelter they had packed her stuff in a box and told her she couldn't stay. She said, "They put my baby on the dirty floor. I was so upset."

The woman said it was hard to make herself understood because no one at the shelter spoke Creole. I raised the issue of possible faulty communication with the shelter because of the woman's language. The DTA lawyer asked if she had complied with the shelter's routines and done what she was supposed to do when she lived there. The woman said she had. The lawyer used that as proof that there was no communication difficulty. Nevertheless, the hearing officer listened to this exchange with interest and it may have helped the woman to win her case.

- A woman in the Homeless Unit had been kicked out of her shelter today, accused of swearing at a staff member. She was extremely upset, insisting that she hadn't sworn and they admitted they would believe a staff member rather than her. Other women waiting in the Homeless Unit sympathized with her.

Some mothers generally liked their shelter but didn't like some of the staff:

- A woman likes the director Lara, thinks she is on the side of the women and really wants to help them. But she doesn't like David. He tells her that she can't "just sit around doing nothing." She said that one young woman in the shelter who "was raised in the streets and has street toughs" lost it one day and told David that she was going to kill some people around here, meaning David. David told all the other residents to get in their room "just in case," but the woman pointed out to me laughingly that she didn't want to kill them, she wanted

to kill David. She said that while she has learned to hold herself in, she does enjoy watching someone else express the anger that all of them feel.

The woman says this is one of the better shelters. She has her own room, comfortably furnished with a couch and a refrigerator. There is a common kitchen where the food is delivered and you can either eat there or take your food to your room. The food isn't all that great, but is o.k. sometimes. Curfews are 9:30 on weeknights, 11 on Saturday. The woman has been here for 3 months. Some people stay a year. She longs to get her own apartment, and dreams that she has one.

Some people understood the need for rules. One man said, "They have to have rules, otherwise people would be going in and out all night and they couldn't handle it." He felt it was a small enough price to pay for getting shelter and he appreciated the help.

Conflicts often arise over the work and the housing search requirements. Housing workers are sometimes merciless in hounding women to find an apartment, even though there is little that the women can do to find affordable housing when it simply doesn't exist. One shelter director said they have a grievance policy, but residents are not allowed to grieve any shelter policies. (That struck me as an Alice in Wonderland sort of grievance policy.) She claimed that they promote resident participation by having weekly meetings, with rotating elected representatives.

Race

THE STAFF OF SHELTERS are most often middle class and white while the residents in Massachusetts's shelters are predominantly people of color, especially in large cities. People of color make up the majority of the homeless nationwide. A survey by the U. S. Conference of Mayors in 2004 estimated the homeless population to be 49 percent African-American, 35 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, two percent Native American and one percent Asian. A black woman who worked in one of the bet-

ter shelters, run by Catholic nuns, reports that the condescending attitudes of staff toward the black residents drove her nuts.

Jean Calterone Williams studied shelters in Phoenix, where the majority of shelter residents were white, and found a great deal of racism toward Chicana women. One woman complained about an employee who "used to whisper in the women's ears who couldn't speak English, saying they need to go back to their own countries." (The woman was evicted from the shelter for complaining.) Williams says that white workers sometimes gave preferential treatment to white residents. White homeless women often attempt to distance themselves from women of color in an attempt to appear more "deserving." This reflects the views of housed white people. Williams says that in Phoenix, where racism runs high, "white housed people perceive Latinos — in particular Chicanos — as too 'different' to be considered American, regardless of their citizenship status. . . . These housed people claim that poor or homeless Chicanos are to blame for their own circumstances because they do not want to work to climb the social or economic ladder."

Williams found that in Phoenix, which has a large Spanish-speaking community, most shelters lacked even one Spanish-speaking staff person and did not offer programs for women who are in the country illegally. Because monolingual Spanish-speaking women often could not find a battered women's shelter with a Spanish-speaking staff person, a local Chicano/a advocacy group established La Casa, a Spanish-speaking shelter for battered women. La Casa and Rose's House, another shelter for battered women, treated women more compassionately than did other shelters for the homeless, and had a more home-like atmosphere. "La Casa seems less interested in keeping residents under constant surveillance than is the case at the homeless shelters." (Probably shelters that were established because of the women's movement and the civil rights struggle are more compassionate.)

Women of color who apply for shelter cannot necessarily count on getting more sympathetic treatment from a worker of their own race. Workers sometimes distance themselves from clients because of their anxiety about status, their contempt for people they view as “lower class,” and their fears about their own fragile economic status.

Shelter Workers

Some middle class shelter staff has an attitude of “noblesse oblige” reminiscent of 19th century “Charity Ladies.” They assume that homeless women need to change, and they have been entrusted with the mission of changing them. Most of the shelter staff that I talked with had a victim-blaming attitude. One shelter director said, “They all come from dysfunctional families, but they are capable of change.” One shelter in an affluent community assigns a volunteer “mentor” to each resident. These are upper-middle-class women whose goal is to help the residents change; thereby conveying the message that their mentor assumes something is wrong with them. Some of these women do have valuable things to give the residents, such as help in locating financial aid for college, giving rides to job interviews, caring for their children while the mothers rest or take care of errands, tutoring children or tutoring the mother for a GED, or teaching computer skills. But to call them “mentors” rather than “community resources” implies that they are on a superior plane.

Some shelter workers are genuinely caring. One resident said that the shelter director “is like a grandmother to me.” Such workers help women find and use resources and help them with personal problems, and sometimes follow up with them after they leave the shelter. Many shelter residents are grateful for the services offered by the shelters, but they are always aware that the main goal of the shelter is to get them out of there and to get them off welfare.

Even staff members who are aware of the structural problems that the residents face nev-

ertheless consider it their job to enforce the rules. Yet some are flexible in the way they enforce the rules and bend them as much as possible. Some, however, deny that there are major structural reasons for homelessness. When I asked a shelter worker what she thought was the cause of homelessness, she said that some women who refuse to follow rules, such as meeting regularly with the housing search worker, just prefer to be homeless. They like being taken care of in the shelter without any responsibilities, and would rather be homeless than to follow rules.

A director of a shelter for teen parents expressed her frustration with her inability to help residents find housing and pay for it when they found it. She said, “They just go from a teen shelter to an adult shelter.” While she enjoyed her work with the residents and they liked her and liked the shelter, she felt hopeless about the job as it felt like putting Band-Aids on a gaping wound. I empathized with her and said that I often feel the same way. I told her that it helps me to get involved in some kind of social action that might help to change the situation, such as a forthcoming lobby day sponsored by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. She planned to attend and bring some of the residents with her. I put her in touch with a local organizing group, the Coalition Against Poverty. (Interestingly, she is the daughter of a woman who was in my social work class when I taught at Bridgewater State College.)

Shelters may ultimately be more expensive than permanent housing. Many people believe that in spite of that, cities rely on shelters because building housing would compete with the real estate industry and would establish government responsibility to provide housing for people. And there is money to be made in the shelter industry. “In the mid-1980s, one-third of New York City’s welfare hotel business went to two separate business partnerships that together grossed \$25 million in rents.” New York City sold some welfare hotels that the city owned, and contracted with the owners to house

the homeless, “paying them \$1.2 million a year to house families in a hotel that it had owned outright just four years earlier.”

Most family shelters are run by nonprofit agencies, and they get much of their funding from the state through the welfare department, as well as from private sources. Churches run many of them. Most are scrambling for money, and are consequently eager to please funders. This often results in “creaming” the population, i.e., accepting people who are most likely to change in desired directions. It also results in adhering to the status quo rather than trying any radical change. Vincent Lyon-Callo tells of organizing the homeless and their allies in western Massachusetts to take over buildings of an abandoned state mental hospital in order to create housing for the homeless. Organizing for the action took place under the auspices of a local shelter for the homeless. Several local politicians were quite upset by this event and attendant media coverage. They reacted by blaming the shelter staff for stirring up trouble and portrayed those involved in the takeover as “outsiders.” People connected with the shelter received threats of decreased support and funding for the shelter from local business and political leaders. A few months later the staff learned that funding from the state had been decreased by almost 20 percent for the coming year, and they had to cut staff.

Most significantly, however, was the imposition of awareness among remaining staff that their assigned role was clearly limited to that of reforming homeless people and managing homelessness if they wanted to keep their job. Consequently, most staff members returned to the more familiar roles of treating deviance and surveillance of homeless people.

Welfare Workers

THE WORKERS in the welfare office are overworked and underpaid, although they are paid more than workers in the private sector (as in shelters) because they have a union. The leadership of the union is relatively progressive.

Robert Haines, the director of AFL-CIO in Massachusetts, grew up in a family that received welfare, and he mentions this in speeches to welfare recipients and advocates.* He opposed

Shelter programs are shaped by prevailing views of the poor, who are considered to be generally inadequate and incompetent and in need of reform.

the harsh welfare reform bill in Massachusetts, but the union did not exert much pressure to lobby against it and most welfare workers do not engage in activism to change welfare policy. Yet two union leaders who were welfare workers joined in an alliance with recipients called Working Mass. The union and welfare rights activists have joined in struggles where they have a common interest such as getting lower case loads and resisting the closing of welfare offices. But there are issues where their interests diverge. When clients and their advocates complain of nasty treatment by workers, welfare directors claim that, while they can talk to disrespectful workers, they are unable to fire them because the union protects workers.

Most of the workers perform like automated bureaucrats. They conduct the interview in a routine way. They enter data into the computer, often with difficulty because the intricacies of their computer program, named Beacon, elude them and they must call a supervisor in to figure it out. They sometimes make mistakes and sometimes lose documents, but they seldom apologize. They often keep clients wait-

* It is important for people who hold high positions to talk about having received welfare, as it helps to reduce the stigma of welfare. The recently elected governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, said that his family received welfare when he was a child.

ing, even when the client has an appointment. One woman said, “They act like it’s their own money they’re giving out.”

Some workers are genuinely friendly and helpful, and the clients appreciate having one of those. One client said, “My worker is wonderful. She really helps me.” A few will bend the rules as much as possible. During one interview when a client was told that she earned too much to be eligible for shelter, I suggested to the client that she lower her working hours. The worker said, “I didn’t hear that.”

But there are a few really nasty ones, like the one described in my letter of outrage above. Here are clients’ comments about unsympathetic workers:

- This man had a worker who was “right out of Beavis and Butt Head. He looked just like Beavis, with a pointy head.” The man gave a letter to the worker from his grandmother that said he could no longer reside with her and the worker said, “I want a letter in lay language.” The man was amazed and angry because the letter was perfectly clear, but he had to get another letter from his grandmother.
- A woman was angry with her worker and said, “He has a bad attitude, and talks down like you’re stupid. A lot of people complain about him. I had a worker before who was o.k. He understood my problems of having no car and no phone that made it hard to get in for appointments. I am trying to get medical disability and the doctor is filling out the form, but it takes time and this worker doesn’t want to wait.”

Even when workers do not agree with welfare policies, they feel that it is their job to follow them. Here is an example of such a worker:

- The client’s 18-month-old child is a Family Cap baby* and she has a 9-year-old daughter. The worker had her sign the form from DOR (Department of Revenue, which enforces child support) that asks about sexual intercourse with

the child’s father. She was deeply offended by the form, and I agreed with her. I asked the worker if she would jeopardize her benefits if she refused to sign it. He said she could write a statement saying she refused to sign it and he would send it to the central office, and it wouldn’t jeopardize her benefits. However, the woman decided to sign it “and get it over with.” The worker also didn’t like the form, and he didn’t agree with the Family Cap. He asked me who brought in that policy and I told him that it was President Clinton who signed the bill. He was surprised, but we agreed that Clinton was more a Republican than a Democrat.

The Myth of Altruism

MICHAEL LIPSKY points out “Virtually every commentary on welfare practices draws attention to the degradation of clients.” Poor people receive a qualitatively different kind of treatment than middle-class people. “The ideology that street-level bureaucrats’ intervention is in the interest of clients appears to be a particularly important instrument of control.” Lipsky calls this “the myth of altruism. This myth is usually unexamined. Social workers believe they are helping others and clients are encouraged to confide in and trust strangers and permit themselves to be manipulated and ordered about in the expectation of receiving help or fair treatment.” Yet social workers* are thrown into the

* Although Michael Lipsky uses the term “social workers,” the people who work in welfare offices are generally not professional social workers and are not accepted by the social work profession as such. (It probably wouldn’t make much difference if they were professional social workers, as they would still be forced to take the same repressive measures, although perhaps with more finesse.) Workers now are not expected to provide services, but only to investigate and administer financial assistance. Prior to 1974 workers provided both services and investigation, but those functions were separated in that year because welfare rights activists saw the services as attempts to “reform” them with the goal of getting them off welfare, and demanded that services be separated from eligibility investigation. They did not want reform; they wanted cash. This separation of services from investigation actually resulted in officials cutting out the few services that were previously offered — yet another example of the unintended consequences of reform.

* The Family Cap policy states that a child born while a mother is on TAFDC is ineligible for cash benefits. This results in the family grant being reduced by \$90 a month. The federal government does not mandate states to enforce it, but encourages them to do so.

most difficult work without the resources to adequately accomplish that work. In order to cope with the stress of being unable to individualize clients and respond to their needs, “street-level bureaucrats develop conceptions of their jobs, and of clients that reduce the strain between capabilities and goals, thereby making their jobs psychologically easier to manage.” Workers often begin the work as idealists, but end by getting burned out. The antidote to this is not to train the workers, but to change the conditions of work. Liberation of the client would also mean liberation of the worker.

Michel Foucault also discusses the social control aspect of “helping.” His history of discipline and punishment traces the gradual widening of the function of the prison to incorporate the so-called “helping” professions, under the rubric of “normalization.”

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the “social worker”-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements. The cerebral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power.

Scratching the Surface

THE SHELTER SYSTEM only scratches the surface of the problem of homelessness. There are never enough shelters to house the homeless even temporarily, and practically everyone prefers to live in her or his own home rather than in a shelter. One count of the homeless in 2005 estimated that 44 percent of homeless people were unsheltered. This was a rough estimate, as are all estimates of the numbers of homeless

people. Counting the homeless has been described as a “high-stakes numbers game.” Officials want the numbers to be low; advocates

want them high, and there is continual debate about them in academic circles. It is impossible to count all of the homeless because many are not found and many are doubling

up with relatives and friends. Many are homeless for only a short time. It is a revolving population. A study in 2005, based on counts of homeless people from a sample of homeless service providers from across the country, found 744,313 people in the U.S. who were homeless in January. This study counted how many people were homeless at a specific point in time, so did not count how many were homeless during the year. The researchers extrapolated the number and estimated that between 2.3 and 3.5 million people are homeless in a given year — nearly 1 to 2 percent of the total population. Approximately 59 percent of the homeless population counted in 2005 were individuals and 41 percent were persons in families with children. The percentage of families with children has increased since a survey in 1996, when 35 percent of homeless people were persons in families. Over 600,000 identified homeless students were enrolled in public schools in the 2003-2004 school year.

In twenty-seven major cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 2004, requests for emergency shelters went unmet for an average of 23 percent of homeless people overall and 32 percent of homeless families alone. In 81 percent of the cities, emergency shelters had to turn away both homeless families and individuals due to lack of resources. People stayed in shelters for an average of eight months, which was longer than in the past year. In 56 percent of the cities, families may have to break up in order to be sheltered. In 52 percent of the cities

“The judges of normality
are present everywhere.”

— MICHEL FOUCAULT

families may have to spend their daytime hours outside of the shelter they use at night. Lack of affordable housing led the list of causes of homelessness identified by the city officials.

Blaming the Victim

I AM BEMUSED by announcements that come over the radio from time to time by foundations or institutes saying they are studying the causes of homelessness and seeking cures. In fact, the causes are quite simple and have been studied quite enough. Homelessness is caused by poverty, insufficient affordable housing and insufficient money to pay for housing, and a weak or nonexistent safety net of income maintenance and support services. It is true that many of the homeless are alcoholics or drug addicts, but they need a home while they are coping with their problem, and they need treatment programs, and both are in short supply. It is also true that many of the homeless have emotional problems. Who wouldn't have emotional problems if they were homeless? But they need a home while they are coping with their problems and they need support services. Both are in short supply. A disproportionate number of foster children who have "aged out" of the foster care system are homeless. A disproportionate number of veterans are homeless. It is the fault of the government that they are in this condition, but the government has deserted them. A large percentage of homeless women have been abused. While they may need a temporary refuge to escape the abuser and counseling to help them heal, they also need permanent housing, childcare, a job that pays a living wage, and social supports.

The focus on individual problems shifts attention away from structural problems and obscures the real causes of homelessness. It leads to stereotyping of homeless people as deviant and degenerate, drunk or drugged, or crazy. When these stereotypes are embedded in people's minds, they view every beggar as a scammer. Stereotyping leads to criminalizing

the homeless, allowing cities to sweep them from the streets. It gives implicit permission to delinquent thugs to beat them up. One man made a series of documentaries in which homeless men fight each other, while being plied with liquor. Reality show producers took the homeless on shopping trips as a subject of amusement. On the Boston radio station WBCN-FM, DJs Opie and Anthony ran an event called the Homeless Shopping Spree, taking street people to a high-end shopping center, giving them liquor and money to shop, and ridiculing their purchases for the amusement of their listeners. Boston's Mayor Menino publicly expressed his outrage at the show.

Stereotyping leads to ever-changing policies geared to fixing different target sub-populations of homeless people. There are "periodic calls for local homeless plans based upon the newest policy flavor (and) temporary and local responses to homelessness that fail to address its systemic causes." The public stereotypes become internalized by the homeless, causing them to try to distance themselves from the "undeserving Other," however they visualize the "Other." I met many people in the welfare office who told me that they were "not like those others" who are lazy and don't want to work. I told one woman that what might look like laziness is actually depression, and she admitted that she was depressed.

Homeless men resist being categorized as "homeless" because that conjures up the image of a drunken bum. Homeless women resist being categorized as "homeless" because that conjures up the image of a crazy disheveled "bag lady." Battered women resist being described as "battered," preferring to see themselves as "survivors."

There is a hierarchy of deserving vs. undeserving in the public's mind. Battered women are seen as deserving because they are victims. Parents and children are more deserving than single men because children are innocent victims. Homeless men are the least deserving, because

they should be working. These “social imaginary significations,” as Castoriades calls them, help to shape the way shelters treat their residents and the way the residents view themselves.

Even though many women who have been victims of domestic violence are not in battered women's shelters, the women in battered women's shelters often see themselves as superior to homeless women in family shelters. Battered women's shelters usually get more funding, have less strict surveillance, have more amenities, and are more likely to be in residential areas. In her comparison of battered women's shelters with homeless shelters, Williams says that the battered women's shelters require residents to engage in several hours of counseling and attendance at support groups, but give little support to working or looking for housing, in contrast to homeless shelters that require housing search. One battered women's shelter had an outdated resource list that was more frustrating than helpful. Some women appreciated the counseling and said it helped them to stabilize their lives. Others would have preferred to spend more time in working or looking for housing. Arlene Avakian discusses how battered women's shelters changed as they became professionalized:

Like many other grass roots movements, the battered women's movement changed drastically when it stopped relying on volunteers and raised funds to hire professionals who no longer aimed to empower women to overthrow patriarchy but helped them adapt to a bad situation. While the battered women's movement has helped thousands of women get out of abusive situations as well as raised the general awareness about domestic abuse, it has also changed from a movement for social change to a social service agency with all the pitfalls accompanying the distance between the worker and the client.

Federal Housing Programs

AS HOMELESSNESS SURGED in the 1980s, organized groups of homeless people, advocates,

service providers, charities, lawyers, health professionals, and churches brought the nation's attention to homelessness. Mitch Snyder's Community for Creative Non-Violence engaged in confrontations with federal officials in Washington, DC and encouraged the homeless and their advocates in other cities to mount protests. These groups lobbied and brought lawsuits, demanding a federal response to homelessness. The federal government initially responded to homelessness through small-scale funding for shelters, rather than by addressing the systemic need for affordable housing. “Over the next couple of decades, shelters grew from being a temporary emergency response to a supposedly momentary problem to become institutionalized as a permanent tier in the housing market of many localities,” creating a large shelter industry.

In 1987, Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, the first and only major federal legislation devoted solely to addressing homelessness. “A small portion supported some transitional housing and mobile health care programs, (but) Federal funding of HUD's low-income affordable housing programs . . . continued to be cut.”

In the 1990s, the federal government funded “supported housing” programs, which focused on “chronic homelessness” of severely disabled people. Rather than funding new housing, it leased hotel rooms, replaced current residents with homeless people, and installed a few caseworkers in the front office.

The federal government created a program in 1993 named HOPE VI. This involved destroying much existing public housing and replacing it with housing that encouraged middle class people to live there, on the theory that contact with middle class people would be good for poor people. While the program created some housing for poor people that was arguably more attractive than large housing projects, it also created more affordable housing for middle income people. When one of these de-

velopments was built in Boston, I read in the *Boston Globe* that two women who lived there said it would be good for their poor neighbors to see them go to work in the morning. The program was named “community building,” which aimed to “weave positive ties among public housing residents, neighborhood associations and community institutions.” In addition to housing, some sites included social services such as childcare, after school programs, computer labs, employment services, training, recreation and health care. One of the goals of HOPE VI was to get residents off welfare and into work. Here is the government’s official version of the goals of the program:

HOPE VI occurred in the context of welfare reform. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act changed the old welfare system. Operating in this new environment, a central focus of HOPE VI projects is to help residents overcome obstacles to work, and placing residents in employment.

Much of the public housing that was destroyed for the HOPE VI program was not actually “severely distressed.” A 1992 commission report found that only 6 percent of the total public housing stock was severely distressed. The HOPE VI program often did more harm than good. “It resulted in the forced displacement of tens of thousands of families and the permanent loss of large amounts of guaranteed affordable housing.”

Recently the federal government has invited local communities to apply for McKinney funds to draw up 5-year “Continuum of Care” plans and 10- year planning bodies to “end chronic homelessness.”

These planning and granting procedures have led to intense competition among local service providers across the nation, pitting communities against each other in the constant scramble for pieces of a federal funding stream that is only a tiny fraction of what used to be spent on affordable housing production and subsidies before the cuts of the 1980s . . . (These

local communities) are competing for the same small pool of McKinney homeless assistance funding. They are told that the small pittance the federal government currently allocates to address homelessness is ample if used in ‘efficient and innovative’ ways.

It is a cruel hoax. These people who are fighting for a piece of a very small pie are being fooled into the belief that they can end homelessness, while they are being denied the resources to make real progress toward that goal. It is similar to officials forcing welfare recipients to get a job and housing, while not providing affordable housing or jobs that pay a living wage. It is yet another part of the conservatives’ goal of privatizing all of the safety net, which they have accomplished with welfare and are trying to accomplish with Social Security.

Resistance

IT IS DIFFICULT, if not impossible, to organize shelter residents. Shelter directors are reluctant to grant outsiders access to residents. It is very hard for women in a shelter to develop the solidarity necessary for collective resistance because of the close surveillance they are subjected to and because they are kept constantly busy at required activities.

Despite their resentment of onerous rules and staff attitudes, mothers depend on shelters to meet their basic needs. When women do resist by defiant acts, that behavior is defined as “deviant,” and is generally met with repression. Yet shelter residents do engage in covert collective resistance. Williams tells of an incident where residents were resentful of one particularly nasty staff member. “Residents held an ongoing contest to see who could spend the least amount of time in his office for their weekly appointments (supposed to last an hour). The record was three minutes.”

There are many advocacy groups in the nation trying to solve the problem of homelessness. Most do not actively involve many homeless people. The Massachusetts

Coalition for the Homeless does not do grassroots organizing of the homeless. They are a coalition *for* the homeless, not *with* the homeless. They lobby for increased state money to prevent homelessness, i.e. to prevent eviction or to pay up-front expenses for renting an apartment, or to get more state-subsidized vouchers, and have won some victories. They lobby for more flexible eligibility rules for access to shelter and eviction from shelters.

Lawyers across the nation have documented violations of the rights of homeless people and sued institutions, states, and cities for those violations. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty has said that homelessness is a violation of the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and submitted a “shadow report” that documented these violations to the Human Rights Committee on May 31, 2006. It is a radical statement to say, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* does, that every human has a right to housing. If housing becomes a universal right, then poor people who need housing will not be stigmatized. As the late British social welfare scholar Richard Titmuss said, “Programs for the poor are poor programs.” When a program like Social Security, Medicare, or the G. I. Bill is universal it is no longer stigmatized.

Since the federal government has abdicated

“Programs for the poor are poor programs.” — RICHARD TITMUSS

its responsibility for building housing, states and localities and non-governmental agencies are trying to take up the slack, but they cannot possibly meet the need without federal help. The Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, some community development agencies, and some social agencies have built affordable housing.

Since the 1980s, organizers have made a few courageous forays into grassroots organizing that involves setting up tent cities or resisting arrests for camping in public spaces. One of the most highly publicized occurred in August 1988 in New York City when the police attempted to clear the Tompkins Square Park of homeless people and a riot erupted, which was labeled a “police riot.” At least one case went to trial, but no police officers were punished.”

Since the Tompkins Square protests, there have been periodic militant protests by homeless people in Seattle, Northampton, Massachusetts, Springfield, Massachusetts (organized by ARISE for Social Justice), San Jose, Chicago, and Philadelphia (organized by the Kensington Welfare Rights Organization). In his book *Checkerboard Square*, David Wagner describes the organizing done by homeless people in Portland, Maine. They put up a tent city and used it, as well as a drop-in center, as a base for organizing. Wagner shows that poor people “are not just acted upon or just passive victims of society (but) develop their own self-consciousness, culture, and alternative community.” He raises the possibility that street communities can develop into loosely organized social movements that can develop “collective approaches to poverty that build on existing social networks to assist poor people in obtaining housing and other benefits *collectively*.” Homeless people are challenging society’s norms of family, work, and institutions.

Talmadge Wright, analyzing tent city pro-

* The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United States voted to support when it was ratified by the United Nations in 1948, states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), www.un.org/Overview/rights.)

tests in San Jose and Chicago, says that squatters who choose encampments (i. e., tents and huts) as opposed to shelters in their organizing “speak to the desire for community, autonomy, and privacy.” Talmadge says that whenever homeless groups actively organized with political organizations, the response was swift and repressive, but “for a brief moment . . . the San Jose encampments offered utopic spaces for reimagining a different social identity for the homeless and very poor.”

A majority of the participants in the protests described by Wagner and Talmadge were single men. They were joined by college professors (Wagner and Talmadge), college students, and church members. Women are less likely to join street protests. They are more vulnerable to violence and rape, and mothers fear that their children might be taken away if they join street protests. However, women make up the majority of welfare rights activists because the majority of welfare recipients are mothers.

Twenty years ago I worked with welfare recipients at UMass/Boston to found a welfare rights organization, called Survivors, Inc. The organization publishes a newspaper called *Survival News*, for which I write a section called “Survival Tips” that tells people about resources and benefits and gives advice about resisting repressive policies. It is translated into Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese. Members of Survivors, Inc. have given speeches to groups, churches, conferences, classes, shelters, and radio and TV stations. They have written letters to the editor and met with the news editor of the *Boston Globe* to try to persuade him to give more coverage to poverty issues. They helped produce a Canadian documentary about welfare and homeless shelters. They do outreach at welfare offices to help people get access to benefits. At the welfare office, we recruited 15 welfare recipients and homeless women to attend the March for Women’s Lives in Washington, DC in 2004. Ten members of Survivors, Inc joined them. A WIC* outreach worker went,

as well as my Haitian outreach colleague and her niece. After the march, her niece gave a speech about the march to her college class. An African-American woman legislator had given money for 3 buses to the march for black women (but not excluding white women). We filled one of those buses. At the march, I wore a sign that said, “Welfare reform kills babies.”

The director of the homeless unit of the Boston DTA, an African-American woman, works to create as humane an atmosphere as possible in the office, and had no objection to our talking informally with the clients. The Haitian outreach worker, and the WIC worker, who is also Haitian, have become well known in the Haitian community and can often be seen in the waiting room talking with a group of Haitians and helping them to access benefits.

In tracing the history of poor people’s movements, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward conclude that the only power that poor people have is the power of disruption. Therefore, they argue, the role of organizers is not to try to form permanent membership organizations but to mobilize the poor for disruptive action when the time is ripe. Membership organizations, they argue, always end up by losing their base in their struggles to get funding and to hold on to leadership roles.

Organizations endure . . . by abandoning their oppositional politics. . . . Organizers tended to work against disruption because, in their search for resources to maintain their organizations, they were driven inexorably to elites, and to the tangible and symbolic supports that elites could provide. Elites conferred these resources because they understood that it was organization-building, not disruption, that organizers were about.

During the Great Depression, there were rent riots when small bands of people prevented

* WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) is a federal food program for young children and their mothers, and for pregnant women.

marshals from putting furniture on the street. People also stormed the relief offices demanding relief.

As the unemployed became more disruptive, even cherished procedures of investigation and surveillance of recipients were relinquished . . . As indignation mounted . . . some people not only defied the prohibition against going on the dole, but some even began to defy the apparatus of ritualized humiliation that had made that prohibition so effective.

People began to shake free of what William Blake described in his poem *London* as “mind-forged manacles,” which had locked them into submission and into internalizing their oppressor’s view of them as not deserving of respect and equal rights. The general population also began to shake those mind-forged manacles when they understood that structural reasons created poverty, not people’s individual failings.

The playwright Jean Racine expressed it well in his play *Britannicus*. Narcissus says to Britannicus:

As long as you are seen as a mere suppliant,
Uttering complaints but not inspiring fear;
While your resentments spend themselves in talk,
No doubt of it, you will complain forever.

Piven and Cloward conclude:

One can never predict with certainty when the “heavings and rumblings of the social foundations” will force up large-scale defiance, although changes of great magnitude were at work. Who, after all, could have predicted the extraordinary mobilization of black people beginning in 1955? Nor can one calculate with certainty the responses of elites to mass disruption. There are no blueprints to guide movements of the poor. But if organizers and leaders want to help those movements emerge, they must always proceed as if protest were possible. They may fail. The time may not be right. But then, they may sometimes succeed.

In *The Fiddler on the Roof* (based on Sholem Alaichem’s *Teyve’s Daughters*), Pertschik, a uni-

versity student who is the husband of Teyve’s daughter Hodel, is a young firebrand revolutionary who wants to turn the world upside down. Teyve tells him that he would do better to fix the leaking roof on the women’s bathhouse and leave the revolution to the future. Until the heavings and rumblings of the social foundations force up large-scale defiance, we will continue to patch the roof. But we know that another world is possible. Finland does not believe that families should be in shelters, and they provide them with apartments.

France endorsed housing as a legal right in January 2007 after an organizing group calling itself “The Children of Don Quixote” (*les Enfants de Don Quichotte*) set up 100 red tents on the Canal Saint-Martin in Paris and moved into a vacant office block to draw attention to the homeless sleeping outside. “The issue has dominated the news and forced politicians from all main parties to promise more help for those without a roof over their heads.” By the end of 2008, the right to housing will apply to homeless people, impoverished workers and single mothers. The new legislation is designed to put housing in the same legal category as education and health in French law.

After the Katrina hurricane, the Housing Authority of New Orleans closed down all the housing developments. It scattered the residents across the country and barricaded their homes. Some residents of those housing developments have reoccupied their units, with the support of volunteers and friends. The People’s Organizing Committee has sent out a nationwide S.O.S. for solar panels and electricians. They can be reached by e-mail at: neworleansurvivorcouncil@gmail.com. These brave people survived disaster and resisted an indifferent government to reclaim their homes.

Maybe the “heavings and rumblings” are beginning.

Editors’ note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website www.newpol.org

Finland Is Soft on Crime

DAN GARDNER

AS PRESSURE GROWS in Canada to adopt the American justice model of harsh prisons and long sentences, Finland has saved millions and prevented centuries of human misery doing the opposite.

HAMEENLINNA, Finland — In a classroom thick with wigs, sinks and barber chairs, a man sprays water through a woman's sudsy hair and works his fingers carefully to rinse the shampoo. Standing in front of a large mirror, another man brushes and sprays a woman's hair. Two others discuss styling techniques. It could be a scene from any community college, but for the bars on the windows. This is Hameenlinna Central Prison, near Helsinki. The stylist working at the mirror is a convicted murderer. The man washing hair is a drug trafficker. Two of the three women are also prisoners; the other is a professional hairstylist hired to teach the class. There are no guards. This is Finland's criminal justice system at work. Here, offenders either serve remarkably short prison sentences or, far more commonly, no prison time at all. Finland's incarceration rate is just 52 per 100,000 people, less than half Canada's rate of 119 per 100,000 people and a tiny fraction of the American rate of 702.

In Finland, prisoners can work or study at any education level. Outside relationships are fostered with frequent visits and "home leaves." Living conditions are generous by anyone's standard. At Hameenlinna, male and female prisoners live together; occasionally they fall in love and get

married in the little auditorium that serves as the prison chapel. Finland's criminal justice system is, in short, a liberal's dream and a conservative's nightmare. In that, Finland is far from unique. Most Western European nations consider large prison populations shameful and use incarceration only as a last resort. What sets Finland apart is how it came to be this way: More than 30 years

In Finland even the
cops are liberals.

ago, Finland made an explicit decision to abandon the country's long tradition of very tough criminal justice in favor of the Western European approach. Never before or since has a country so consciously and completely shifted from one philosophy of justice to its opposite.

It was a grand experiment in criminal justice, and the results are in. "We don't have this idea that 'hard crimes deserve hard punishment,' " says Markku Salminen, the director general of Finland's prisons. Mr. Salminen might seem an unlikely advocate for liberal justice policies. Tall, fit, and sporting a classic policeman's moustache, he looks every inch the cop he was for 30 years. But in Finland even the cops are liberals. Mr. Salminen says one reason for the consensus is geography. "In Finland, Russia is very close. We follow it very keenly."

RUSSIAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE is the negative image of Finland's. The St. Petersburg region, with 5.9 million people, has 72,000 police officers — the five million people of Finland employ 8,500. Russian criminals are far more likely to be punished with prison time, and the sen-

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tences they receive are far longer. And, in most cases, Russian convicts serve time in prison conditions that would be considered barbaric and illegal in Finland. The Finns also know that the two countries' crime rates are just as starkly different. In an international survey, 82 percent of Finns said they felt safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, the second highest national rating (after Sweden; both Canada and the United States scored just more than 70 percent, placing them near the bottom of the 11 countries surveyed). Russia wasn't included in that survey, but fear of crime is widespread, and for good reason — the murder rate in Russia is 10 times that in Finland. "We see that there is nobody safe in Russia," says Mr. Salminen.

For Finns, history makes the contrast with Russia all the more poignant. Until the First World War, Finland was a province of the Russian Empire. Crime and punishment in Finland were governed by the tough Russian justice system, a system the Finns inherited after independence. The break with Russia at the end of the First World War was followed by a terrible civil war, political unrest, and then two wars with the U.S.S.R. After 1945, peace returned, but Finland was firmly fixed within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

This violent history hardened Finnish attitudes toward crime and punishment. Long prison sentences in austere conditions were standard. In the 1950s, Finland's incarceration rate was 200 prisoners per 100,000 people — a normal rate for East Bloc countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia where justice systems had been Sovietized, but four times the rate in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. In the 1960s, Finland began edging cautiously toward reform, using its Scandinavian neighbours as models. Nils Christie, a renowned Norwegian criminologist, recalls speaking to Finnish judges and criminologists in Helsinki in 1968. At the time, Mr. Christie and others were developing the first international comparisons of prison populations, so he was the first to tell the Finns that their incarceration rate was

totally unlike that of their Scandinavian neighbours and was "really in the Russian tradition." The audience was shocked, Mr. Christie recalls in an interview in Ottawa, "and some of them then decided this was not a very good policy." Discussions and debates were widespread. Ultimately, says Tapio Lappi-Seppala, the director of the Finnish National Research Institute of Legal Policy, an agreement was reached that "our position was a kind of disgrace."

During the next two decades, a long series of policy changes were implemented, all united by one goal: to reduce imprisonment, either by diverting offenders to other forms of punishment or by reducing the time served in prison. "It was a long-term and consistent policy," Mr. Lappi-Seppala emphasizes. "It was not just one or two law reforms. It was a coherent approach." The reforms began in earnest in the late 1960s and continued into the 1990s. In 1971, the laws allowing repeat criminals to be held indefinitely were changed to apply only to dangerous, violent offenders. The use of conditional sentences (in which offenders avoid prison if they obey certain conditions) was greatly expanded. Community service was introduced. Prisoners may be considered for parole after serving just 14 days; even those who violate parole and are returned to prison are eligible for parole again after one month. And for those who aren't paroled, there is early release: All first-time offenders are let out after serving just half their sentences, while other prisoners serve two-thirds. Mediation was also implemented, allowing willing victims and offenders to discuss if the offender can somehow set things right. "It does not replace a prison sentence," says Mr. Lappi-Seppala, but "in minor crimes, you may escape prosecution or you may get a reduction in your sentence." There are now 5,000 cases of mediation per year, almost equal to the number of imprisonments.

Juvenile justice was also liberalized. Criminals aged 15 to 21 can only be imprisoned for extraordinary reasons — and even then, they are released after serving just one-third of their time.

Children under the age of 15 cannot be charged with a crime. The most serious crimes can still be punished with life sentences but these are now

Crime has never been
a political issue.

routinely commuted, and the prisoner released, as early as 10 years into the sentence and no longer than 15 or 16 years. The Finns retain a power similar to Canada's "dangerous offender" law: persons found to be repeat, serious, violent offenders with a high likelihood of committing new violent crimes can be held until they are determined to no longer be a threat to the public. There are now 80 such offenders in prison and they, like Canada's dangerous offenders, are unlikely to ever be released. One especially critical change was the creation of sentencing guidelines that set shorter norms. Similar guidelines are used in the United States, but many of those restrict judges' discretion — Finnish judges remain free to sentence outside the norm if they feel that is appropriate. These guidelines were also the product of extensive discussions among judges and other officials in the justice system, unlike American guidelines which were, in most cases, simply imposed on judges by politicians.

THE ABSENCE OF DIRECT POLITICAL control was critical to the Finnish transformation. Despite the enormous changes in Finnish criminal justice, crime has never been a political issue. "None of the major parties took this on their agenda," says Mr. Lappi-Seppala. That's still true today. Even Finnish victims of crime seem to be satisfied with that approach. Victims' organizations act as support groups, not political lobbies, says Markku Salminen, the head of prisons. "You don't mix politics with this. There are so many feelings," he says. "It's a tradition."

The long-term result has been a spectacular

drop in the country's imprisonment rate. From 200 prisoners per 100,000 people in the 1950s, Finland now has 52 per 100,000, a rate slightly lower than those of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Finland's tiny prison population is the result of vigorous efforts to settle criminal cases with anything but jail time. In 1996, there were 64,000 convictions. These resulted in 36,000 fines, 30,000 conditional sentences, and 3,000 community service orders. There were just 6,000 actual prison sentences — fewer than 10 percent of the convictions. By contrast, in the same year, roughly one-third of criminal convictions in Canadian courts resulted in prison sentences.

On any given day, there are about 2,800 prisoners in Finland's prisons. There are 100 incarcerated young offenders between the ages of 18 and 21; there are just eight young offenders aged 15 to 17 behind bars. Enormous as the change shown by these numbers may be, it represents only half of Finland's experiment in criminal justice policy. The other transformation occurred inside the country's prisons. With the justice revolution launched in the late 1960s, the idea that tough prisons deterred crime was junked. "The main purpose (of prisons) in Finland," says Esko Aaltonen, the director of Hameenlinna Prison, "is to try to solve what are the biggest problems in the lives of prisoners. We try to take care of those problems to increase the chance that they will live a life without crime after they are released."

Hameenlinna Prison, opened in 1972, was built according to the new philosophy. To a traveller passing by on the road, it could easily be mistaken for a community college. Even driving into the prison, you pass no guardhouses, walls or razor wire. It can be a little confusing. Speaking with Mr. Aaltonen in his office, I had to ask the director if we were in fact inside the prison. He assured me we were. Hameenlinna has security, of course. Buried wires in the perimeter detect motion and trigger alarms, but guards are almost never armed. Only one guard on the night shift carries a pistol, while the prison's remain-

ing armaments — several more pistols — are stored in a safe. Nightsticks are available but, says Mr. Aaltonen with a smile, they too are stored away and “if anybody wants to use one he has to write an application form to the director.” By Finnish standards, Hameenlinna, the country’s largest prison, is not a minimum-security facility. Almost one-third of Finland’s prisoners are housed in “open institutions,” which are essentially halfway houses that allow prisoners to work in the community and to travel as long as they return at night. Any prisoner, regardless of his crime, can apply for transfer to an open institution when he has fewer than three years remaining on his sentence.

Prisons like Hameenlinna can afford to be so open because of Finland’s inmate population. Unlike many countries’ prison systems, which are at or above capacity, Finland’s prisons use less than three-quarters of their space. The 70 male and 80 female prisoners in Hameenlinna are outnumbered by the prison’s 225 staff. “There are two ways to think of prisoners,” says Mr. Salminen. “One is that authorities control prisoners. The other is that prisoners control themselves. And I trust this second idea, that criminals have to decide that they don’t want a criminal life.” In Mr. Salminen’s prisons, staff handle prisoners not with force and physical control, but with a level of familiarity, concern and engagement that is possible only with small prison populations.

As we walk through the hallways of Hameenlinna, Merja Toivonen, a study counselor, greets people by name. Whether they are staff or prisoners isn’t clear since both wear civilian clothes. Ms. Toivonen seems to know everybody, and treats them with equal decency. “We get to know the prisoners quite well,” she says. Familiarity builds trust. It’s why officials can allow a convicted murderer to attend a hairdressing class without a guard: They know him. Trust permeates the entire system. “I can speak to any prisoner in any prison without guards,” Mr. Salminen says with pride. The previous week he had been alone in a cell with a dangerous offender. “It’s very im-

portant that the prisoners trust me as a person who thinks about their legal rights.”

WHEN IT WAS BUILT IN 1972, Hameenlinna was intended to be a women’s prison but the dramatic drop in imprisonment left too few women to fill the new facility so one of its wings was given to men. During the day, when prisoners are required to work or study, men and women mix freely.

A classroom door swings open and half a dozen prisoners file out — maximum class size in Hameenlinna is eight students. A prisoner, Ronja Siren, stays behind to talk. This is an English class and an interview with a Canadian journalist is good practice. Ms. Siren, 33, was a bookkeeper before being arrested, along with her husband, for drug trafficking. “I needed money,” she says. “It’s always about money.” Their partners were caught with explosives and weapons, so she received a nine-year sentence, severe by Finnish standards; as a first-time offender, she will only serve, at most, half her sentence. Her husband is in another prison; their two sons, ages nine and five, are in foster care. Her children visit every three weeks. Every sixth week, her husband visits and the whole family is re-united for a day.

Ms. Siren is thoughtful and articulate, even speaking in English. In Hameenlinna, she says, “Everybody has some kind of plan.” Hers is to get a high school diploma. She also exercises in the prison’s gym, which offers aerobics and volleyball, large exercise yards, and a well-equipped weight room. Ms. Siren says of her cell, “It’s like a home. It’s not very big but it’s got everything I need. I have a TV, stereo, videos and all that kind of thing.” She understands why some might think this lifestyle too pleasant for a prisoner, but she says that’s a mistake. Being locked up was “a kind of shock,” she says. “Freedom is a very important thing to every person. Prison is always tough.”

The cells are grouped in wards, each with its own kitchen, common room, television, and showers. Windows flood the wards with natural light. Books by Gunter Grass, Primo Levi and

more populist authors line the shelves. During the day, the metal doors of the cells are open and prisoners move freely.

In one of the men's wards, "Lemmy" lies on his bunk watching a video of a Pink Floyd concert. He tells me he's in for drug charges. His cell, at roughly six square meters, isn't spacious but it's clean and has a large window overlooking a forest. Except for the metal door, it could be taken for a university dorm.

Female prisoners with very young children live with them in a spacious ward that resembles a daycare. Colorful paper cutouts of flowers and children are taped to the windows, obscuring the bars behind the glass. In an ordinary women's ward, we again meet Ms. Siren, who has finished her classes. A tidy throw rug covers the tile floor. There is little clutter except for a tack board overflowing with photographs of her husband, a crys-

Violence is rare in Finnish prisons.

tal-eyed, handsome man, and their cherubic, blond boys. The photos should be on the cover of a department store catalogue, perhaps, or magazine ads for whole-wheat bread or Nordic skis. They should be anywhere but on a prison wall. Separation has been especially hard on her five-year-old. "The last time I saw my son, he said, 'I don't want to grow up. I want to stay a baby.' And I said, 'yes, you stay a baby until I get out and we'll grow up together.'" Her voice, quiet and steady throughout the interview, catches for the only time. I ask how long she has until she's released. "Two years and 11 months," she answers instantly.

VIOLENCE IS RARE IN FINNISH PRISONS. Officials credit this calm in part to their policy of giving prisoners as much contact with other people, both inside and outside prisons, as possible. Frequent visits from family and friends are encouraged, including conjugal visits.

There are also "home leaves." After serv-

ing six months, all prisoners can apply for leave to return to their home towns for periods of up to six days every four months. Only if a prisoner is considered likely to re-offend, or is misbehaving, is he likely to be turned down. Home leaves have been controversial in Finland, particularly when violent offenders are allowed out, but the authorities insist the program is both successful and necessary. Ninety percent of home leaves occur without even minor difficulties. And by allowing prisoners the chance to live briefly in the real world, home leaves strengthen relationships and help prevent the atrophy of basic social skills. "Prisoners must have contact with the civil world," insists Ms. Toivonen. Officials also try to build new relationships between prisoners and people on the outside by bringing in volunteers, who may join group discussions or even visit prisoners in their cells. The goal, says Mr. Aaltonen, is that "everybody has some close connection with somebody — some person outside, whether it is a wife or husband, social worker, friend, voluntary worker from the church or Red Cross. It is very important that everybody should have somebody waiting for him." If prisons don't encourage these relationships, says Mr. Aaltonen, released convicts will be met on the outside "by a gang or friends involved in crime."

Finland's extensive use of parole and early release also creates transition periods in which released prisoners are supervised while they try to get established in legitimate society. Before and after release, the authorities help ex-cons get jobs and homes. Thanks to Hollywood, North Americans imagine prisoners are released with little more than a bus ticket and a shake of the warden's hand. In the United States, and to a lesser extent Canada, there's some truth in that. But in Finland, no prisoner is simply walked out the penitentiary gate. That was the experiment. According to the "tough on crime" theory, what Finland did was monumentally foolish. And a superficial reading of the data appears to prove this school right. From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, crime in Fin-

land rose sharply while imprisonment declined rapidly, suggesting that by going “soft” Finland fostered crime. But crime also rose in every other country in the developed world (including Canada and the United States), regardless of these country’s criminal justice policies. The reasons are complex. One factor: the post-war baby boom produced a huge bulge in the young males who are always responsible for most crime. More important and lasting was the rapid urbanization of the era since the social restrictions that control behaviour in rural environments are often weaker or non-existent in cities.

So Finland’s experience has to be judged relative to other comparable countries. In doing that, Mr. Lappi-Seppala explains, the absolute numbers of crimes aren’t important — crime data usually cannot be compared internationally because each country uses different definitions and reporting standards. What matters are the trends. Mr. Lappi-Seppala compared Finland’s crime rates going back many decades with Sweden and Norway and discovered “the trends are basically identical in each of the countries. So despite the fact that we had radically different prison policies, our crime trends went hand-in-hand with the other countries.” When Finland took a hard-line approach, its crime trends were identical to those of its liberal neighbors. And when it switched to a liberal system its trends continued in line with its neighbors. Ultimately, Finland’s choices about how to punish crime had little or no effect on the crime rate. Mr. Lappi-Seppala produces a chart that compares the number of robberies in Finland with the average sentence given for that crime. In the decade before 1965, judges cut the length of the average robbery sentence in half with no effect on the number of robberies. Then from 1965 to 1990, the sentences for robbery stayed about the same — while robberies first grew by five times, then dropped by a quarter, then doubled, then dropped by almost half again. There is simply no correlation between the punishment inflicted and the number of robberies.

JUVENILE CRIME IS ANOTHER CASE IN POINT. The astonishingly liberal approach Finland implemented for juvenile crime — no one under 15 can be charged, and offenders between 15 and 21 are rarely incarcerated — did not spark an increase in juvenile crime. Over the last 20 years, the proportion of crime for which young offenders are responsible has even declined.

After more than 30 years, the Finnish experiment has produced clear conclusions: High incarceration rates and tough prison conditions do not control crime. They are unnecessary. If a nation wishes, it can send few offenders to prison, and make those prisons humane, without sacrificing the public’s safety. For those interested in building a less punitive society, the benefits of such an approach are obvious. But there are also more quantifiable returns. Mr. Lappi-Seppala notes that, by one estimate, Finland’s smaller prison population has saved the country’s taxpayers \$200 million over the last 20 years.

Then there is Finland’s bounty of time. About 6,500 years of human life was saved from incarceration. Some 40,000 people avoided prison altogether. Finland’s reforms meant that this time was instead spent with families and communities, a contribution whose value is surely great, if incalculable. Mr. Salminen takes obvious pride in this record and hopes other countries draw lessons from it. He has visited Canadian prisons and, in many ways, he admires our system, particularly our rehabilitation programs. One such program is now the subject of a trial in Finland. “But at the same time,” he notes, “there is a whole lot of Americanization.” That worries Mr. Salminen, who, like all Finnish justice officials, thinks the wave of “tough on crime” policies in the United States is folly. If Canada goes further in the American direction, he warns, “you get the American problems, too.” Mr. Salminen’s English may be slightly fractured but he speaks with a quiet, clear sincerity. The cop-turned-jailer insists, “You should do in Canada your own system.”

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Revolutionary Unionism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

DAN JAKOPOVICH

THERE IS A CONSENSUS among democratic socialists today that the struggle for deep social change has to somehow reflect the kind of society we want to build, but this remains inseparable from the questions of power, political strength and effectiveness because *prefiguration* goes beyond the “pure” ethical sphere to include wider issues of ideological/cultural, political and socio-economic hegemony. The revolutionary syndicalist answer to the problem of integral prefiguration represents a specific and important historical (and contemporary) synthesis. Revolutionary unionism, in the ideologically broader and more modern sense, could be defined as a movement and strategy more closely resembling traditional revolutionary syndicalism on the ethical and organizational “micro-level,” without adhering to the relatively rigid “grand narrative” which the traditional syndicalists attempted to provide.

I will try to identify not only the main lines of syndicalist development, but also some weak links of syndicalist strategy, which manifest its inability to produce a sufficiently *dialectical* strategic solution to the puzzle of social change.

Beginnings

ALTHOUGH EARLY ATTEMPTS AT combination were already made in the pre-Chartist period (The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834 being a well-known example), it took several more decades of betrayal by craft unions and union bureaucrats for the ideas of industrial unionism and revolutionary syndicalism to flourish. To the narrow sectionalism of

contemporary unions, industrial unionists counterposed the idea of organizing all workers in the same industry into the same union regardless of skill or trade, and organizing *across* industries — in such a way building collective leverage and workers’ power through unity and solidarity beyond the boundaries imposed by capitalist society. Free associations of producers were the ultimate goal of this vision.

The idea of a system of labor councils, or *Chambers of Labor* (*Bourses du Travail*), which were to be the protection of workers in the existing system and the nuclei of the future society, was already present in certain sections of the First International (especially among Spanish and Belgian delegates, the Swiss Jura Federation, and many French sections), but its practical implementation within the International came to an abrupt end when the two rival groups exemplified by Marx and Bakunin split at the Hague Conference in 1872, and it suffered further setbacks with the defeat of the Paris Commune and the incipient spread of reaction across Southern Europe.

Revolutionary Syndicalism, which first flourished in France at the end of the 19th century, developed both as a practical response to the exploitation of workers, bureaucratic and craft unionism and — especially in its more explicitly anarcho-socialist forms — as a response to the parliamentary strategy of the Second International, when the understanding that the real strength of workers ultimately lies in their character as producers began to rapidly develop.

The French *Confederation Generale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labor, CGT, founded in 1895) became one of the main initiators of the syndicalist movement. It was captured by the syndicalists, and was largely a result of patient anarchist and syndicalist

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radicalizing work from *within* the mainstream trade union movement.

As opposed to the largely *negative* programme of many anti-capitalists of the time, revolutionary unionists propagated (somewhat idealistically, arguably out of context from the actual dynamic of the development of class consciousness and class power) “constructive” libertarian socialist activity based upon the ideas of self-help, mutual aid and struggle from below and the reorganization of socio-economic life on the basis of workers’ self-management.

General Characteristics

LIBERTARIAN REVOLUTIONARY UNIONISTS are generally distrustful of leaders and the principle of hierarchy. Their views on the subject usually correspond to the “iron law of oligarchy” concerning the danger of bureaucratization inherent in hierarchical organizations, as identified by the German sociologist Robert Michels in his anarchosyndicalist phase. Revolutionary unionists therefore emphasize the importance of local branch and workplace assemblies, with union officials being directly elected, accountable and recallable delegates in direct contact with their fellow workers. Ultimately, independent rank-and-file thinking and initiative are seen as the basic precondition for liberation, since “the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself” (Marx).

Related to the detestation of bureaucracy and the managerial approach is the rejection of the goal of centralised “state socialism.”

As an alternative to the politics of states and parties, revolutionary unionism posits the economic reorganization of production, replacing the rule of man over man with the simple administration of things. . . . Revolutionary unionism considers that along with the disappearance of a property owning caste, must come the disappearance of a central ruling caste; and that no form of statism, however camouflaged, can ever be an instrument for human liberation, but that on the contrary, it will always be the creator of new monopolies

and new privileges.

—International Workers’ Association

Revolutionary unionism is therefore distinguished from most other approaches by its un-

Trotsky argued strongly against dual unionist strategies and stressed the absolute necessity of working within existing mass unions vs. the tendency to form ideologically pure unions.

equivocal endorsement of *self-management* and strong commitment to *socialism from below*. Its ideas of direct working class power precede and resemble the early Russian soviets and factory councils as a form of anti-capitalist dual power.

Furthermore, there is distrust of parliamentary politics, which is often extended to suspicion of party politics and conquest of state power in general, especially among anarchosyndicalists. However, there have also been and continue to exist revolutionary unionists who — while subscribing to the goal of socialism from below and genuine participatory democracy — still recognise a certain role for socialist revolutionary parties. Antonio Gramsci’s *Ordine Nuovo* brilliantly epitomized (and served as a catalyst for) the fiercely democratic, councilist spirit of the Italian factory occupation movement of 1919-1920 (“*biennio rosso*”). The Marxian syndicalism of James Connolly is another prominent example of such an approach which, in a strategic and dialectical way, cautiously attempts (primarily through a revolutionary party) to utilize the political system, elections and the concrete, existing social structures and movements, but nonetheless appreciates and supports the central role of workers’ self-government in the creation of a genuinely democratic socialist society.

Another trait of most syndicalist organiza-

tions is federalism, IWW being a notable exception with a somewhat more centralist organization, mainly because of the enormous territory it had to cover (and still does), at the same time basing itself on the democratic principles of (relative) local autonomy, recallable delegates with limited tenure, membership referendums etc., principles which were first put to practice on a grand scale in the Paris Commune of 1871.

Additionally, revolutionary unionists are united in their desire for truly combative unions, either through transforming existing unions, starting new, alternative ones, or combining the creation of autonomous rank-and-file structures with work in existing mass organizations, but universally stressing the value of creative militancy and primacy of direct action. They share the supposition — syndicalists in the narrow sense especially — that the working class must prioritize the industrial, economic front.

Following from this, syndicalism can largely be defined as “hardline workerism,” which quite often (although not always and automatically) degenerates from an uncompromising commitment to egalitarianism into vulgar anti-intellectualism and rejection of organic intellectuals as possible allies in the struggle, one of the important reasons for syndicalism’s lack of greater, longer-lasting counter-hegemonic ideological influence (somewhat ameliorated by a typically vibrant and creative workers’ culture of resistance).

Finally, it is important to note the syndicalist “myth” of the *revolutionary general strike* — sometimes propagandized as an isolated, final act (especially by early French and American revolutionary unionists), and as a possible nonviolent/unarmed path to socialism. However, it was generally seen as a prototypical “insurrectionary general strike,” and it remains so both in syndicalist and more popular contemporary Marxist approaches.

Syndicalism’s Greatest Moment — CNT and the Spanish Revolution

SYNDICALISM’S MOST ILLUSTRIOUS CHILD has

to be the historical Spanish CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, National Confederation of Labor), and it was among the more “prodigal” ones as well.

The development of the Spanish libertarian labor movement, especially from 1910 when CNT was founded, and in the early stages of the revolution itself, is one of the most encouraging stories of democratic empowerment in the 20th century. Many thousands of libertarian revolutionaries, workers, and peasants sacrificed their lives for a world based on genuine equality, decision-making by common people and freedom from oppression in the multiplicity of its forms. For a short time that new world seemed very near, according to Rudolph Rocker.

It is the great merit of Libertarian Socialism in Spain, which now finds expression in the CNT and the FAI, that since the days of the First International it has trained the workers in that spirit which treasures freedom above all else and regards the intellectual independence of its adherents as the basis of its existence.

The Spanish CNT had over 550,000 members in May 1936. It was ostensibly the strongest revolutionary organization at the onset of the civil war, main organizer of anti-fascist resistance, initiator of expropriations, agrarian collectivizations and factory councils. Although external factors (mainly the civil war and the sheer superior force of the reaction backed by Mussolini’s and Hitler’s military might) shouldn’t be underestimated, the defeat of the revolutionary forces was also partly a result of their mistakes and weaknesses. The CNT in particular had to sacrifice its programme in order to maintain an alliance with the Popular Front government, with a few of its leading members (who were also militants of the explicitly anarchist FAI) even becoming government ministers.

Radical land reform in the Republic endorsed and proclaimed by the government, would have allowed the Republicans to appeal to the peasant soldiers of the fascist army over the heads of their officers. If the Madrid govern-

ment had proclaimed the Spanish colonies, Morocco for instance, liberated, they could have appealed to the Moorish soldiers of Franco's army to rise against the generals, or desert to the Republic. They did none of that. Their self-imposed "bourgeois" limitations ruled out everything of that sort. Above all, in the Republican areas they stood against a socialist revolution.

—Jean Matgamna

A minority current within the union (and the independent Marxist POUM) advocated a political takeover, but that would have led to the breaking of antifascist unity and an open confrontation on at least three fronts: against the fascists, the republican and authoritarian left government as well as capitalist owners themselves. The CNT proved unprepared (or unwilling) to develop and carry out an independent programme for workers' power; it was unwilling to wage a battle for dominance against other currents fighting for control under the guise of the popular front, and was forced into submission and compromise politics, ultimately being pushed aside by the Stalinist, "left-bourgeois" and fascist reaction.

Major Criticisms

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CONTROVERSIES regarding syndicalism has been its tendency to form alternative unions determined to compete with mainstream, craft and reformist ones, and organize the unorganized workers that the existing unions usually weren't interested in. It is necessary to take into account the important, although often not entirely clear-cut distinction (stressed by Hal Draper for instance) between dual/alternative unions that came out of actual struggles and the actual mass labor movement (like the CIO), and ideological dual unionism: "artificial" attempts at "inventing" mass alternative organizations "out of the blue," and often with a radical phraseology that is alien and intimidating to most workers, therefore being an impediment to organizing.

Following from Lenin in "Left Wing'

Communism — an Infantile Disorder," Trotsky argued strongly against dual unionist strategies and stressed the absolute necessity of working within existing mass unions vs. the tendency to form ideologically pure unions and turn backs on the workers stuck in bureaucratic trade unions.

Some syndicalist unions grew out of the existing workers' movement by boring from within (e.g., French CGT, partly CNT & early American IWW). The Australian IWW largely pursued the "boring from within" agenda, with considerable success and a very strong position in the early Australian workers' movement. It was based on the concept of a "conscious minority" and dual membership in the mainstream trade unions as well as the IWW, constituting the fighting spirit of those organizations.

In the U.S., William Z. Foster (later a Communist Party leader), influenced by French syndicalists, boring from within, produced a brilliant, powerful critique of dual unionism that all proponents of this approach would do well to consider.

However, see Max Eastman's and Karl Radek's more nuanced position regarding the IWW in Max Eastman, *Foster, The Liberator*, 1921, www.marxists.org/archive/eastman/1921/foster.htm, as well as Hal Draper's greater "tolerance" of the IWW in light of the fact it was breaking new ground in terms of organizing the unorganized, etc. (Hal Draper, *Marxism and the Trade Unions*), 1970, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1970/tus/index.htm>, not to mention James P. Cannon's unwillingness to directly cross swords with his past (James P. Cannon, *The I.W.W.*, Fourth International, Summer, 1955, www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1955/iww.htm).

Moreover, "boring from within" also holds grave dangers for the revolutionary movement, and has so far largely failed to produce expected results (or perhaps live up to its true potential).

Other important charges have been that of economism and anti-politicism. It has often been argued that syndicalist neglect of the po-

litical sphere obstructed the creation of democratic revolutionary parties, in the end leaving vanguardist options as the only serious party-political response to social-democratic betrayal. These charges were less of a problem for Marxist revolutionary unionists like Connolly, Debs or De Leon who had their socialist parties and could therefore also easily mobilize around issues that weren't strictly economic.

Yet there were and are obvious, significant antinationalist, antiracist, and antisexist implications of syndicalist battles, if little explication. IWW was for instance far more open than most to women workers and workers' wives. "The IWW has been accused of putting the women in the front. The truth is, the IWW does not keep them in the back, and they go to the front." It was also among the first to make an attempt at breaking the racial boundaries between the American working class, and the first to include all "races" (Knights of Labor excluded the Chinese). "During its active life, from 1905 to about 1924, the IWW issued about a million membership cards, of which about 100,000 were to Negroes." Furthermore, syndicalist involvement was important in general strikes for universal suffrage; they were heavily involved in free-speech, anti-war, anti-conscription and community struggles, etc.

Indeed, while syndicalists have often been accused of vulgar economism (by Lenin and Gramsci for example), others have actually attacked the tendencies towards (universalistic) "revolutionary romanticism" instead of simply concentrating on bread-and-butter issues. A considerable number of IWW and CNT radicals (for instance) even attempted to further countercultural ideas such as free love.

A major, indeed central criticism, as previously stated in relation to the CNT, is that syndicalists — especially anarchosyndicalists — have on the whole failed to effectively address the issue of state power and construct an offensive programme with regard to the state, a programme for taking power.

This evasion of the problem of *power* has gotten worse since the days of the practical syndicalist unions, and the current position of workerist ideas is particularly unfavorable on the anarchist Left. The centrality of the labor movement in Left, and especially anarcho-socialist politics has been seriously challenged, and the workers' movement as a whole is in many ways lagging behind "new social movements." Libertarian revolutionary unionism has largely lost its natural ideological base, at least for the time being.

Decline

THE RISE AND FALL OF SYNDICALISM as a mass movement that dominated the revolutionary left landscape at the beginning of the 20th century has been compared to a shooting star by some, and a plainly failed concept by others.

The beginning, as with some other revolutionary movements, was very promising. Between 1902 and 1908, the French CGT experienced a rapid growth from 100,000 to 400,000 members — "out of a total unionized population of 900,000 workers. Its fight for the eight-hour day, [. . .] for a day off work each week, for wage increases and improvements in working conditions — a fight often crowned with success — made it the representative of the finest of the labor movement's aspirations to emancipation." That same CGT later fell under reformist, governmental and jingoistic influences, and is today the biggest — and one of the most mainstream — trade union confederations in France.

Although some have argued that the "golden age of syndicalism" is confined to the period prior to WWI, it was actually largely still a formative phase, with early 1920's marking syndicalism's zenith (at least in terms of membership), even though the Spanish CNT's heyday came later.

Nonetheless, the Russian Revolution meant the "beginning of the end" for syndicalism, which was increasingly being seen as "old hat", without any such "successes" like the Bolsheviks had to point to, and unable to grasp the new political arena that was unfolding. Third

International anti-syndicalist policies and the rise of communist parties didn't help either. Stalin's "Third Period" (with the establishment of "red unions") eroded the position of the syndicalists even further.

In 1922, the International Workers' Association (IWA) was founded in Berlin as a syndicalist counterweight to the Second and Third Internationals. Present at the conference were, among others, Argentinian Workers Regional Organization (FORA) apparently representing 200,000 members, the Industrial Workers of the World in Chile representing 20,000, the Free Workers Union of Germany (FAU) with 120,000, the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI) with 500,000, General Confederation of Workers in Portugal with 150,000, the Swedish Workers Central Organization (SAC) with 32,000, National Workers Secretariat of the Netherlands representing 22,000, the Committee for the Defense of Revolutionary Syndicalism in France [a breakaway from the CGT] with 100,000, and the Federation du Battiment from Paris representing 32,000. "The Spanish CNT was unable to send delegates due to the fierce class struggle being waged in their country under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. They did, however, join the following year."

Secondly, another major factor that has to be considered with regard to syndicalism's demise was the extreme repression that often frustrated organizing efforts and destroyed gains that were already made. Workers and union organizers (often one and the same in the case of syndicalism) were subjected to methods such as red baiting, mass deportations, long imprisonment, or vigilante "justice" among other things.

The Argentine FORA, in the middle of an internal wrangle in 1931, was suppressed by the military, never to regain its importance within the trade union movement. The Chilean IWW was beaten into the ground by the Ibanez dictatorship. The German movement was liquidated by the Nazis and a left-right combination of Stalinists and falangists destroyed the

Spanish CNT in 1938-39. . . . Salazar wiped out the Portuguese movement. Brazilian syndicalists felt the lash of the Vargas regime. . . . the Castro regime finished off the Cuban syndicalists — something neither the Machado nor the Batista regimes were able to do. . . . Communist, fascist and military dictatorships crushed the movement in Argentina, Brazil, Russia, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain and Portugal. Government repression also played a part in the weakening of the Chilean and American IWW and the Mexican CGT.

Cooption proved more fruitful in other cases, such as the one of the Polish Solidarnosc (its full name, reflecting its early semi-syndicalist spirit, is still "Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity").

Furthermore, other factors such as the changing economic structures with new, hard to organize, non-unionized industries impermeable by political unions; agricultural collectivist principles — plausible in Spain or Ukraine, not in places where individual ownership was traditional; militant anti-clericalism which actually aided in the separation of the working class along the lines of religion, instead of truly helping to annul its negative effects; cooption and competition from conservative, mainstream and business unions, now infinitely superior when it comes to organizational size in the vast majority of countries — have all added to the demise.

Ultimately, the centralization of political and economic power was the overwhelming tendency of the 20th century. Syndicalist ideas ran contrary to the tide of history.

Today & Tomorrow

GEOFFREY OSTERGAARD, THE SCHOLAR of workers' control, stated in 1954

[that the] syndicalism of the period 1900-1920 now appears as the great heroic movement of the proletariat, the last desperate attempt before society took the plunge down the managerial abyss to emancipate the proletariat by its own exertions, to build up a distinct proletarian culture purged of any traces of bour-

geois ideology, and to evolve a uniquely proletarian method of social action.

The resurgence of traditional syndicalism and separate “free unions” does indeed seem an unlikely prospect, at least in developed countries. Syndicalist unions still seem quite plausible in Third World countries where low levels of union density, coupled with hyperexploitation, lower level of political representation and a greater level of direct class conflict offer opportunities for combative, class unions. The energetic Mexican FAT (Frente Auténtico del Trabajo, about 50,000 members and a working relationship with the American class union UE) and the great proto-syndicalist Indonesian union FSPNI (allegedly with a membership close to a million) are better-known examples. The militancy of the South Korean labor movement is particularly notable.

Also, considerable inroads have been made by some less ideological, “reformist” class unions (some of which are gathered in FESAL — European Federation of Alternative Syndicalism), such as the SUD unions in France that are influenced by democratic socialism and base committee ideas, the Swedish syndicalist SAC (about 10,000 members) which controls a portion of shipyards and the postal service, the Spanish CGT (with membership claims ranging from 60,000 to 100,000. Particularly interesting is the Italian base union movement expressed through the COBAS (“Comitati di Base,” committees of the base) unions originating from the radicalization of the 60s (reaching its political peak in the “hot autumn” of 1969, although the number of Italian factory councils continually increased from 1969 to 1973) and with a couple hundred thousand members, mainly in education but also among metal workers for instance. Their presence, it could be argued, contributes to the atypical militancy of the Italian labor movement.

Some non-sectarian revolutionary unionist organizations could also provide one of the bases for highly progressive work in mass organiza-

tions, if they transformed themselves more into militant rank-and-file networks which would actively intervene in these conservative organizations. When ultra-leftists state that trade unions “may now be considered as a special police force deployed against the workers,” that is a recognition, but also an exaggeration of structural tendencies that are certainly present and even dominant at this stage of trade unionism in the “developed” world. However, trade unions aren’t static entities — they are themselves spaces in which a continual class struggle for power between the union bureaucracy and the workers takes place. It is a struggle which mustn’t be neglected, but the enslavement by the trade union machinery has to be actively resisted. Socialists should work *with*, but also *against* trade union officials when necessary; they should help build strong and direct-democratic shop-floor, sectional organizations; combine struggles, encourage cross-sectional solidarity; and point to the *political* connection between fighting for immediate goals and building a better world.

Syndicalism itself is an ideology that is here to stay, although some of its past strategies — especially those that fetishised organizational purity over engaging with the working masses in less than pure organizations and movements — haven’t withstood the test of time. Principled, daring opposition to the bureaucratic stifling of labor organizations is a necessity, but it should keep clear from well-intentioned, yet ultra-leftist fantasies that can ultimately only frustrate the efforts of libertarian revolutionaries. The only way ideas of workers’ power and solidarity are to have relevance for the present and for the future is through engagement with average (and below-average) workers and an organic connection to the actual, existing labor movement through immersion into mass popular struggles and organizations, with a clear strategy centered at empowering the rank-and-file of labor.

Editor’s note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, www.newpol.org

Alice in Imperialist Wonderland

RICHARD GREEMAN

LEWIS CARROLL, the creator of *Alice in Wonderland* satirized the imperialist rivalry between England and France *circa* 1870 in his hilarious “nonsense” poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter.” Every child recalls how the two friends joyfully invite a band of young oysters to join them for a stroll on the beach and then — as shown in the delightful Tenniel illustration below — sit down and devour them all.

The Walrus, who symbolizes hypocritical,



perfidious Britain, weeps for the unfortunate oysters, who may represent the newly subjugated peoples of the colonies:

With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the larger size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

Alice, indignant, declares she likes the British Walrus better than the French Carpenter because at least the Walrus felt sorry. But when she learns that the Walrus, hiding his huge mouth behind the hypocritical handkerchief of

British sentimental moralism, had secretly eaten the most oysters, Alice decides she likes the Carpenter better. Alas, the latter ate “as many as he could.”

This ingenious parable illustrates the hypocrisy and cynicism which continue to mask inter-imperialist rivalries — for example between the U.S. and France — in our own day. The Carpenter continues to defend tooth and claw his spheres of influence among French ex-colonies and ex-protectorates in Africa and the Middle East, while the U.S., having replaced Britain in the role of the moralistic Walrus, hypocritically supports the “rebels” against pro-French corrupt dictatorships in the name of “democracy.” The result has been a generation of bloody and never-ending civil wars which have devoured hundreds of thousands of Oysters — I mean of dark-skinned men, women and children. Yet such proxy wars — from Algeria to Central Africa — are generally portrayed in the media as inexplicable mayhem rooted in “age-old ethnic or religious rivalries.”

Anti-imperialist Alices

UNFORTUNATELY, MANY INTELLECTUALS on the Left are quite as naïve as Alice when it comes to understanding the nature of these inter-imperialist conflicts which continue to bloody the planet. For some, the one and only imperialist is the American Walrus, the one who eats the most Oysters (while throwing a few to his faithful imperialist lapdog, Britain). Thus for many anti-imperialists and Third World supporters on the Left, the word “imperialism” has become synonymous with “U.S. superpower.” Anti-imperialist internationalism is thus reduced to simple anti-Americanism.

This confusion is very convenient for

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French neo-colonialism which literally gets away with murder, for example in the Ivory Coast today. Like Alice, many intellectuals in both France and the U.S. are naïvely unaware

France's current prosperity is in large measure based on its privileged relationships with the French-supported Kleptocratic dictatorships.

that the little imperialist Carpenter is still devouring "as many (African and Asian) oysters as he can." They forget that "little" French imperialism — personified today by the slightly ridiculous pointy-nosed Carpenter Chirac — counts among his ancestors Louis XIV, the two Napoleons, Clemenceau "the Tiger" and Charles de Gaulle. They forget that France's current prosperity is in large measure based on its privileged relationships with the French-supported kleptocratic dictatorships which have replaced the former French colonial administrations (thus keeping the profits while reducing administrative costs). However, the imperialist rivalry between the Franco-American allies becomes obvious once we look behind the handkerchief of humanitarian propaganda which masks the genocidal civil wars which are ravaging central Africa today — as they ravaged Rwanda a decade ago.

Genocide in Rwanda

INDEED, THE SCANDAL of Western responsibility in the Rwandan genocides is once again back in the headlines — at least in France. On the one hand, Paul Kagame, the pro-American President of Rwanda, has correctly accused the French government of having supported and armed the genocidal "Hutu" militias both before and during the massacres of summer 1994.

This complicity had already been exposed in *Le Monde diplomatique* as early as March 1995.¹ On the other hand, a French prosecutor has riposted by accusing Kagame of having plotted the murder of the former President, the pro-French Hutu Habyarimana in April 1994 — thus provoking the massacres. The prosecutor's case is quite convincing.

The point is that during this sordid imperialist proxy-war between the colossal American Walrus and the small French Carpenter — 500,000 African oysters were being cruelly murdered while the Western media prattled on about "ancestral ethnic hatreds." In fact, the words "Tutsi" and "Hutu" refer to two castes of a single ethnic group who for the past hundred years have been turned against each other first by the Belgian colonial regime (who created these legal identities) and then the French. Divide and rule, the oldest trick in the imperialist book. Nowadays, we have the American Walrus cynically backing the ex-"rebel" President Kagame in order to squeeze the French out of their spheres of influence in central Africa. Nonetheless, today's naïve intellectuals, Alice-like, always seem to feel the need to back one imperialist side over the other. Thus the French section of the NGO Doctors Without Borders "were eager to intervene [in Rwanda] on the side of the French Army, which the other sections categorically refused."²

More recently we saw another instance of this naivety in the buildup to the Iraqi War during 2002-2003. Then the French Carpenters Chirac and de Villepin appeared as veritable anti-imperialists for attempting to block the bloated Walruses Bush and Blair who were preparing, for humanitarian reasons, to devour Iraq's oyster reserves — I mean "oil reserves." Yet the anti-imperialist Alices had no clue that Carpenter Chirac was only doing his imperialist duty bravely defending the interests of the French oil cartel Elf/Total, long implanted in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, against the pretensions of the nasty Walruses Bush/Exxon and Blair/

BP who were trying to gobble them up.

Liberal and Social-Democratic Alices

FORTUNATELY, ANGLO-SAXON liberal and social-democratic Alices were around to reassure us that the tender-hearted Anglo-Saxon Walruses were only intervening in Iraq to save us from nonexistent WMD's, or to save us from Islamic terrorism (after having subsidized it in Afghanistan), or to free the Muslim women-folk (by imposing Sharia) or to bring democracy (in the form of Islamic militias). Cynical or naively patriotic, these pro-American Alices failed to see that the hypocritical super-armed Walrus always hides his ravenous appetite for oysters behind ideological handkerchiefs like "humanitarian intervention," "defending democracy," and never-ending crusades like the "war against drugs" and the "war against terrorism." So they support such imperialistic interventions "from the Left," while criticizing the excessively brutal, greedy and sloppy table manners of the Walrus devouring his prey.

Both of these groups of intellectual Alices commit the same logical error as Carroll's original Alice, who as an English school child was taught to believe in Fair Play. Indignant at the sneaky hypocrisy of her compatriot, the Walrus, Carroll's Alice instinctively transfers her sympathies to the Carpenter — equally rapacious, but smaller. We find the same naïve reaction among sincere (or cynical) Leftists who, revolted by the barbarism of the Western imperialists in the Middle East, turn around and support the barbarism of reactionary Islamist militias. I call this common error in reasoning the EEF fallacy: "the Enemies of our Enemies are our Friends" (itself a derivative of the Lesser of Two Evils or LTE fallacy).

Thus, the Islamic movement of Sheiks, Mullahs and bloodthirsty sectarian militias who massacre civilians in internecine warfare, blow up elementary schools, rape and murder unveiled women and break up trade-unions are today consecrated as "the Iraqi Resistance" in

the writings of Left intellectuals like Alex Calinicos and Chris Harmon of the British *Socialist Workers' Party* and by their U.S. and French co-thinkers. The proof that these reactionary militias are truly "progressive"? When not murdering each other and preying on civilians, the Islamists also fight against U.S. and British troops! Q.E.D.³ Lewis Carroll, who in his day job was a Professor of mathematics and logic at Oxford University and delighted in pushing such illogic to its logical conclusions in his *Alice* books, would have died laughing. But what is truly sad is to see independent socialists like the SWP crowd, who during the Cold War had the clear-sightedness to reject *both* the capitalist imperialism of the West *and* "Communist" state-capitalist imperialism of the East, fall opportunistically into this EEF trap over Iraq.

But how are we to avoid choosing between the imperialist Walrus and his buddy, the Carpenter? How to escape the false logic in which one is inevitably obliged to choose *either* between Uncle Sam *or* smaller rival imperialisms like France and Russia? Between the Wall Street consensus *or* emerging regional competitors like Iran, China, India and Brazil? Between the Great Imperialist Satan America *or* reactionary nationalist-religious forces striving to become local hegemons in places like Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine? That, said Hamlet, "is the question!"

Dustups in a Gentlemen's Club

ENGROSSED IN THIS DILEMMA, I decided to address myself to the professional Marxist scholars who publish the journals *ReThinking Marxism* (U.S.), *Historical Materialism*, and *The Socialist Register* (G.B.) on the occasion of two international conferences they had organized last winter at University of Massachusetts at Amherst and at the University of London. During my sojourn in these postmodern academic paradises, I was heartened to learn that in today's globalised world inter-imperialist ri-

valries no longer existed (or had been reduced to mere vestiges of former times, like your Correspondent). This excellent news was systematically presented by the keynote speakers — highly respected specialists — at the London plenary session on International Relations. For them, world capitalism is “a club” (exact quote) whose only problem is to choose new members with prudence.⁴ (Is China “clubbable” yet?) For a moment I thought myself transported back to the 19th century Oxbridge world of Carroll and Wilde.

Courteously, these Marxist clubmen explained to me that today, with a globalized economy, something called “international capital” (the club) had emerged. This mysteriously ubiquitous capital apparently has no denomination, no nationality, no home port; and its club has been ruling for the past century over a relatively stable, peaceful world. Naïvely, I asked them, “but what about the two World Wars?” (results, according to the *passé* Marxism of Luxemburg, Lenin, Kautsky, Hilferding and Trotsky, of “so-called inter-imperialist rivalries”). These were merely “dustups” (exact quotation). This last explanation provoked groans from certain members of the otherwise respectful and attentive audience. However, calm returned when another lecturer provided conclusive evidence that the capitalists of every land indeed belong to the same international club. Using slides, he demonstrated that corporate advertisements and government campaign posters promoting higher efficiency through competition were virtually identical whether produced in Britain, Europe, Taiwan or Indonesia. From this it follows that international competitiveness, far from dividing, actually unites all the members of the club by providing each and all incentives to increase their productivity.⁵ Conclusion: inter-imperialist rivalry cannot exist. The Walrus and the Carpenter are good friends and always have been. Q.E.D. again!

By now, it had begun to dawn on me that

these British Dons, like Don Quixote before them, had lost their reason from reading too many books — for example by reading postmodern Romances by legendary authors with foreign-sounding names like “Negri-and-Hardt.” Reading these Romances, they imbibe tales about multitudes of revolutionary knights-errant tilting at a windmill marked “Empire,” while in the real world giants of various sizes and nationalities (Russian, American, Iranian, French, Chinese) are busy dividing up the world and fighting over the spoils.

Always practical and curious like Alice, I decided to test these charmingly deranged Dons by asking them to explain to me — without reference to the interests of national capital — how it was that my comfortable teachers’ pension, paid in deflated U.S. dollars, was no longer adequate enough for me to stay in a London Hotel (\$200) or buy them a round of British beer at twelve bucks a glass. Like true gentlemen and true socialists, these generous colleagues immediately invited me to be their guests — but no one came up with the obvious explanation for this devaluation, to wit: Uncle Sam, that scheming old Yankee Walrus, was in debt up to his ears, having borrowed billions from the Chinese, and was now cranking the printing press full speed ahead in order to pay the poor benighted heathen back in devaluated paper worth 75 cents on the dollar — all the while yelling ‘unfair!’ at the deceitful Chinese for keeping the yuan at an “artificially low” exchange rate.

For me, it is hard to conceive the existence of “International Capital” other than as a statistical abstraction (the sum total of all the capital invested in the world’s banks and stock exchanges) or as a kind of imaginary monster, like the “Jewish capital” that anti-Semites are always raging about. Call me “insufficiently theorized,” but I always imagined that capital (or rather individual capitals) had to be denominated in one or another fluctuating national currency (dollars, Euros, pounds, yuan) and that it had to be invested in corporations chartered by one

or another national state (however great its foreign holdings might be) and traded on one or another national stock market. My occasional reading of the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes Capitalist Tool* gives me the impression that these nationally based corporations are always competing among each other and trying to take over new markets in order to repatriate their profits to their stock-holders. Moreover, these corporations are able to count on the support of their national governments, which they influence through media control and political campaign contributions, not only to receive tax breaks and bailouts (“in the national interest”) but also for diplomatic and military support in their international operations.

Take one example: the U.S. multinational corporation *United Brands* (formerly the *United Fruit Company* of Chiquita Banana fame) owns half of Guatemala, including the railroads and other essential infrastructures. This corporation's purpose is to enrich its U.S. investors, and it depends on the U.S. government to keep Guatemalan labor costs low, for example by using the C.I.A. to overthrow Arbenz's reformist government in 1954 and by supporting and arming a horrendous series of death-squad dictatorships ever since. And speaking of bananas, the business pages of my *International Herald Tribune* are full of stories about the diplomatic trade-war between France and America over whether the U.S. has the right to dump cheaply-produced Guatemalan bananas on the European market — a market heretofore dominated by French banana companies implanted in Africa. Like the 2003-4 diplomatic conflict between Bush/Exxon and Chirac/Elf-Total over Iraq, today's banana wars are a clear case of imperialist rivalry between national capitals invested in globalized multinational corporations. How to explain this apparent paradox?

The Unified Actor Fallacy

LET'S BEGIN WITH THE ERROR in reasoning that blinded our London International Relations

specialists so that they couldn't see such blatant examples of inter-imperialist conflict as World Wars I and II: the Unified Actor Fallacy (UAF). Our Dons' Negri-sotted brains are apparently so obsessed with the vision of a unitary “Inter-

Naively, I asked them, “but what about the two World Wars?”

national Capital” that they imagine this abstraction is the necessary cause of every political-economic effect in the real world. How ironic that the Dons of Oxford seemed to have missed the point of their logician colleague Lewis Carroll's Walrus parable! Even little Alice finally got behind the apparent paradox that the Walrus and the Carpenter were “friends” (or accomplices) when it came to luring the naïve young oysters onto the beach, but “enemies” (or rivals) when it came to dividing the spoils. An old-fashioned Marxist (if there were any left) would have patiently explained to them that this friendship is a dialectical relationship, at once complimentary and contradictory.

It goes without saying that all bourgeois capitalists (and the governments they control) agree that they should pay their workers the minimum possible salary, extract from them the maximum amount of labor and send for the police when they go on strike. Small wonder that their “competitiveness means productivity” propaganda should be nearly identical from Indianapolis to Indonesia.⁶ Their bourgeois class interests are complimentary. But that doesn't stop the different national bourgeoisies from competing to attract new capital and to dominate markets or from eating each other up in hostile takeovers, trade disputes or even armed invasions — the ultimate in contradictions. From this common sense point of view, the Fallacy of International Capital as a Unified Actor is just as absurd as the Unified Actor

Fallacy that allows anti-Semites to believe that Jews rule the world (and thus to believe that Israeli intelligence warned all the Jews who worked in the Twin Towers to stay home on September 11, 2001 when Bush and Cheney secretly planned to blow them up).

With these fallacies out of the way, we are now able to return dialectically to the paradoxical “friendship” between France and the United States. As we know, the French Carpenter and the American Walrus have been great Allies since the 1770’s when Louis XVI supported George Washington’s War of Independence in order to undermine his rival, England. In the 20th Century, the American Republic supported the French Republic during two World Wars (“Lafayette, we are here!”) Yet this unity between the world’s two oldest republics also contains its own dialectical contradiction, as I discovered during the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the U.S. landings in Normandy when the French papers were full of historical information. It transpired that in June 1944, General Eisenhower landed in France planning not to liberate it but to *occupy* it (like Iraq today) and that in his baggage train he brought cases of printed bank notes intended to replace the *franc*. Far from planning to free Paris from German occupation much supporting de Gaulle, the Anglo-Saxon commanders’ plan was to abandon the Parisians to their fate and head straight toward Berlin — as we learned in the popular book and film *Is Paris Burning?* Roosevelt’s unspoken goal — pursued by all of his successors — was to take control of France’s rich colonies in Africa and Indo-China. On the other hand, the underlying objective of de Gaulle’s Free France, based in France’s overseas territories, was always to preserve these colonies for the benefit of the French bourgeoisie, which had lost its legitimacy by collaborating with the losing side (Germany and Japan).

Bloody Handshakes

HOWEVER, IT MUST BE BORN IN MIND that this



Franco-American rivalry was ever and always subordinated to their Alliance against the Axis and against the Communists. Thus, for example, in 1954 Eisenhower and Dulles were seriously considering dropping an atomic bomb to save the French colonial troops pinned down by the Vietnamese Communists at Dien Bien Phu. Which didn’t stop the friendly American Walrus from replacing France as imperialist overlord in Vietnam and suffering his own prolonged “Dien Bien Phu” in 1965-1975. Nor did it stop the American imperialists from encouraging anti-French rebels in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in the name of “anti-colonialism.” In 1993-4 as we have seen, the two imperialisms fought a kind of proxy war in Rwanda using the “Hutus” and “Tutsis” as pawns just as in 2003-4 they had a big falling out over Iraq and oil. But that story had a happy ending in 2004 when the Presidents of the two Republics shook hands and collaborated in overthrowing the elected government of the third oldest (and only Black) Republic of Haiti, kidnapping its legitimate President Aristide, occupying the island (for humanitarian reasons) and supporting the terrorist *Tontons Macoutes* as well as friends of the deposed dictator “Baby Doc” Duvalier. And now here we are in 2007, with the French and American military once again murkily involved in murderous maneuvers in Chad, Central Africa, Darfur and Somalia and more massacres in sight.

Conclusion! Oysters of the world arise! Stop heeding the siren songs of the imperialist Walruses and Carpenters! Unite before they eat us all up! Oysters have no Fatherland! We have a world to win (if global warming doesn't get us first)!

NOTES

1. "France massively equipped the Rwandan Military Forces (FAR) ; France introduced them into the camps where torture and massacres of civilians was taking place . . . From April to June 1994, during which period the massacres continued and 500,000 Tutsis were murdered with *machetes*, part of the French Army had but a single obsession: continue to resupply the FAR."
2. See "Retour sur le génocide de 1994 au Rwanda," in

Révolution internationale No 375 Jan. 2007. www.internationalism.org

3. This EEF fallacy has led these "Marxist socialists" to some wonderfully absurd deviations like "Islamic feminism." I witnessed this aberration being introduced by the SWP at the World Social Forum in London in 2004. See Caroline Fourest, *La tentation obscurantiste*, (Paris: Grasset 2005), pp. 131 ff.

4. Peter Gowan, "One Logic or Two in Capitalist International Relations and the Possibilities of Transcending the Inter-state System." Paper presented at the *Historical Materialism* international conference, University of London, Dec. 2006.

5. Paul Cammack, "Governance of Global Capitalism," *loc cit*.

6. And were Stalin's Stakhanovite productivity campaigns in favor of "socialist emulation" any different?

Laws and Injustice

Fighting for Human Rights in Mexico

CHRIS TILLY AND MARIE KENNEDY

IN A FEBRUARY STATEMENT, Amnesty International described Mexico as a country with “laws but no justice.” They were talking about the criminal justice system, but the statement describes Mexico more broadly, in a couple of ways. First, the application of laws in Mexico is often arbitrary and driven by covert or overt economic and political interests. Second, Mexican society (like most others, including the U.S.) institutionalizes injustice toward a number of groups of second-class citizens — such as indigenous people, the poor, and women.

But the story is more complex. Mexico today also is registering some unexpected breakthroughs in civil rights, including gay/lesbian rights. And popular organizations, sometimes with allies in the mainstream parties and sometimes without, are continuing to push forward the struggle for social justice.

Whose Law?

TOTALITARIANISM, ACCORDING TO ONE description, is a situation in which laws are constructed so that absolutely everyone must violate them in the course of daily life, rendering everyone vulnerable to selective application of the law. Mexico does not meet this definition of totalitarianism, but the country certainly has some things in common with it. Tax evasion is virtually universal. There are often multiple land ownership claims based on conflicting govern-

ment policies or actions — agrarian reform, indigenous reservations, patronage gifts by some governor or other, eminent domain, and so on. And politicians often interpret broadly written laws to their own advantage, as well as supplementing legal actions with extralegal and illegal ones.

Perhaps the most celebrated recent example of arbitrary application of the law took place in 2004, in the political jockeying preceding the 2006 presidential campaign. The popular center-left mayor of Mexico City, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), was leading in early polls. The government of President Vicente Fox, of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) contrived charges against AMLO for taking a small slice of private land by eminent domain for a hospital access road. An open criminal proceeding would have barred López Obrador from being a candidate. AMLO responded by organizing a protest movement, and the federal prosecutor finally dropped the charges. Fox stirred up a furor earlier this year by commenting that López Obrador had beaten him that time, but “I got even when my candidate” — Felipe Calderón, the PAN’s presidential candidate—“won at the polls.” López Obrador and his supporters maintain the election was stolen with Fox’s collusion.

AMLO’s plight is just one of many such cases. Journalist Lydia Cacho, who accused the governor of Puebla of shielding powerful political and business figures who were procuring sex with minors, spent a year in prison awaiting trial on libel charges before a judge finally ordered her released in January. In the case highlighted by Amnesty International, indigenous activists in Oaxaca languish in prison on trumped-up charges for taking part in the

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movement against that state's governor. Environmental activists in Morelos and elsewhere have suffered a similar fate. Because Mexico's laws do not include a presumption of innocence, people accused for political reasons have limited tools to fight their incarceration.

Unjust imprisonment is bad enough, but those with political power sometimes go well beyond that in clamping down on dissidents. Mexico, historically a land of *caudillos* (regional political-military leaders) and *caciques* (local bosses controlling patronage and enforcement systems), has not completely escaped its legacy. In San Salvador Atenco (Mexico State) and Oaxaca, where governors savagely repressed demonstrations last year, human rights observers have documented cases of detention without charges, beating, torture, rape of women and men, disappearance, and assassination. Some such actions are targeted, others appear designed to indiscriminately sow terror — one account describes how an apolitical Oaxaca ice cream vendor Ismael Cruz, who was unlucky enough to get caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, was beaten and tortured, and remains under detention. In Chiapas, similar tactics have been used against the Zapatistas and communities suspected of being sympathizers. The National Human Rights Commission recently reported that in the last six years, 31 journalists have been assassinated and five disappeared in Mexico — more than a third of these in the last year — making it the second-most dangerous country for journalists after Iraq (some of the killings are presumed to be the work of organized crime). The Observatory for the Protection of Defenders of Rights, reporting 41 new cases of attacks on human rights advocates in 2006, concluded that this, too is “a high-risk activity” in

Mexico.

Typically the worst abuses are carried out by non-uniformed troops or police, paramilitaries, or thugs, giving government officials “plausible deniability.” Those ordering and carrying out such acts of violence generally enjoy impunity. In fact, it's only in the last few years that the Mexican

system of justice has begun to investigate the “dirty war” the Mexican government pursued against militants in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Multiple Jeopardy

THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS SUFFER MOST. Indigenous people, many of whom are among Mexico's poorest — start out with three strikes against them: race, class, and language. This combination disadvantages them in property rights—land thefts from indigenous communities are legion — and in the courtroom as well. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the UN's special rapporteur on indigenous people's rights, issued a report singling out the state of Yucatán's treatment of the indigenous, who make up the majority of the state's population. Stavenhagen highlighted the case of Ricardo Ucán, currently serving 22 years in prison. Ucán, who speaks no Spanish, killed a man who was pointing a gun at him and his family. Because his court-appointed lawyer spoke only Spanish and the proceedings were never translated, the fact of self-defense was never raised. On the other side of the ledger, in the nearby state of Veracruz, a 73 year old indigenous woman Ernestina Ascención was reportedly raped, beaten, and left to die by soldiers from a neighboring base — but the federal government abruptly declared that she had died of natural causes and dropped the search for perpetrators (see box, “The bizarre case of Ernestina Ascención”).

Women, who gained the vote in Mexican national elections only in 1953, also suffer more violations of their rights. A Mexican anthropologist colleague commented to us that, “In Mexico, men can accept women being politicians, professionals, even their bosses — but they are *machos* in the home.” Domestic violence is a serious problem — suffered by 44 percent of women living with a partner, according to a survey by the National Institute on Women. The state of Puebla tabulated 60 reports last year of men who beat their wives for the “crime” of trying to learn to read. The hundreds of killings of women in the border city of Juárez remain unsolved, leading many to suspect official complicity. And criminologist Rocío Santillan Ramírez characterizes the criminal justice system as “patriarchal and misogynist,” pointing out that women murderers receive longer sentences on average than men, even though they have often killed a partner after years of abuse and violence.

In both substance and symbolism, Calderón’s government is giving off signs of worse things to come. Calderón has done a phenomenally large number of photo-ops with the military, including one occasion when he posed in fatigues (maybe he’s getting PR lessons from George W. Bush?). He gave troops a 46 percent raise, while raising Mexico’s ultra-low \$4.50 a day minimum wage by only 4 percent and proposing significant cuts to anti-poverty programs. The president’s most visible policy initiative has been a series of military raids — so far without significant success — against the organized criminals running the drug trade. The violent acts of these gangsters are indeed a serious public concern, but given the range of economic and social problems facing Mexico, making this priority number one sends a clear message (as well as winning points with the United States). The director of the country’s war school, Rafael García, gratefully told Calderón, “Your actions as commander have a positive impact on maintaining high morale.”

In March, Calderón announced a proposal to streamline the criminal justice system, even though he acknowledged the reform would be “restrictive of fundamental rights.” “I don’t believe in the *mano dura* [iron fist],” he declared coyly. “I believe, rather, in the *mano firme* [firm hand].” Calderón is not alone in playing the law-and-order card. Marcelo Ebrard, current mayor of Mexico City and a stalwart of AMLO’s Party of the Democratic Revolution, has been carrying out mass evictions of neighborhoods where drug-dealing is allegedly taking place. The state of Guerrero recently authorized its state legislators to carry arms and is paying for bodyguards.

Calderón’s rhetoric targets not just criminals, but dissidents. “In this country, we will no longer confuse illegality with respect for rights,” he intoned ominously in late January. It’s true that in Atenco and Oaxaca protestors broke the law by violating police orders to disperse. But one could argue that when protest and criticism are made illegal, protestors and critics will necessarily become criminals. In any case, Calderón’s Presidential Guard (*Estado Mayor*) went well beyond punishing illegal acts when he visited the National Governor’s Conference here in Tlaxcala. The *Estado Mayor* roughed up seven reporters — all from mainstream publications—without warning, throwing one to the ground and kicking him in the head, breaking his nose and sending him to the hospital. “We’ve never known the *Estado Mayor* to act like this,” one friend commented. Calderón’s officials have also blocked AMLO’s TV talk show from going on the air.

Meanwhile, the Assistant Attorney General for Human Rights, Juan de Dios Castro, as much as threw his hands in the air when he declared earlier this year that “We have a problem of violation of human rights that unfortunately the federal government...so far does not have in its hands the possibility of totally eliminating.” He blamed state governments, complaining that in some states, “a climate of im-

punity is facilitated because democracy doesn't exist," but claimed that Mexico's federal system limits the central government's ability to intervene. (If the U.S. federal government had adopted this view in the 1960s, we'd probably still have Jim Crow in the South today!) Human rights advocates slammed Castro the next day for abdicating federal responsibility — especially given that federal police helped Oaxaca's governor to drive out, beat, and arrest the protestors who were camped in the middle of that state's capital.

Though the actions of Calderón and his cabinet anger and worry government critics, they have gained favor in other quarters. *La Jornada* columnist Julio Hernández reports that mega-capitalist Alberto Bailleres (major stockholder in financial, mining, commercial, and agribusiness interests), commented publicly in mid-February that the rule of law requires a strong government that compels all to obey, "even in the face of factional interests.... The civilizing way of law," he continued, should not be detained by "the hesitations of any actor or any political tendency." Interesting words coming from a major stockholder of Peñoles, in whose coal mine 65 miners perished in an explosion in early 2006 after years of safety violations. After one year, five mid-level company officials (not Bailleres) finally had charges brought against them, but are out on bail; widespread opinion has it that the company will never pay a significant penalty.

Surprising Breakthroughs

BUT THE NEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS FROM Mexico is not all bad. Mexico's governments are naming domestic violence (*violencia intrafamiliar*), and conducting educational campaigns to raise consciousness about it. The federal government passed a law criminalizing domestic violence last year, and is conducting a hard-hitting radio campaign to publicize it ("Señor Martínez, you are charged with assaulting your wife—come with us, please!").

Perhaps even more surprising in a land where *machismo* is so deeply rooted, laws recognizing gay and lesbian rights are taking new strides. The first same-sex civil union in Latin

Of course, Mexicans have long had an ambivalent relationship toward homosexuality.

America, between two lesbians, was celebrated at the end of January in the gritty border state of Coahuila, best known for coal mines (including the Pasta de Conchos mine where last year's disaster took place) and *maquiladoras*. (Coahuila's law was championed, not by the left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution, but by the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party that ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000.) In the Distrito Federal (the federal district containing Mexico City) a similar law took effect in March, and hundreds of same-sex couples have tied the knot there. Seven other states are considering legalizing civil unions. Of course, Mexicans have long had an ambivalent relationship toward homosexuality. On the one hand, there are few insults harsher than *puto* (faggot). On the other hand, perhaps the most popular marchers in the recent *Carnaval* parade in Santa Ana, where we are living, were the dozens of drag queens — a fixture in many Mexican Carnivals. Some were clownish objects of ridicule, but others were glamorous figures (including quite a few androgynous sylphs of ambiguous gender) who attracted appreciative whistles and propositions from male onlookers.

Mexican laws and views on reproductive rights, the rights of the HIV-positive, and even ex-offenders' rights are also changing. The morning-after pill was approved in Mexico in 2004, two years before the U.S. FDA finally gave it the nod. Abortion is illegal but tolerated in many areas, and at the time of writing the

Distrito Federal was about to decriminalize it altogether (to the consternation of the very powerful Catholic Church). The Mexican Supreme Court ruled earlier this year that the Army may not discharge soldiers for being HIV-positive, and the Secretary of Health has initiated legal action for “crimes against public health” against the National Movement for the Refocusing of Science, which promotes a theory that the AIDS virus doesn’t exist. The state of Coahuila even passed a law prohibiting discrimination against ex-convicts in government employment (with the exception of the police).

And in the shadow of brutal repression in Oaxaca and Atenco, in spite of the echoes of Calderón’s tough-guy speeches, Mexicans continue to organize for basic human rights. A “citi-

zens’ jury” of well known cultural and political figures traveled to Oaxaca to hear testimony from victims of the government crackdown there (they counted 26 murders, with nobody prosecuted for any of them to date). A crowded field of human rights organizations pursues its crucial work of documentation and denunciation. Brave journalists face down death threats and worse to tell the stories of Ismael Cruz, Ricardo Ucán, Ernestina Ascención, and many others. And ordinary Mexicans, including growing numbers of indigenous people and women, challenge arbitrary power by lobbying, litigating, meeting, demonstrating, and creating autonomous, community-based institutions — building alternative structures of power founded on recognizing the rights of all.

The Bizarre Case of Ernestina Ascención

Ernestina Ascención, a 73-year-old Nahua indigenous woman from Soledad Atzompa, Veracruz, died on February 26, 2007. That much everybody agrees. But the official story has taken such a bizarre set of twists and turns that the only way to explain it is with a time line.

February 25-26. Ernestina’s daughter Marta finds her lying in a field with a fractured skull and ribs. Ernestina tells Marta that four soldiers bound and gagged her, beat and raped her. She says the soldiers were eating oranges when they came upon her. She repeats her story to other family members and townspeople, including the mayor and other officials. They take her to first the local, then the regional hospital, where she re-tells her story to the doctors, bringing the number of witnesses up to 15. She continues repeating her story until she loses consciousness and dies.

February 26. An autopsy conducted by three forensic doctors employed by the state of Veracruz concludes that Ernestina was raped (semen, along with serious lacerations, were found in her vagina and anus; they had also been noted by doctors treating her while she was still alive). Cause of death: a fractured skull and neck vertebrae. State investigators find orange peels at the site where

Ernestina was found, confirming another aspect of her story. They provide semen samples to the neighboring Army encampment. The commanding officer reports that four soldiers have been arrested and will be investigated.

February 27. The commanding officer now says no one is under arrest.

Early March. Investigators from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) tell townspeople that “everything points toward the Army.”

March 6. The Defense Department states that the military camp in question is located 10 miles from where Ernestina was found (in reality, it had relocated to 1/4-mile from the community one week before her death). They attribute the attack to “criminals using military uniforms.” A few hours later, this statement is gone from their website, replaced by one saying that examinations of the genitals of all soldiers in the base have ruled out sexual activity. Nonetheless, it adds that technicians are comparing the semen samples with blood samples from the soldiers.

March 9. Ernestina’s body is exhumed by researchers from the Defense Department, the federal prosecutor’s office, and the CNDH. A spokes-

person for the CNDH states that the purpose is to address some doubts about the autopsy.

March 13. To everyone's surprise. President Calderón tells reporters that Ernestina was not raped, but died of "chronic gastritis," based on the autopsy conducted by the CNDH on March 9. The state of Veracruz's special prosecutor starts telling townspeople that they will be committing a crime if they keep repeating their account of the death.

March 16. José Luis Soberanes, president of the CNDH (and a presidential appointee), states that Ernestina's death "could have been from natural causes," and that those who say she was raped and killed are making statements "without basis."

March 29. After a prolonged silence, the CNDH issues a report saying that an autopsy conducted by them on March 9 concluded that Ernestina died of acute anemia due to bleeding in the digestive tract caused by ulcers, and that she had no traumatic injuries. The three forensic examiners from the state of Veracruz are suspended and placed under criminal investigation.

April 1. María del Rocío García, President of the National Women's Institute (and a presidential appointee) dismisses Ernestina's dying accusations: "She was half-dead, babbling," and furthermore, "it was in Nahuatl" (the modern-day Aztec language spoken by the Nahuas, including most of the witnesses who saw her alive). In the next few days, spokespeople from the CNDH and the Defense Department repeat the assertion that

since she made her charges in Nahuatl, nobody can be sure what she said.

April 5. A CNDH spokesperson reports that the lacerations in Ernestina's vagina and anus were caused by a scalpel during the second autopsy (ignoring the fact that they were noted while Ernestina was alive and in the first autopsy). She asks the Defense Department for information about whether they have semen samples.

April 6. The Defense Department says they never had any semen samples.

And so on. Soberanes of the CNDH says that the Veracruz prosecutor's office lost the semen samples, that the Veracruz autopsy was sloppy, and that the CNDH has "scientific evidence" that there was no rape. The Veracruz Attorney General's office angrily retorts that their post mortem was professionally done, and that they provided semen samples to the CNDH — and reinstates the three suspended forensic examiners, dropping charges against them. Indigenous organizations from Ernestina's region demand a meeting with the president, so far without reply. With assertions and counter-assertions being traded almost daily as we write, we hesitate to draw out a final bottom line. But it seems crystal clear that the president is covering for his political allies in the Army, and federal government officials are covering for the president. "We only ask for justice, that's all," says Ernestina's son Julio on behalf of the five children. Will they get it?

Information from *La Jornada* and *Proceso*, March-April 2007

Visiting Raúl Castro's Cuba

SAMUEL FARBER

ON JULY 31, 2006, THE CUBAN government announced that due to a serious illness, the nature of which was declared a state secret, Fidel Castro was stepping aside as the head of state. His younger brother Raúl, officially designated as his successor since the early days of the 1959 Revolution, was “temporarily” replacing the commander-in-chief.

Raúl is reputed to be more pragmatic and a better organizer and administrator than his older brother. He has favored economic reforms such as those implemented in the mid-nineties, like the expansion of joint ventures with foreign capital, the legalization of the dollar, and the opening of agricultural markets and small family enterprises in the cities (although in recent years, the Cuban government has retreated from some of these concessions to private enterprise and the market.) Raúl is also an open admirer of the current Chinese model of development. He has made the army the most important actor in the Cuban economy, as in the case of the major tourist enterprise Gaviota and hundreds of other enterprises where capitalist-type methods have been introduced through the Sistema de Perfeccionamiento Empresarial (System of Enterprise Perfection). High Army officers have also assumed leadership roles in various sectors of the country's industries such as sugar.

Raúl is also known as a political hard-liner, like the Chinese leaders he admires. He played a central role in the execution of Arnaldo Ochoa

and other high army officers in 1989 and in the 1996 dissolution of the Center for the Study of the Americas, an unorthodox Communist Party think tank.

On the surface, nothing much seems to have changed since Raúl replaced Fidel. The policies of the regime seem to be pretty much the same as they were until July 30, 2006. The commander-in-chief may not be in but neither is he out. Although he is no longer the hands-on chief giving long speeches and moving around the country issuing orders and instructions, he does have access to the telephone and regularly talks to ministers Carlos Lage and Felipe Pérez Roque (see below.) He also receives visitors, most prominently Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who has come to see him several times during the last months. Chavez' visits with Fidel, parts of which have been televised, and broadcast phone interviews, have become the main channels through which Cubans and people abroad get a glimpse of Fidel Castro's physical condition.

Nevertheless, some significant developments have taken place below that surface. Most important of all has been the marginalization of Fidel Castro's staff. His “Grupo de Apoyo” (Support Group) constituted by figures such as his personal secretary Carlos Valenciaga was the principal organizational means through which Fidel intervened in the political and economic life of the country. The Grupo de Apoyo, known as the “Talibanes” because of its ideological orthodoxy, but now also jokingly referred to as “los huerfanitos” or little orphans, has existed for a long time, but recently acquired much greater importance and relative autonomy within the system because of the central role it has played in the Commander in Chief's cam-

SAMUEL FARBER was born and raised in Cuba. He is a long-time socialist and the author of numerous works on Cuba including *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (University of North Carolina Press), 2006.

paid for the “Battle of Ideas.” This “Battle” was not just about ideological and political struggles and the frequent massive demonstrations that went along with those, but also about implementing economic projects, which often departed from existing plans and usurped the powers and functions of the government’s departments and ministries. One such project involved the decision by Fidel and his Grupo de Apoyo, contrary to established construction priorities, to renovate the University of Havana’s Law School that the Cuban leader had attended in the late forties. These kinds of interventions have apparently come to an end as Raúl Castro has made the delegation of powers to ministries and other government agencies a central feature of his rule, and has strengthened the role of established government plans. In addition, there has been a reduction in the number of government-sponsored mobilizations at places such as the U.S. interest section building, apparently in order to increase the productivity of labor, while also softening the constant pressure on people to disrupt their lives and show their support for the regime. Thus, it appears that “normal” ruling class bureaucratic rationality has trumped Bonapartist and charismatic chaos and disorder in Round One of the Transition.¹

It is hard to predict what will happen in the rounds to come. Raúl Castro, at 75 years of age, may well turn out to be a short-lived transitional figure. Among the people in the next leadership rung there is first, Carlos Lage, a medical doctor in his fifties who has been put in charge of the Cuban economy; he has a reputation as a “moderate.” So does Ricardo Alarcón, in his late sixties or early seventies, former Foreign Minister and the head of Cuba’s Parliament, although he appears to be playing a lesser role in the transition that began last July 31.²

Everybody I talked to agreed that breaking the law had become a way of life in order to survive.

The youngest is Felipe Pérez Roque, the current Foreign Minister, who is in his forties. As former chief of staff of Fidel Castro, he is seen not surprisingly, as close to the “Talibanes” of the Grupo de Apoyo to which he used to belong. None of these people, however, have the power and prestige of the major “historic”

leaders of the revolution. That is why there has been a fair amount of talk about a “collegiate” leadership team eventually taking over after Raúl passes from the scene. The record of “collegiate leaderships” has been unimpressive in every type of political system, even more so in Soviet-type systems like the former USSR or China. In the absence of well-established, let alone democratic, mechanisms to resolve important differences that are bound to develop, it is likely that one or another individual leader will inevitably rise to the top. If the army leadership remains united, whether under Raúl or some other general, it is very unlikely that either the “Talibanes,” or any other force within the ruling circles, could prevail against them. Thus, Cuba will probably follow a state sponsored capitalist road of development in the manner of Vietnam and China.³ Meanwhile, a number of Cuban leaders have reported that Fidel Castro’s health is improving and that he may even return to office. While unlikely, such an event would greatly complicate and make much harder a prediction of Cuba’s future.

I ARRIVED IN CUBA during this transitional period on January 23, 2007 and stayed for two weeks. I was born and raised in Cuba and left the island in early 1958 while the Batista dictatorship was still in power. I visited the country for two weeks in January of 2000 and, before then, for one week at the end of 1979, a few months before the exodus from the port of Mariel in the spring of 1980. My impressions

of those two trips were published in three different socialist journals.⁴

The Havana metropolitan area that I saw this time looked poorer than the impoverished Havana of 1979, although perhaps slightly better off than the Havana of 2000. There was definitely more automobile traffic with its accompanying pollution and smell of burned fuel. The proportion of the ancient North American cars of the forties and fifties had visibly declined. People, particularly women, were better dressed: they wore new looking clothes and shoes. Jeans, in generally good condition, were worn everywhere, whether in the relatively more fashionable area of Vedado or in the various poor, working class districts that I visited. Women of all ages wore makeup and nail polish. There were a handful of beggars here and there, but these were always old people rather than children. Many more elderly people were selling peanuts and the Communist daily newspaper *Granma*, a multifaceted irony that reflects the inadequate level of peso-denominated pensions, one of the many serious problems confronting the country. The Cuban press also recently reported that the authorities were trying to stop, as a threat to public health, the growing activity of people going through garbage bags in search of empty containers to be sold to self-employed traders and for discarded food to feed animals.⁵ These expressions of extreme poverty however, are considerably less visible than in the major cities in Mexico, where I have traveled often. Friends told me that there had been fewer blackouts in recent months, although I experienced a couple of short-lived ones, lasting two minutes or so. Although more dwellings looked freshly painted than in 2000, they frequently had broken window panes, crumbling window frames, and rusty hardware. The overall condition of urban housing in Havana seemed to be getting worse, as the cumulative impact of rain, hurricanes and the sheer impact of time's wear and tear, has gradually destroyed the housing stock. The Cuban government claims that it built 100,000

housing units in the country in 2006, thereby expanding new construction by 30 percent in comparison with 2005. I saw very little if any evidence of this in the poor, working class areas of Old Havana, Cayo Hueso and other neighborhoods of Central Havana, and various *barrios* of my native city of Marianao (near Havana). Urban transport is in the worst condition with the incredibly congested "camellos" (camels — or long buses with humped roofs built on top of flatbed trucks) barely making a dent on people's need to get around, including getting to and from work. This problem has had devastating effects, isolating people in their neighborhoods and seriously affecting work as well as family, leisure and cultural life. Most of the streets in Havana were in a more or less acceptable condition, but sidewalks were generally in a terrible state of disrepair. The poor state of the sidewalks has been worsened by the expansion of the telephone system carried out by ETECSA, the joint Italian-Cuban enterprise, which has left gaping holes and telephone poles lying on the sidewalks without signs or lights to indicate danger. This has become a real problem particularly at night, since, in order to save energy, streets are dimly lit.

Only those with access to hard foreign currency are able to afford the best taxi service, and the comfortable bus service connecting Havana with the principal cities of the interior. For example, a round trip bus from Havana to Cuba's best known beach at Varadero — 120 kilometers each way — costs 20 USD, a veritable fortune for Cubans since each dollar is worth around 25 Cuban pesos (according to official figures, the minimum salary is 250 pesos a month while the average salary is 385 pesos). A similar situation exists with respect to food. Walking around various Havana metropolitan neighborhoods, street markets seemed to be better stocked than they were in 2000, but at high prices in Cuban terms. One dollar for a pound of pork is cheap in U.S. terms but out of reach for the majority of Cubans with little or no access to foreign hard cur-

rency. The peso-denominated official rationing book only covers about 40 percent of the dietary needs of Cubans. The rest have to be acquired in the parallel and free markets at much higher prices. As it is, Cubans today are spending 57 percent of their income on food. However, in assessing this figure, one has to keep in mind that the very congested and deteriorated housing is practically free.

The relatively greater availability of consumer goods but only at high prices is key to understanding the acknowledged growing inequality of Cuban society and one of the things that most impressed me during this visit: an all-encompassing law breaking and corruption. Although it was visible during my visit in 2000, it did not seem as pervasive and intrusive as I found it this time. I was often personally affected by having to informally work out a fare with drivers of state owned taxis whose meters suddenly “broke down” in the middle of a ride, prodding cashiers who were trying to short-change me, or avoiding people offering stolen goods in the street. Everybody I talked to agreed that breaking the law had become a way of life in order to survive in Cuba. No wonder then than in an important speech delivered at the University of Havana in November of 2005, Fidel Castro warned that corruption could destroy the revolution from within. In October of 2006, the Cuban newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* ran an investigative report detailing how customers were systematically cheated in retail establishments such as cafeterias and shoe and watch repair services.⁶ More recently, on February 19, 2007, the daily *Granma* published a two-page centerfold on the important social and economic damages caused by the frequent theft of the “angular” sections of high-tension electric towers, notwithstanding the risk to life and increased criminal penalties.⁷

Economic Conditions During the Transition

WHAT ARE THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS that

underlie the kinds of behavior that we just described? How well is the Cuban economy doing? If we are to believe the Cuban government, the economy is doing very well. They have developed a new method of measuring Cuba's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that includes the freely provided social services which in other countries are paid for by the public. Based on this new method, Cuba's leaders claim that the economy grew by 12.5 percent in 2006, an even higher rate of growth than China's. An independent-minded economist I interviewed questioned this claim, arguing that there was a great lack of transparency in the calculations that official government economists made to arrive at such a figure. In his own estimation the Cuban economy had grown in 2006 by 6 or 7 percent, a very respectable performance. Notwithstanding some relatively good years, Cuba is probably just about to catch up with the 1989 levels of production, right before the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Aside from nickel, a raw material that in conjunction with other commodities has enjoyed several very good years in the international market, and is produced in a joint venture with Sherritt, a Canadian corporation, Cuba's economy has become rooted primarily in the provision of services. Tourism is the most important of these services, and the principal earner of foreign currency, although it experienced a decline of 3.6 percent in the number of tourists that came to the island in 2006.⁸ The U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLA) has estimated that 62 percent of Cubans have access to hard currency [obviously in greatly varying quantities] while 20 percent of the island's urban population is at risk of not covering its minimal basic needs (Cuba is currently 75 percent urban).⁹ The impact of foreign remittances, the source of hard currency for two thirds of those with access to it, is highly concentrated, however, because a disproportionate number of those receiving them are white Cubans residing in the Havana

metropolitan area. The possible benefits of biotechnology and the oil that Cuba has explored and found in the Gulf of Mexico in partnership with various foreign companies mostly lie in the future, although Cuban oil is already covering 48 percent of the country's domestic energy needs. The sugar industry is a shadow of its former self as the majority of sugar mills have been shut down. Cuba produced 1.2 million tons of sugar in 2006, and is facing difficult climactic and organizational problems as it tries to reach its goal of producing 1.6 million tons in 2007. These figures stand in stark contrast with the long-term historic annual averages of 5 to 7 million tons before the onset of crisis of the "special period" after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The non-sugar agricultural production is not carrying its weight either, as Cuba has been importing 84 percent of the basic food-stuffs destined for the Cuban non-tourist market ("canasta básica") consisting of such items as rice, chicken and canned fish at an annual cost of a billion dollars.

Although the Cuban government has placed much hope on Chinese investment, not a lot has happened along these lines as the Chinese have driven a harder bargain than the Cubans expected. Nevertheless, China has become Cuba's second largest trading partner accounting for two billion dollars in 2006, doubling the amount traded in 2005. For example, Cuba has been exporting 400,000 tons of sugar to China, which added to the 700,000 tons it consumes internally, accounts for the lion's share of current sugar production. More significant is the economic exchange with Venezuela, Cuba's principal trading partner, although, to put these matters in perspective, neither Venezuela's nor China's role in the Cuban economy approximate the massive subsidies that the USSR provided from the early sixties until the late eighties. Venezuela provides oil to Cuba in exchange for services, particularly in the medical field, with thousands of Cuban doctors periodically sent to the South American country. This has

had a significant negative effect on the Cuban health care system. The number of patients per doctor in the up to recently well-regarded family doctor program has substantially increased, and the number of specialists available to Cubans has been reduced.¹⁰ The lack of medical supplies and provisions, from medicines to bedding, has become seriously aggravated since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early nineties. First aid and over the counter remedies from aspirins to Imodium are difficult to get. The Cuban government is unable to purchase large wholesale quantities of medicine from the U.S. because of the criminal blockade that the U.S. has maintained against Cuba since the beginning of the sixties. But this is only part of the problem, the other part being Cuba's relative lack of goods to offer for export and its overall poverty and consequently its inability to purchase whatever non-U.S. medicines and equipment it can afford to purchase from Canada, Latin America, and Western Europe. During the last several years, Cuba has been allowed to import agricultural and processed goods from the U.S. under a "humanitarian" exception to the blockade established in November 2001, making the United States the main supplier of food to the island. Cuba, however, is not allowed to export anything to the U.S. to pay for these imports. While these imports have amounted to 1.5 billion dollars, they have been a financial drain that would be greatly alleviated if Cuba could sell things to the U.S., or if, more likely, several hundred thousand U.S. tourists could travel to the island.

The abolition of the blockade would be welcome for both principled reasons — the right of nations to determine their own destiny against foreign domination — and practical considerations: it would greatly increase economic activity in Cuba¹¹ and undermine the regime's principal anti-imperialist claim to legitimacy. However, it would not diminish the effect of the other principal source of economic problems in the island, the visibility of which

has, in fact, been hidden by the imperialist blockade: the inefficiency and waste inherent in the present bureaucratic administration of the economy. The old maxim attributed to Soviet and East European workers that “they pretend to pay us and we pretend to work,” fully applies to Cuba. This became evident in the visible lack of care, attention and maintenance of every type of public sector property, from planes to hotels, restaurants, parks and buildings, no matter how recently they were, often beautifully, renovated. While economic hardship and the U.S. blockade may explain the lack of building materials necessary to carry out certain kinds of upkeep, it does not explain the absence of the simple, labor-intensive activities that have no significant capital components such as cleaning, sweeping and just plain run-of-the-mill neatness.

The fundamental problem is the lack of initiative, motivation and of managerial and labor discipline. Over the centuries, capitalism developed bureaucratic, hierarchical systems where workers make no decisions and have no idea of what the overall process of production is for or about. Nevertheless, workers were bound to perform up to a certain level of competence prodded by the sticks — produce or you will get fired — and carrot — the promise, if not the reality, of higher wages and promotions — policy. On the whole, the Soviet type systems have not been able to develop a parallel system of motivation that could at least match the effectiveness of capitalist methods. Workers in this equally, if not more, bureaucratic and hierarchical system, do not grasp any better than in capitalism what the whole process of production is for or about. One of the “sticks” available to the single government employer was removed by the policy of overall security of employment (except for those who get in political trouble with the authorities). The systematic scarcity of goods characteristic of what the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai called “shortage economies” has taken care of remov-

ing a good part of the carrots. This provides the context of and helps to explain the preachy, ascetic emphasis on “moral” incentives that people such as Che Guevara advocated as a fundamentally flawed solution to the bureaucratic dilemma I just described. Classical Marxism, besides assuming that socialism would take place in a society with a relatively high level of material abundance and cultural advancement, emphasized not “moral,” but what could be called “political incentives” that involved democratic control of the economy, polity and society, including the control of the workplace by the workers. According to this approach, only by participating and controlling their own productive lives would people become interested and responsible for what they do for a living day in and day out; that is, only thus would they get to care and give a damn. In this sense, workers’ democracy was seen both as a good in itself — people taking control of their lives — and as a truly productive economic force.

Absent an alternative approach, Cuba will witness an inevitable drift towards capitalist ideology and practice. Cubans who are witnessing the small existing private enterprises, whether farms or small urban firms like the tiny restaurants called “paladares” being run better and more efficiently than the larger state enterprises, are already concluding that capitalism can deliver the goods better than the state. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that the mass of the population will adopt a neo-liberal version of capitalist ideology. Although they may look towards capitalism as the desirable system to produce goods and services, they will ferociously defend free public health, education and other social services, no matter how much they have deteriorated, particularly under the impact of the “special period” since the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Viewed statically, there seem to be few prospects for a democratic, revolutionary socialist politics in Cuba. However, the ample history of Communist transitions to capitalism shows

that it is highly unlikely for a transition to take even a relatively benign form. Instead, we are highly likely to witness “shock therapies” and sharp reductions of “welfare state” institutions and spending enforced by dictatorial rule, whether in the openly despotic Chinese form or the cosmetically disguised Russian style (these two countries share with Cuba the significant fact that Communism originated in home grown revolutionary upheavals.) Such a neo-liberal course is likely to be accompanied by a substantial U.S. control over the internal affairs of the island, with its IMF-type structural adjustment, privatization and austerity policies. It is in opposition to such a type of transition that the possibilities of a democratic revolutionary politics lie.

Intellectuals Defend Themselves

IT IS IRONIC THAT THE DISASTROUS ECONOMIC breakdown of the Special Period that came about after the collapse of the USSR in the early nineties was a major factor in forcing the Castro regime to allow a religious and cultural liberalization that has continued until now. On the religious front, the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party that took place in 1991 removed restrictions on religious practitioners and declared the latter eligible for party membership and to hold official positions in the government. (It is interesting to note in this context that in my recent visit I saw half a dozen Cubans, mostly women, openly wearing Christian crosses on their necks, something that I had not seen in the year 2000, much less in 1979.)

A similar relaxation took place in the cultural front. The public harassment of homosexuals and other “deviants” significantly diminished, although there was, and continues to be a marked tendency for most homosexuals to “stay in the closet.” Since then, more critical views, although well short of political opposition, which would automatically be a one-way ticket to dissident status outside of the system's boundaries and all that implies, have begun to

be expressed in a number of small but sophisticated and well-written journals. Among these are *Temas*, *La Gaceta De Cuba* (organ of the UNEAC, or writers' and artists' union) and *Revolución y Cultura*. These journals have on several occasions included contributions on exile writers and academics and read very differently, in style and content, than the turgid, boring and dogmatic *Granma*. Plastic artists and musicians have also been given more leeway including much greater ease to travel abroad, a concession that writers and academics have also obtained. In fact, there are now many artists and professionals who are allowed to work and reside abroad and regularly return to visit their relatives on the island. Needless to add, the Cuban government gets a cut of the action through a substantial taxation of these activities abroad.

Given the unavoidable uncertainty of a transition that just started on July 31, 2006, it is no wonder that Cuba's intellectual and artistic worlds were alarmed with the startling events that took place at the beginning of January. Three former high cultural functionaries — Luis Pavón Tamayo, Armando Quesada and Jorge “Papito” Serguera — reappeared in several television programs and were presented as important contributors to Cuban culture. The three former functionaries had presided over the most culturally repressive period in the history of Cuban Communism, the so-called “Quinquenio Gris,” Gray Five Years period, from 1971 to 1976. The sense of alarm was strengthened by the fact that members of this group had, in the past, been closely associated on and off with Raúl Castro. For example, Luis Pavón Tamayo had worked directly under Raúl as the editor of *Verde Olivo*, the Army's official newspaper, before he became Cuba's cultural czar in the seventies. Writers and intellectuals were also worried about the coming elections in the UNEAC (National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba) and who would replace the current relatively liberal leadership that was stepping aside.¹²

A storm of protest ensued among intellectuals and artists and continued through the remainder of January, during the time when I had coincidentally arrived in Cuba. The protest was politically limited. It was mostly aimed at preventing a return to the darker and more repressive past, and not at abolishing censorship and expanding the concessions that had already been obtained from the state, much less to protest the repression of outright dissident artists and writers. But, the protest was, at least initially, truly spontaneous, a rarity in Castro's Cuba.

The artists and intellectuals relied on the email as the principal means of expressing and organizing the protest. (Computers are relatively scarce in Cuba, and people have access to them usually in the workplace, where access to Internet sites is supervised by the authorities and must be justified in terms of relevance to work duties. Email communication, particularly among people inside Cuba, is less supervised than access to Internet sites.¹³) The regular Party-controlled press essentially ignored what had taken place. A brief communiqué formulated the Party's response that essentially conceded that the appearance of the three former functionaries in television had been an error and tried to reassure the intellectuals and artists that no change in cultural policy was being contemplated. Abel Prieto, the minister of Culture, played a key role as a go between the party and the protesters who were represented, in this context, by the UNEAC. With the support and endorsement of the Party, a big, invitation-only meeting of over 400 people took place on January 30 at Casa de las Americas, one of the most important cultural institutions in Cuba. The meeting was addressed by Ambrosio Fornet, a leading Cuban intellectual associated with the current relatively liberal policies of the regime

Liberals claimed that Raúl had just done the dirty work at the behest of his older brother, although Raúl was in fact a very practical fellow.

who in the past has argued that the intellectual and cultural life of Cubans abroad had to be part and parcel of a single Cuban culture. His address was an account and reflection on the Quinquenio Gris — a term which he had originally coined — but with the clear implication that it stood in contrast with an obviously satisfactory present. It goes without saying that

Fornet did not address the key question of who gave the orders to the functionaries who presided over the Quinquenio Gris. His speech and the meeting where it took place was an effort, endorsed by

the party, to contain and bring the matter to a close. This is possibly why this important party-endorsed event was not even mentioned by *Granma*. Nevertheless, a few days later, on February 9, the poet César López, in his address to the inaugural crowd at the Havana Book Fair that included Raúl Castro, revindicated several deceased writers who had become prominent exile oppositionists such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Heberto Padilla, Reinaldo Arenas and Jesús Díaz. César López claimed that their work was an important component of Cuban national culture. Although *Granma* reported that López had spoken at the event, it omitted any reference to this most unusual content of his speech.

The emphasis that people such as Ambrosio Fornet and Cesar López have placed on incorporating exile writers and artists into the national canon poses some interesting questions. To the extent that raising these matters is intended as a blow against the harsh censorship that for many decades has prevented people from even being able to listen to the music of Celia Cruz on the radio, it is welcome news. Beyond that, there is a degree of ideological ambiguity and lack of clarity about the problem of the "divided Cuban family" that has long troubled many Cuban intellectuals, and Cubans

in general, both inside and outside the island. In so far as it constitutes an at least implicit demand for removing the travel barriers that have been imposed by both the Cuban and U.S. governments, it is again, good news. But something else is lurking in these discussions that goes beyond these incontrovertibly democratic demands. There might be a tinge of liberalism among some of these thinkers, in the sense that they regard that what is needed is to “split the difference” in order to have the capitalism of South Florida and the Communism of Havana converge with each other. Unfortunately, the regime’s censorship and controls have prevented a frank and open discussion of these critical matters. I should note that in my discussion I have described this intellectual and artistic milieu, as predominantly a liberal Communism loyal to the system. In reality, however, it is a more complicated environment that includes people to the right and left of that group. The liberal Communism that prevails in these circles in many ways provides a protective umbrella under which both conservative and revolutionary leftist opponents of the regime that have not become open and public dissidents can take cover and at least survive, if not prosper, politically. During my trip, I had the opportunity to talk with one of an informal group of young revolutionary Cuban intellectuals who function within the broad limits of this milieu¹⁴ and who have been influenced by such figures as Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and other leftist libertarian thinkers. This group is interested in what these major thinkers had to say about the relationship of equality, democracy and liberty to socialism. They are also concerned about how they can be politically active and relevant in a way that will help to empower and politicize people in what overwhelms the great majority of Cubans: the daily struggle to survive. It is revealing that this young revolutionary used the Marxist metaphor of the “Old Mole” to refer to their small group’s present role in Cuba.

Left pending is the question of why the

three former functionaries appeared on Cuban television one after the other within such a short period of time, particularly in the context of a political transition. This was a question I repeatedly raised with a number of people of varying persuasions and could not get a fully satisfactory answer. Responses ranged from its having been instigated by Raúl Castro as the prelude to a crackdown, to the notion that it had just been a coincidence. I heard a third interpretation, somewhere in the middle, which, regardless of its truth-value, was put forward by liberal Communist academics and intellectuals who personally did not know each other, and is thus sociologically revealing. According to this view, repressive elements in the media, formerly associated with Raúl Castro, saw the transition as the right moment to send a signal to the new top leader that they were ready, willing and available to go back to the old days the moment he gave the go ahead. This may be a reasonable and plausible hypothesis. The problem is that the liberals putting forward this interpretation also saw Raúl Castro as a man who was going to maintain and perhaps expand the existing liberalization, and, much more telling, that he was not, in any case, the repressive type he was reputed to be. These liberals claimed that Raúl had just done the dirty work at the behest of his older brother who did not want to be directly involved in those disagreeable tasks. In other words, Fidel Castro had forced him to behave like the “bad cop,” although Raúl was in fact a very practical fellow who would improve the economy of the country by introducing more rationality into the system and would also experiment with some additional economic reforms.

It may well be that there will be no more “crackdowns” under Raúl’s rule if for no other reason than from his standpoint as a “practical leader” fundamentally uninterested in those matters, he may see little danger in allowing intellectuals and artists some elbow room while they play in their “sandboxes.” From this per-

spective, what counts is what appears in the very strictly controlled mass circulation newspapers and television, and not in the little magazines and artistic exhibitions that relatively few Cubans ever see or hear about.

Be it as it may, even if the government succeeds in containing and bringing this protest to a close, the fact that artists and intellectuals “flexed their political muscles” independently of the control of the one-party state constitutes an important precedent and contribution to future democratic struggles to the island.¹⁵

Race and Marginality — The Sleeping Giants?

HAVING ARRIVED IN CUBA in the middle of the artists and intellectuals' protest against the possible return of the darkest days of the revolutionary period, I attended every intellectual and artistic event I heard about that was open to the public. My purpose was to hear what was said and discussed and also to look around to get a feeling of the various audiences involved. I was shocked although not surprised to see that the speakers and audiences were overwhelmingly White. No more than five percent of the people present in the various venues were Black or Mulatto (a term widely used in Cuba to describe people of visibly “mixed” White and Black descent). Interestingly, many of the darker Cubans who did attend these events were rather young; they might have been students or disciples of the White presenters.

Compared to my previous trip, the racial situation looked a bit more balanced in the various tourist-related locations that I visited. While the front-line personnel in those kinds of jobs was still predominantly White, there were many more Black Cubans than in the year 2000. This might be due to a change in the government's recruitment policies in response to widespread criticism. In particular, people broadly associated with foreign left and civil rights organizations strongly objected to the blatantly racist policy of excluding darker Cubans from front-

line jobs in the tourist industry under the claim that they lacked a “good appearance.”

Or perhaps the tourist industry is merely reflecting the major demographic changes that have been taking place in Cuba. Historically, the present Cuban government has not been quite open about the racial breakdown of the country, although it did acknowledge that the last 2002 census registered a 24.9 percent increase in the number of people classified as mixed race in comparison to the previous 1981 Census. According to the 1981 census, 66 percent of the Cuban population was White, 12 percent Black and 22 percent mixed-race. This in turn constituted a significant increase in the mixed-race population since the last pre-revolutionary census of 1953 where only 14.5 percent of the population was counted as mixed-race (the proportion of people officially counted as Blacks had not changed significantly from 1953 to 1981).¹⁶ The official figures for the post-revolutionary period almost certainly overestimate the size of the White population in Cuba. While Cuban fertility has been very low for quite some time (raising worries about overall dependency rates in the near future), emigration has continued at a steady clip. The United States has committed itself to accepting 20,000 Cuban emigrants a year (this figure does not include the rafters and others who manage to touch U.S. land and are thus eligible to apply for political asylum under the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act). Emigration to other countries is also taking place. On various occasions during my trip, I saw long lines at the Spanish Embassy located near the entrance to the port of Havana. Spain has extended immigration and citizenship rights to the numerous Cuban descendants of the more than a million Spaniards who emigrated to the island, one of its last major Western Hemisphere colonies, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As one can imagine, the great majority of the descendants of these emigrants are White, as are those going to the United States. In the case of the

U.S., a family tie to those who have already gone to that country is the easiest way of obtaining a visa in Havana, and since the Cuban community in the U.S. is overwhelmingly White, so will be the new emigrants. There are, in addition, educational and work criteria that facilitate entry into the U.S., requirements that are

The Cuban government has adhered to a “color-blind” policy that allowed Cuban Blacks and Mulattos to make some progress but fell short of what an “affirmative action” policy could have accomplished.

much more likely to be met by White Cubans.

The Cuban government has, ever since the early days of the revolution, adhered to a “color-blind” policy that allowed Cuban Blacks and Mulattos to make some progress but fell far short of what an “affirmative action” policy could have accomplished. Under the “color-blind” policy, Cuban style Jim Crow was abolished. While Cuban Jim Crow was historically never as important as in the U.S. prior to the revolution, darker Cubans were barred from most beaches and in many provincial towns were segregated from Whites in public parks. Darker skinned Cubans were also barred from many white-collar jobs, particularly in the private sector. Under the revolutionary “color-blind” policy, darker Cubans, who have been a disproportionately large part of the Cuban poor, have been able to benefit from measures designed to help the poor, particularly in terms of health and access to educational facilities. As a result there are, proportionately speaking, many more Blacks in positions of influence and power than there were before the revolution, but still substantially below any even rough correspondence

to their overall proportions in the population as a whole.¹⁷ Most of all, under the one-party system prevailing in Cuba, Blacks (along with any other groups such as workers, women, gays) are not allowed to independently organize to defend their interests. Notwithstanding this ban, there has been an amorphous but growing Black youth protest developing in Cuba today, centered on the issue of police brutality and often expressing itself through a Cuban version of hip-hop music. A friend also mentioned that protests had taken place in the ICRT (Cuban Institute for Radio and Television) objecting to the overwhelming dominance of White faces in Cuban television.

The issues of race and class have been more intermingled in Cuba than in the U.S.; consequently, much of White Cuban worries and hostility toward Black Cubans have been so mixed in with the issue of social marginality that it has been very hard to separate one from the other. This historical entanglement was exacerbated by the serious economic effects of the Special Period after the collapse of the USSR that led to the growth of a mass of disproportionately Black unemployed or underemployed people living in highly precarious conditions. So many of them migrated to overcrowded Havana that the government officially restricted movement into the city, although nobody seems to know with what actual practical effect. New terms began to be coined to refer to this increasingly visible marginalized group, like “Palestinos” in the case of the dark-skinned migrants from Oriente, the easternmost part of the island. The Cuban author Pedro Juan Gutiérrez made an international name for himself, with his “dirty trilogy” describing life among the marginalized people of Havana in all its gory and, especially sexual, detail. The sophisticated liberal Communist magazine *Temas* had nothing less than eleven social scientists and writers discuss the issue of marginality in one of its issues.¹⁸ The foreign press got into the act with, for example, the important Mexican newspa-

per *El Universal* having recently published an article about “El Fanguito” (“Little Mud”), one of the *favelas* surrounding Havana.¹⁹

In reaction to this phenomenon of marginalization, White Cubans — including those integrated in the ruling system — made many more hostile and open comments directed towards Black Cubans than I heard in 2000. A high housing official trained in the Soviet bloc brought up Oscar Lewis’ “culture of poverty” theory to explain what was to her the otherwise inexplicable behavior of many of the poor people who had moved into new housing she had helped to plan for. No sooner than having moved into their new quarters, the poor people had dismantled and disconnected the brand new fixtures in order to sell them in the black market. To her, this was irrational behavior that could only be explained on the basis of the values of a “culture of poverty” passed from generation to generation. Apparently, the official, manual-based “Marxism” that she learned in Cuba and in Eastern Europe had never exposed her to what Marx called “the same old shit,” referring to what serious scarcity could bring about in people’s behavior. Although it was unfortunate and even tragic that these new tenants would ruin the facilities that they had just been provided by the state, that was not irrational since they needed money, and hard currency, to feed and clothe themselves. In any case, it is not necessary to raise the issue of so-called values, even if we make the highly doubtful assumption that they have any independent explanatory power, to explain why these poor, marginalized people behaved the way they did after they were installed in new houses and apartments.

As it turns out, none other than Fidel Castro himself has recently endorsed and put to use the “culture of poverty” theory. In his 2005, and probably last major book-length interview, with Ignacio Ramonet, the Spanish-born editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, he alluded to it on a few occasions. Thus, Fidel

Castro told Ramonet that “at the beginning [of the Revolution] we eliminated some marginal neighborhoods. But already a culture of marginality had been created, that even if you make new houses for them, the phenomena that took place in those areas, prolong themselves. That is a culture that repeats itself, and then their children . . .” Elsewhere in the interview, Fidel Castro also asserted that “I remember that we discovered that there was a culture of rich people and a culture of poor people. That of the rich, very decent: I buy and I pay. That of poor people: how can I get this? How do I steal from rich people or from whomever? Many good, humble and patriotic families, told their son who works, for example, in the hotel industry: ‘Hey, take away a bedsheet, a pillow, bring me this, bring me that.’ Those attitudes are born from the culture of poverty, and when social changes are made to change all that, habits last a much longer time.”²⁰

In that interview, Fidel Castro added a twist to the “culture of poverty” theory that has a special resonance in Soviet-type societies such as Cuba with highly selective institutions such as the famous Lenin School outside of Havana. He indicated to Ramonet that the country’s selective and meritocratic education system had created a situation where the children of workers and of Afro-Cubans tended to perpetuate themselves in the lower levels of society. Castro explained that this had happened because “the parental level of schooling, even where there has been a Revolution, continues to have a tremendous influence in the eventual fate of the children. And you see that the children whose parents come from the humblest sectors, or with less knowledge, don’t get the necessary grades to enter the best schools. And that tends to perpetuate itself through the decades. And if you leave things as they are, you can predict the children of those people will never be directors of enterprises, managers, or will occupy important positions because today you cannot direct anything without a university education. What they

can expect, in the first place, is to go to prison.”²¹ According to Fidel Castro, the Cuban government had begun to tackle the problem in 2001. At that time, the government began to substantially expand access to higher education through a system of university extensions in a variety of locations such as municipalities, sugar mills, and even prisons. As Castro explained it, this expansion had, on the one hand, turned into state-supported university students people between seventeen to thirty years of age who had not finished their secondary education and who for a variety of causes were neither studying nor working when they were grafted into the program. On the other hand, the expansion made adjunct professors out of laid off personnel from the administrative staff of enterprises such as those in the sugar industry. According to Castro, there were 500,000 university students in Cuba in 2005 and over 90,000 [or approximately 20 percent of the total] had been recruited through these new means.²² What Castro left unsaid was the obvious fact that this was a program designed, in great part, to address the issue of unemployment. (I should mention that during my recent visit, one former academic explained that the principal reason for her recent retirement had been her objection to the low educational quality of the new program.)

Leaving aside the intrinsic merits or flaws of Fidel Castro's educational innovations, he assigns an excessive weight to education as an explanation for the fate of marginalized people in Cuba. This is Castro's way to change the subject from the state of the Cuban economy since the collapse of the USSR, and particularly the devastating and sharply inequitable effects of the establishment of a two-track economy of pesos on one hand and hard currency on the other. Fidel Castro's talk about educational inequalities, as real as they undoubtedly are, is a way of not talking about class and race as such or about the fundamental economic inequalities mentioned above, let alone the political inequalities of the highly hierarchical one-party

state. It remains to be seen what impact these changes in higher education will have first, on the educational system itself, and second, on the composition of the higher circles in Cuba. It will be important to find out the impact that a program not specifically and explicitly oriented to the elimination of racial exclusion may have on the latter.

We do not know, in the last analysis, what actual role race and marginality are likely to play in a Cuban transition. For one thing, racial consciousness in Cuba is not likely to develop along the lines it took in the United States, nor we do know at this time what political and organizational forms popular resistance to the likely state sponsored capitalist transition is going to take.

NOTES

1. I was unaware of these developments previous to my recent visit to Cuba. See “An Interview with Samuel Farber: Cuban Reality Beyond Fidel,” *Against the Current*, 126, January/February 2007, 14-15.
2. In an interview with the Argentinian newspaper *Clarín* (March 3, 2007), Alarcón declared that “the reforms of the *compañero* Deng Xiaoping in China are very positive for the Chinese people. But one has to understand those reforms within the context of the Chinese revolution.” In the same interview, Alarcón also stated that “the world has not changed in a restorationist sense that will bring back the Bolsheviks and the soviet model, nor will it be the bare capitalism of neoliberalism. It will be a diverse world. Why shouldn't we copy something from China or the United States? And why wouldn't the United States adopt some of the good things that Iran, Korea or Argentina may have? There has to be pluralism and to let everyone choose its own road. We will search for ours within our revolution.”
3. For a more elaborate analysis of this prospect see my article “Cuba's likely transition and its politics,” *International Socialist Review*, Issue 48, July-August 2006, 43-50. This article was published a little over a month before Fidel Castro left office on July 31, 2006.
4. Samuel Farber, “Going Home to Cuba,” *Critique* (Glasgow, Scotland), No. 13, 1981, 138-150, “A Look at Cuba Today,” *Changes*, July/August 1980, 13-21, and “Cuba Today & Prospects for Change,” *New Politics*, VIII, 1, Summer 2000, 164-174.
5. See “Busca Cuba frenar a pepenadores de basura,” *La Jornada* (Mexico City), March 26, 2007 reporting on an article that had appeared the same day in the

Cuban regional weekly *Tribuna de la Habana*.

6. Yailin Orta Rivera and Norge Martínez Montero, "La Vieja Gran Estafa," *Juventud Rebelde*, October 1, 2006.

7. María Julia Mayoral, "'Canibaleo' en las Torres," *Granma*, Lunes, 19 de Febrero del 2007, 4-5.

8. Tourism continued to diminish in the early months of 2007 with a decline of 7 percent in January and 13 percent in February compared to the same months in 2006. The high season for tourism in Cuba starts in January and ends in April. "Turismo en Cuba sigue declinando por precios y embargo," Reuters dispatch of March 14, 2007.

9. Andrea Rodríguez, "Expertos cubanos investigan sobre marginalidad," Associated Press dispatch, December 8, 2006.

10. Thus, for example, the wife of an old friend of mine had a botched colonoscopy that was administered by a technician, rather than by a qualified specialist, and without anesthesia, since there was none available.

11. Pedro Alvarez, the head of Alimport, Cuba's food import agency, has stated that if the U.S. blockade was lifted, bilateral trade in goods and services could total as much as \$21 billion in five years. Esteban Israel (Reuters), "Cuba says US rules limiting food trade," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2007.

12. At the time of this writing in late March of 2007, no changes in the leadership of UNEAC had yet taken place.

13. In fact, one of my friends in Havana asked me to locate some research sources on the Internet and to email him what I found there.

14. For an example of an article written from an leftist oppositionist perspective inside Cuba see Manuel Paz Ortega (pseudonym) "'The Battle of Ideas' and the Capitalist Transformation of the Cuban State," IV Online Magazine: IV386, February 2007.

15. In fact, the ferment among intellectuals and artists that began in January apparently still continued at the time of this writing as shown by a very critical article by the distinguished architect Mario Coyula that was being circulated in Cuba via email in March of this year. Under the title of "El Trinquenio Amargo y la Ciudad Distópica. Autopsia de una Utopía," Coyula argued that the darkest period of repression of the present regime lasted fifteen, and not five years, as Fornet claimed, and that its consequences have lasted until the present day. Coyula goes well beyond historical matters and presents a very critical perspective of things that need to be corrected in Cuba, with a special emphasis on urban issues.

16. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All. Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 308, and "Data from the 2002 Population and Housing Census are officially announced," *Granma Digital Internacional*, November 14, 2005.

17. A recent article by Henley C. Adams in the *Latin American Research Review* (February 2004) painstakingly documents the relatively small proportion of Blacks in the Political Bureau and Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, in the Council of Ministers, and among top officers of the Cuban Armed Forces.

18. "Controversia. Entendemos la marginalidad?" *Temas*, 27, Octubre-Diciembre 2001, 69-96.

19. César González-Calero, "Cuba: Memorias del Subdesarrollo," *El Universal*, Monday, November 20, 2006.

20. Ignacio Ramonet, *Fidel Castro. Biografía a Dos Voces*, Barcelona, Spain: Random House Mondadori, S.A., 2006, 211, 323-24. My translation.

21. Ramonet, 365. My translation.

22. Ramonet, 365-67.

Howard Zinn's Anti-War Speech

The transcript of Howard Zinn's March 27, 2007, anti-war speech made on the Boston Commons is available on *New Politics's* "Iraq Symposium" page at www.newpol.org.

The Return of Limits

ASHLEY DAWSON

“Nature has a habit of returning with a pitchfork” —FRANCIS BACON

NEAR THE BEGINNING of Voltaire's satirical classic *Candide*, the protagonist is told by his learned mentor Dr. Pangloss that he lives in the best of all possible worlds. No sooner has Candide absorbed this nugget of life-defining wisdom than he is booted out of the manor in which he has been living, conscripted into an army, and exposed to the clarifying rigors of a gore-filled modern battlefield. Throughout the rest of the novel, Voltaire subjects his naïve protagonist to a series of remorseless misadventures, designed one and all to demonstrate the foolhardiness of Panglossian optimism. The goal of Voltaire's bathetic epic was to skewer the pre-Enlightenment belief that god had ordained the world to remain as it was and that the attempts of human beings to ameliorate their situation were a form of blasphemy. *Candide* holds particular relevance today, for, notwithstanding the many tribulations human beings have experienced since it was written, we live today within a Panglossian frame of mind.

Nowhere is this truer than in the United States of America, the most wealthy and technologically advanced civilization in human history. Americans tend to believe that they live in the best of all possible worlds, regardless of mounting evidence to the contrary. Despite the impressive scientific acumen and the resulting material abundance that surrounds the residents of developed nations like the U.S., there is little

discussion of the crisis that looms in our collective future. Indeed, Americans are blinded by their affluence, by the significant freedoms that they enjoy, and by their sense that the U.S. is god's chosen country, a liberal democratic capitalist light to the nations. So fortunate do Americans feel that some of them have even come to believe that the pageant of human history has finally drawn to a close as a result of their immense accomplishments. Of course, this attitude is quite a convenient one for those who currently hold power, since the doctrine of optimism tends to discourage efforts to eradicate injustice and inequality, just as it did during Voltaire's time. Yet the U.S., and the rest of the planet with it, faces a dire future unless it awakens from its Panglossian trance.

U.S. armed forces are currently engaged in the first nakedly resource-driven conflict of the post-Cold War period. “Operation Iraqi Freedom” was, of course, initially touted as a battle to destroy Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and to rupture the links between his regime and Al Qaeda. As these bloody lies have been exposed, the war has been revealed ever more clearly as an attempt to secure control over the world's second largest oil reserves and, with it, to exert geo-political sway over a significant portion of the Middle East. Behind this agenda lies a more long-term strategy of gaining a choke hold on industrial development, ensuring that current economic rivals such as the European Union and Japan and developing powers such as China will be dependent on American largesse for the fuel that supplies their industrial production. As America loses its economic and political hegemony over the globe, in other words, its fundamental strategic objective will be to use its unrivalled military might

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to gain control of the world's key natural resources, particularly petroleum, in order to maintain its declining power.

Yet this military strategy, whose viability is already being put in question by a significant resistance movement in Iraq, was doomed at the outset. For America's obscenely bellicose policy, which was framed well before the horrifying attacks of 9/11/01, is based on the illusion that America can continue to consume the earth's resources at the current rate. This idea is, remarkably, seldom challenged in American public life today. But then the American way of life is predicated on deeply ingrained cultural presuppositions about eternal plenty. As a settler colonial society, early denizens of the United States formed a potent ideology based on the myth of limitless virgin territory ripe for exploitation. Although this territory was of course already occupied, the Native Americans had no genuine claim to the land on which they resided in the eyes of European settlers because they had done nothing to develop it. Freed from the weight of the feudal past and blessed with apparently limitless land to develop, American attitudes towards economy in the broadest sense have been framed not as the study of the optimum allocation of scarce resources but instead as a religion of ceaseless expansion.

The peak of the world's cheap supply of petroleum in the near future will shatter this perennial American attitude and, potentially, destroy the material underpinnings of American prosperity. Inevitable rises in the cost of crude as a result of increasing scarcity over the next couple of decades will rock the economy of the United States, triggering a wave of recessions that are likely to end in unrelenting depression. In addition, the end of cheap oil will reveal the ecologically unsustainable character of fundamental aspects of contemporary American culture such as suburban development and industrialized corporate agriculture. Not only will we find it difficult to get around quickly and to heat our homes in the winter, but the

abundant food supplies that Americans and other residents of industrialized nations have taken for granted over the last century are likely to dwindle. How quickly all of this will happen is of course subject to debate, yet there can be no denying the fact that the so-called American way of life and the cultural attitudes on which it is based are unsustainable in the long run. If Americans do not awaken from their Panglossian reverie, like *Candide* they will soon learn that they do not live in the best of all possible worlds.

The Return of Limits

BACK IN THE 1970s, the publication of *The Limits to Growth* spurred fears that excessive consumption of nonrenewable resources would inevitably trigger a global economic crisis. In response to such fears, President Jimmy Carter had solar panels placed on the roof of the White House and began telling Americans that they'd have to learn to consume less. As a result of conservation measures, increases in fuel efficiency, and strategic political amnesia, concerns about resource depletion largely faded during the subsequent decade, to be replaced by the more distant threat of fossil fuel-induced climate change. Now, however, the specter of petroleum depletion has been revived by the predictions of a group of geologists. After a thirty year long interlude during which consumption reached unprecedented heights in the U.S., we are once again confronted by the possibility of a catastrophic breakdown of industrial civilization.

The last wave of concern about oil depletion had very real material causes: in 1970, U.S. oil production — the primary factor that powered the inexorable rise of the U.S. to global hegemony during the 20th century — peaked. This is not to say that oil wells in the U.S. suddenly ran dry, but rather that they reached their maximum productive capacity. Consequently, after 1970, the U.S. produced increasingly smaller amounts of crude. The ravenous appe-

tite of its growth-oriented economy for fuel meant that the U.S. was forced to turn increasingly to imported sources of petroleum. In 1973,

American attitudes towards economy . . . a religion of ceaseless expansion

however, the members of the recently organized OPEC cartel established an oil embargo to punish the U.S. for its military and economic support of Israel. The resulting long lines at gas stations brought home the message of *The Limits to Growth* in the most tangible form.

The U.S. responded to this crisis in a variety of ways. Not only did Americans learn to drive smaller, less gas-guzzling cars, to insulate their houses better and buy more energy efficient appliances; in addition, the major oil companies began diversifying their sources of oil. OPEC and, more specifically, the Middle Eastern nations that sit on the world's greatest petroleum reserves, became less crucial suppliers for the U.S. as new fields were opened up in less politically volatile sites such as the North Sea and Alaska's North Slope. Despite the recession that was provoked by the Iranian revolution and the consequent withdrawal of that country's oil from the global market, Americans quickly forgot their fears of resource depletion. The nation welcomed Ronald Reagan's feel-good message that it was "morning in America" and chuckled as he had Carter's solar panels torn off the White House roof and junked. So filled with optimism were Americans that they embarked on a consumption spree over the following twenty years that had few historical precedents.

Of course, there were always wild-eyed prophets of doom warning of the dire consequences of such profligate lifestyles. But Ameri-

cans in general basically ignored such crazies. Every now and then news reports about the cataclysmic loss of biodiversity, rapid climate change, and the hole in the ozone layer would penetrate through this complacent cocoon. But political leaders in the U.S. continued to assure Americans that these problems could be dealt with through piecemeal, reformist solutions, measures that would have to be paid for, by and large, by other people. And by this point consumption had become a kind of profane religion, one of the sole satisfactions in an otherwise alarmingly vacuous moral universe. When the nations of the world tried to unite to address some of the more alarming threats to the planet's environment, American leaders insisted that the U.S. could not afford to sacrifice economic growth in the name of a luxury like environmental reform. What was more pressing, after all, putting food in your kids' stomachs or worrying about spotted owls? Americans spent two decades in this feel-good reverie, gradually returning to the worst excesses of the period before the scare of the 1970s by buying elephantine SUVs, constructing increasingly mammoth suburban homes, and bingeing on fast food engineered to choke them in their own fat. During these two decades, world population grew by 35 percent, energy use by 40 percent, and automobile production by 45 percent.

Of course, all of this was unsustainable, but who cares about the future when you live in a culture intent on seizing the day? Recently, however, reports have begun to appear in the margins of what passes for a public culture in the U.S. that suggest Americans are fast approaching a day of reckoning. Despite the complacency of policy makers, business leaders, and mainstream economists about energy supplies, predictions by a group of leading geologists suggest that we are quickly approaching the global peak in oil reserves. And they're not talking about decades in these predictions. While the exact date is a matter of extremely heated dispute, there is an emerging consensus among

geologists that the peak will occur close to 2010. Like the peak in U.S. reserves, this does not mean that wells in Saudi Arabia, Angola, and other oil-rich countries are nearly empty of oil. Instead, the bell curve pattern described by M. King Hubbert, who accurately predicted the U.S.'s own oil peak in 1970, indicates that we will soon be extracting the greatest amount of crude that will ever be extracted. From this point on, reserves will begin to diminish and the oil that remains in the ground will be both far more difficult to extract and of inferior quality to the oil already extracted. Since the American economy is based on constant expansion and because once predominantly pre-industrial countries like China and India are modernizing at a hectic tilt, the economics of supply and demand suggest that this increasingly scarce resource will very quickly become dramatically more expensive. It is not so much the age of oil that is over, then, but rather the era of cheap crude.

As Reagan's dismantling of the White House solar panels in the early 1980s suggests, most American political leaders took the oil crisis of the 1970s as a kind of false alarm. In retrospect it may come to seem a wake up call that was foolishly ignored. Because there have been no new discoveries of substantial oil fields since the 1960s, the U.S. and other countries that depend on oil imports will not be able to repeat their strategy following the 1970s oil crisis. We have developed all the remaining major oil fields and will have to subsist on those that already exist. By far the greatest remaining oil reserves of course lie in the Middle East, in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, to be specific. As other sources of oil become scarcer, the U.S. will become increasingly dependent on this politically volatile part of the world for the fuel that powers its economy. American political leaders are, of course, aware of this fact, and the current conflict in Iraq, despite the many bloody lies we have been fed as legitimization for the U.S. invasion, is clearly of a piece with longstanding

U.S. policy. Even Jimmy Carter, that paragon of conservation, threatened to use military force if anyone tried to monkey with U.S. access to oil reserves after the Iranian Revolution took out one of the most important client states in the region. Few Americans today remember that it was this Carter Doctrine, rather than the hollow rhetoric of democratization that we hear today, that was used to justify the first Gulf War after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Although the U.S. once felt itself impervious to the animosity generated by its many foreign interventions, the danger of blowback from such actions has become all too clear since 9/11.

While the current hawkish attitude among American policymakers may be relatively aberrant, there is clearly a new "great game" afoot in the Middle East and other oil-rich regions such as the Caspian basin that is unlikely to end even if regime change takes place at home. Moves by both the current administration and by the Clinton White House suggest that the U.S. is seeking to cement its geo-political hegemony in these areas through a combination of military aid, propping up surrogate rulers such as the Saudi royalty, and, in some cases, direct intervention. The problem with the increasingly naked assertion of unilateral U.S. control over the world's oil resources is that America is not, of course, the only economy dependent on cheap crude. Erstwhile allies such as the E.U. and Japan, as well as rising industrial competitors such as China and India, are just as if not more dependent on the region's resources. They are not likely to stand by idly while the U.S. establishes itself as the sole arbiter of global economic development. While none of these countries possesses the military muscle or even the political will to confront the U.S. on the battlefield, their combined economic might is a real threat, particularly as the U.S. is hobbled by classic imperial military over-extension. European analysts such as Emmanuel Todd have already seen which way the wind is blowing and are calling for strategic alliances

between the E.U. and Russia, whose oil reserves and nuclear arsenal will make it a serious counter-force in the future despite its currently wobbly economic condition. Similarly, European reluctance to join the “coalition of the willing” was surely dictated not simply by respect for international law but also by careful calculation concerning the dangers of alienating the Arab populations of the Middle East. Although geo-political crystal ball gazing is always tempting, it’s impossible to tell how these increasing global tensions will resolve themselves. One thing is clear, however: as oil reserves dwindle, we are going to witness the inexorable return of the great power politics that disfigured the first half of the twentieth century. The stakes this time, however, are infinitely higher.

Two Examples of the American Predicament

AS CHILLING AS THIS SCENARIO of a return to inter-imperial rivalry of the sort anatomized by Lenin nearly a century ago may be, the end of the era of cheap oil will have a far more immediate impact on the average American. Indeed, as the greatest power of the fossil fuel-based industrial age, the U.S. is singularly ill prepared for the challenges that resource depletion pose. Virtually every facet of American life will be thrown into crisis by the end of cheap oil. It is, ironically, the very strength of the U.S. in the world as it exists today that threatens to be its undoing in the world that is to come.

Take the American suburbs, for instance. Over half of the U.S. population currently lives in suburbs that remorselessly gobble up more and more rural land each year in a form of development that has come to be known as “sprawl.” The roots of the suburb lie deep in the American psyche, which, embodied in prominent figures from Thomas Jefferson to Henry Ford, has harbored perennial antipathy towards cities. After World War II, the U.S. used a significant percentage of its industrial wealth to realize the dreams of visionaries such as

Ebenezer Howard, who sought to create a harmonious blend of city and countryside while eliminating the less felicitous characteristics of each. Private developers and public agencies cooperated to build the suburbs and the massive system of highways and other infrastructure necessary to support them. Although the growth of suburbs during the postwar period offered a windfall for developers and automobile manufacturers, they largely failed to satisfy the craving for rural tranquility and community felt by those who snapped up suburban lots with the help of government mortgage programs. Basically functioning as dormitories for workers forced into arduous commutes by their distance from the workplace, suburbs offered urban propinquity without rural fellowship. Although suburbs have developed considerably since the 1950s and are now no longer as homogeneous and monotonous as they once were, the underlying ethos has changed little. Whether or not they know it, American suburbanites live in gigantic machines whose primary purpose is consumption. Typical suburbs therefore feature few facilities for socialization other than shopping malls. They are designed to facilitate movement by cars rather than by people, and as a result tend to isolate people in their individual homes. While suburbs obviously are not the sole cause of the fragmentation, alienation, and racial segregation of contemporary life in the U.S., they have been powerful catalysts for these trends in post-war American society.

The American suburb is also an ecologist’s nightmare. Although Western Europeans enjoy a similar standard of living to Americans today, they consume on average half the resources of the typical American as a result of the greater density of European cities. The concentrated cities of Europe are not only far more energy efficient, but also help facilitate vibrant social exchanges. Indeed, few American suburbs offer the pedestrian delights that cities like Amsterdam, Vienna, or Florence do. Even mak-

ing such a comparison seems absurd. The suburban streets of newly built U.S. cities like Phoenix are typically as empty as those of a ghost town, enlivened in the evenings solely by the eerie glow of cathode rays emerging from the otherwise inscrutable facades of isolated houses. The low density of suburban development in the U.S. also largely precludes public transportation, ensuring that the automobile is the primary if not the exclusive form of mobility available to the denizens of American suburbia. The impact of sprawl on those unable for reasons of age or income to drive are seldom discussed in public. Such low density also ensures that travel by car is necessary whenever any tasks outside the family domicile are at hand. The suburb is, in other words, tailored to stimulate the maximum amount of fossil fuel-based consumption possible, and its form reflects and magnifies the short sighted and wasteful attitudes that underlie the consumerist ethos. Although there has been recognition of the suburban cul-de-sac on an intellectual plane in the U.S., such recognition has not translated into significant transformation of the America landscape. Predicated on the eternal availability of cheap gas, suburbs will leave their affluent residents stranded in the wreckage of the American dream as gas shortages become increasingly serious a decade or so from now. Residents of remote, car-dependent, and generally working class regions of the country are already feeling the bite of higher gas prices, creating ghost towns out of once booming rural villages.

Suburban development typically displaces farmers, who give up their increasingly unprofitable family farms to the blandishments of real estate developers. This happens because the American agricultural system is just as unsus-

tainable as the suburbs that so frequently grow over farms like toxic kudzu. Despite the fact that U.S. farms produce more food than Americans are capable of eating, hunger has been spreading in the U.S. for the last quarter cen-

tury and farmers are being pushed off their land in increasing numbers. Behind this paradox lies the seldom-discussed trend towards monopoly in the U.S. agricultural sector. Despite the relatively late beginning of this trend, since the 1970s

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agribusiness corporations have been engaging in mergers and acquisitions with startling gusto. This process of consolidation has led to virtually complete vertical integration, meaning that large corporations such as Con Agra and Monsanto now are the sole suppliers of grain, fertilizer, pesticide and all other agricultural inputs, and also happen to be the lone buyers and processors of the agricultural goods the farmers grow. Since these big firms constantly seek to inflate the cost of inputs and depress the price paid for goods, farmers are caught on a treadmill. In order to survive financially, they must constantly seek to grow more crops, but the more crops they produce the more prices are depressed by a flooded market. This treadmill leads inexorably towards economies of scale in which only farmers who can produce massive amounts of food can break even. When they are not forced to sell their farms, American farmers become serfs working their own land for huge corporations who assume none of the risks of farming while reaping all of the profits.

American agriculture has become just as homogeneous and profit driven as the suburbs that all too often replace family farms. Diverse crops suited to local climates and tastes are driven out by single crops that can be grown on the massive scale necessary to turn a profit. The huge industrial operations that have replaced

family farms are often owned by absentee landlords — insurance companies that have inherited the land after farming families go belly up — who have little incentive to adopt the ethic of land stewardship that has traditionally defined farming. The recent introduction of genetically modified crops has only exacerbated the tendency towards monopoly in farming. Despite the promises of agribusiness companies that GM crops would save money and hence increase farmers' profits, they simply triggered another wave of overproduction that threatens to overwhelm the few remaining small independent farmers. Finally, just as the suburbs were produced by a lethal synergy between private developers and the public authorities who built vital infrastructure, so the trend towards monopoly in U.S. agriculture has been significantly hastened by pork-barrel government spending that disproportionately benefits large agribusiness interests.

Underlying the intensification of agricultural production over the last half century is one key shift: the replacement of human labor by fossil fuel-powered machines such as tractors, combines, and center-pivot irrigation systems. Every element of the American agricultural system is now dependent on fossil fuels, including the petroleum-derived pesticides and fertilizers that help make the specialized hybrid seeds developed over the last half-century viable. Although agricultural production around the world has kept up with population growth by exploiting fossil fuels, the “green revolution” has all sorts of costs that are seldom calculated when we buy our groceries. In fact, if U.S. agricultural production were to be measured based on the ratio between energy input and production, it would be one of the most *inefficient* forms of farming ever developed by human beings. Yet this is the least of the problems that beset modern agriculture. Contemporary farmers treat the soil as if it were nothing but an inert substrate designed by engineers to hold crops in place while they are doused with the chemicals nec-

essary to make them grow and to kill pests. The human beings who work this land and eat the crops grown there are of course adversely affected by the chemicals that saturate it. We pump water out of underground aquifers in order to irrigate these crops using diesel engines without thinking much about whether these reservoirs are being replenished. We eat hamburgers whose production requires mammoth quantities of grain, which in turn of course also consumes millions of gallons of petroleum. And, of course, we never, ever stop to think about what is likely to happen when there is no more gas for the tractors, no more petroleum from which to synthesize fertilizer, and no more electricity to power our irrigation systems.

The Myth of Progress

AMERICAN SUBURBANITES AND FARMERS are not the only ones who believe that more growth offers the solution to their problems. Progress is a fundamental dogma of modern, secular societies, one that is lodged particularly deeply in the collective psyche of Americans. As a settler society confronted by relatively sparse resistance from the indigenous peoples, Americans framed their national story as one of boundless space and endless expansion. It was, American leaders proclaimed, the nation's manifest destiny to spread from sea to shining sea. Moreover, Americans staked their claim to the land through its development from what appeared to European settler eyes to be barren wilderness into productive farmland. As John Locke formulated it, this transformation gave settlers license to dispossess the Native Americans and to enslave the pagans of Africa. The settlers' ideology of improvement held that people acquired a right to property through their capacity to give it value, which, for influential writers of the time like Locke, meant exchange value. Americans were thus enacting God's plan for the New World. When the frontier eventually closed, the U.S. transferred much of its sense of boundless expansion to technology. For ex-

ample, in an influential essay of 1910, Frederick Jackson Turner equated the pioneer ideals that had driven relentless westward expansion with the aims of the rapidly developing industrial techno-science of the period. This fervent belief in progress helps explain Americans' seemingly purblind creation of an industrial landscape through suburbanization and factory farming. Bigger cars outside bigger houses with bigger yards must be a sign that all is well in America and that god is smiling on this most fortunate of nations, right? New genetically engineered crops designed to withstand greater doses of pesticide and fertilizer will surely lead to greater yield that will help save the family farm, no?

Wrong. Growth disproportionately benefits those who control the institutions that help generate expansion, not those who do the actual work that creates such expansion. Take what has come to be known as globalization. This was a strategy for accumulation developed by U.S. elites in response to the economic crises of the 1970s. In tandem with the recession created by the OPEC oil embargo, the U.S. was confronted during this period with a glut of commodities as a result of competition from Germany and Japan, whose spectacular redevelopment after World War II now presented problems for a saturated world economy. American corporations and the government policy makers who supported them adopted two major strategies to reinvigorate growth in these apparently dire conditions: automation and outsourcing. While these tactics were very successful when measured in terms of the revival of America's Gross National Product, their effects have been nothing short of cataclysmic for the average American.

Capitalist production methods have always sought to transfer skills from workers and embed them in machines or mechanized processes such as the production line. The automation of the 1980s and 1990s has, however, been significantly different from previous waves of de-

skilling: for the first time, machines were taking over not simply the physical tasks performed by human bodies but also the tasks we perform with our minds. Driven by the need to make more profit, companies replaced expensive workers, whose unions demanded high wages and benefits for their members, with computerized robots on the assembly lines. Automation also decimated the managerial class, who were originally tasked with getting rid of superfluous workers, when it became possible to program many managers' supervisory functions into computers. The new watchwords of corporate management became leanness and meanness. Employees who were "downsized" were typically offered poorly paying jobs in the service sector. But even ill paying service work was not secure since corporations were also automating these jobs as quickly as possible in order to boost profits and resist hostile takeover bids. While the "new economy" did produce some fresh work, these opportunities were limited to a numerically small sector of elite knowledge workers such as computer programmers, scientists, and technicians. The ugly truth that few public figures are willing to acknowledge is that technological development has helped make permanent, structural unemployment a routine experience for more and more Americans. These losers of the casino economy also help drive down the wages of those who manage to hold on to their jobs by providing a pool of desperate supplicants who will accept any job on virtually any terms.

Automation has also helped facilitate outsourcing, the spinning off of basic steps in the production process to independent contractors. As a result of the amazing levels of long-distance communication and coordination created by new technology, companies like General Motors no longer need to produce spark plugs for their cars in one of their own factories. Instead, big corporations can use computer technology to predict exactly how many parts they will need at any particularly

moment and order those parts from factories located in parts of the world where labor is cheap and environmental regulation lax. As a result of these policies, commodity chains now extend across the planet. The clothes we buy in stores such as the Gap and Niketown are put together in distant locations such as China, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam by workers who toil in dismal conditions of which we are seldom aware. Politicians have recently begun to attack government policies that promote outsourcing, but the nationalistic rhetoric they use on such occasions obscures a fundamental fact: government-supported outsourcing has helped U.S. corporations rack up record profits over the last two decades. In addition, it has also provided a sea of extremely cheap commodities to American consumers. In the name of expanding production and consumption, the U.S. has transformed itself into a largely post-industrial society. Americans have been so busy getting and spending that there has been virtually no public discussion about the wisdom of this strategy.

The globalized consumer economy is riddled with contradictions. Automation has transformed the U.S. into the most unequal society among the developed industrial nations. While CEOs have made out like bandits in the new lean, mean economy, workers wages have remained stagnant. The American dream has only been kept afloat over the last twenty years by the full-scale entrance of women into the workforce. Despite dual-earner incomes, most American families have barely kept up with inflation. At the same time as average Americans struggle to keep their heads above water, peasants around the world are pushed off their land as international lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund force governments to withdraw subsidies for food production. While significant numbers of these peasants have found employment in the factories produced by outsourcing, they too are confronting the replacement of their labor by techno-

logical automation. Every year, approximately 40 million of these members of a global surplus humanity migrate to the squalid slums that surround the mega-cities of the South, hoping to survive off the detritus of unregulated industrial growth, casting about for some belief system that can explain their wretched lot, and nursing smoldering anger towards those they believe responsible for their fate.

There are relatively few signs of concern in America's public culture about these trends. Instead, our society blames the victims of this structural trend towards unemployment through the rhetoric of a "culture of poverty." The poor are responsible for their poverty, this ideology argues, because of their collapsing families and lack of a work ethic. New Deal social justice programs simply exacerbate these problems by making the poor dependent on the state. Consequently, eliminating such programs actually does the poor a favor: once they are stripped of the meager state charity that prevents them from starving, they will learn to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps or, as Malthus would have it, simply die and thereby ameliorate the problem of overpopulation. American policy makers seldom contemplate job creation initiatives because they operate on the condescending and paternalistic assumption that the problem is not a lack of decent jobs but rather the unsuitability of those who might fill the jobs that exist. Instead of confronting structural unemployment, the U.S. has dealt with the inevitable rise of crime that accompanies increasing inequality and unemployment by developing the world's largest prison-industrial complex. The U.S. response to "terrorism," which is actually asymmetrical violence carried out by those on the losing end of globalization, has been conditioned by this punitive mindset. Americans should have learned long ago that this approach is economically and socially dysfunctional. As Henry Ford, father of the Model T, recognized, workers who are not paid enough cannot afford to buy the goods they manufac-

ture. As the downward spiral of automation, unemployment, and declining wages gradually erodes American affluence, workers will eventually have to cut back their profligate, debt-driven spending. American hyper-consumerism is currently funded to a significant extent by countries like China and Japan, who must lend the U.S. billions of dollars every day in order to make up for our country's ballooning trade deficit. Every day, the U.S. loses more control of its own financial affairs as a greater percentage of the national debt is owned by foreigners.

Will countries like China and India eventually pull our financial plug as they develop their own markets and thereby become less dependent on consumers in the U.S.? Although it's impossible to say exactly how the endgame of U.S. global hegemony will play itself out, it is clear that the U.S. has chosen a path of economic growth that is completely unsustainable. Americans depend on foreign countries for everything from their underpants to their most sophisticated electronics. These supply lines are menaced by many factors, including trade conflicts, resource wars, terrorists, and, if analysts who cite Hubbert's curve are correct, escalating petroleum prices. What will happen to a corporation such as Walmart when oil prices rise to the point where it is no longer profitable to raise cotton in Egypt, ship it to China to be sewn into t-shirts, and then transport those t-shirts to the U.S. for sale at prices attractive to people working in the service industries? What will happen to McDonalds employees when their employer can no longer obtain cheap beef from Central America, when they can't afford the gas needed to commute to work, when the cost of corn skyrockets because farmers have to pass on the costs of powering their combines? In the name of growth, the U.S. has constructed an economy that not only generates spiraling inequality and social antagonism, but that is likely to prove ecological unsustainable in the very near future.

What Is to Be Done?

IF GROWTH IS THE MODERN SECULAR religion, then economists and politicians are its bishops and cardinals and the corporate media are its priests. The former pontificate ceaselessly about the benefits of ongoing expansion and the latter faithfully transmit these messages to the flock. Most of this priesthood of progress no

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doubt believes firmly in the dogma they spout. But it is also in their interest to do so since they are the ones who, along with corporate CEOs and wealthy stockholders, benefit from the ideology of growth. There are tremendous institutional and social disincentives for such people to challenge notions that growth will solve our problems. Even mainstream environmentalist organizations are caught up in the religion of expansion. Thus important groups like the Environmental Defense Fund typically prescribe steps like planting trees, recycling newspapers, and engaging in green consumerism to those who are concerned about the fate of the Earth. While there's nothing inherently wrong with such measures, they suggest that environmental reform is primarily the responsibility of the individual and that such reform can be accomplished within the framework of expanded consumption. They offer little sense that expanded production and consumption, particularly in the overdeveloped countries of the North, is at the heart of environmental crises. Indeed, by making the system more efficient, measures such as recycling and green consumerism can actually

intensify growth.

So the first step in preparing for a zero-growth civilization is to spread awareness of the contradictions discussed above. While there are already some groups attempting to create alternative ways of life based on awareness of resource depletion, they remain relatively marginal in hyper-consumerist societies like the U.S. A powerful resource in expanding awareness of the contradictions of growth beyond such marginal groups will be the global movement for peace and social justice. This movement had its greatest successes in demonstrating against undemocratic global institutions such as the World Trade Organization. Organizations like the WTO were perceived as engaging in a new round of enclosure of the global commons by ramming through privatization laws that stripped people around the world of access to land, drinking water, food, education, and other human rights. Consequently, activists in the peace and justice movement tend to be highly aware of the dramatic inequalities associated with globalization and have begun articulating alternatives to the status quo through the Social Forums held around the world over the last few years. Moreover, the creation of autonomous, decentered international media networks such as Indymedia has been a key component of movement activism, offering an important alternative to the increasingly monopolistic corporate media.

The attacks of 9/11/01 and the U.S. war on Iraq initially threw the peace and justice movement off balance by making it far harder to criticize government policies without being tarred as unpatriotic. But these events also offer the movement an important opportunity. The movement for justice and peace must engage not simply with transnational corporate power but with the state institutions whose support is vital to the mobility of capital and industry around the planet. Many involved with the movement are opposed to state power *per se*, and seek to construct vibrant locally based,

self-managed alternatives to the nation-state. These ideals seem very forward thinking in light of recent predictions concerning petroleum depletion; however they do run the risk of missing an important opportunity. As David Harvey has argued, not all contemporary struggles take place over enclosure of the global commons; more traditional conflict over the accumulation of capital remains important, particularly as increasing numbers of humanity lose their autonomous existence as subsistence farmers and join the industrial workforce. Consequently, the movement for justice and peace must advance a set of alternative prescriptions for a zero-growth world that place pressure on both state organizations and corporations to transform current practices radically. Failure to do so also threatens to limit the movement's appeal to an affluent minority fortunate enough to be able to ignore the state.

This alternative program should be framed as a new New Deal. Instead of developing the country's industrial infrastructure as FDR's original New Deal did, however, this alternative program should begin preparation for an economy based on minimal consumption of nonrenewable energy and natural resources. With the impending peak of oil production in mind, the U.S. should begin retrofitting its infrastructure in a number of specific ways. First of all, U.S. cities need to be redesigned to be more compact. This means that suburbs either need to be dismantled or revamped until they achieve a density that makes public transportation infrastructure viable. The tax system needs to be overhauled to reward public transportation and other forms of energy consumption and discourage state spending on highways and other infrastructure that promotes excessive fossil fuel use. The U.S. also needs to dismantle its more than 700 military bases around the world and use the capital that is thereby freed up to initiate a massive research and development program for renewable energy forms such as solar, wind, and geothermal power.

The unsustainable U.S. agricultural system also needs to be utterly transformed. America should strive to redesign its current national economy so that particular bio-regions become self-sufficient, with as little long-distance transportation of agricultural goods and commodities as necessary. Small organic farms have been shown to be just as productive as large industrial ones when energy input is measured, and obviously they don't pollute the earth the way fossil fuel-dependent agriculture does. Of course, such farming is far more labor intensive. But this and other aspects of the new New Deal could be implemented with an eye to rectifying the structural unemployment generated by technological development over the last century. We need to revive the slogan of the workers' movement for a shorter working day and for better work. We also need to engage in our spatial transmogrification of the U.S. with a clear eye to dismantling the endemic forms of spatial apartheid and gender inequality that have characterized our country throughout its history.

There are obviously many other changes that should be part of a set of basic proposals for a new New Deal. The point is that we need to begin drafting such proposals and advancing them and their underlying rationale with all possible speed. For if recent analysis of the

peak of petroleum is accurate, we have very little time left. Discussing the feasibility of constructing a renewable energy infrastructure, Robert Heinberg argues that the odds are long indeed. Simply to harvest a third of the nation's potential wind power, for example, we would have to deploy 20,000 turbines every year from now until 2030. Our odds, Heinberg says, do not look very good given the fact that we're going to have to make difficult choices about whether to use dwindling energy reserves to maintain essential current energy infrastructure or to construct new renewable generating supplies. His grimly realistic take is certainly sobering. Whether or not such dire predictions are fulfilled, Americans and other residents of industrialized nations are likely to continue acting as if they are the authors of their own future. Yet if we truly wish to play a conscious role in constructing a new society, we must awaken from the optimistic trance that currently enthalls us. If we do not, we are fated to allow the dissolution of our naïve belief in progress and unending growth to shape the new world that unfolds around us as we discover our proximity to the limits of growth.

Editors' note: A fully footnoted version will be found on our website, www.newpol.org

Who's Afraid of the ICC?

LAURIE CALHOUN

WAR VESTS THE POWER of the tyrant in a merely human being, the commander-in-chief, who is granted by one group of people the authority to determine the fate of others who never appointed him their leader. Yet the citizens of many ostensibly democratic nations continue to condone the recourse to military force in circumstances of conflict with outsiders, pointing to the lack of any international analogue to the criminal justice system found within democratic societies. As Michael Walzer puts it, "There is no global regime of justice, and one can't call such a regime into existence by wishing for it" (Walzer, Michael, "Michael Walzer Responds [to Laurie Calhoun]," *Dissent*, v. 48, no.1, winter, 2001, p.86).

The favor which the military continues to enjoy, despite the number of innocent people destroyed, perpetually reinforces the idea that it is perfectly permissible, even obligatory, to wreak destruction upon other societies when their leaders commit crimes. In addition, the ready availability of massive stockpiles of weapons may well impel leaders to opt hastily for the use of deadly force, without first having carefully considered the alternatives. The higher the frequency of recourse to deadly force, the more "normal" it seems to leaders and the populace alike, and the more likely it becomes that force will be deployed precipitously in the future.

Military supporters do not deny the importance of a formal justice system *within* civil society, but the very idea of an international criminal court has been ridiculed by some, though it would seem to provide the only rea-

sonable and morally defensible way in which to hold leaders accountable for their own actions, rather than punishing the people under their rule. Some have criticized the idea of an international criminal court (ICC) on the grounds that it would always and only effect *victor's justice* — a one-sided assessment of what has transpired. However, the outcome of the Nuremberg Trials, when some but not all of the defendants were convicted, and some but not all of those convicted received the stiffest possible sentence (the death penalty), illustrates that such tribunals are capable of drawing distinctions between disparate cases through attending to the particular circumstances regarding individual defendants' culpability (Rosenbaum, Alan S., *Prosecuting Nazi War Criminals*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

Those who maintain that only "mock justice" could be served by the ICC fail to appreciate that every criticism of the very possibility of an international justice system applies equally as well to any subset of the world, including every nation. There is no more reason for denying the very possibility of a global justice system than there is for denying the possibility of a domestic justice system — each sphere reaches its outer limit at some point, beyond which there is no further arbiter available. Both are based on the same fundamental principles of democracy: there are (at least) two sides to every story, and all views must be aired and available evidence assessed by a jury of peers in order for a sound judgment to be made. Just as checks and balances are implemented within civil society to minimize the commission of injustices by institutions ostensibly concerned with justice, so, too, could and should such measures be built into the structure of any global justice system.

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Ironically, those who thus reject the ICC, supporting instead the use of military force in dealing with criminal regimes, promote precisely the notion of “victor’s justice” about which critics of international tribunals have expressed concern. For judgments are certainly made by those who wage war: most obviously, that the leaders of the nation being attacked are guilty of wrongdoing. War is the sentence handed down by self-appointed judges who have themselves convicted enemy leaders of crimes. In other words, war represents the quintessential form of “victor’s justice” whenever those who initially passed judgment finally prevail.

To support the ratification of an international court is not to claim that it would be perfect — if infallibility were required within civil society, then we would have no domes-

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tic justice systems either. Military supporters who put forth such arguments apparently fail to remember that mistakes have been and continue to be made through the deployment of the weapons of mass destruction used in modern war. But the types and magnitudes of mistakes made by a court could never, even in principle, attain the level of atrocity inherent in what has become the practice of war, which virtually guarantees the slaughter of entirely innocent people.* Given that those who oppose the ICC do, nonetheless, uphold the validity of domestic justice systems, and some among them go so far as to carve the world into Manichean categories of good and evil, one must delve some-

what deeper in order to ascertain the true grounds for their apparently dichotomous views regarding the possibility of erecting a fair system in the two cases.

A STANDARD COMPLAINT among “just war” advocates who cynically reject the ICC is that justice would and could not be served by such an institution. Consider Jean Bethke Elshtain’s articulation of this concern:

“Independent of the enforcing powers of individual states, however, does anyone seriously believe that the ICC will hold terrorists accountable for their deeds? And if it somehow

manages to do so, would states thus become exempt from accountability for their collaboration in sustaining and supporting terrorism — as did the Taliban with Al Qaeda? No court can

haul an entire state into the docket, even though it may be ultimately responsible for the ‘crimes’ committed. In sum, relying on international courts to make a just response to attacks like those of September 11 lets those who are responsible off the hook almost by definition.” (Elshtain, Jean Bethke, *Just War Against Terror: the Burden of American Power in a Violent World*. N.Y.: Basic Books, 2003, p.165).

The most obvious problem with Elshtain’s rejection of the ICC is that a state is not an agent. Individual leaders and government administrators are the parties responsible for the crimes committed in the name of the state. Such critics of the ICC consistently fail to recognize (or acknowledge) that *most* of the people punished through recourse to war are not those responsible for the crimes supposedly being redressed. The sentiment driving the pro-war position is that “Something must be done!” but is it really better to kill innocent people than to risk the possibility that the criminals may walk free? This risk certainly is assumed within civil society, where criminal suspects are regarded as

*Capital punishment has been outlawed in all but two ostensibly civilized Western democratic nations: the United States and Japan. Because the European Union rejects capital punishment, innocent people would probably not be vulnerable to the possibility of erroneous execution by such an international tribunal. The European Union’s statement regarding capital punishment is online at: www.eurunion.org/legislat/DeathPenalty/deathpenhome.htm.

innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. But military supporters reject this principle beyond the bounds of civil society, in effect claiming not only that criminal leaders are guilty until proven innocent but, far worse, that innocent people may be killed in their stead. For, in reality, what usually happens through the recourse to war is that scores of innocent people are killed *and* the criminals go effectively unpunished. (Was that not precisely the outcome of the 1991 Gulf War?) In the spirit of Elshtain, Michael Walzer has derided what he calls the “Dial 911 response to 9/11” (Walzer, Michael, *Arguing About War*. New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2004, p. xiv). However, the 2001 war on Afghanistan did not lead to the apprehension of Osama bin Laden, the party ultimately responsible for the 9/11 attacks, but instead executed thousands of innocent people. Was that supposed to be justice?

To prevent or impede the establishment of an international court is not to prevent or impede judgments from being made. Rather, it is to concentrate the authority to judge, restricting it to a small group of militarily powerful elites. It is, in other words, to support a tyrannical regime. The benefit of an effective international justice system would be that the authority to render what amount to death sentences upon human beings (through the waging of a war) would not be entirely and only vested in the fallible leaders of the nation(s) which just happen(s) to be the most militarily powerful at the moment. In addition, if the criminal prosecution of a leader were possible, then war against his nation could not be coherently claimed to be a last resort until after a trial had taken place. It is therefore entirely to be expected that the leaders most apt to wage wars in the modern world will always be those least likely ever to accept the jurisdiction of an international tribunal. So, for example, in May 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush withdrew the United States from participation in the ICC, raising questions in skeptics' minds regarding

his use of the rhetoric of justice and morality in rationalizing his wars. The administration's rejection of the ICC was claimed in the September 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSSUSA) to be grounded in a concern that it might be used unfairly to indict and punish people who have acted on behalf of the United States:

We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept. We will work together with other nations to avoid complications in our military operations and cooperation, through such mechanisms as multilateral and bilateral agreements that will protect U.S. nationals from the ICC. We will implement fully the American Service members Protection Act, whose provisions are intended to ensure and enhance the protection of U.S. personnel and officials. (*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September, 2002, p.31). Available online at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf.

The U.S. position leaves open the possibility of military trials for crimes such as were committed at My Lai in Vietnam or at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, but whenever military personnel commit crimes it is *never* in their official capacity as U.S. soldiers — a court-martial is, by definition, of a solitary soldier who has acted out of order. In other words, the NSSUSA presumes that it is impossible, even in principle, for leaders of the United States to wage criminal wars. While this has been precisely the perspective held by military dictators throughout history, it has now emerged in what is claimed to be a democratic society. One of the primary purposes of an international criminal court is to make it possible for the world community to assess claims on the part of belligerent leaders to have waged “just wars.” From the perspective of those who considered the 2003 invasion of Iraq a criminal

act, in flagrant violation of the 1945 *Charter of the United Nations*, the United States' antecedent withdrawal from the ICC made strategic sense: U.S. President Bush wished above all to protect himself from indictment for war crimes.

In attempting to reconcile some U.S. military supporters' rhetoric of justice, on the one hand, with their refusal to support the ICC, on the other, one need look no further than the fact that the sole military and economic superpower has an enormous strategic advantage in any military conflict, the outcome of which is always determined by the logic of "might makes right." An international court, in contrast, would not favor any particular nation or regime in virtue of its sheer might. Instead, such a court, comprising representatives of a variety of nations, would be the analogue to the court system within civil society, for evidence would be assessed by a group of variously situated parties. In other words, the very fact that a court offers the possibility of a relatively objective (or, at any rate, the closest mere mortals can come to objective, i.e., *intersubjective*) assessment of the situation, rather than favoring the strongest in a conflict, would seem to be the best explanation for the overt disdain by the U.S. administration for the ICC. But such grounds for rejecting the authority of an international court, while strategically comprehensible, are morally suspect.

Although critics of the ICC regard war as a reasonable means of contending with criminal regimes, in fact, the moral framework serving as the basis for the justice system within civil society, according to which moral persons are free and rational agents responsible for their own actions, plays no role whatsoever in the military paradigm. Rather, the commander-in-chief is granted the prerogative of deciding when to sacrifice other people's lives for a cause that he regards as just. The perspectives of the innocent civilians slaughtered and the soldiers who kill them are systematically ignored by those who wage and support war. Enemy leaders are reified in the sense that they are denounced as

both categorically evil and "beyond the reach of reason" (though these would appear to be mutually exclusive), but their troops — whether conscripted through force or coerced through deception — are made the direct targets of homicide. Accordingly, even if one accepts the judgment of enemy leaders as evil and guilty of crimes, the fact is that, through war, punishments are not meted out in any way that might be said to cohere with the moral properties of the persons involved.

RACIST, SEXIST, AND CLASSIST conceptions of moral personhood have been rejected by modern Western societies through their abolition of slavery and the extension of civil rights to all men and women regardless of race, income, or social status. Yet in international conflicts said to necessitate the recourse to war, the people involved are divided into six distinct moral classes: the leaders, the soldiers, and the civilian population of the nation waging war; and the leaders, the soldiers, and the civilian population of the nation against which war is waged. Although, from a moral perspective, all of these people should be considered equal, the pro-military view implicitly imposes a strict hierarchy of value upon them, as becomes clear through reflection upon the immunities enjoyed by some of these groups, and the heightened risks incurred by others.

In the case of the nation waging war, the leaders, not the soldiers or the populace, are said to possess the right to decide who may live and who should die. At the same time, soldiers are said to possess the right to effect those deaths when called upon to do so. But the price that soldiers pay for their legal immunity in killing the enemy directly and civilians collaterally is more than outweighed by the fact that they forsake the right to their own lives in agreeing to fight. (Soldiers pay other prices as well, as evidenced by the preponderance of psychiatric casualties among twentieth- and twenty-first-century veterans.) The civilians who pay for the war

may enjoy a degree of protection from the death and destruction wrought, provided that the war is fought somewhere else far away. When the war is brought back to the country itself — whether by the military of another nation or through terrorist attacks in retaliation against

When outsiders deploy military force the people most at risk are those least responsible for the conflict.

military action — then civilians themselves are at a considerably greater risk of death than are the leaders whose actions provoked retaliation.

Strikingly, the anti-democratic, classist hierarchy that governs and is reflected within military institutions is transferred through modern military practice to the people of the enemy nation as well, for in virtue of their position of political power within their own society, enemy leaders enjoy a type of immunity from physical harm not shared by their less powerful compatriots during wartime. Accordingly, when outsiders opt to deploy military force, rather than addressing the government's crimes through systems of international justice, the people most at risk are those least responsible for the conflict, for the leaders themselves have access to the highest level of protection available to anyone in the land. Paradoxically, in the aftermath of the wars waged ostensibly in response to their crimes, men such as Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein continued to benefit from a level of security not shared by their compatriots (to say nothing of the casualties of those wars). While claimed nominally to be protected by “non-combatant immunity,” in reality, the civilians of the nation under attack possess the least *de facto* value of anyone in this entire hierarchy, for they are subject to arbitrary destruction and have no legal claim whatsoever, ac-

cording to either regime, when they are harmed or their family members are killed. At the end of the conflict, the winner decrees whether the civilians destroyed were murder victims or “collateral damage,” but these people, most of whom never chose war, have been stripped of their lives along with their moral personhood.

How can it be that the leader of an enemy nation possesses a greater immunity from harm through war for his own crimes than do the children of his land? Yet this absurd implication is but one among a set of glaring signs that moral rhetoric merely *masquerades* as moral justification in modern war. Because one's place of birth is irrelevant to one's moral worth, civilians under enemy rule should have just as much of a right to life as do the civilians of the attacking nation. Justice furthermore implies that people should be treated according to their own actions, not those of people over whom they have no control. What transpires during wartime, however, is that an outside leader, whom the victims themselves never selected, wages war against their own leader's regime (which in some cases was not even installed by the victims themselves — this is always true of children, but also the populace more generally, in cases of dictatorial rule) and, in doing so, subjects the innocent inhabitants of the land to the risk of maiming and death (not to mention the psychological effects of terror). Yet through the rejection of the authority of a court to indict and prosecute international terrorists and criminal leaders, the application of military force comes to be regarded as the only remaining option. Multiplying tyrannies and adding execution to oppression, the leaders who wage war against nations led by despots end by destroying some of the people who have already been living under dictatorial rule. While some would claim that the execution of Saddam Hussein made possible by the 2003 invasion constituted an act of justice, nothing could be more obvious than that each and every innocent Iraqi annihilated along the way was the victim of a gross and irrevoc-

cable *injustice*.

Any lingering doubts regarding the question whether *might* makes *right* should have been put to rest by the case of the Nazis, who throughout their reign of power made plenty of erroneous moral judgments about the need to execute human beings. Furthermore, contrary to military supporters' apparent beliefs, the fact that the United States succeeded in defeating the Nazis implies nothing whatsoever about the justice of any subsequent U.S. intervention. As though the Vietnam debacle were not alone sufficient to refute the often polyannaish outlook of those patriots who wave the U.S. flag in support of intervention any- and everywhere, the glaringly long list of bungled missions orchestrated by the United States in Latin America (many of which undermined nascent democracies) would seem to demonstrate that nothing whatsoever follows from World War II. But why, after all, should it? The leaders who intervene today are not those who intervened in World War II. The circumstances are entirely different, and the outcomes have been in every case devastating to the people of the lands invaded.*

U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH'S invasion of Iraq in 2003 was but the most extreme expression of a quasi-medieval hierarchical political structure embodied in the prevailing pro-military view, according to which some people may sacrifice other people for whatever reasons happen to have been offered by the leader waging war. The list of reasons in this case was quite long: WMDs, links to Al Qaeda, the im-

portance of world democratization, the fact that Saddam Hussein had committed criminal acts in the past, that he had tried on many occasions to deceive, etc. The most compelling of these reasons all proved to be false, but any one of them would have sufficed, given the formidable authority vested in the merely mortal being who ordered the invasion of Iraq.

It is precisely because the received view is so widely embraced that a leader can succeed in galvanizing his troops to kill for virtually any reason at all, for the commander-in-chief's opinion is automatically taken to refute every possible argument against war. The burden of proof is regarded as simple to defuse, and *a fortiori* since for every war there is some group of "experts" standing by ready and willing to vociferously support a belligerent leader's call to arms. In contrast, the war opponent's position is taken to be proven wrong by most any rationale mouthed by the very commander-in-chief promoting war, a point most graphically illustrated in October 2002 by the willingness of the U.S. Congress to grant George W. Bush *carte blanche* to take the nation to war on his own terms, according to his own time table, and for his own idiosyncratic reasons (whatever they may have been).

An international justice system run by the representatives of mutually self-interested nations could and should be used to render judgments upon the criminal leaders whose actions are alleged to warrant recourse to war. Because criminal leaders typically have loyal followings, the only way to change the view of those people is to provide them with evidence of the crimes in question. While some would deny the feasibility of delivering such information to people under criminal rule, it is obviously just as possible to drop leaflets as it is to drop cluster bombs. The difference is that leaflets do not destroy innocent people while leaving criminal leaders and/or their loyalists in power. Tragically, one of the most likely effects of assaulting the inhabitants of a country led by a criminal is

*I am accepting for the sake of this argument that most people do regard World War II as "The Good War". The burning to death of entirely innocent people in both Germany and Japan and the razing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the use of atomic bombs make it difficult if not impossible to regard the allies as champions of morality. But my point here is that, even if one were to accept that World War II was a "good war", nothing would follow from that premise for any subsequent war. Yet allied leaders, both political and military, have capitalized upon the widely held belief that "We are good" because we defeated the Nazis.

to provide them with what they interpret as confirmation of the story currently being promulgated by the reigning regime.

In such cases, even those who dissent from the government against which war is being waged may arrive at the conclusion that the “benefactors” are no better than the oppressors (Cerovic, Stanko, *Dans les Griffes des Humanistes*, tr. Mireille Robin, Paris: Editions Climats, 2001). Consider, for example, the longer range effects of the 1999 NATO bombing of Kosovo, ostensibly in response to the crimes of Slobodan Milosevic. Years later, in the democratic elections of December 2003, the Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj (on trial at the Hague for war crimes) received the largest number of votes of any other party, including those that supported the NATO ousting of Milosevic,* a fairly unequivocal expression of protest against the brutal and widespread destruction of the property and people of Kosovo caused by NATO during the 1999 bombing campaign. Needless to say, similar dynamics have been amply displayed in Iraq, where the ever-proliferating insurgency can no longer be blamed on Saddam Hussein.

In 1990, in direct violation of international law as stated in the 1945 *Charter of the United Nations*, Saddam Hussein ordered Iraqi troops to invade Kuwait, and they did. (Approximately 500 people were killed.) In 2003, in direct violation of international law as stated in the 1945 *Charter of the United Nations*, George W. Bush ordered U.S. troops to invade Iraq, and they did. (To date, multiple thousands of people have been killed.) If it is wrong for the leaders of nations to invade sovereign nations during peacetime, then it matters not who the leader in question happens to be. It is true that of all nations in existence today, only the United States can violate international law without risk of military reprisal, for it possesses an army and

arsenal orders of magnitude more powerful than those of any other nation, with an annual budget exceeding that of the next fifteen nations combined. However, the last thing that the leaders of less militarily powerful democracies should do is silently capitulate to the despotic self-appointment by the leader of any nation of himself as the final arbiter in matters of justice. To do so is to make precisely the same mistake as that of those who collaborated with Hitler on pragmatic grounds.

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*The Serbian Radical Party prevailed again in the January 2007 elections.

The Socialist Challenge for British Labour Leadership

Interview with John McDonnell MP

CONDUCTED BY CHRIS FORD AND DAVID BRODER

John McDonnell is a Member of Parliament for West London; he is the Chair of the *Socialist Campaign Group* of MPs. Within the Labour Party he is the Chair of the *Labour Representation Committee*, a rank-and-file organization for Labour Party supporters and trade unionists. He is also a leading member of a number of groups within Parliament representing trade unions and has been a consistent campaigner against the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

WHAT LED TO YOUR DECISION to stand for the Labour leadership?

Tony Blair announced that he was going before the last election, and he did that as a defensive reaction to what was going on in the opinion polls and on the doorstep where people were anxious that he should leave and depart the scene. When he announced that he was going, the view was then discussed as to whether the left should run a candidate, and there was extensive discussion for about a year about whether or not, in principle, we should run a candidate, on what programme, and who the individual should be. I initially argued that we shouldn't run a candidate, since I'm a slow bureaucratic plodder, working on the basis that

we were building up the left in the unions, building up the left in Parliament, building up the left in the CLPs,* and we may not have had the strength or ability to mount an adequate challenge and unify everyone around that challenge. After lots of consultative meetings with CLPs, meetings with trade unions, open trade union conferences, it was clear that people were up for it, that everyone thought it would be a missed opportunity if we didn't. In addition to that, it was clear that the organization was on the ground, the broad left in the unions and the CLPs, what's left of the Constituency Labour Parties.* So, having been one of the people who was opposed to the idea, having strong reservations, I became convinced. People were coming to meetings and demanding it, people getting up at union conferences and calling for a candidacy, so there was popular demand. Then, we went back into consultative discussions about whether we should in principle, the whole point was making sure the rank and file were up for it, and, having made the principal decision that we should, we went to the Labour Representation Committee conference to seek their endorsement, got unanimous support, and then, a more detailed discussion about the policy.

There's not been a challenge for 18 years. Since the last challenge, a lot has changed. Will it be a viable challenge — and why now?

I think it's a difficult assessment, but if you look at what's happening numerically within the Constituency Labour Parties, they're significantly reduced in terms of what they were be-

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*Constituency Labour Parties are general committees organized along the lines of the electoral boundaries for Parliamentary elections.

fore. A much smaller membership will be voting in the Constituency Labour Parties. A smaller membership — but still we're finding there, all the time now, a left which has been dormant but which can easily be re-engaged. That's the first thing. The second thing is that there's a left which has left the Labour Party but which as a result of this campaign wants to rejoin and get stuck in again. So I think there's a viable challenge in the CLPs and a sufficient level of support to turn this into a realistic campaign that could possibly win. Within the trade unions there's a completely different story altogether. There's been a resurgence of the left in the last five years to the point that you can't stand for any electoral position within a trade union without being on the left . . . that includes some elements who pretend they're on the left, but they need our support. The broad lefts within each of the major unions — the affiliated unions — I think they'll give us a strong organizational base. Where we're weak is in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), obviously, which is completely understandable, since New Labour's approach to democracy is to squeeze out any opportunity for left-wingers to get back into Parliament. The process has been geared to parachute New Labour apparatchiks in, and any opponents of the government have been squeezed out. What we've not been able to do is replenish the left within the PLP. I think we've got the vote in the CLPs, we've got the vote in the trade unions — overwhelmingly — as demonstrated by the Trade Union Congress, where we got 59 percent of the support. The problem is in the PLP: the issue is whether we can get the 44 nominations to be on the ballot paper. Don't know. I just don't know, to be honest. The *Guardian* says we've got 41, The *Times* says 42 — I don't know where they get those figures from. I'm not even putting people in a corner to ask them whether they're going to nominate at this stage. I don't want that to happen — if people want to volunteer themselves at this stage, that's fine. But

I don't want to pressure anyone until we've got the campaign built up in the constituencies and the trade unions to demonstrate that we've got viable support. At that point in time, when we've demonstrated that we've got realistic support on the ballot, at that point I think we'll get the nominations together. Calculations at the moment — it could be anything between 5 and 10 short. That's my view, but we'll see.

I have seen it said that your campaign is a doomed effort to recreate Bennism.¹ How would you respond to that?

The most important thing about this campaign is that we're trying to stimulate a debate about what socialism means in Britain and globally in the 21st century. It's the old Gramsci thing — we're trying to win the battle of ideas on the basis of a really thorough, democratic debate. So we're trying to win hegemony within both the party and the country. And then, use that battle of ideas to make sure we can reflect that in the battle of organization within the movement overall. If you look at what we're doing, New Labour has run into the sand. All those people, even in government, are down a small rump, a bunker mentality around Blair and some around Brown. The Labour Party is facing the prospect of loss of office, as a result of the failure of its policies, and people are desperate for an alternative. We're providing that alternative — both within the movement, and, I think, in the country. If we can build up sufficient elements engaged in the debate, that will draw us in the support we need electorally. Traditional route — win the argument, on the basis of organization. That's what we're doing.

As we know, the Labour Party grew out of the trade unions, of a desire for working-class representation. In the early days, it comprised all the socialist tendencies. Some of the leaders were just looking for a respectable place, representatives of labour alongside capital in Parliament. Some genuinely believed in social change. An important contribution to the shape of the party was the left, like the Social Demo-

cratic Federation, which left after a year, the Socialist Labour Party, the syndicalists, the shop stewards, the ILP, the CP, they all took a quite sectarian attitude towards the Labour Party and that led to a lot of self-isolation. Is that still a relevant issue? Let's just go back to the historical comparisons.

New Labour's approach to democracy is to squeeze out any opportunity for left-wingers to get back into Parliament.

The Labour Party always described themselves as a broad church. That's true. A huge coalition — not just in terms of the formation of the membership of the party, but also its support base. The formation of the Labour Party ranged from socialists who had an analysis of the world as we understand it, right the way across from Marxists to social reformers, an element of trade unionists with straightforward, economic demands, and ranged to a liberal end partly of social reformers but also those disaffected with the Liberal Party itself. A broad coalition. The key issue for us as socialists is that it's a terrain of struggle. The point of the Labour Party is that it provides us with a forum within which we can engage in that debate and win our argument. At different times in our history, different elements within that coalition have dominated, and at different times the policies have represented the balance of forces within that struggle. I think we've had a long period where it's not just that the right wing have dominated, but that elements which are not normally part of that coalition have entered the party. You would never see New Labour as part of the historic coalition of Labour, they've gone much beyond that. The policies they've implemented have been downright Thatcherite. What we've seen for a long time is not just right-wing domination of the Labour Party, but the domination

of parties extraneous to that coalition.

WHAT THIS CAMPAIGN IS ALL ABOUT is winning back the Labour Party to a position where avowed socialists can say that this is where we want the party to go, and win the argument within that coalition. I think we're doing it, I actually think we're doing it. The problem is that we don't have a democratic structure within the party and government that means there's no accountability of the leadership and the implementers of policy to those who want to change policy. That's what the challenge is as well, so there isn't just a debate around what policy there is, around what the analysis of the world should be, but also about how we restore democracy. We can win the battle of ideas, but if we don't win the battle of organization we don't win the battle of restoring democracy to the party, and we'd be in the same position we are now, in opposition within our own party.

Revulsion to New Labour, since 1996, has led a lot of the left to coalesce into electoral blocs against it. How would you assess that?

I don't want to get into a sectarian discussion — I think people want to make their own minds up about what route to pursue. I'm coming at it in terms of the sheer pragmatism of politics in this country, with a first-past-the-post electoral system. On a sheer pragmatic basis, I can't see how you can assess that outside the party you'd be more effective. The reason I'm in the Labour Party is, as I say, it's a terrain of struggle, within which we can win battles and eventually win power with the ideas that we convince people of. Outside the Labour Party, the problem is that there's no form under the first-past-the-post system that you'd be able to win sufficient support to win positions where you could form a government or have any real pressure on government. And the second thing is that it's a matter of cutting yourself off from the party which still has — and you can call it false con-

sciousness or whatever — the affinity and loyalty of the large section of the labour movement and of the working class. So for those very pragmatic reasons, I think it's important to work within the Labour Party.

You've referred to Blair and Brown coming to power as a "coup" — elements from outside the traditional party coming in and taking over. But given, for example in last week's vote on an inquiry into the war, how little of the traditional social democrat or "old Labour" forces in the party opposes itself to the New Labour project, how can it meaningfully be described as a coup?

The issue around accountability and democracy is one of the issues here. That vote was very specific. But if you take the vote on the war itself, which I think is much more reflective of the balance of forces within the party, and the vote on the inquiry last week with only 12 votes [i.e., rebel Labour MPs] and also the vote on extradition,² that demonstrates just how isolated the PLP was from not just the Labour Party and the trade union movement generally, but also isolated from the community. And I think that if you had a re-run of the vote on the war — even then, no matter how isolated they were, there was a significant number of Labour MPs who voted on the basis of their own beliefs and their consciences, as it was such an important issue. So, the issue for me really is how has that PLP, which holds some of the strings of power, become so isolated from the movement overall? You see at Labour Party conference, if you look at the resolutions that go through, both in terms of the trade union votes but also in terms of CLPs, which are largely manipulated by full time officials, majority after majority votes a position on a whole range of issues which the government completely rejects, which are a challenge to New Labour. The issue is how has the PLP become cut off in the same way that any degenerate party does? In the early 20th century someone analyzed the degenerate political party — the Liberal Party if you like — and it's

the same as Trotsky's analysis of the bureaucracy. The leadership replaces the central committee, the central committee replaces the membership. And that's what's happened here. That coup has allowed the ruthless use of patronage to isolate the PLP from any democracy or accountability within the party itself. So where do we win from here? We argue around the policies, we build majority support for those policies, we lead members and others through that process of having won that argument on policies; what is it stopping us from implementing them in government? The breakdown of accountability and democracy. And it isn't just the PLP cut off from the party — it's also Cabinet meetings, according to David Blunkett, for 20 minutes on a Thursday, with no political debate whatsoever and a leadership that's isolated itself in two ministries — in the Prime Minister's office and in the Treasury, completely cut off from any accountability. The reason I refer to the coup is that when John Smith took over as leader after Kinnock, there was a different atmosphere within the party. Smith came from the right-wing tradition within the party but he was Labour. You couldn't contest that he was a traditional Labour, social-democratic politician. And he was committed to the elements of the Labour Party which represent the "broad church" coalition. When Jack Straw came up with the abolition of Clause Four³ at the time, he rejected it completely. The second thing he did was to get rid of Mandelson⁴ immediately — all the spin doctors went. Thirdly, he appointed a cabinet which was largely reflective of the left, right and centre of the Labour Party. Good example: John McAllion was a front bench spokesperson for the Labour front bench at that time, now with the Scottish Socialist Party. So you'd had that "broad church" coalition re-established under John Smith's leadership. The coup that occurred when he died not only changed the political direction of the party, but the accountability. The ruthless use of patronage within the PLP, the closing down

of democratic structures like Cabinet, the closing down of Conference as a sovereign decision-making body, cut off the connection of accountability between the PLP and the Labour Party overall.

In terms of your campaign as it stands, a big argument has been made that the main task of socialists should be that the unions should assert themselves in the Labour Party, and that they're the ones who can make significant change in terms of your campaign. Do you agree with that, and would you agree that fighting just through the unions could be a self-defeating approach in itself?

There's a line of argument that whenever the Labour Party finds itself in trouble the unions always come forward to save it. Now, to some extent, if you look back through the history of the Labour Party, it's true in organizational terms, and in some instances it's true in political terms as well, because they reassert the strength of feeling of working-class people about certain policies which Labour governments are pursuing, and there's a need for change. So there's an element of that, in that the unions could play an important role in this campaign. There's no doubt about it. Electorally, they play a significant role. But what I'm concerned about is that we don't want to be in a situation where we mobilize support in the unions through some bureaucratic maneuver. People say "what general secretaries are supporting you?" I don't want to be seen as the candidate of the general secretaries of the unions, because we don't want to get back into the old situation of smoke-filled rooms where maneuvers are taken to impose a candidate on their unions which the rank-and-file have no support for or have no idea what their policies are, and then manipulate the situation where we have someone elected on the backs of general secretary votes, mobilization of bloc votes, where there's no political understanding of what we're about. That's why my campaign is a rank-and-file campaign. It's basically saying; here's the

policy discussions we need to have in the rank-and-file, we need to arrive at a common set of conclusions about the way forward in each of these policy areas, and also an overall analysis about the way the world works and how we want to change it. And on that basis we win with a politically conscious campaign, not by way of bureaucratic maneuver. The unions are quite important in playing that role. That will be translated electorally into individual rank-and-file members' votes. In their section of the electoral college, every union is required by rule to ballot their members — one person one vote — and distribute their votes accordingly. If we can win the argument, if we can mobilize the support, we don't need bureaucratic maneuvers either to get onto the ballot paper or to win the election itself. It's the same with the CLPs, actually. The other thing that's coming out of this campaign: it isn't just about the leadership; it's also about, if there are issues that affect us across the board in terms of individual unions — we can link up with communities as well - it's about mounting those individual campaigns. So the campaign around the Trade Union Freedom Bill⁵ is absolutely critical for us, the campaign against privatization is absolutely critical. We've been discussing for about 18 months — and not done much about it until now — this general concept of quality of life at work, which links employment rights with health and safety and control of working hours, maternity leave and parental care and anti-discrimination legislation — how does that affect the workplace? What's coming out of the campaign is that we're discussing the issues and how we resolve them, and how we work together in individual unions, across unions and in the political movement more widely. Completely non-sectarian approach. That's the exciting thing about the campaign — people's ideas are being challenged in practice.

In regard to your own ideas. I've often heard you refer to Marx, and despite all the talk about the

“end of history” there seems to be a lot more respect for him now. What do you think of Marx, and do you think he’s made a positive contribution to 21st century socialism?

What’s interesting is that all the people who talked about the end of history and the irrelevance of Marxism and all the rest of it ten years ago are now eating their hats, eating their words, aren’t they? There is not a single political or economic debate that’s

gone on over the last century and a half without some reference to Marx. In the real world — full stop. I meet with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Institute of Directors and all the rest on different issues, and they refer to capitalism and how it works straightforwardly. Look at the American debates — they openly refer to their economic system as “capitalist.” They’re not ashamed of it. And they use the same sort of analysis of the development of profit etc. as Marx did himself. There’s an understanding of the realities of what the world is. The significance of Marx is that he has the most detailed and comprehensive understanding and analysis of what capitalism is and how it works that we’ve had. So, whether you’re an opponent or a supporter of Marx, you have to refer to him — that’s the first thing. The second thing is that as a mobilizing understanding of the world, it’s absolutely key to what’s happened. It isn’t just Marx; it’s how Marxism has been developed on. I’ll just give the example of rehabilitation of terms. We now have again the use of the word “imperialism” in many textbooks. And it isn’t just coming from the left; it’s general — David Harvey’s piece on the new era of imperialism, for example, an academic from New York. Rehabilitating the term because it matches the reality of what’s going on. Globalization is the highest stage of imperialism so far. I think what’s interesting about

How has that Parliamentary Labour Party become so isolated from the movement overall?

this whole period now is that we can remove the prejudices from the debate that have gone on from the 80s into the 90s about what Marxism means, and get back to the discussion about what Marx’s analysis was and how it’s been interpreted by individual political theorists and

activists — and arrive at a situation where we have a more thorough understanding of the world. There’s example after example. Marx did a hell of a lot of work in terms of the role of fi-

nance capital. That’s been developed upon by various others, and also issues around economic cycles. That’s highly relevant today — we now live in a country where finance capital absolutely dominates the whole system, to the point of squeezing manufacturing out. So we now have an economy which is dominated by finance and the service sector. If you look at the work that Marx and others did around the analysis of finance capital, and how it drives out other forms of investment to maximize exploitation — that’s a thorough understanding of 21st century capitalism.

In terms of yourself, who have been most significant in terms of your thinking?

If we go through it . . . the fundamental Marxist writers of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, basically. In terms of the ability to mobilize spontaneously, Rosa Luxemburg. Interestingly enough, for a long time I was quite interested by the writers of the New Left who appeared in the 60s. Williams, Miliband, Griffiths, E.P. Thompson and others, particularly around the historical issues themselves. That New Left that blossomed in the 60s were quite influential upon my generation, and they introduced us to Gramsci. If you remember, Gramsci wasn’t even published in this country until that point in time. So that was important — and Perry Anderson too. Unfortunately, they exhausted themselves

doing theoretical work without actually encouraging what they'd introduced us to, which was praxis — the mixture of theory and practice on the ground. I also think, in practical terms, some of them linked to the Stalinist parties etc., and others were taken down political paths which became either fairly sectarian, or irrelevant. When they took us down the cul-de-sac of Althusser, who was a complete headcase as far as I'm concerned, it drove us all into the sand. That sort of influence. Miliband for example was a brilliant writer, a brilliant Marxist writer in this country, but in terms of pragmatic practical politics was a complete disaster. At that point in time when he was encouraging people to leave the Labour Party, that was probably one of the strongest times for the left in dominating the Labour Party, through the late 70s and early 80s.

You mentioned globalization as being a "highest stage." Do you think we are in a world-historic crisis, a turning point?

There are some issues which clearly demonstrate that we're at a turning point, because, if not, we're in an endgame in terms of climate change. We've now discovered that in addition to the economic issues there's an environmental limit that we can't go beyond. I don't want to be cataclysmic about it, but there is a clear issue there that transforms the nature of the debate as well. But I think globalization is a form of imperialism that is more intense than anything that we've experienced in the past. The issue for us is how do we debate 21st century socialism in a way that enables us to take account of what's happened by way of both the reach of capital exploitation, and also the intensity of capital exploitation. For the last century we've been arguing that we're an international movement to work together in solidarity across the world to tackle these issues and combat imperialism, but realistically, there's been virtually no movement in terms of seriously combatting it. Socialist Internationals have collapsed, usually in

the face of war, and people have retreated into, or retrenched into, "socialism in one country" type arguments. The challenge for us in this debate is first of all, yes, look at the policies we need on the ground here, but how do we work in international solidarity and what structures of world governance do we need to tackle globalization and imperialism in this form. We haven't even scratched the surface in that debate yet. Is it about a new socialist International? Is it about something built on the World Social Forum debates? Is it looking at restructuring world governance around the UN or whatever, that we can then use as a terrain of struggle to win our ideas?

Do you think the basis exists for a new International?

I think we've got to start raising the question now. I really do. And I think the question's been put on the agenda as a result of the intensification of the war, the renewal of nuclear weapons and proliferation — but in addition to that, these climactic issues which will result in tensions across the world if we don't deal with them.

In terms of the 21st century vision and a historic crisis, I would ask about the 20th, because a common answer was state control — whether it be the USSR, the National Coal Board etc. — simply taking over private capitalism. What lessons do you think we can learn from this for the 21st century?

Well, the interesting thing with these arguments around public ownership is that we've been floating ideas for quite a while about how we create new forms of public ownership which make sure that there's democratic accountability to those who provide the services, those who receive them and the community in general. But we've not produced definitive models industry-by-industry. We're going into the same phase as we did after the second world war where Manny Shinwell, who was the minister responsible, came into office after the election of a Labour government with a reasonable major-

ity, and he asked for the files on nationalization, what the policies and proposals were, and there was nothing there. They were empty. One of the things that I've been trying to highlight to people in this campaign is that if we want to go into power, we've got to get serious about detailed policy analysis and implementation. I'll just give you one small example. Two years ago Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) commissioned Catalyst, a think tank, at our request to undertake a study about privatization but then we asked them to move it on and asked them to look at how we pull back from the government's privatization policies in a way that can bring rail back into public ownership and what structures of governance will be effective in providing the service itself. A very simple plan was put forward, which I wholeheartedly endorsed, which was for rail to be brought back into public ownership and the cheapest and most effective way to do that is to make sure that as the contracts with private companies run out, we systematically roll them back into the public sector. The reason for doing that is not just that it's the easiest one financially and legally, but also in managerial terms it's more effective as well. In the same way, when this government brought back Connex and South East Trains into the public sector, it managed it very well, and it was done in a way with which management could cope over a period of time. One of the arguments is; how do we introduce that in government after the election of a Labour leader such as myself? Well, we'll simply announce the policy itself, as the contracts run out we'll bring them back into public ownership, and in the breathing space between now and the contracts running out, we would establish the structures, which are thoroughly democratic, based upon worker representatives, passenger representatives, and local community representatives actually engaged in the management of their train service in their region. Perfectly appropriate and effective, I think. That would give us the basis, just in that industry, of

showing a practical example of socialism in practice. We should have that debate in the health service, in local government, in every other public service. On the other issues I've been trying to raise, New Labour has gone along

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the line that it's a non-interventionist government in the economy overall. Therefore they always use this slogan "we're not ever going back to backing winners," i.e. going into certain sectors of industry and taking them over or trying to in some way take a section of a sector and dominate it, and try to make a base upon which you improve service delivery or pricing overall. The argument that we've been putting forward is that the "backing winners" approach of past Labour governments has always been on the basis of bailing out failures, never about "backing winners." There's never been a long term strategy for investment in manufacturing or any service business in this country. One of the proposals that we're trying to get a discussion going around is "Let's look at certain sectors of our industrial sector or our financial sector, and see whether or not we should be pursuing now a policy of public ownership of part of that sector so it does set the trend in terms of pricing, long-term research and development investment, and the conditions and treatment of the workers themselves." If we did that and then looked at the same sort of structure, which would be around management of the company by the workers themselves, by the people who consume the service, and by directly elected representatives of local communities. I think what we'd be able to do; I'll use the example of the pharmaceutical industry: we would break the exploitation of the National Health Service

(NHS) by the pharmaceutical industry and we'd set a standard for the rest of the industry both in terms of pricing and conditions. We need to be having those practical debates. I come at it as a civil servant, I come at it as a bureaucrat, we've got to get down to the situation where we know, exactly, all the answers to sector-by-sector engagement.

In the late 70s and early 80s, the left opposition in the Labour Party developed the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES). Do you think there's a need for that type of alternative?

I was an opponent of the AES, because I didn't see it doing anything by way of challenging the power bases or offering public ownership on the basis of democratic control of either any sector of industry, or the economy overall. And I didn't see it as the basis of promoting public services, which not only allow us to deliver services efficiently, effectively, and accountably, but also give us more managerial control of the economy overall. So I wasn't an advocate, although in comparison with what New Labour's done it was almost revolutionary. What we need to do, I think, is to stake the claim for the management and planning of our economy, and get that almost philosophical debate going again. Is planning and co-operation and management of the economy in the interests of the community overall, better than the free market liberalism and neocon, dog-eat-dog capitalism that we're experiencing at the moment? I think there'd be majority support in the country for a more managed and rational approach. We've won that argument since the Enlightenment, but we've never been able to implement it. The way you win the argument to people out in the community overall is that you relate the very practical and pragmatic effects of what that would have on their lives in particular. So working in whatever sector you're working in, how would this work within your particular sector, and how efficient and effective would it be for the country overall but also for you and your family. I think

that's the level of detail we've got to back down to.

In your criticism of the AES, you point to some difficulties which exist, especially under globalization. It does restrict maneuverability, the political system. Under a Labour government with you at the head of it — if they let you — how would you tackle these restrictions imposed on political maneuverability?

The issue for us is posed in Miliband's book *Socialism and the Sceptical Age*, which I thought was quite interesting. It was his last book, which he did on his deathbed, and signed off the proofs when he was actually in hospital itself. I thought it was an interesting book because he's an academic trying to come to terms with the use of power. He approached it in a very academic way, but I think he caught the drift of what we should do as socialists in government. And his argument, straightforwardly, is that there are three phases when you're in government. First is making sure that you secure your position tactically by ensuring very, very quickly that you demonstrate to those people who elected you that you're delivering the goods. So one of the first things that we'd do would be to increase pensions and restore the link with earnings. We'd go out to public sector workers and stop the wage freeze implemented by Gordon Brown. We'd stop privatization. There are tactical issues there where you immediately build up support among the supporters who have elected you. It's important that we recognize that what you want to do is maintain popular support throughout. The second phase then is to make sure that you're putting in place medium term strategic plans that move the debate forward; that enables you then to bring forward further longer term ambitions. So I think there's always those three phases that face any socialist government or any government that wants change. What I'm campaigning on now is almost schematic: very straightforward alternatives that we can provide very, very quickly. So, like on peace

and war, we'd withdraw from Iraq. On peace and war, no investment in Trident, an end to nuclear weapons. Something very symbolic yet straightforward and relatively easy to do. On poverty, increase pensions, restore the link with earnings, increase child benefit, significantly increase the minimum wage —

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all pragmatic and popular policies. That enables us then to enter into the wider debate about why we're not in control of our lives. Why do communities not have democratic control over their existence? Why are people working all the hours God sends just to survive? Why can't they afford a roof over their heads? It enables us to have the debate about who runs our economy, and whether it's run in a way which meets the needs of the community and the population as a whole, and whether it's fair and democratic. I think that opens up then about how we plan our economy. As soon as we start building up that popular support for measures which enable us to plan our economy, and that includes elements of control over finance — of course there'll be a backlash against us - but if we've built up that popular support, we'll sustain it. Remember, even the most hardened capitalist in this country is here because he wants to make a profit . . .

But I'll give you an example, the Bullock report in the late 70s, which called for a degree of workers' participation. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI — equal to NAM in the U.S.) immediately threatened a strike of capital.

Of course they did. And wouldn't have done, and wouldn't have delivered. Because the thing about capital is that it's not coherent. There's no such thing as solidarity among capital. They compete against each other for who'll make the most profit. So therefore they'll undercut one

another — you just have to face them out, basically. The issue for us though is that there is a changed world, and there's no such thing as "socialism in one country" and never was. The issue is how do we build our international links, to ensure mutual protection and promotion of socialism to our mutual advantage.

In terms of Europe, it seems difficult to roll the process back. What's your attitude? Much of the labour movement is quite "Little England."

Some elements are "Little England." But the key issue for us will be the stability pact, whether we can invest in public services and go beyond the limits that Gordon Brown's set us, as a result of Europe, on borrowing in relation to GDP, and the level of public investment we'd undertake. I think there are countries across Europe in exactly the same position as us; most of them disregard the stability pact and Brown's used that as an excuse. So I think we have allies in Europe that we can link up with to transform the European Union into something which we've been arguing for for a long period of time, people looking for a progressive social model in Europe rather than the one we have at the moment. That does raise issues around international alliances, international solidarity, and eventually, the reform of European institutions. How do we achieve some form of solidarity that doesn't emerge in a super-state emerging, based upon capital? A challenging debate. I think as soon as we plant that flag of debate in the ground, others will rally to it.

The other big international issue is Afghanistan, Iraq and the U.S. In the light of the elections, what do you think our perspective should be?

The statement I've made all the way along is that we should immediately break the military

alliance with Bush, withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, link up with progressives in the U.S. as best we can. We recognize that the Democrats have been relatively weak on this in the run-up to the elections, but if we provide the opportunity of a discussion on this issue, I think we'll find more of a consensus than people realize. Whatever the Democrats are, they'll be hunting votes for the presidential elections. I think that the votes they'll want are those people who've made up their minds that the U.S. ought to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan. Let's exploit it for all it's worth. My own view, a stage-by-stage process, is withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, link up with partners in Europe and the U.S. as best we can, about international peace conferences and how we go forward, seek to resolve the Middle East issue as a result of that, but also move onto this discussion about world governance and nuclear proliferation.

There's been a disagreement in the anti-war movement on Iraq in terms of the Third Camp. Whether you side with the "resistance," or whether you support the workers', women's and secular movements. What's your view on this?

We offer solidarity to all those developing civil society structures such as trade unions and political parties that have association and affinity with our own ideals. That's based upon democracy, and I think also we must make it very clear that what we're looking for is a secular society, and we'll be arguing for — it might sound fanciful at the moment — a socialist society. What do we mean by that? One of the strongest arguments is the control by the people themselves of the enormous wealth that Iraq has and its oil.

The emergence of American hegemony has deflected attention a lot, in some ways, from other powers, for example China and Russia. What attitude do you think should be taken towards China, with no free labour movement and a growing economy?

It's always been the same. Just because China has now gone through this process of

marketization, development down the capitalist path or whatever, our criticisms are exactly the same as before. A lack of socialist practice, in terms of democratic accountability and engagement, abuse of human rights, and now, abuse of human rights as a result of the intensity of exploitation of their own people. The criticisms stand up, whether they call themselves socialist or now capitalist, that exploitation and abuse still goes on. So I think it's critical. Our role is to be critical of those people who we feel abuse other people, wherever they are.

What do you think of Russia's role in the east?

The concern that I've got is that we now have a system . . . the criticisms we had of the Soviet Union were completely correct, their abuse of their own people, the lack of democratic rights, the undermining of democracy itself, the horrendous human suffering that went on. The criticisms were right. That's moved on now to a form of gangsterism which again we have to be critical of. These aren't people we want to be allying ourselves to. Of course, on a whole range of international issues what we'll want to do is try and engage them in the same way we have in the past, to try and persuade them otherwise.

It's possible you might not win. Do you think there's a possibility through this campaign of a recomposition of the left? Secondly, even if you don't win, we'll be facing the serious possibility of a Tory victory in an election. What attitude do you think socialists should take through this campaign and after into a general election?

I don't envisage, or even contemplate, or discuss at any time, the prospect of not winning. I don't go into any campaign without seeking to win. The issue is, win or lose, what do we do? If we win, the importance of having a conscious, effectively mobilized left, across the board, is absolutely critical for two reasons. One is to hold to account those people who we elect into position. Absolutely critical. The second role is to support those who we elect into position. If we have a socialist Prime Minister seeking to

implement socialist policies in this country, we need to make sure that we hold that person to account so that we all have a say in the implementation of those policies, and we never lose control of the trajectory and the process that we're going through. But, if we do have a Prime Minister of that sort, we will come under immediate attack from the City of London, international finance capital, and other countries in terms of political isolation. What we will then need to do as a movement is mobilize popular support behind that government. So, whatever, win or lose, the most important thing is to build up the base of the party in a completely non-sectarian way, offering them structures of engagement, in the way we're running this campaign. All our meetings are open. People can come along to them and express their views. We're encouraging them to mobilize support and work with others on individual campaigns if they can't support this one. I think that's the way to go forward. If out of this campaign we can get that, I think we'll have moved forward dramatically, and we could have a significant breakthrough on what our shared understanding of the world is, and where we go forward in the detail of policy making as well.

NOTES

1. Following the election of Thatcher in 1979 there emerged a strong left current inside the Labour Party around Tony Benn which culminated in his contest for deputy leader in 1981 which Benn came close to winning. Bennism remained a force of the left in the Party throughout the 1980's.
2. On October 23, 2006 there was debate in Parliament on the question of Extradition by Order of the USA of British citizens. There was a demand that if a person is to be extradited to a foreign country a British court must have the right to decide whether it is in the interests of justice that it goes ahead. New Labour opposed this safeguard and their stance was seen as a concession to Bush.
3. Clause 4 is a famous section of the Labour Party constitution adopted in 1918: "*To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production.*" Blair, after becoming Leader of the Labour Party, abolished Clause 4 at a Special Conference in 1995. Whilst the new Clause described Labour for the first time as "democratic socialist party" it actually reflected a defeat of the left and proclaimed the centrality of the free market.
4. Peter Mandelson, nicknamed "The Prince of Darkness," was for a long time a cabinet minister in Blair's government. He started his political life by leaving the Labour Party to join the Young Communist League due to his hatred of Trotskyists. He continued his Stalinist education in the forging of "New Labour" along with Blair and wrote the *Blair Revolution*. He was considered the "spin doctor" and was widely hated as a political manipulator.
5. The Trade Union Freedom Bill is an attempt to restore the rights of trades unions which were removed by the Thatcher governments. These include the right to take solidarity strike action and protection of workers from dismissal during a strike. The 2005 Trades Union Congress decided to campaign for a Trade Union Freedom and it currently has the support of 50 Members of Parliament.

The Religious Right and the Perversion of Biblical Ethics Unclear on the Concept

RUSSELL PREGEANT

NAME THE ISSUE — economic justice, U.S. foreign policy, stem cell research, abortion, the teaching of evolution, gay marriage/civil unions, sex education — and it's a sure bet that you will find the legions of the religious right out in full force citing the Bible in support of their reactionary positions. A person whose knowledge of the biblical tradition was limited to the interpretations fostered by these zealous apostles would surely get the impression that the main concerns of the scriptural texts were such matters as the condemnation of homosexual sex, the promotion of laissez-faire capitalism, the treatment of fetuses as persons, and the promulgation of specific doctrines regarding the precise way in which the earth came into being and human life appeared. Name the issue, also, and you will have to admit that the zealots have had remarkable success in promoting their agenda. In the course of the last few decades we have witnessed the incremental dismantling of *Roe v. Wade*, constitutional amendments in several states banning gay marriage, severe restrictions on stem cell research, and widespread progress in passing off creationism as a valid scientific theory. Symptomatic of the absurdity of the current situation is the directive of the Bush administration forbidding employees in the National Park Service to mention the age of the geological formations to visitors for fear of offending fundamentalists. And

although the relentless erosion of the structures promoting social welfare cannot be laid entirely at the feet of the religious right, this movement has surely been an important factor in the process.

So where does this leave those who are committed to progressive versions of biblical faith? There was a time, early in my theological training, when I thought that fundamentalism — although not a viable option for a thinking person in the modern world — was an accurate representation of original Christianity. However, the more I learned about the history of the church, the nature and origin of the biblical writings, and the history of religions in general, the more I came to understand fundamentalism as in fact a modern perversion of the outlook of the earliest Christians. That is, I began to see that it issues from a basic misapprehension of the very nature of religious faith and the character of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. Rooted, paradoxically, in the world view of its archenemy, the enlightenment, it is a distortion of the way the ancients related to their own traditions and an outright betrayal of the spirit that inhabited the earliest communities of Jews and Christians. And it is this misapprehension and this distortion that fuel the grotesque mischief that the religious right has visited upon society as a whole through their sanctimonious pronouncements on biblical ethics.

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THE FIRST POINT TO BE MADE is that the biblical writers were not themselves fundamentalists. That is, they did not treat the traditions handed down to them, even those already designated as scripture, as containing either doctrines or facts that were utterly fixed in stone. To the contrary, they felt free to modify

them to fit their own particular purposes and sometimes even to challenge them. Two examples will have to suffice.

1.) The gospel of Matthew presents a genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17), based in part upon 1 Chronicles, which traces Jesus' ancestry back through David to Abraham. In keeping with the author's penchant for sevens, the history of Israel from Abraham to Jesus is divided neatly into three periods of fourteen generations — that is, a series of six sevens. Several explanations of the symbolism are possible, but the important point in the present context is that in order to make the scheme work, the author of Matthew had to leave out four kings from David's royal line in 1 Chronicles.

Now, to accuse the author of either incompetence or a cynical attempt to deceive readers is to fail to appreciate the imaginative character of the religious consciousness. Anthropologists have found that in some tribal societies a person can have several different genealogies, each serving a different purpose; and to focus on the biological impossibility of more than one line of descent is to miss the rich cultural function of the phenomenon. In a similar way, the point of Matthew's genealogy is not factuality but imaginative testimony to the conviction that in Jesus the messianic hopes of Israel are fulfilled. Yet fundamentalists — utterly unclear on the concept — have gone through excruciating exegetical shenanigans to defend the historical accuracy of the Bible on points such as this.

2.) In the book of Job, the main character — having been told by his friends that his misfortunes are the result of his sins — continually refuses to repent unless those sins can be identified. In the end, God appears and humbles Job, but also rebukes the friends, proclaiming that they “have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” (41:7). What is so stun-

ning about this is that the friends have consistently voiced the theology of retribution that is central to other biblical writings, while Job has consistently challenged that theology. Although we cannot derive a clear answer to the problem of human suffering from Job, it leaves in shambles the traditional notion that it is God's punishment for sin. Thus one component of the Bible stands as protest against another. But, here again,

fundamentalists — unclear on the concept — go to great lengths to try to find doctrinal consistency across the wide spectrum of canonical writings.

What these examples show is that the biblical writers themselves approached their received traditions neither as literalists nor primarily as purveyors of doctrines but as imaginative authors seeking to express spiritual insights. Thus when fundamentalists treat the texts as infallible repositories of immutable doctrines or empirically verifiable information, they ironically fall into the same trap as nonreligious rationalists who think they undermine the spiritual value of the texts when they point out historical inaccuracies and discrepancies. Neither group really understands the character of these religious witnesses or appreciates the nature of the religious consciousness.

THE DISTORTED LENS through which fundamentalists and many conservative evangelicals read scripture has a disastrous effect upon their application of biblical ethics to contemporary moral issues. To begin with, their search for complete consistency and their rationalistic mentality result in the reduction of a wide range of moral witnesses, which are made in a variety of modes, to a simplistic compilation of concrete rules. By way of example, the gospels of Matthew (5:31-32; 19:9) and Mark (10:11-12) are consistent in reporting that Jesus

The biblical writers were not themselves fundamentalists.

overturned a provision in the Mosaic Law that provides for divorce. The likelihood is that Jesus did in fact speak against divorce, as a way of protecting the rights of women, who were virtually at the mercy of their husbands' whims on this matter. But the two gospels differ on an essential point. In Mark, the prohibition is absolute, whereas in Matthew Jesus makes an exception in the case of adultery. One cannot have it both ways: either there is an exception or there is not. And to try to find consistency here is to miss what is happening in the shift of positions. The tradition is undergoing modification as it wends its way into new times and circumstances. Thus the long history of the church's wrestling with this issue, with different branches of the Christian body coming to different conclusions, has its root within scripture itself. Differing experiences lead to modifications from one writing to the next, and the tensions among various strains of teaching that arise from such modifications provide the impetus for further modifications after the biblical canon is closed.

We can observe a similar tension in the New Testament's views on the status and role of women — even, indeed, within the body of writings attributed to the apostle Paul. In some of the letters, the subordination of women is clear. In Ephesians 5:22-25, for example, wives are commanded to be subject “in everything” to their husbands, and in 1 Tim 2:11-12 Paul lays down these rules: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.” In other letters, however, it is quite clear that Paul allows women not only to teach but also to hold prominent offices in the churches he has founded. He mentions several women as co-workers (e.g., Romans 16:3-5; Philippians 4:2-3), and in Romans 16:1 he refers to a woman named Phoebe as a “deacon,” although translators have weakened the probable implication of an actual office with such renderings as “helper” (which is in fact the root meaning), “benefactor,” or (without linguistic

justification) “deaconess.” In Romans 16:7, moreover, he apparently refers to a woman named Junia as an apostle (although translators have posited an unknown masculine equivalent Junias as the correct reading and some manuscript copyists substituted Julian). In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, moreover, he refers to women praying and prophesying in worship. Although he makes an obscure pronouncement about the proper adornment of their heads when they do so and distinguishes between male and female propriety on this matter, his acceptance of the practice of women's prophesying stands in blatant contradiction to the injunction in 1 Timothy that women should remain silent.

The discrepancy in this case is explained by the likelihood that the letters in which women are commanded to be subservient and denied leadership roles were written not by Paul but by members of the Pauline “school” in a later generation — a judgment made by critical scholars long ago on the grounds of linguistic and theological differences. But the important point is that the discrepancy exists, although conservative interpreters gravitate toward passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 because they contain explicit rules. This allows them to ignore the ways in which Paul implies a relative egalitarianism through his practice, as well as the implications of the truly radical formula he cites in Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Of equal importance is how this gravitation toward rules obscures the fact that for the most part Paul does not in fact issue direct pronouncements on moral questions but promotes a Spirit-guided ethic of discernment grounded in the broad command to love one's neighbor. Thus in Romans 13:8-10 he emphasizes that all God's commandments are “summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” And in Romans 12:1 he gives this moral counsel to his readers: “be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may

discern the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The fundamentalists’ “flat” reading of the Bible also entails a radical de-contextualization

In ancient Israel there were
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of its moral injunctions that allows them to discount the cultural codes and ancient patterns of thought that lie in the background. Despite some noble attempts to show otherwise, the Bible is in fact consistent in condemning homoerotic sex. The theme is quite marginal in the scriptures, however, and some of the passages often cited actually have nothing to do with homosexuality. The issue at stake in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19), for example, is not the homosexual character of the rape the mob intend toward the angelic visitors but the violation of the rules of hospitality, which were so important in the ancient world. It’s not nice to allow the gang rape of your guests, of whatever sex. And, in any case, the rejection of homoeroticism seems to be tied to ancient presuppositions that are extremely difficult to reconcile with modern sensibilities. The passages in Leviticus are related to the purity system, which the anthropologist Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger*) explains in terms of an ancient sense of order. Shellfish are unclean, for example, because they do not fit the “normal” pattern of animals that dwell in the sea, and blood and semen are unclean when they are outside their “normal” provenance — the body. By the same logic, apparently, the Bible assumes that persons who mate with the same sex do not fit the supposed pattern of normal-

ity. Such reasoning is never made explicit, but it is the most likely explanation of what lies behind the whole purity system. Paul does not cite purity concerns, but he does pronounce homoerotic sex “unnatural” in Romans 1. Interestingly, however, he also argues in 1 Corinthians 11:14 that it is unnatural for men to wear long hair. The obvious point here is that it is an extremely difficult matter to distinguish between what is truly natural and what is actually cultural bias.

None of this matters, of course, if one treats all scriptural injunctions as absolute norms handed down directly by God. But one might hope that a peek at Leviticus 19:19 — which forbids the planting of two kinds of seed in the same field and wearing a garment made of more than one kind of cloth — might call such a perspective into question. And one might also hope that consideration of the likelihood that Paul’s view of homoeroticism was colored by the widespread and highly exploitative practice of pederasty would caution against accepting his pronouncements on this issue as unconditional truth. But of course the same lack of imagination that prevents one from playing broad principles and other modes of moral reflection off against specific rules prevents one from looking beneath the surface of those rules. Thus Paul’s own ethic of Spirit-driven discernment grounded in love, along with Jesus’ practice of radical inclusiveness, gets buried beneath the weight of the most culture-bound aspects of the biblical writings.

IT IS TRAGIC that conservative biblical interpretation focuses on issues such as homoerotic sex, which is a peripheral concern within the spectrum of biblical thought, and abortion, which is never even mentioned in scripture (despite absurd attempts to read it into such passages as Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”). It is equally tragic that such fetishistic concerns obscure the moral issues that actually are prominent in scripture;

and there is none more central to the biblical moral conscience than social (and specifically economic) justice.

On the institutional level, in ancient Israel there were mechanisms designed to insure that all members of the community were adequately housed and clothed. Farmers were required to leave part of their crops for the poor to glean (Leviticus 19:9-10), and the ideal of the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-17) was that every fifty years all land would be returned to the family that originally owned it. The presupposition was that all persons are entitled to a share in the bounty of the earth, that all families and clans are entitled to their inheritance, and that even the greatest financial genius in the world does not have the right to own the whole world. Indeed, human ownership *per se* is qualified by the theological principle laid down in God's command in Leviticus 25:23: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, *for the land is mine.*" On the level of the prophetic moral conscience, the witness is even stronger. Amos rails out against those who "trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain" (5:11) and satirizes rich women "who oppress the poor, who crush the needy" and in their luxurious leisure say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!" (4:1) Isaiah ridicules those whose religious practice begins and ends with ritual sacrifice and observances and proposes that they "seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow" (1:17). And he pronounces solemn judgment on those "who join house to house and field to field, until there is room for no one but you" (5:8), clearly implying that having too much land is in and of itself a sin, since it deprives others of their rightful inheritance.

In Matthew 5:5, Jesus pronounces blessing on the oppressed (a better reading than "meek") and promises them the earth — an echo of the ancient right to ancestral lands. And in Luke 6, after Jesus has blessed the poor and promised that the hungry will be filled he pronounces

woes on the rich, thus imaging the coming Kingdom or Rule of God specifically as a reversal of fortunes. In doing so, he echoes a central message in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible.

Conservative interpreters, however, are largely inured to the theme of economic justice in the scriptures and instinctively reduce it to a call for mere charity. The historical roots of this rather astounding myopia are complex, involving a fundamental shift of consciousness that owes something to the early alliance of the church with the Roman Empire, something to the birth of Protestantism in tandem with the rise of bourgeois society in Europe, and something to the specifics of the American environment. But the myopia is in fact astounding, since in this particular case conservatives have scant biblical grounds on which to base their case. There is, of course, a strain of biblical teaching, deeply entwined with the theology of retribution that attributes the accumulation of wealth to good standing with God. But the weight of the tradition expresses what liberation theologians have aptly termed God's "preferential option for the poor."

Part of the problem lies in fundamentalists' attachment to apocalyptic literature. Focused on the supposed "end of the world," they are able to deflect attention from human suffering in the present by offering the hope of a glorious world to come. But they misunderstand the genre completely and thus miss its message. The cataclysm envisioned by apocalyptists is not the "end of the world," but the demise of the "present evil age" and the birth of a new and just order on this earth (albeit with supernatural overtones). And the future of which they speak is immediate, within the lifetime of the author, as is evident, for example, in the repeated motif in Revelation that "the time is near." (1:3) The book of Daniel envisions God's intervention in the Maccabean War to bring the Seleucid kingdom to its knees, and Revelation similarly envisions the end of the Roman Empire. Both

use symbolic language to express their points, however, so that later generations of literal-minded interpreters have had endless field days trying to connect the symbols to events in their own times.

The supreme irony in fundamentalists' use of this literature, however, is that apocalyptic writings are actually about justice and have in fact often been termed the "literature of the oppressed." They arise in times of persecution and function as

ways of giving hope to the hopeless. Apocalyptic writing can easily degenerate into a group's self-centered longing for revenge against the oppressor, but at its best it testifies against oppression per se. Thus in Revelation 18, we find a condemnation of Rome that reaches far beyond its persecution of Christians and implies a critique of an imperial economy dependent upon slavery (vv. 11-14). All this is lost, of course, if one reduces the writing to the prediction of a heavenly world to come in the distant future.

The inability of the fundamentalism of the religious right to grasp the centrality of economic justice in the biblical writings shows that in the end it is a failure not only of the imagination but also of human sensitivity. But it is indeed a failure of the imagination, as is seen so clearly in the way it turns the imaginative poetry of the creation stories in Genesis 1-2 into a grotesque parody of science. And when the failures on these two levels combine, then the stage is set for fanaticism. But we are far past the stage-setting phase, and the drama is being

played out not on a stage but in the world of human events. And the damage is inestimable.

The legacy of the Bible in the realm of ethics is a mixed one. In some ways, the biblical

writings remain tied to the patterns of hierarchy and oppression that pervaded ancient civilizations. The genius of this body of literature, however, is that in rather remarkable ways it also gives voice to radical innovations that have challenged these patterns and set into

motion a long history of reform and revolution. Although providing plenty of fodder for the fires of reaction, it has also inspired innumerable movements "from below" and heroic activists on the part of humane values. The "genius" of the fundamentalism of the religious right, however, is that it consistently allows the reactionary elements to suppress the progressive. Thus on their reading the pervasive demand for economic justice gives way to an uncritical celebration of predatory capitalism; Jesus' unambiguous rejection of violence gives way to an endorsement of nationalistic and imperialist war-making; and an ethic of love, inclusiveness, and reconciliation gives way to self-righteous and mean-spirited judgmentalism. Thus the transformation is complete: God is the champion not of liberation but of domination, and Jesus is the agent not of healing but of retribution.

Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Part of the problem lies in fundamentalists' attachment to apocalyptic literature. They deflect attention from human suffering in the present by offering the hope of a glorious world to come.



Armageddon Blues

JACKIE DEE KING

OUR STORY OPENS with the simultaneous disappearance of millions of people around the globe. Captain Rayford Steele, the pilot of a 747 flying over the Atlantic, struggles to maintain control when a hysterical flight attendant tells him that more than 100 people have vanished from the plane, leaving their clothes in crumpled heaps on the seats. It turns out the worldwide “disappeared” were all virtuous, God-fearing Christians who have been lifted — body and soul — into heaven to be with Christ in the Rapture. The rest of humanity has been “left behind” to suffer the devastating events that will unfold during the seven-year period known as the Tribulation.

Thus begins the first book of the *Left Behind* series, a 16-volume media phenomenon that has swept the country in the past decade.¹ More than 60 million copies have been sold in the series, making its creators Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins the best-selling authors in America. (It is worth noting that 60 million sold in a 16-volume series could mean a dedicated

readership of about 3.7 million people who keep buying each new installment.) The series has spawned a mini-industry of spinoffs, including films with well-known movie actors, devotionals, calendars, comic books, audio cassettes, and a violent video game in which good Christians blow away minions of the Antichrist on the streets of New York. Despite the real temptation to ignore these books or simply dismiss them as pure schlock, they are having a major impact and we need to pay attention. The statistics behind this phenomenon are sobering. There are at least 70 million evangelicals in the United States, according to some estimates. Some 40 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll said they believed in the Bible literally, word for word; 36 percent believe the world is coming to an end soon; and almost a third said they believe in the Rapture.² Messages such as those in the *Left Behind* books are speaking to deep feelings and beliefs in vast segments of our culture.

To get back to our story: Rayford finds, when he returns home, that his wife and son have been raptured, while he and his modern, Stanford University-attending daughter Chloe were not found worthy. Steele has been a mildly bored Christian, made uncomfortable by his wife's new church and her avid proselytizing. He now feels guilty that his lack of fervor influenced his daughter. Also, Rayford has also been carrying on a flirtation with the aforemen-

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tioned flight attendant. Under the guidance of his wife's pastor, Bruce Barnes, Steele repents and accepts Jesus as his Savior, then manages to convert Chloe and her fiancé Buck Williams. (The good guys all stride about with manly names in these books.)

A group of new believers gradually gathers around Rayford and Company; they become the Tribulation Force, one of the principal loci of resistance to the forces of evil stalking the planet.

Meanwhile, chaos reigns in the wake of the disappearances. The population of the United States, which had more than its share of raptured Christians, is decimated and it becomes a second-rate power, while the more godless Europe is ascendant. Out of Romania arises Nicolae Carpathia, a smooth-talking politician who rapidly becomes president of his country, then Secretary-General of the United Nations. Carpathia espouses such diabolical concepts as international economic cooperation, disarmament, and world peace. He is the Beast that was prophesied in the Book of Revelation and became known to later generations as the Antichrist. Carpathia hypnotises individuals and nations and soon becomes the ruler of the world. Carpathia relocates to New Babylon, in modern-day Iraq. He persuades countries to destroy most of their nuclear weapons and turn over the remaining ones to him. He takes over the Catholic Church, putting one of his henchmen in the papacy.

A new spiritual leader arises in Israel, Tsion Ben-Judah, a learned rabbi and scholar who converts to Christianity. (LaHaye's anti-semitism is an iron fist wrapped in a velvet glove. Whereas Israel is protected by God in these books and Jews who convert are heroes, any who don't are doomed to eternal torment in a lake of fire.) Ben-Judah's family is murdered and he has to be smuggled out of Israel by Buck Wil-

liams and taken to the underground headquarters of the Tribulation Force outside of Chicago. From there, he begins to write sermons and messages which are sent by email around the world. Like the movement that gave birth

to this series, these characters don't lack for technological know-how and resources. They have all the latest gadgets, from advanced computer systems to

souped up cell phones — all somehow immune to being traced, although the technology required would be no more than that found on any run-of-the-mill *Law and Order* episode. Ben-Judah is soon being read by more than a billion people, winning millions of converts to Christ. Rayford Steele becomes the Antichrist's personal pilot and Buck Williams his chief propagandist. This allows both of them access to the inner workings of the Antichrist's top councils.

One disaster after another strikes the earth, as God's wrath grows and the end approaches: thunder and lightning storms, worldwide earthquakes, eclipses, hailstones, locusts, plagues, oceans and rivers turning to blood, absolute darkness. After Carpathia is assassinated by one of the Tribulation saints, he is miraculously "reborn" when Satan takes possession of his body (*The Indwelling*). Most begin to worship Carpathia as a god. He forces everyone to take "the mark" of the Beast — a biochip planted in their forehead — or be guillotined. Eventually, the forces of good and evil gather in the Holy Land for the final battle of Armageddon. Christ gloriously reappears on earth, a warrior king on a white horse, triumphantly defeats Satan and the billions of unbelievers. Satan is thrown into a bottomless pit and Christ establishes his kingdom on earth for a thousand years.

No John Le Carre

IF YOU HAVEN'T READ THESE BOOKS, this de-

The prose is wooden, the
characters two-dimensional.

scription might make them seem more exciting than they are. The elements of the plot come from the Book of Revelation,³ which is practically incomprehensible in places but still beautifully written and emotionally compelling; it reads like the dream of a fevered mind, with strange symbolic beasts and dragons, mythic-seeming figures such as the whore of Babylon carrying the cup of her abominations and fornications, the appearing and disappearing of figures, movement forward and backward in time, the thunderous rage of a vengeful god, and great apocalyptic conflicts roiling in its pages.⁴ This is far from what LaHaye and Jenkins have managed to convey. While the book jackets carry quotations saying that the series “combines Tom Clancy-like suspense with touches of romance, high-tech flash and Biblical references” (*NY Times*) or that it is “doing for Christian fiction what John Grisham did for courtroom thrillers” (*Time* magazine), in fact I found the books stultifyingly dull. I had to force myself to plow through several of them. The prose is wooden, the characters two-dimensional. There are long boring accounts of logistical arrangements, including excruciating detail about modes of transportation. Most of the characters sound exactly alike, except that the “low-class” protagonists, who are treated with condescension throughout, dutifully drop their g’s at the end of words. Elements of plot which are meant to be realistic are instead woefully implausible, laced with transparent devices to move the story along. The major confrontations between good and evil characters often take the form of arguments about whether the proper titles of respect are being used to address the Antichrist and his followers. These particular exchanges are repeated frequently and are obviously meant to be witty, as the protagonists gleefully thwart the self-important demands of the villains. They sound more like playground taunts than a grappling with the source of ultimate evil in the universe.

Rage in the Rust Belt

THE POPULARITY OF THESE BOOKS — indeed, the rise of the Christian Right in general — both reflects and feeds a culture of rage and despair. This movement has arisen in the context of economic devastation experienced by significant sectors of the working population over the past few decades. Manufacturing jobs have practically disappeared, dropping from 53 percent of the economy in 1965, to 39 percent in 1988, to 9 percent in 2004.⁵ Workers forced out of the steel mills and auto plants in the Midwest by automation and outsourcing took jobs in the service sector that often paid less than half their former salaries. Laborers in those plants once made an average of \$51,000 a year; wages in the service industry run \$16,000 in leisure and hospitality, \$33,000 in health care, and \$39,000 in construction.⁶ Most couples have had to bring in two salaries to make what one was making before, and single parents have been forced into poverty. At a time when the safety net is most needed, federal and state assistance programs have been cut dramatically, including reductions in welfare, elementary and secondary education, the Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program, Head Start, and rental assistance to low-income, elderly, and disabled people. Inner-city communities and former manufacturing towns are plagued with drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, and street crime. In this context, many despair. People are desperate for a source of hope, for direction and meaning in their lives. The problems of the world are so overwhelming that they don’t seem amenable to real-life solutions.

Jesus on the Assembly Line

ALONG COMES THE FUNDAMENTALIST MESSAGE; it offers not only hope for a better world to come, but a drastic reversal of the existing power structure. The high shall be brought low, the oppressed shall be exalted. The resentments seething underneath the surface in so many

communities that have been “left behind” by predatory capitalism and globalization are stoked and directed to certain targets rather than others by the preachers of this “gospel.” Keep in mind that some of the major funders of this right-wing thread in the evangelical world are Tyson Foods, Wal-Mart, Purdue, Sam’s Wholesale, and Coors Beer — companies notorious for low wages, poor working conditions and union busting. As one example of the extent of their reach: Tyson Foods has placed 128 part-time chaplains, most of them fundamentalists, in 78 plants across the country.⁷ In a recent sermon entitled “Seven Events That Will Shake the World,” broadcast on Jerry Falwell’s “Old Time Gospel Hour,” televangelist Ed Hindson seriously raised the question of whether Hillary Clinton is the Antichrist. (She’s not, he concluded, because the Book of Revelation uses only a male pronoun when speaking of the Beast.) However, in the Manichean universe inhabited by the end-timers, where everyone who disagrees with them is demonized, the list of those in service to the Antichrist is long, including those who espouse: a woman’s right to choose, women’s rights in general, economic cooperation, labor unions, environmental protection, disarmament, world peace, the teaching of evolution, and all those who consider themselves “humanists.”

Rise of the Theocrats

IN HIS 1980 BOOK *THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND*, Tim LaHaye wrote, “Unless Christians wake up to who the enemy really is, the humanists will accomplish their goal of a complete world takeover by the year 2000.”⁸ He added, “No humanist is qualified to hold any governmental office in America — United States senator, congressman, cabinet member, State Department employee, or any other position that requires him to think in the best interest of America . . .” LaHaye also made a famous statement on Pat Robertson’s 700 Club show in the 1980s: “It is time that the 110,000 faithful min-

isters from every Bible-believing denomination in our country lead the 60 million Christians to vote out of office every devotee of humanism and every politician naïve enough to vote for humanist programs. For example, every office holder in our land — local, state, and national — regardless of party, who votes for or advocates the following, should be voted out of office: abortion on demand, Equal Rights Amendment, decriminalization of prostitution, approval of homosexuality and lesbianism, leniency on pornography, child’s rights over parents’ rights, legalizing marijuana, gambling, or national weakness through disarmament.”

Who is Tim LaHaye? Jerry Falwell called him “the motivation behind the birth of the Religious Right.”⁹ The man has had a checkered career. He worked for years in the rabidly anti-communist John Birch Society, leading trainings for the organization in Southern California. He developed and marketed a quack theory of “temperament analysis” which some have compared to astrology and fortune-telling. In 1981, he helped to found the secretive right-wing Council for National Policy and became its first president; it brought together ultra-conservative activists with the businessmen who had the means to fund them. The group meets three times a year in secret. Presidential candidates and advisors regularly attend their meetings, but their comments are not made public.¹⁰ LaHaye is now a preacher. He travels the country with other apocalyptic ministers holding day-long seminars on the End Times.

The philosophy informing the Council for National Policy and the radical Christian right is called “dominionism” or the less ominous “Christian Reconstructionism.” The former name is taken from two verses in the *Bible*, Genesis 1:26 “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and *let them have dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” and Genesis 1:28 “And

God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue it*: and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (*The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 1953) (emphasis added)

Dominionists believe that Bible-believing Christians should take over the United States government — at the local, state, and national levels — and establish a Christian nation. Eventually, they should extend their dominion to the world. They seek to bring down the wall between church and state and make Biblical codes the basis of our legal system; abolish labor unions, civil rights laws, progressive income taxes, and public schools; remove women from the workforce and return them to the home; get rid of many branches and functions of the government, such as welfare and public schools, and make them the province of the churches.¹¹ Dominionists have already taken over significant portions of the Republican Party, the Congress, and the White House, but that is a subject beyond the scope of this review.

Grisly Doings at the End of Time

THE FATE THAT LAHAYE HAS IN STORE for all the humanists and other evil-doers whom he rails against in his sermons goes far beyond being voted out of office. The *Left Behind* books imagine a host of horrors to be visited upon all the unbelievers: they will be stricken by famine and plagues, attacked by locusts, crushed by hundred-pound hailstones, fried by lightning, terrified by falling comets and stars, swallowed up by earthquakes, drowned by rivers of blood, splayed and filleted by the Word of God, and their bodies feasted upon by birds of prey. The *Left Behind* website complains in an aggrieved manner that their video games have been criticized for being too violent. Jerry Jenkins protests that the public should not be disturbed because “victims shot in our game fall in a puff of smoke” instead of “buckets of blood and fly-

ing body parts.”¹² The novels, however, operate under no such compunction. Toward the end of *The Glorious Appearing*, as Carpathia’s troops

Dominionists believe that Bible-believing Christians should take over the United States government and establish a Christian nation.

are slain by the Word of God coming from Christ’s mouth: “Tens of thousands of foot soldiers dropped their weapons, grabbed their heads or chests, fell to their knees, and writhed as they were invisibly sliced asunder. Their innards and entrails gushed to the desert floor, and as those around them turned to run, they too were slain, their blood pooling and rising in the unforgiving brightness of the glory of Christ.”¹³ Or later, in Jerusalem, “The riders not thrown leaped from their horses and tried to control them with the reins, but even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted, and their tongues disintegrated . . . the soldiers stood briefly as skeletons in now-baggy uniforms, then dropped in heaps of bones as the blinded horses continued to fume and rant and rave.”¹⁴

The phantasmagoric imagery in these passages calls to mind the nightmarish visions of nuclear war so prevalent in our culture. That is probably no accident, since the subliminal message of these authors and of the right-wing Christian movement in general seems to be that nuclear apocalypse is coming soon and is unavoidable because it’s God’s plan for the world. Ronald Reagan made explicit references to the coming Armageddon in some of his speeches, a deeply disturbing behavior for a man who traveled with the launch codes of the nuclear arsenal wherever he went. Jerry Falwell has said that

anyone who advocates disarmament and world peace is doing the work of the Antichrist. The *Left Behind* books seem to condone both the American militia movement and even assassination — at least in the case of the Antichrist. Conspicuously lacking from all these formulations are the deep and radical concepts presented in the Scriptures of a loving, merciful, and forgiving God. The Deity of the *Left Behind* series is a wrath-filled, vengeful, hating God who wreaks havoc on the earth to punish humankind for its sins.

The *Left Behind* series touches a live nerve in our culture and answers needs in millions of readers. Women especially have said in answer to surveys that it “brings the Bible alive” for them.¹⁵ While many commentators have noted with alarm the astounding growth of the Christian Right and have talked about the need to challenge it, their admonitions often do not take account of what the movement is offering that other aspects of our society do not. It provides a paradigm for understanding a complex and rapidly changing world that has ruined the lives of many; it offers a message of cathartic revenge against the *perceived* perpetrators of this ruin. Any movement for social and economic justice needs not only to critique and challenge the ideology put forward by these hate-mongers, but to present an alternative paradigm for understanding what is happening in the world and to issue a thunderous call for change.

NOTES

1. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, (*The Left Behind series*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995-2007).
2. Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York, NY: Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc, 2006) 18, 44.
3. *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Book of Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005)
4. Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World: How the Most Controversial Book in the Bible Changed the Course of Western Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) 6.
5. Hedges, 42.
6. Ibid, 43.
7. Ibid, 22.
8. Tim LaHaye, *Battle for the Mind* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1980) as quoted by Katherine Yurica in “Outing Creeping Dominionism: A Response to an Evangelist’s Attack,” www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/CreepingDominionism.html Other quotations in this paragraph are also from the Yurica article on the LaHaye book.
9. Kirsch, 244.
10. Hedges, 136-7.
11. Yurica, “Outing Creeping Dominionism.”
12. Jerry B. Jenkins, “Left Behind Video Game Controversy,” www.leftbehind.com/channelnews.asp?pageid=1322&channelID=17
13. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *The Glorious Appearing: The End of Days* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004) 226.
14. Ibid, 274.
15. Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Viking, 2006) 254.

Marx's Mixed Legacy Anti-Semitism and Socialism

SHERRY GORELICK

HOW HAVE MARXIST THEORISTS and ACTIVISTS, Socialist parties and Communist States understood Anti-Semitism? How did they confront the rise of fascism in Germany? Spanning the period between *The Communist Manifesto* and the fall of the Berlin Wall, German historian Mario Kessler's

On Anti-Semitism and Socialism

MARIO KESSLER

Berlin: Trafo, 2005
208 pp, 21.80 eur

On Anti-Semitism and Socialism examines the relationship to Jews, and to anti-Semitism, of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Leon Trotsky, other individual Marxists, and various political parties in Germany and the Soviet Union. He traces on theoretical, personal, and political levels, how they have *misunderstood* fascist and radical right movements from Nazi Germany to the racist violence of the present. His analysis attacks Stalinism, and attempts to assess the implications of this compromised past for the future of Marxist thought. The book has important implications for understanding racism, anti-Semitism, and Marxist theory.

The strength of Marxist analysis (and socialist ideology) has always been its vision of social equality, of the abolition of oppression, of a better future. It is largely this vision that has drawn so many Jews to Leftist movements.

But in these twelve "Selected Essays," Kessler, a non-Jewish German historian born and raised in East Germany, shows that certain flaws in the ways that Marx and the Marxists who followed him analyzed Jews, nationalism, and the process of history itself, disabled many of them from predicting the rise of fascism or effectively combating it. Furthermore, he analyzes Socialist and Communist practice, in the Soviet Union and in Germany, both in opposing anti-Semitism, and in promoting it.

Marx "On the Jewish Question"

BEGINNING WITH "KARL MARX: AN EXAMPLE of Anti-Semitism?" Kessler examines Marx's relationship to Jews and Jewishness on personal, private, political, and theoretical levels. According to Kessler, the young Marx's 1843 essay, "On the Jewish Question," his only explicit treatment of the subject, lacks the sophistication, wit, and brilliance of his later works. Intoxicated with Hegelian dialectics, competing with other "Young Hegelians," Marx was concerned with not the Jews *per se*, but with using the case of the Jews to score points against Bruno Bauer on the nature of the relationship between the State and religion.

Marx stereotyped Jews, identifying them with finance, money, Capital. Drawing on several Marxist critics, Kessler says that in linking "true Judaism" with the conditions and form of capitalism, Marx's analysis was "still caught within the framework of then-contemporary misconceptions and prejudices." Moreover he ignored "the well-established fact that the majority of Jews, even in nineteenth-century Ger-

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many, were not engaged in money lending or any money accumulating activities . . .” (p.15)

How can we understand Marx’s utter failure to comprehend “the Jewish question” and

Marx ignored “the well-established fact that the majority of Jews, even in nineteenth-century Germany, were not engaged in money lending or any money accumulating activities.”

its larger implications? According to Kessler, Marx believed that (1) The immanent demise of capitalism would end all exploitation and repression. Therefore (2) “the Jewish question” would disappear because Jews would disappear through assimilation. (3) Marx failed to comprehend the actual class differentiation of Jews, and their material reality. Kessler notes “Marx’s seeming indifference to the beginnings of the Jewish working-class movement, which is particularly curious in light of the fact that Marx otherwise noted the emergence of even the most obscure socialist groups with great interest, commenting on them extensively” (p18). (4) Marx’s personal biography predisposed him to anti-Semitism. Kessler is to be credited for seeing the ways in which the personal was political for Marx and his followers. An examination of how and why Marx and some of those who followed him were anti-Semitic is crucial beyond the question of Jews; it is crucial for understanding some of the underlying problems in Marxism’s treatment of race, nationality and religion.

The Personal is Political: The Ardor of the Convert

KESSLER NOTES THAT MARX’S FATHER, Heinrich, converted from Judaism to Protestantism just after Karl’s birth, and he had Karl

baptized in 1824. (There is no mention of Karl’s mother.) We don’t know what it meant to little Karl to be baptized at six-years-old, but Kessler tells us that “[g]rowing up in a milieu of recent converts, Marx’s formative years were barren of any Jewish acculturation and were directly exposed to anti-Semitic undercurrents then typical of Central European Christianity (p.13).”

Kessler notes that Marx’s published writing about the Jews was contradictory, but his private correspondence is gratuitously hostile. In published works he used Jews as metaphors (e.g. for money, for exchange-value in *Das Kapital*), but he also occasionally defended them. But in his unpublished texts and in private correspondence with Engels, Marx “frequently derided his political foes’ and his friends’ Jewish backgrounds, even when the specific context of the exchanges did not deal with Jewish issues” (Kessler, p.13.) Kessler reveals extensive irrelevant ethnic slurs in their letters.

Marx’s absorption of anti-Semitism, and his sensitivity about being a convert, may have contributed to an apparent willful ignorance about the Jewish working class, which had further implications for his theoretical treatment of Jews and “the Jewish question.” According to Kessler, “thus far, no one has managed to locate even the briefest comment by Marx on the beginnings of the Jewish socialist movement in Eastern Europe, although Russian-Jewish socialists were among the first to seriously read Marx’s main work, *Das Kapital*.” (p.21) . . . He did not even protest against the large and unprecedented wave of pogroms (1881-1882) in Imperial Russia, despite his usual habit of condemning the persecution and exploitation of the weak.” (p. 22.) Kessler suggests that Marx’s “almost hostile silence” can be explained by his not “want[ing] to be reminded of his Jewish heritage.” (p. 22). And indeed his foes sometimes cruelly did just that.¹

It seems to me that in suggesting that “the Jewish question” be solved by assimilation, Marx was recommending that *all* Jews follow the path

of his own family, his own life. Kessler points out that

the one key idea that linked Marxism and Liberalism [and] was present in . . . most publications of socialists all the way up to Hitler's rise to power was the assumption that Jewish emancipation had to happen through *assimilation* or giving up of a discernable Jewish identity. . . . Liberals wanted Jews to assimilate fully into bourgeois society, while Marxists advocated Jewish assimilation into the general revolutionary movement, which would eventually achieve a future socialist state and thereby quasi-automatically solve the "Jewish Question" as well (pp. 17-18).

On a practical level, assimilation failed the test in both worlds. Even Marx, the convert son of a convert, was attacked as a Jew, as he attacked other converts for having been (by definition) *formerly* Jews. Is there an assimilation more extreme, more devoted, more abject, than conversion? For bourgeois states, the rise of Hitler finally put the lie to assimilation as salvation.

The Immanent Demise of Capitalism; The Shock of Fascism

KESSLER LOCATES MARX and each of the succeeding Marxist theorists in history, and shows how their perceptions were formed and limited by the times in which they lived. Marx's belief in the inevitable progress of history prevented him from seeing how contradictions in capitalist development within Europe could produce as retrograde (and murderous) a system as fascism. Engels, outliving Marx, could see developments that Marx missed. In the 1890s Engels began to notice both Jewish socialist activities (he even wrote an introduction for a Yiddish version of *The Communist Manifesto!*), and the tie between the increasingly virulent anti-Semitic and anti-worker movements. Tracing Engels' evolution from the Jew-hating remarks he shared with Marx to a public opponent of anti-Semitism, Kessler concludes:

Friedrich Engels played a decisive part in the mobilization of the socialist movement against anti-Semitism. He presented in his analysis the potential, barbaric consequences of imperialist national policies. But he also believed in the timely transformation of capitalist society into a socialist one. The growth of racist anti-Semitism under conditions of modern barbarism, and in the name of the continuation of the old order, could not be imagined by him — or by any other socialist (p. 46).

And yet even some later Marxists were prevented by theory from understanding their own times. "Otto Heller, . . . a highly respected Communist authority on Jewish matters, wrote, shortly before Hitler's rise to power, that 'a genuine Jewish Question exists only in Eastern and Southern Europe, in those areas with a backward social development.' " Heller soon fell victim to Germany's advanced technological murder machine. "His friend, Bruno Frei wrote . . . that 'seldom has a historical misconception been so tragically refuted (p. 23).' "2

The Russian Revolution and the Jewish Workers' Movement

CREATING THE FIRST SOCIALIST REPUBLIC, the Russian revolution put the Marxist solution to the test. In an chapter called "The Russian Revolution and the Jewish Workers Movement," and in several other essays, Kessler examines the contradictory nature of the Soviet Union. Lenin was resolutely opposed to anti-Semitism, and put into effect policies which won over those Jews who had formerly opposed the Bolsheviks. "One of the very first measures adopted by the Provisional government was the suppression of the anti-Semitic legislation in force under the old regime: a total of 650 laws limiting the civic rights of the Jewish population were abolished (p. 48)."

The new government initially granted Jews "and all other national minorities" legal equality and required all governmental organs to combat anti-Semitism (p. 50). When counter-

revolutionary anti-Semitic forces in the Ukraine caused over 2000 pogroms resulting in the death of 50,000 -150,000 Jews, the Red Army fought back, winning the support of many Russian Jews. (My father recalled his childhood, when his mother hid “from the Cossacks” in a haystack, followed by the family’s joy when the Red Army came through. It turned him and his six siblings into life-long Communists.)

But while Lenin resolutely opposed discrimination and violence against Jews, he equally opposed their cultural autonomy as demanded by The Jewish Workers’ Bund [Organization] of Russia, Poland and Lithuania, known as “The Bund.” Kessler points out that there were several organized political tendencies among Jews at the time of the Russian Revolution: (1) bourgeois Zionist parties, and Social Democrats, divided into (2) Socialist Zionist groups, and (3) the anti-Zionist Socialist Bund.³ “One purpose of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, was to weaken the Marxist elements among the Russian Jews by strengthening Zionist tendencies.” (p. 59)

The Bund, founded in 1897, put forth an alternative solution to assimilation: independent Jewish cultural identity within a socialist political framework. Lenin fought any notion of Jewish autonomy. Kessler says (correctly) that it was a struggle for political control. “During the first 10 or 11 years of the Soviet regime, ‘in certain respects the Bolsheviks took over the former Bundist policy of cultural-national autonomy while outlawing the Bund and other Jewish socialist parties as obsolete remnants of the ancient regime.’”⁴ That is, Jews could have “autonomy” as long as non-Jews controlled it!

But underlying that struggle over control (as well as assimilation) were two fundamental underlying assumptions: (1) that (non-Jewish) Russians were universal, while Jews were particular, or (2) that (non-Jewish) Russians were superior to Jewish Russians. Later, Stalinists asserted that the people in the anti-Stalinist opposition (many of whose leaders were Jews) were

“rootless cosmopolitans,” not “native sons of Mother Russia.” That is, Jewish Russians were not real Russians. Kessler calls this “Great Russian chauvinism with a pseudo-socialist face” (p. 56). But beyond active discrimination, Russian chauvinism also underlay the demand for assimilation as a solution for “The Jewish Question,” as I shall discuss below.

The Bund was fundamentally opposed to both assimilation and Zionism. Henryk Erlich argued that the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine “would mean that the Arab majority there would fall under the domination of a handful of Jewish chauvinists, [while the establishment of a Jewish state] would endanger the Jewish struggle for equal civil rights in Europe.” (pp. 69-70) The Bund believed that Jews should not emigrate; rather they should remain in Russia — and wherever else they lived — and fight for their national rights within Socialism. They called this concept *dawikeit* (here-ness.) In destroying the Bund Lenin destroyed the greatest counterweight to the Balfour declaration.

I should note that the destruction of the Bund, combined, later on, with Stalinist anti-Semitism and the holocaust, made many Jews throughout the world feel that they had little alternative to Zionism. The Bund and its concept of *dawikeit* was the alternative. Now, in the 21st Century in the US, as young leftist Jews come to question Israeli government policies, some have begun to refer positively to the Bund as a model for a consciously Jewish politics.

Trotsky and The Failure of Communist Assimilation

LEON TROTSKY WAS THE VERY MODEL of socialist assimilation. Kessler begins his fascinating chapter on Trotsky with an apt and poignant epigraph: “You consider yourself, I suppose, either a Russian or a Jew? No, Trotsky responded . . . I am a Social Democrat, and only that.”⁵

Alas, although Trotsky thought that he was “a Social Democrat, and only that,” non-Jew-

ish Russians saw him as a Jew after all: "He was shattered . . . when in 1926 the first intimations reached him that his Jewish origin had not remained unimportant, particularly in the party struggles."

In 1937, two decades after the Russian Revolution, defeated by Stalin and in Mexican exile, Trotsky realized that Jews were not dissolving in the warm and welcome waters of socialist comradeship. In an interview with Jewish newspaper correspondents he said:

During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective.⁶

In Trotsky's 1938 "Letter to American Jews menaced by Fascism and anti-Semitism," he predicted that "the next development of world reaction signifies with certainty the *physical extermination of the Jews*."⁷ At the same time, he noted in *Thermidor and anti-Semitism*, that Jewish Bolsheviks were being exterminated as the bureaucracy, as a regressive force, was using Jews as scapegoats. "History has never yet seen an example when the reaction following the revolutionary upsurge was not accompanied by the most unbridled chauvinistic passions, anti-Semitism among them."⁸

Trotsky's recognition that reactionary responses to revolution foster anti-Semitic scapegoating implies a further, unasked question: why did anti-Semitism persist as an available resource for scapegoating, in revolutionary Russia?

In face of this murderous anti-Semitism in both Germany and Russia, Trotsky came to favor emigration of Jews from Europe, although the destination was not clear. As for Zionism,

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he said that "the attempt to solve the Jewish question through the migration of Jews to Palestine . . . [is] a tragic mockery of the Jewish people. . . . The future development of military

events may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews."⁹

In "The Resistance of Small Socialist Groups Against German Fascism" Kessler examines the failure of the Ger-

man Social Democratic and Communist parties to combat the rise of fascism, preoccupied, as they were, with viciously fighting each other. Unfortunately in addressing efforts at resistance, he completely neglects the work of Claudia Koonz' brilliant book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1987). Kessler's neglect of Koonz' excellent and supremely relevant work parallels his neglect of women generally. Rosa Luxemburg, who certainly might have merited a chapter of her own, is mentioned only in two paragraphs on the significance of her death.

Kessler's later chapters focus on the harmful effects of Stalinism on German politics, and of anti-Semitism regarding scholars returning from exile abroad. His discussion of the relationship between Soviet anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is too complex to be analyzed here. His penultimate essay, "The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Radical Right in East Germany" examines, with depth and complexity, the rise of the radical right, especially neo-Nazism, in the new German states, the former GDR.

In his final essay, Kessler rails against "a canonized, anti-pluralistic Marxism-Leninism," (p.202) and against the substitution of dogma for analysis. He faults East German Marxist historians because "they were largely immune to the insights and research from disciplines

which were unknown to the founding fathers of Marxism. [They] did not open themselves to the . . . reception of personal and mass psychology [resulting in] a narrow perspective which was particularly harmful in the analysis of Fascism” (pp. 202-3).

Considering Kessler: A Major Contribution

KESSLER’S CONTRIBUTION is a thorough and nuanced exploration fueled by a principled commitment to combating and exposing anti-Semitism, and exploring its sources. The significance of Kessler being a *non-Jewish* German brings the issue out of the ghetto, out of the odor of self-serving concerns; he is taking responsibility as a Leftist non-Jewish German for his country’s history and practices. I hope that a next step will involve integrating the work of feminist scholars, sorely missing in various aspects of his own analysis, and crucial to his project of broadening “narrow [Marxist] perspectives.”

Kessler’s analysis is far from simplistic. It is measured and conveys the complexities of the issues. He brings to an English audience information based on numerous German sources, making one wish that they too were available in English, especially some of Kessler’s own other writing. (In pouring over this fascinating work, I sorely missed an index and bibliography.) His book raises questions which invite further thinking. Kessler leaves to us, his readers, the task of thinking out the implications of this tarnished history for Marxist analysis of nationalism & minority rights.

Some Further Reflections on the Wrong Question

NEITHER ZIONISM NOR “DAWIKEIT” nor assimilation has solved the Jewish Question. Fundamentally, it’s the wrong question. Is the Jewish Question “what should be done with (or to) the Jews?” — a rather anti-Semitic formulation at its core? Or is the Jewish Question “what should

the Jews do to save themselves?” Both formulations presuppose a structure of inequality, an existential situation of anti-Semitic domination which must be fully analyzed and confronted. Underneath them is the ethnic and cultural nature of the State, neither universal nor neutral.

Here is the one serious contribution of Marx’s essay “On the Jewish Question”: he pointed out that the secular state is substantively Christian.

[I]t is not the so-called Christian state, the one that recognizes Christianity as . . . the state religion . . . that is the perfected Christian state, but rather the atheist state, the democratic state . . . [that is substantively and deeply Christian.] In the North American states, where the Constitution does not impose religious belief . . . people . . . do not believe that a man without religion can be an honest man . . . [and] North America is the land of religiosity *par excellence* . . .¹⁰

All the more remarkable, then, is Marx’s failure to understand the *particularities* of his own standpoint, in which Jews are seen as particular, while German Christian Marxists are seen as general, universal, lacking particularity. There is a “Jewish Question,” but there is not, for Marx, a “Christian Question.” Nor did he understand his own experience: that assimilation into a dominant culture means encountering daily and radically its bigotries against you (as African-Americans learn in integrating White society, or members of the working class learn with upward mobility.) How can a system of inequality be transcended by such contaminated processes?

Although anti-Semitism and racism permeate capitalist and imperialist society — indeed it is hard to see how they would maintain themselves *without* anti-Semitism and racism — the demise of capitalism cannot solve them without a thorough examination of the way that anti-Semitism and racism permeate the dominant national cultures: Anglo-Christianity,

German and Russian chauvinism, etc. And then, beyond that examination, we need a strategy to cleanse these dominant cultures of their superiority complexes. Just as anti-racists have turned around what used to be called “the Negro Question” to analyzing White Supremacy, and feminists have made clear that the problem is not “the woman question” — it is male supremacy, the answer to “the Jewish Question” is the question of destroying and dismantling all systems and ideologies of racial and religio-ethnic domination, and supplanting them with a culture and practice of real and substantive equality.

Kessler’s book is a valuable contribution to that goal.

NOTES

1. See p. 30 quoting von Muller-Telling calling him “a conceited Jew,” who “perspired democratic garlic,” and had a “vengeful Jew heart.”
2. Kessler does not mention the case of Jewish labor organizer Abram Leon. Hiding (in Belgium) from the Nazis, Leon wrote *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (Pathfinder 1970, first English edition 1950). Basing his argument on Marx’s 1843 essay (exactly 100 years later), Leon presented a much more sophisticated, and less stereotypical concept of Jews as a “people-class” and their eventual class differentiation. Leon explained the rise of European anti-Semitism in terms of competition between the newly developed national industrial capitalists in the emerging nation-states of Europe, and the historic European Jewish merchant capitalists. Unlike Heller, Leon saw fascism clearly, but he shared Heller’s fate. While analyzing the rise of fascism (using only those historical materials available to him in hiding), the brilliant young Leon was discovered by the Nazis and executed at age 26.
3. “and non-Zionist groups of Orthodox or *Territorialist* orientation, i.e., parties who saw the future of the Jews inside Russia and favored a program of national or cultural autonomy without a strict socialist orientation,” p. 49. Kessler groups the Bund with the Socialist Zionists, but his text reveals that they were always irreconcilable enemies.
4. Wistrich, 1979, quoted by Kessler, p. 54. Kessler notes that this period led to a *temporary* flourishing of Jewish (including Yiddish) culture, p. 55.
5. Kessler cites “Trotsky to Vladimir Medem, quoted in Robert S. Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London, Harap, 1976),” p. 189.
6. Kessler, p.86, quoting Trotsky *On the Jewish Question*, p. 20, “Interview with Jewish Correspondents.”
7. Kessler p. 88 and fn. 29 Trotsky’s emphasis.
8. Kessler, p. 87, quoting pp. 26-27 of *Thermidor and anti-Semitism*.
9. Kessler, p. 87, quoting Trotsky, *On the Jewish Question*, p. 12.
10. To which we who live in G.W. Bush’s America can only say “Amen!” See Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in David McLellan, ed. *Karl Marx: Early Texts* (NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1972) pp. 96 & 90-91.

In Memoriam: Ellen Willis

LYNN CHANCER

ON NOVEMBER 9, 2006, Ellen Jane Willis died of lung cancer. That this happened when she was only 64 is a tragic event that prematurely robbed my former graduate school adviser and now colleague, Stanley Aronowitz, of his cherished life partner, and their daughter Nona Willis-Aronowitz of a mom she obviously adored. But her death strikes me also, overwhelmingly, as a loss to the world. We need you, Ellen, I have cried since her death, far from public places where mourning surfaces only apparently. Already, in this era of seemingly unabated conservatism, I have thought of Ellen many times. What would she be writing as the Supreme Court, in a disturbing April 2007 decision limiting women's right to choose, set up a real constitutional possibility of overturning *Roe v. Wade*? Why, I fret, could Ellen not have had a chance to finish the ambitious book on psychoanalysis and society on which she was laboring when she became ill? Ellen knew that new frameworks of thought are desperately needed to fathom why people vote for politicians who don't represent their/our interests, and why calamities from Virginia Tech to Baghdad continue to overwhelm us now just as Stalinism and Hitler plagued us before. Who but Ellen Willis will link, as she started to and as Wilhelm Reich did with fascism, contemporary terrorism and sexual repression?

Others have described, in a flourishing of obituaries that included an unusually lengthy tribute in *The New York Times*, Ellen's brilliance as a writer and cultural critic. Ellen published

three volumes — *Don't Think-Smile!* (1999), *No More Nice Girls* (1992), *Beginning to See the Light* (1981) — but was perhaps best known for essays she wrote in myriad journals on topics ranging from politics and sex to rock and roll, on O.J. Simpson to (less known) her passionate critiques of class inequalities. If I add anything to this deserved praise, it is perhaps a tribute both political and personal, oriented toward the past and turned — in her honor — toward the future. For, if my 7-year-old little boy asked me to define intellectuality, Ellen would exemplify the quality, and I would try to describe to him — as I endeavor here to say — how.

Ellen and I never reached the point where we discussed men and sex and emotions, as I'm sure she did with close friends. Partially this was because, just a generation or so younger, I always felt a little awed of Ellen and her cohort — among them Ann Snitow and Carole Vance, the authors of *Powers of Desire* whose historical importance in second-wave feminist theory and activism made them, like Ellen, rather famous in my eyes. Yet I know somewhere deeply that Ellen respected and cared about me just as I admired her enormously. This is where intellectuality comes in.

Yes, Ellen was and should have been known for her huge commitment to freedom, for her "pro-sex" feminism, and her spectacular talents as an essay writer. But she epitomized intellectuality because of her just as remarkable thoughtfulness. I can easily imagine wondering, to Ellen, whether her 'pro sex' feminism had its limits — should sex itself be the basis of new theories or, I might have asked her, energy in a more comprehensive sense? I envision, as actually happened at one Socialist Scholars conference, Ellen listening to my reflections on "sa-

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domasochism and the American left” nodding her head and, most of all, taking me seriously. Debate was, for Ellen, what sociologists call, in their/our own professional jargon, a “norm.” With Ellen, it was fine to query in general and to question her in particular — so long as one made a good argument, and wrote well, in so doing. I learned this, too, when benefiting from her editing skills; an article I wrote when Ellen was a *Village Voice* editor gained enormously from her dedication to pushing that piece’s own logic. To question, to debate, to argue: for Ellen, a democratic left was one that thrived on and would permanently encourage, not repress, intellectuality and dissent. How I will miss her; how I will want more conversations than we had. But I’ll try to pass on to my kid, as I’m positive she must have to Nona, a vision of a world wherein pleasures of both the body and the mind are permissible and encouraged. Maybe all of us should try to keep her gentle and loving spirit, her thoughtful feminism and embrace of democratic socialism, alive. Au revoir, my friend. I’m so fortunate to have known you.

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Leaving Asia Minor

ANDREW KRIVAK

Priam leaps from the chariot to the ground,
leaves Idaios with the team of horses and mules.
The old man walks straight to Achilles' tent:

Achilles, the one who, through all of this, Zeus
has loved best. Except for Automedon and Alcimus,
Achilles sits apart from the others. The meal is over,

the wine gone. Achilles has just pushed himself
away from the table. Priam moves
as though he were invisible, approaches

a stunned Achilles to embrace his knees. He
gathers the hands that cradle his head and kisses them,
the same hands that have killed his sons. When a man

takes the life of another in his own country, he becomes
blind, spiritless, and so must escape, if he isn't captured,
to a land of strangers, to the house of one who has

nothing to lose. The man wonders who this stranger is.
It's like that, Achilles wondering, *Who is this god?*
The others freeze, unsure of what they're seeing.

Priam bows. "Achilles," he begs, "remember your father,
whose years, like mine, have come to the threshold
of old age. He too must be surrounded by hate,

ANDREW KRIVAK is the former Poetry Editor of DoubleTake Magazine. His book of poems, *Islands*, was published by The Slapering Hol Press and the Hudson Valley Writers Center in 1999. His first full-length work of literary nonfiction, *A Long Retreat: In Search of a Religious Life*, is forthcoming (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) in March 2008.

with no one close to protect him from the pain.
Surely he hears rumors that you are still alive,
which is a peace and a hope to him as he waits

for your return from Troy. I am not so blessed.
I fathered the strongest sons in the Troas, and each
has been taken. When you first came, I had fifty,

all hacked down before my eyes. The only one
left to protect us you've killed: Hector.
Tonight I have come to take him home,

offering as ransom treasures no one man should claim.
Fear the gods, Achilles. Bend to me. Remember
your Father. I am worse than he. I have done

what no man of our time on this earth
has done. I have touched the face of the wrath
whose hands have slain my sons." Achilles

falters, thinks of his own father, begins to weep,
then checks his tears. He takes the old man's hands
and then pushes him back, so that Greek and Trojan,

it seems, can each grieve for his dead. Priam, crouched
and trembling, weeps for Hector; Achilles for Peleus
and then for Patroklos. Their mourning fills the night.

After Homer, *The Iliad*, book XXIV, lines 550-599

New Politics

EVERETT FROST

Break beyond politics: where governments
and insolent oppositions, born in hate,
are one, locked argument to argument;
bulls in the arena of the state.
Break where bleared sun and love battered night
meet — hold out for a human birth.
Enter the circle of the flower children's flight,
that fuses sun and blood on the living earth.

Soldiers, too, do that: bruise the pulsing rose
with their wasted blood.

Now end death,
Soul flight, love breath, power fight:
All alone vain.
Let Abel rise to mock the murdering Cain.

EVERETT FROST *is writing — trying to write — a book on Samuel Beckett.*

It's Not Easy Being Green

KURT JACOBSEN

ORDINARINESS — SHEER ORNERY ORDINARINESS — is what British director Ken Loach intrepidly injects into historical events that otherwise get the glitzy Braveheart treatment on screen. Loach positively loathes flashiness. A camera movement that calls attention to itself is unimaginable. The history is the thing. So at the risk of inflicting some dull, and even unintelligible, moments on his viewers Loach scraps “star” power, injects authentic idiom (begging at moments for subtitles), sidesteps narrative conventions, and sticks to a grimy cinematographic “look” to help audiences to see that they too could have been the hard-pressed people they watch making history, though not of course just as they please. The flip side of this deliberately under-dramatized approach is the likewise lucid realization that the high-powered elites of the era weren't making history just as they liked either. Complex devious struggles were roiling away all the time among rivals as to who would ultimately gain, or retain, the upper hand in bitterly fought contests.

What Loach brings flourishingly into focus is not just the master as viewed from the servants' quarters, or upper crust plots as beheld by uncomprehending toadies like Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern. His subject is “risen people” emerging, even if briefly, as full-fledged players. Yet Loach acutely appreciates

The Wind That Shakes the Barley

DIRECTED BY KEN LOACH

Sixteen Films, 2006

that in high stakes games anyone is liable to wind up as a pawn of crafty bastards, who nominally may even be on your side. Sometimes it's only been by a hair's breadth that the manic Machiavellians win, but part of the secret of their hanging onto power afterward is pretending that their victory was

much easier to achieve than it was. As in 1995 film *Land and Freedom*, his Spanish Civil war story told from the anarcho-syndicalist side (for whom Orwell fought), or his 1990 flick *Hidden Agenda*, inspired by a Northern Irish probe of a cover-up of police collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries, Loach highlights how basically decent people act within, and try to shift the gears of, rigged systems that enclose them. His intent is to show that things didn't have to turn out this way and that you don't have to be a utopian dreamer to think so. Poke around the archives and one finds how tantalizingly close some people came to enacting far more humane arrangements.

So in *Land and Freedom* the crux comes when the ragtag fighters, as small-d democrats — the most subversive creatures anywhere when they get this participatory idea in their heads — begin to work out their own destinies in a spirited discussion of land reform. Only they are eventually to be undone by internecine battles, cruel betrayals, a reassertion of property *uber alles*, and cold-blooded diplomatic machinations favoring Franco. In *Hidden Agenda*, set in 1980s Ulster, Loach probes the ugly sectarian antics of the 90 percent-plus Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary and follows a chain of murderous collusion to mainland Brit-

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ain where authorities care nothing for those on either side of the divide so long as elite interests are served. In *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* the key scene occurs at the revolutionary Courts

Loach captures in one fraught scene the subversion of social justice as the power of money and class infest the national struggle.

of Justice, which were a parallel secret network set up under the self-declared Irish Parliament (“Dail Eireann”) after the 1918 general election had given Irish nationalists 73 of 105 seats throughout the Island. This parallel system drained legitimacy from British courts and was an integral part of the independence fight. Loach captures in one fraught scene the subversion of social justice as the power of money and class infest the national struggle. Although history books like to explain anti-colonial conflicts exclusively in terms of nationalist motives, Loach digs deeper into the stakes for ordinary people. Did they improve their lot? Did they acquire more power? If not, what was the point of the sacrifices?

With the hitherto implacable Reverend Ian Paisley and ex-IRA hard man Martin McGuinness about to clasp hands in a new power sharing executive it's a bit easier to make a frank film about the Irish War of independence and tragic Civil war, spanning 1919 to 1923, than it would have been a decade or so ago, before the Provisional IRA ceasefire and commencement of the long and fitful peace process. The never-ending argument as to whether the present edition of the IRA is an honorable descendent of the revered 1920s IRA seems almost quaint today and pretty much beside the point. (Had the IRA operated as pathologically as it did in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* or

innumerable other movie portrayals about the “Troubles,” it would have been wiped out inside a week.) Still, armed insurgency remains a very touchy cinematic subject, not least for all its newly acquired overtones.

Barley opens with a hurling match, a banned Irish sport, in the Southernmost county of Cork as frisky young men in cloth caps and wool vests dash around wielding wooden bats. It is 1920 — four years after the quixotic Easter rebellion, and not long after the end of the incomprehensible carnage of the First World War. British policy, by now, has driven much of the population into the arms of the initially disdained rebels. Cut to a cottage where young doctor Damien (Cillian Murphy), brother Teddy, and other hurling players gather to josh each other after the match. Truculent Black and Tans — mercenaries recruited from ample ranks of unemployed British veterans — suddenly barge in and commence roughing up the natives for the hell of it, almost as a reflex. One defiant lad, who refuses to speak English, summarily is beaten to death with rifle butts. That sort of thing did indeed happen. Our surly occupiers have taught the filthy natives a bloody lesson, though, of course, not the exact lesson they had hoped. (No worse a villain, in his more elegant way, is an Anglo-Irish landowner who haughtily scorns this common “scum” who aspire outrageously to run their own affairs.) Nonetheless, Damien, no dummy, figures the odds of ejecting the English aren't favorable and plans to emigrate anyway.

The last straw comes the next day when Damien watches angry soldiers batter trade unionist train drivers who refuse point blank to take aboard armed British personnel. Unions were a big contributor to the independence bid through their brave supportive actions, and Loach likewise pays tribute to women and children who performed as weapons smugglers, nurses, spies, quartermasters, messengers and many other indispensable duties. (Counterinsurgency specialists, ironically, aren't wrong

when they advocate treating whole populations as the enemy: the catch is that it is pointless as well as vile to do anything other than withdraw under such circumstances.) Now Damien takes the IRA oath and begins his first toddling steps in learning the lethal skills of guerrilla warfare. He had better: the military odds were about 40 to 1 against the rebels at the best of times. The plain scarcity of weapons and ammunition, which were acquired mostly in local raids and ambushes, was a desperate constraint through the independence campaign, which forced rebels to pick their moments very carefully.

FOUR BRITISH MERCENARY OFFICERS burst into a billiard parlor, roust local customers, lounge around drinking — and are swiftly shot dead. (Black and Tans and the “Auxiliaries” were recruited to make up for loss of locally stationed police, who resigned in droves under pressure.) The British, on a tip-off, easily round up Damien’s guerrilla band. “I am a democrat. What am I to do as a democrat?” Damien tells a smug British officer, regarding the pro-independence 1918 election outcome. “Get out of my country!” His brother Ted is tortured, fingernails ripped out, and everyone faces the same and worse. But a sympathizer among the soldiers helps the rebels escape. Since counterinsurgency is, above all, a war of informers there’s little choice but to kidnap the landlord and the peach fuzz-cheeked boy who tattled. The landlord is shot in reprisal when the British heedlessly execute IRA captives. Damien shoots the boy dead as his distressed comrades try but fail to conjure an excuse to let him go: “I hope whatever it is we’re fighting for is worth it.”

A key character Loach features from time to time is a craggy veteran of socialist icon James Connolly’s Citizens’ Army, which fought in the Easter rebellion, and who recites Connolly’s prophetic warning that without a social revolution attached to the national struggle, the color of the flag may change but Ireland will be ruled

only by British capital as channeled through obliging avaricious homegrown accomplices. The sources of the civil war probably always lay within the conflicting class forces forming the independence movement. The socially progressive contingents, led by talents like Liam Mellows and Paeder O’ Donnell, backed the goals expressed in the 1919 “Democratic Programme” of the First Dail (Irish parliament), a rousing populist-socialist statement cited in *Barley*. These hardy souls fought for a nation guaranteeing “the right of the people of Ireland” to the “social, natural resources, wealth and wealth-producing processes,” for the principle that all rights “to private property must be subordinated to public right and welfare” and that every citizen had a right to “an adequate share of the produce of the nation’s labor.” This dangerous document, naturally, was going to be ditched as quickly as propertied groups could manage it. The Irish bourgeoisie (such as it was) — most shopkeepers, and the big farmers — merely wanted to run the show as before, with Irish labor under their own green thumbs.

Loach crystallizes this internal turmoil in the aforementioned Court of Justice scene in which a usurious businessman — charging a widow a mere 500 percent interest — is graciously let off the hook because the indigent IRA needs the financial support of the creeps of his class, even if unwillingly given. Damien is, as the Irish say, gobsmacked by the awesome expedience of it all. Indeed, in the course of the independence war the IRA did enforce old property rules wherever local groups got the gumption to seize land for redistribution or start up cooperative experiments. The Catholic Church too was only strategically sympathetic with the nationalist cause inasmuch as most priests didn’t dare go against their own parishioners. However, as Loach depicts, the Church later freely interfered in politics by excommunicating anti-Treaty rebels.

In the heartbreaking Treaty debate, Loach gives everyone a fair say as to what to do about

an undeniable dilemma. British leader Lloyd George threatened “immediate and terrible war” if the Treaty wasn’t signed, a document stipulating an oath to the King, dominion status, and exclusion of 6 counties in Northern Ireland (as if a lot of armed northern Protestants otherwise had nothing to say about it). This is the Treaty that Michael Collins signed, suspecting correctly it was his own death warrant, although he strived mightily to avoid an outbreak of civil war — even contemplating a joint attack on British forces in the North. The brothers, Teddy and Damien, embody the terrible split, as Teddy argues Collins’ case for taking the treaty offer now as a “stepping stone” to a 32 county Republic. Damien wants a Republic and wants it now. Would Britain really permit a leftwing government to arise off its western shores? Not likely. The British indeed coaxed, and armed, the Free State government to attack the anti-treaty Republicans, a bunch of whom were holed up in the Four Courts in Dublin. The assault with British artillery commenced a civil war, as well as a counter-revolutionary one. Any social radicalism in Ireland thereby would be tamped down for generations, as was the case.

The Treaty tragedy, stirred by external pressures and internal fissions, unfolded. Loach repeats the earlier raucous raid scenes, this time with uniformed Irish “free state” soldiers substituting for screaming brutal Brits. Although the Treaty was approved by a 64-57 vote, the anti-Treaty forces at first were larger — though fatally less centralized and less well armed. Casualties were higher than in the War of Independence. The new Irish Government executed more Irish than did British authorities. Damien is captured in an arms raid and cannot spill information to save his own skin. Radical Republicans are killed, silenced, or driven out. The

Irish Republic (as it redesignated itself in 1949) then settles into a pious, hypocritical, narrow-minded and philistine redoubt, at least until it discovered the risky joys of luring in foreign investment plus the largesse of the European Union.

As for Iraq, the resonances — imperial arrogance, mercenaries, raids, torture, ambushes, atrocities — are damned well there. Loach can deny that he was drawing modern parallels because he is absolutely right that any anti-imperialist history cannot help but trigger jarring associations with the Iraq imbroglio today. Still, British critics across the entire spectrum — from the *Daily Mail* to the *Guardian* — brayed away at Loach for his unflinching portrayal of brutal activities of occupying forces ravaging a land where they are not wanted. The cherished myth that British troops — celebrated, as everyone knows, for gentility in late 20th century Ulster — were wiser and wilier occupiers than those dull-witted Yanks exploded a while ago, which is why they are bugging out. Lord knows that had Loach really wanted to bait Britain he had plenty of foregone opportunities. Omitted from Loach’s fine film is the highly piquant fact that the most legendary of Irish guerrilla commanders, Tom Barry, was disturbed to have read about the 1916 Easter rebellion and its suppression while he was a British soldier in Iraq, part of a force that failed to save the doomed British garrison at Kut (which may yet turn out to be the green zone of its day). Indeed, a famous ambush of a Black and Tan caravan at Kilmichael in Cork, planned by Barry, clearly inspired a shoot-out recreated in *Barley*. So give Loach credit for resisting rubbing certain English toffee noses in their own imperial ordure. I wouldn’t have.

A Sober View of Capitalism

JAMES GILBERT

A DECADE AGO, I suspect that this collection of essays would not have been published nor even conceived of by the authors represented in this book.

There is a sober ambience to these contributions, no doubt inspired by the triumphalism of the conservative resurgence and its political domination of American politics. If this Republican dominion now seems a bit more fragile because of corruption, ineptitude, economic mismanagement, and a war gone terribly wrong, the grip of conservative economic thinking still appears very strong in American life. As Nelson Lichtenstein puts it in his very useful introduction, the accomplishment of the essays is to “historicize how we have thought about twentieth-century capitalism, therefore also problematizing the contemporary ideas and sentiments that sustain the sense of inevitability that so often characterizes twenty-first-century discussion of global market economy.” (7) There is little talk in this volume of Marxism — even Christopher Phelps’ fine essay on C. L. R. James is about the thinker’s interesting divergences from Marx. Instead, the impression that accumulates in reading these entries is the key role that a variety of social

American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century

NELSON LICHTENSTEIN, ED.
Phil.: University of Pennsylvania Press,
2006. 377pp.

theories and theorists have played in articulating a rather different and more complex inspection of modern American society within, rather than outside the mainstream. The “we” of social theorists invoked by Lichtenstein is thus a rather inclusive one. In fact, it is the comprehensiveness of the collection as a sampler of social theories from the last 50 years

that makes it so valuable. And just as surely, it is a sign of our times that we are compelled to rethink the social philosophies of Talcott Parsons, Peter Drucker, Ayn Rand, and Friedrich von Hayek, as well as Clark Kerr and John K. Galbraith.

In several respects, Howard Brick’s is the lead essay to this collection, appearing both first and foremost. Brick identifies what he calls the post capitalist vision. This is a view that began to emerge in the 1950s, centering on the proposition that the American economic system was best understood as political economy centered on the role of the state. In other words, “capitalist” was deemed an insufficient term to designate all the dynamic and important elements of the economic system. He identifies a broad range of thinkers under this umbrella including the sociologist Talcott Parsons, Raymond Aron, Robert Heilbroner, C. Wright Mills, and others. Indeed, he argues that even if this orientation were not the sole or even predominant theory, it nonetheless provided the basis upon which radical theorists of the New Left evolved their theories. In other words, they constructed their radical proposals by extending and modifying the post-capitalist assumptions of 1950s

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theorists.

This is an extremely fruitful proposition, one that is reinforced by its emphasis on the evolutionary nature of American thought. It is particularly impressive in reassessing the major social/economic critics of the 1950s, including Parsons, Mills, Karl Polanyi, Riesman, and others who described contemporary industrial society in sociological, political, and psychological terms. If they focused less on property relations and class and more on other elements of the political economy, their ideas easily led to assumptions in the 1970s that non-economic elements should predominate in social criticism. But this precipitated a crisis. Brick stresses that the disruptive and disheartening recession of the 1970s exposed the limits of this thought, and led to a dual revival of Marxism on the one hand and a conservative resurgence of Adam Smithian orthodoxy.

If a failure in some respects, post-capitalist theory, according to Brick, demonstrates an important conclusion about the possibilities of reform generated within a capitalist system. Such ideas expressed the possibilities of a broad critique, and, as he notes, they encourage the hope of a similar, even more thorough, generation of social criticism within a private enterprise system that (now) seems temporarily immune from reform.

I have spent considerable space discussing Brick's contribution for several reasons. The editors obviously believed in its importance, placing the essay first. It is also clear from numerous references throughout the book that the other authors agreed. More broadly, Brick's contribution illustrates a central interpretive thread that prevails throughout the work. This is a self-conscious attempt to find a non-Marxist theoretical position to confront neo-orthodox capitalist thought and conservative political hegemony. It is Brick's achievement to demonstrate that in addition to self-serving justifications, modern American capitalism has also generated powerful critiques that suggest some hope

for the future.

JUST HOW DIFFERENT THE PAST looks from today's chastened perspective is suggested by Kevin Mattson's interesting essay on John K. Galbraith. A major public intellectual in the 1950s and 1960s, Galbraith's theories about "countervailing powers" have been eclipsed, partly because the dialectic he assumed to be operating between two more or less equivalent powers (business and labor) has today become lop-sided and distended in the favor of business. Galbraith's assumption of a "new class" of managers and political figures, operating within an institutionalized environment, has not proven to be true. The "vital center" upon which he relied to adjudicate a more just society has "quite simply collapsed" (108) as Mattson puts it. If the theory of countervailing powers was a false hope, perpetuated by a miscalculation of the power of the political right, Galbraith was certainly not alone in his misunderstanding. Indeed, it has become a historiographical cliché now to look back over the last 20 years or so of writings about the 1950s and 1960s and suggest how much they underestimated the growing power of the right.

There is much truth in this reconsideration and it certainly informs Mattson's viewpoint. At the same time, he resists the temptation to throw out Galbraith's genuine and lasting insights into the operations of American capitalism and the potential power of his cultural and social critique of American society. If the final conclusion must be less than optimistic, it is nonetheless a beginning to honor Galbraith's demonstration of the possibility that "we can be both liberals and cultural critics at the same time." (108)

There are several other powerful essays in this collection, but I will only touch on three others, because they illustrate, in somewhat different fashion, the central notion of this book's exploration of the shifting promises and premises of late twentieth century attitudes toward

modifications of capitalism. If this ideological declension can be found in a wide variety of theories, it is also apparent in biography. Thus Daniel Horowitz's perceptive combined study of four feminists provides a vivid personal description of this process of coming down from the Marxist mountain. Horowitz chooses four innovative figures — Carl Degler, Eleanor Flexner, Aileen Kraditor, and Gerda Lerner — all of whom owed a major intellectual debt to Marxist feminism as a strong initial influence in their path breaking accounts of women's history. Each figure, he posits, was deeply impressed by Marxism and by anti-fascism in the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, as they developed their insights into the historical position of women in American society, each developed in her or his own way, a different pathway away from this initial orientation. If Marx and Engels and Bebel, for example, provided important insights into the oppression of women, their influences were attenuated as other issues concerning race, for example, and political activism, intervened. By the late 1960s, this group of pioneers found themselves in radically different positions. Flexner converted to Catholicism and backed away from organized feminism. Degler's historical commitments to feminism remained, even if his politics stressed the importance of political liberalism. Lerner probably remained the truest to the core of Marxist notions of patriarchy, and Kraditor swerved significantly to the right.

Horowitz concludes that the pressures of McCarthyism, the growing weakness of the labor movement, shifts in social science, swung the attention of this cohort away from capitalism as an explanation for women's social position and toward other considerations. In effect, what happened as a personal reaction to the times was a reflection of the larger evolution of social theory, as the ground under liberalism itself shifted.

Nils Gilman's reassessment of management theorist Peter Drucker, in some respects, en-

gages the same history of institutional relationships that intrigued J. K. Galbraith, but from

Rand's atheism was particularly
troubling to William Buckley Jr.,
who believed in a tight
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Christianity and Capitalism.

the right. Although Drucker focused his attention upon management, not the broader new class described by Galbraith, he too, but from a conservative perspective, was fascinated by the social dynamism that he hoped would mitigate the harshest elements of "Fordism" on the assembly line and in the corporation. Initially, Drucker posited the view that worker pride and commitment to the job (as opposed to the inevitable alienation stressed by Marxists) could be socially engineered and augmented by management. This, he proposed, would entail far more than friendly words and pep talks, instead demanding real inclusion and empowerment by initiating social and rank mobility among industrial workers. If, as Gilman rightly suggests, this theory underestimated the refusal of management to share power, Drucker nonetheless found that from a conservative perspective there were areas within the corporation that demanded reform. And, as Gilman finally concludes, one of Drucker's strengths was his notion that to propose a more liberating and fulfilling work environment was not necessarily to be an anti-capitalist.

THE FINAL CONTRIBUTION to this volume is Jennifer' Burns' fascinating essay on Ayn Rand's troubled, but fruitful relationship to the organization of the right during the foundation days of the 1950s and 1960s. As an avowed atheist, Rand was a troubling presence in a

movement that was deeply informed (at first) by conservative Catholicism, and then, in later days by evangelical Protestantism. Rand, the author of several widely popular novels, and a much sought-after public speaker, particularly on college campuses, was an outsider who nonetheless exercised considerable influence over a wide number of readers and recruits to the right. Although her novels are lugubrious tomes, with huge chunks of ideology declaimed by wooden figures, they conveyed her message of anti-statism and anti-liberalism with memorable clarity. Rand's atheism, however, was particularly troubling to such figures as William Buckley Jr., who believed in a tight correspondence between Christianity and capitalism. Burns' essay recounts, in some detail, the hostile interactions between Rand and Buckley, as the latter used his journal, the *National Review*, often through surrogates, to attack the atheist convictions of Rand.

Yet if Rand was a powerful exile from what was becoming the mainstream of popular conservative thought, she remained a figure with considerable influence. As Burns tells it, this is far more than the tale of two competing figures in the development of conservative ideology. If, in the end, Rand's influence evaporated and Buckley's shepherding of the Christian-capitalist alliance proved more successful, the story reveals the important intricacies of this history, and perhaps, how it was that the right was able to engineer its religious alliances.

There is far more of interest in this book than I have been able to include here, and other thinkers described whom I shall not mention. But there is one figure that makes a few cameo appearances, that might well have been usefully included in this volume. This is the late historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Schlesinger is rightly remembered primarily as a historian and pub-

lic intellectual, a political adviser to the Kennedys, and a pundit rather than a profound theorist of liberalism. But there is one fascinating, if underdeveloped notion for which he is best known, which is his cyclical theory of history.

In several books, Schlesinger argues that periods of liberalism informed by popular movements have alternated in American history with long stretches of conservative hegemony. First applying this notion to the presidency of Andrew Jackson, and then seeing it renewed in Franklin Roosevelt and most prominently with John F. Kennedy, Schlesinger was perhaps only defining moments of exception to the generally conservative history of American politics. Yet periods of conservatism and liberalism have alternated in American history, however we might ultimately define their causes. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of American history has been the dynamism of social criticism, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, despite the overall political power of conservatism, and despite the refusal, except on certain marked occasions, for the body politic to act on these propositions.

If, in Schlesinger's hands, cyclical history was generally a polemical tool to justify the "vital center"* and a hoped-for Democratic political hegemony, the theory might suggest something else: the instability and shifting fortunes of both liberalism and conservatism. Perhaps in these sober moments, this is the best one can hope for: that circumstances will change and that the truly creative energies of social criticism, so well described in this volume, will once again have traction.

*Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1986).

Killers for Hire

MICHAEL BUSCH

IN ITS RESPONSE TO SEPTEMBER 11TH, the Bush administration has turned the War on Terror into a Wild West story for the 21st century. Complete with grizzled bad guys, “Wanted” posters, lawless badlands, and a straight-shooting sheriff in cowboy boots, this violent burlesque bears all the hallmarks of a classic western. It should come as no surprise, then, that hired guns have appeared in Baghdad, assisting the forces of good in their fight against evil. Yet far from their lone-ranging Hollywood counterparts, modern day gunslingers roll in Humvees, carry AK-47s, and work for corporations contracted by the United States Government.

These military contractors are the subject of a new book from freelance journalist Robert Young Pelton. *Licensed to Kill* illustrates how the presence of soldiers-for-hire in Iraq and Afghanistan exemplifies the changing nature of the way the United States conducts war. As a corollary to Donald Rumsfeld’s desire to transform the military into a smaller, more efficient fighting force, combat security operations have increasingly been outsourced to private corporations. From guarding kitchen supplies in Baghdad’s Green Zone, to hunting Osama bin Laden in the caves of Tora Bora, paramilitary contractors have increasingly assumed the responsibilities of regular armed forces.

Of course, the phenomenon of private militaries is nothing new. Soldiers of fortune have been a staple of war since classical times: Herodotus notes that the Persian king Xerxes employed native Greeks in his war with Sparta;

the Romans had an extensive history of hiring barbarian groups to do their fighting; Swiss mercenaries developed such a strong reputation in battle that to this day the Pope retains them as his personal guard. But it wasn’t until global decolonization took hold in the latter half of the 20th century that mercenary warfare began to wear the clothes of corporate respectability.

Decolonization brought institutional collapse to a number of countries throughout Africa and Asia. As these nations deteriorated into civil war and social turmoil, special interest groups searched for mercenaries to seize and secure natural resources, while weak governments sought assistance in controlling domestic turbulence. A handful of corporations developed almost overnight to meet this demand. Before long, small groups of highly-trained former military men were defending diamond shafts in Sierra Leone, putting down popular revolts in Papua New Guinea, and seizing precious metal deposits in the Solomon Islands. The first generation of “corporate warriors” had been born.

After September 11th, the business of private militaries blossomed into a full-blown service industry. As the United States engaged in state-building on the one hand, and regime-change on the other, demand for skilled fighters skyrocketed. The stakes were high: on offer from the State Department and Pentagon were billions of dollars in contracts waiting to be seized. Suddenly, companies like Blackwater USA and Triple Canopy began emerging from nowhere, promising services specifically tailored to the demands of the Bush administration’s nascent War on Terror.

While the number of private security con-

Licensed to Kill

ROBERT YOUNG PELTON
N.Y.: Crown, 2006, 358 pp

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tractors has proliferated into the tens of thousands since the invasion of Iraq, little is known about these men, or the companies that employ them. To be sure, a small literature on private militaries exists, but it's largely theoretical in character. Academics, like Peter Singer of the Brookings Institution, have dissected the genealogy of corporate mercenaries, and asked uncomfortable questions about the possible consequences of their continued use. But little effort has been made to study private security operations on the ground, undoubtedly due to the immense danger involved.

Licensed to Kill constitutes an attempt to bridge this knowledge gap. Pelton has made a career of traveling the world's most violent terrain in what he describes as an effort to understand the motivations of people living there. For the past two years, however, he has undertaken a decidedly different endeavor. In order to examine the foot soldiers of privatized violence, Pelton spent time traveling with corporate contractors in Iraq, searching for CIA-sponsored operators in southern Afghanistan, and retracing the steps of mercenaries attempting to overthrow the government of Equatorial Guinea. What emerges is a study in the muddled distinction between traditional mercenaries, and their recently arrived stepsiblings, private military contractors.

Licensed to Kill offers a largely descriptive account of Pelton's travels through the battlefields of the ever-changing War on Terror. While he disavows any attempt to provide "an academic treatise on the complete range of issues raised" by the advent of the modern military contractor, Pelton does not shy away from addressing critical problems associated with hiring private fighters to help in the fight against terrorism. *Licensed to Kill* commendably shines a spotlight on corporate neglect, privately-funded human rights abuses, and U.S. failure to successfully reintegrate returning members of the armed forces back

Pelton refuses a sustained argument against the increased privatization of the United States military.

to civilian life. Yet it ultimately disappoints: Pelton refuses to marshal his evidence into a sustained argument against the increased privatization of the United

States military, a thread that would have fastened together an otherwise engaging and significant study. What he presents instead are a series of disturbing, and disparate, vignettes sketching the world of private armies.

Since March 2003, few images stand out in Iraq's gallery of horrors as powerfully as those depicting the brutal killing of four Americans in Fallujah during March 2004. The victims were private contractors working a security detail for Blackwater USA. After their bodies had been punctured by bullets and set on fire, the men were dragged through the streets and dismembered by a jubilant crowd of local Iraqis. What remained of the contractors was hoisted up on a bridge spanning the Euphrates, then cut down and incinerated by street bonfires to the cheers of onlookers.

Pelton uses the incident at "Blackwater Bridge" to investigate corporate response to the deaths of its employees. What he uncovers is ugly, but not surprising. The families of the dead contractors each received a one-time payment of \$64,000 and a letter of condolence from L. Paul Bremer. That the convoy had been improperly equipped, undermanned, and the operation hastily organized, seems of limited importance to the company. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout Pelton's narrative is the willingness of corporations to abandon their employees when the going gets tough. But Fallujah drives to the heart of even more disturbing problems associated with private military contractors.

Pelton notes that "while not active members of the military per se, [the four contractors] were armed and ready to shoot if necessary, were providing critical support for the U.S. military's core mission, and their paychecks . . . were ultimately financed by the Pentagon. Even though

those facts tilt the assessment essentially in a military, though nontraditional, direction, some analysts continue to argue that the contractors were essentially playing a civilian role.”

THIS QUESTIONABLE ASSESSMENT leads to concerns related to international law, and the protection of human rights. Non-state armed groups, and their activities in combat zones, have received considerable attention from lawyers and scholars since the end of the Cold War. The attacks of September 11th, and U.S. response since, have further complicated the difficulty of understanding legal accountability during wartime. The presence of private contractors on the battlefield and in detention centers throughout Iraq and Afghanistan has become *pro forma* in Bush's War on Terror. Yet unlike the soldiers at Abu Ghraib, or those patrolling the streets of Baghdad, corporate warriors are not held responsible to a clear chain of authority.

Pelton wills the problem away by noting that “for the most part, the vast majority of security contractors in Iraq abide by the rules of engagement” that state “shoot only when shot at.” But as “trophy videos” of random murder shot by contractors emanate from Iraq, and a contractor in Afghanistan is charged with torture and murder, it's clear that the small percentage of human rights violators in the contracting ranks is precisely what demands attention. In the aftermath of September 11th, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed the need to articulate “guidelines for . . . the protection of civilians in armed conflicts where terrorist organizations are active.” Yet no such stipulation has been advanced for contract organizations.

Of greater importance still is Pelton's observation that many contractors slip back and forth between security-related contracting jobs and more traditional mercenary activities. As Pelton, Singer, and others have pointed out, future military operations will likely become dependent on soldiers-for-hire. Private militaries are not only cost-effective, but politically effective. They allow

governments and organizations the luxury of pursuing military objectives without taking responsibility if things go awry. That a significant number of these private fighters have experience as death squad operators in apartheid-era South Africa and as Chilean “disappears” under Pinochet, should compound our anxieties about shaping future conflicts within more humane laws of war, let alone about the possibility of peace.

It goes without saying, however, that not every contractor is a trigger-happy killer. Back at home, Pelton explores the motivations driving those (almost exclusively male) that choose to sign up with private security firms. He finds that most are desperate people struggling to make ends meet after completing tours of military service. They find that the specialized skills of their former jobs are of little value when seeking work in civilian life. Without job placement assistance from the government, or financial help to return to school, many find the money in private security difficult to resist. Shockingly, ninety percent of contractors interviewed by Pelton said they only worked details to support their families, pay their mortgages, and provide a better life for their children. Nevertheless, many quickly decide that the experience is not worth the pay.

Despite considerable evidence demonstrating the illegality and immorality of military privatization assembled throughout *Licensed to Kill*, Pelton fails to assess the wisdom of employing private armies. This is frustrating, given that the scope of Pelton's subject demands more than silence. It's no secret that corporations have benefited enormously from the chaos raging in Iraq, and that their financial gain has come at the expense of untold thousands of lives. *Licensed to Kill's* unique glimpse into the world where capital entrepreneurship and violence directly interface offered its author the opportunity to contribute an important voice to the chorus of dissent from corporate malfeasance and a senseless war. As it stands, the book will likely become a footnote in some future study chronicling the horrendous beginning to the twenty-first century.

Words and Pictures: Interview with Harvey Pekar

KENT WORCESTER

HARVEY PEKAR WAS THE FEATURED GUEST at a Brown University conference on Comics and Culture that was held in mid-April 2007. The conference was inspired by the forthcoming publication of *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History* (Hill & Wang), edited by Paul Buhle, with artwork by Gary Dumm, Summer McClinton, Wes Modes, Nick Thorkelson, and others. Pekar wrote a brief overview of SDS's rise and fall for the book and took part in a panel discussion with other contributors.

Harvey Pekar is best known for his self-published comic book, *American Splendor*, which inspired a prize-winning independent film of the same name. He also gained a certain notoriety for his several appearances on the Letterman show on NBC in the 1980s, when he managed to get under the skin of the talk show host by pointedly asking about GE's role in shaping NBC's news coverage. Pekar is the author of several excellent graphic novels, including *Our Cancer Year* and *The Quitter*. The interview was conducted in Providence on April 13, 2007.

Kent Worcester: In The Quitter you reveal that your mother was sympathetic to the Communist Party. Was she a formative influence on your political views?

Harvey Pekar: I was always on the left of the political spectrum, in part because of her influence. She subscribed to the *Daily Worker* for



Illustrations by Gary Dumm

much of her life, and was particularly active in the Henry Wallace campaign. I've written about this in a short graphic story called "Red Baiting." A lot of people in her family were leftists, including her father. But she stopped talking about the party when the Soviet Union backed Egypt rather than Israel during the Suez crisis in 1956.

My parents owned a small grocery store in the Mount Pleasant section of Cleveland. They worked long hours. What was more important than Communism for both of them was Zionism. And my father was a religious man. My mother kept a kosher house for my father. My father worked all the time — seven days a week. My mother worked in the store as well. A lot of people who lived in the neighborhood were sympathetic to Henry Wallace, but there were plenty of people who were critical of him for one reason or another.

KENT WORCESTER is the coeditor of *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (University Press of Mississippi, 2004).



KW: Many of your American Splendor stories depict your real-life job as a file clerk at a VA hospital. How long did you work for the VA?

HP: From 1966 until 2001, when I retired. Thirty-seven years working for the federal government. In fact, before that I held a couple of other government jobs, including at the Navy

Crumb ended up drawing some of my stories and that eventually led to the creation of my own comic book, *American Splendor*, in 1976.

Finance Center. The job worked out wonderfully for me — it didn't pay much, but I liked the people, including the doctors, the nurses, and the patients. The work was so simple that you never worried about it. You could do the job in your sleep. So there was plenty of time to socialize, and also to write. There was a union, but it was not particularly active.

A lot of my friends at work said that I should go for a promotion. But why would I want that? The job was already great. In fact,

one of the managers did ask if I was interested in climbing up the ladder. He was a little surprised when I turned him down.

For some reason I was never a political activist. I was against the Vietnam War, of course. I knew people in SDS, but I had a full-time job. Most of the people I worked with at the VA hospital were black — and they were not in favor of the war.

KW: What inspired you to start your own autobiographical comic book?

*HP: I had already been writing comics for four years, through my connection with Robert Crumb, who I first met in 1962. Crumb was very reserved and shy. He made it a point to be inconspicuous. In 1972, Crumb came back to Cleveland. The underground comics movement was still in progress. I thought the underground was fine but that it could go further. I showed some stories I had written to Crumb, and he liked them. I was floored — that gave me a tremendous boost. He ended up drawing some of my stories and that eventually led to the creation of my own comic book, *American Splendor*, in 1976.*

I had all these ideas for comic stories that were about unexplored topics. But I did not really think there was a market for *American*

Splendor, so I was prepared to spend my own money on it. At first, the comic was mainly distributed by underground publishers. Later it mostly sold at the larger comic book stores that stocked non-superhero comics. I did receive a lot of letters, and that helped.

KW: How did your friends at the hospital respond to your comic book?

HP: My coworkers were happy with *American Splendor*. They found it pretty interesting. The local media, however, paid very little attention. It was the success of the movie that made my story seem important. After the film came out, the mayor got mad at me. "Look at how our town is portrayed!" This probably helped keep my name in lights, at any rate.

KW: You say that you weren't a political activist, and yet you used the Letterman show as a platform

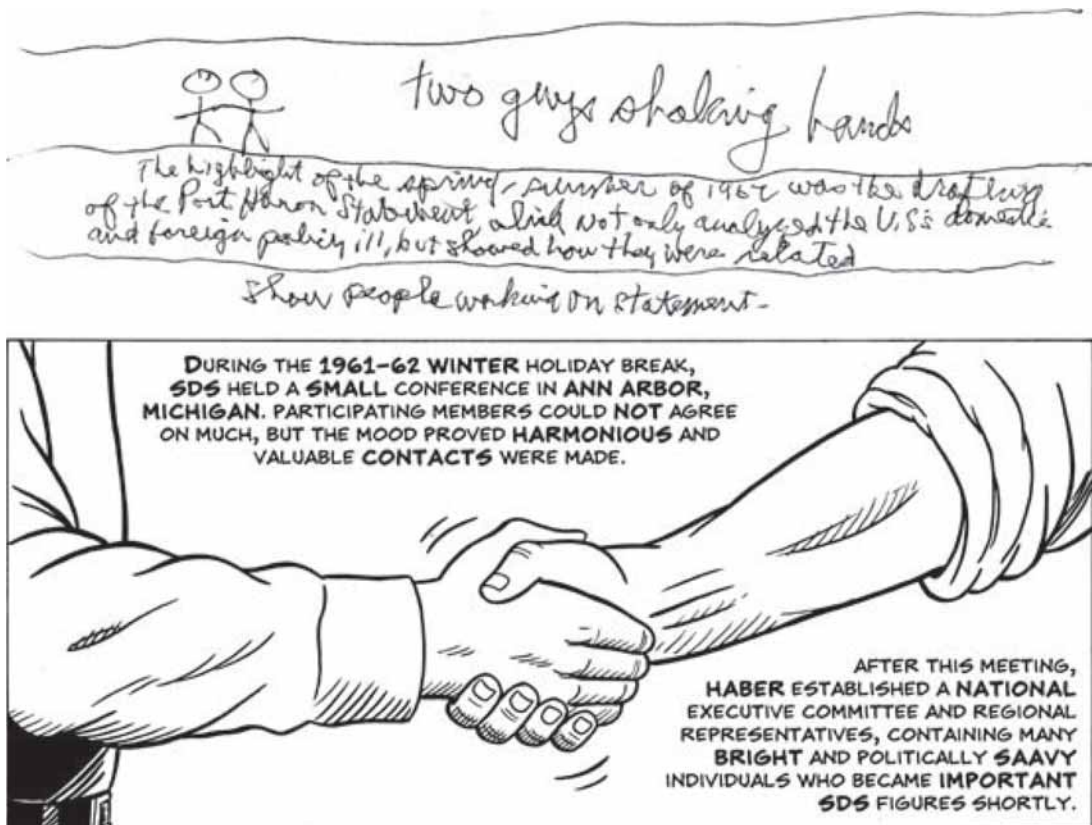
to talk about corporate America.

HP: Well, as an adult I've been interested in history and politics. Now that I'm retired, I have a chance to write more about political issues.

The reason I was political on the Letterman show was because of spite — he wanted me to play the dumb working stiff. The only reason I was invited onto the show was because someone who worked backstage was from Cleveland and knew about my comic. The first time I appeared on the show they paid me \$100, and no expenses. They paid for my plane flight, however. As far as I could tell, Letterman doesn't care about much. I appeared on his show eight times. I would hang out afterwards, but Letterman would always take off like a shot.

KW: Do you draw?

HP: Enough to know that I'm no good. But I give the artists I work with storyboards, not just



scripts. I draw stick figures and word balloons and stuff. I like to work with artists. One of my favorites is Frank Stack, who wrote to me after a few issues had been published. We've done several things together. I always make certain that the artist gets paid, even though it's not a lot of money, maybe \$100 per page. I like to find young artists. Every year there are more good cartoonists out there.

I like most of the artists who are highly praised — people like Joe Sacco and Dan Clowes. Some really good cartoonists don't stay in the business, however, because of the low pay. Gerry Shamray is someone I worked with — he had a unique style. Sue Carey is another artist who I admired.

Overall, I have mainly been influenced by prose writers rather than by cartoonists. Some of writers I like best are George Ade, Daniel Fuchs, Harvey Swados, and Henry Roth. I like fiction that deals with everyday life. I'm working on a comics version of Studs Terkel's *Working* — in some ways our work is very similar, with a special emphasis on everyday speech. I'm also writing on the life of Lenny Bruce. My favorite novelists include Joyce, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov. But I literally can't write fiction. Everytime I take a stab it doesn't work.

As far as comics are concerned, they are simply words and pictures. You can do anything with words and pictures.