Interview: Ernesto Laclau

In describing the process of uniting disparate social demands behind a common politics, your work argues that the proliferation of social movements and politicization of certain identities in recent decades offers the potential for a deepening of the democratic process and presents new possibilities for social emancipation. Politics is to be understood as process through which demands are articulated by particular identities; immigrants, public housing residents, the unemployed, etc. Do you see this emphasis on the plurality of political demands as a challenge to the creation of a coherent progressive politics?

I think we are dealing with two edges of a sword, because

on the one hand it is obvious that the horizontal proliferation of social demands in recent decades is enlarging the area from which an emancipatory project can be launched. On the other hand to put together all of these social demands in a coherent project is more complicated than when people thought that there was just one social agent of emancipation, which was the working class. For instance, I remember thirty years ago in San Francisco; everybody said that we had all the conditions for a very large emancipatory movement, popular pole etc., because we had the demands of the Chicanos, the demands of the blacks, the demands of the gays, but at the end of the day, some of these demands clashed with the demands of the other groups, so nothing happened. There have been attempts like the Rainbow Coalition of Jesse Jackson to put together a plurality of these demands but the task is not easy; the Rainbow Coalition didn't have a particularly good end. So I think that the dilemma of contemporary politics is how to create a unity out of diversity. That is the political challenge that we are facing today.

Your work describes the process of radicalizing political demands as the process through which disperse localized claims become discursively linked such that political subjects come to identify themselves in common as the bearers of rights that are not being met by an institutional order. This unity then becomes asserted as the demand for the radical overhaul of the institutional order, or some process of radical reform or revolution. Does this

common antagonism provide a sufficient mechanism of unification among 'the people' of democratic politics to allow them to carry out the task of self-governance?

Well, I have tried to argue that all demands taking place

in a public sphere are always internally divided. For instance you can have a demand for higher wages, but if it is articulated in some kind of repressive regime in which the demand is not immediately responded to, on the one hand the demand will have its particular content (higher wages), but on the other hand people will see the demand as a challenge to the existing system as a whole. Because of this second, more universal side of the demand, the demand could generate other social demands whose content is very different from the first; for instance, student demands for increasing autonomy in schools will start to form an equivalential relation so that the two demands. higher wages and increased autonomy—which are very different from the point of view of their particularity, come to be seen as equivalent in their opposition to a regime which is challenged by both. Thirdly let's suppose that you have a third demand: the demand for freedom of the press from some liberal sector. Again this demand is a particularity that establishes the opposition to an existing state and creates some equivalential relations and in this way it constructs what I would call an equivalential chain. Now at some point you would see not only the individual demand, but the chain of demands as a whole. At that point, because the means of representation of this chain is one individual demand—this demand is charged with the function of representing the whole. This is an example that I have used in my work: the

demands of Solidarność in Poland. In the beginning there were the demands of a group of workers in the Lenin shipvards in Gdańsk, but because these demands took place in a situation in which many other demands were not recognized by a repressive regime, these demands assumed the function of representing the whole. This is what I call an empty signifier. Why empty? Because, if the signifier is going to represent the totality of the chain, it has to abandon its only relationship with the particular demand from which it originated, and it has to represent a vast array of demands which are in an equivalential relationship: so it is less clearly a particularity and more and more a universal. and at the same time it is a hegemonic signifier because it has the function of representing—through its particular body—the universality transcending it. As I see it, this is the process of generation of a popular will as a whole. But as we were saying before there are counter tendencies that go against this popular representation of the collective will. For instance there is the tendency to reduce each demand to its own particularity so that this equivalential effect—the construction of the popular will—is finally defeated. And in the societies in which we live these two tendencies—the tendency toward universalization through

towards the particularism of the special demands—create a tension that is the very terrain in which the political is constructed.

Do you see the creation of an open, participatory system as the main task of emancipatory politics. Does this participatory dimension ensure the progressive nature of a democratic system?

I think so. I think that the construction of a democratic system depends on two dimensions that are to some extent at odds with each other, and to some extent are complimentary. On the one hand, democracy involves the extension of the points of rupture through which the underdog expresses itself. This is the horizontal dimension, which is given by the horizontal expansion of demands: the chain of equivalences. On the other hand you have the vertical pole, which is the unification of this chain around some kind of a central signifier. Now these two tendencies are not brought together by some sort of square circle: there is a tension between the two, but the two are necessary in order to construct democratic politics.

I think this tension you describe is at the root of the debate about co-optation vs. participation—alongside unification and institutionalization we often see the de-radicalization of many groups. How can one remain critical to the way in which these different social actors become integrated into the democratic process, given the fact that some of their demands are met, and some are not?

Well listen, Lenin used to say that politics means walking between precipices. You can go to one side of the precipice as opposed to the other side. Co-optation is one possible precipice. If you have some demands that are partially met, and you are integrated into the system, in that case there is co-optation and you have clearly a failure of the emancipatory project. If on the other hand, you keep a purely sterile position of protest outside of the system, in the short or long term what is going to happen is that the movement disintegrates because it is reaching nothing; it is a moment of total political sterility. In between these two extremes you have to find a medium way, which is politically effective. In Argentina we cannot say whether this medium terrain has been reached or not. And I don't know if actually when we speak about these types of processes a definite answer can ever be given. But there is not doubt that the political spectrum as result of the integration of these two dimensions has moved sharply to the left. It is a far more left wing public sphere than the one we had in 2003.

Perhaps the second example that I was going to give you is even more telling: the example of the construction of the hegemony of the Italian communist party after the Second World War. After the Second World War there was a discussion about how to build up party politics in Italy and there were two positions; one position said: well we are the party of the working class; the working class is an enclave in the industrial north, so we have to be the party of the industrial north. The other position which was more Gramsician, and in the end imposed itself because Palmiro Togliatti, who was the general secretary of the party, supported it, said: no we are going to build up the hegemony of the party also in southern Italy, where the working class is very weak. So how should we do that? Well, simply we will transform the premises of the trade

union and the party as the uniting point of a set of diverse social struggles. For example the struggle for the supply of water, the struggle against the mafia, the struggle for food cooperatives and so on. So that in the end many disperse demands came together in the same equivalential chain. So there you have the bad possibility that you proposed—these demands on the one hand acquire much more solidity by becoming unified to the communist party equivalential chain—they became more effective. But on the other hand they became subordinated to the communist party general ideology, so the possibility of their sterilization through a party controlling mechanism was there. But at the same time if they had remained disperse and so on they would have had no effect...[The communist party] had been a powerful force of democratization in Italy. And there you have these two dangers that we were mentioning were quite operative.

These political demands, when they start out at least, are isolated to specific social instances: to specific times and places. In each instance they respond to different power structures and social problems. We can see how a political demand could be created that would not be of very much use to emancipatory politics because it is very arbitrary or very specific to a particular problematic. In your vision of politics is there room for weighing the content of different demands and prioritizing them?

The truth is that all of these new types of demands were responding to an objective change in capitalist development. At the beginning of the second post-world war period, you still had the inheritance of the old structure of the working class movement; capitalism was essentially industrial capitalism, the trade unions were essentially industrial trade unions, and around the big industrial cities in the west you had the so called red belts—which were constituted by the trade unions, the communist party and so on—which were the focus of a strong proletarian culture and identity. Now then comes the transition to post-Fordism, firstly the industrial workers start loosing centrality—there is a terciarization (1) of the economy. And so if you wanted to have radical protest, they were not going to come, as in the past, from typical working class values, they were going to come from some kind of imaginary re-aggregation of things: the culture of the young, ethnicity and this set of things, which were totally different in nature. Now the big communist parties in the West, but also the Labor party in Britain, were constituted around the old industrial union identity. At the moment when this new proliferation of demands started they were quite unprepared to meet this historically changing climate. Today the red belts no longer exist, neither in France nor in Italy, not even in Britain; the trade unions have lost all their old centrality. This is where we come back to your first question. You have a dispersal of social demands, a new way in which they had to be put together, and no objective mechanism which ensures that the centrality of what we have called the empty signifier, is going to be linked to a class position. It is going to be linked to the ability of these elements to put together a much wider set of social demands.

"Laclau" continues on page 2

. Terciarization: Refers to changes brought about by the increasing centrality of the service sector of the economy, and the flexibility of the work force characterized by a prevalence of part-time, temporary, and 1 Interview: Ernest Laclau Ashleigh Campi

1 On anarchism and Marxism: a response to *Mayday* magazine (UK)

2 Review: "The past and future of militant anti-capitalist street protest in North America"

2 Review: Jeff Wall

2 On the relationship between psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics

3 The failure of Pakistan: A concise history of the Left The Platypus Historians Group

3 Who needs the Left? Joe Grim Feinberg

The Platypus Review

The Editorial board of *The Platypus Review* is motivated by a sense that very concepts of the "political" and the "Left" have become so inclusive as to be meaningless. The Review seeks to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches to these categories of thought and action—not out of a concern with inclusiveness for its own sake, but rather to provoke productive disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left, and to evaluate their saliency for an emancipatory politics today. Doing this work implies a reconsideration of what we mean by "the Left

The editorial board wishes to provide an ongoing public forum wherein ${\it questioning}$ and reconsidering one's own convictions is not seen as a weakness, but as part of the necessary work of building a revolutionary politics. We hope to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying the variety of positions and orientations currently represented on the political Left, in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that do find a place within existing Left discourses, locally or internationally.

discussion that explores these and other often-

paraphernalia to be found abundant in coffee

progressive personality allows for anti-yuppie

bervasiveness of identity politics in the liberal or

studies, we can see that this is the case. Yet the

or black lower-class families. From empirical

while those who are displaced are either Latino

disproportionately wealthy, are white yuppies",

snops, cuttural cornerstones of gentrification.

or progressive personality allows for "anti-yup-

pie" paraphernalia to be found abundant in coffee

the pervasiveness of identity politics in the liberal

studies, we can see that this is not the case. Yet

while those who are displaced are either Latino

qısbroportionately wealthy, are white yuppies,

with Identity: The Politics of Anti-gentrification."

print, in Laura Schmidt's article Taking Issue

The Platypus Review regrets the tollowing mis-

ng a space for reports-back, follow-ups and

accompany the calendar in each issue, provid-

educational events of interest to Chicago

The Platypus Review features a monthly

@ The Hideout, 1354 West Wabansia

Platypus Announcements

Russian/Eurasian Studies Events

Franke Institute for the Humanities

Platypus Review Issue #3 Benefit Party

http://ceeres.uchicago.edu/MRHW_2008.html

Created By: Center for East European and

2008 Midwest Russian Historians Workshop

om) and members of the Industrial Workers of

Finding Our Roots (http://mayfirst.wordpress.

Street Underground (www.49underground.org)

are not expected to read all the articles, but

destroy the world or revolutionize it. Texts to be

or magnificently elevated; thru which we may

changing nature of work in our time and in

"Work Against Work: Green Collar Work"

Bring something to share.)

otluck and discusssion

This is a continuation in a series exploring the

activity thru which we may be utterly debased

nistory. All events approach work as a complex

The series is co-organized by the 49th

It is held that gentrifiers, consistent with the

The following passage is incorrect:

platypus 1917 webzineldyahoogroups.com

Issue #1 retraction

About the calendar

February 16, 4-7pm

1/2 - 62/2

It is held that gentrifiers, consistent with the

Museum nistorian Kussett Lewis teads a panet

and a litestyle of peace, love, and rock in roll?

parance between determined political activism

so important? How did participants achieve a

terculture take root in Chicago and why was it

had Wells Street in Old Iown. How did the coun-

San Francisco had Haight-Ashbury and Chicago

loader.asp?target=hall.asp?event=3809

with European ones as the only acceptable

German genocide of the Herrero people there.

in Namibia on this the centenary of the 1904

tionship between North and South even today.

ndeed, as the ideological model for the rela-

orerunner of European colonialism in Africa

The film looks at Christian evangelism as the

Library Forum Room. Morthwestern Main Uni-

in very poor countries, and that even countries

that the desire for democracy runs deep, even

why democracy progresses, Diamond maintains

governments are faltering. Exploring how and

the world have stumbled and many democratic

recent efforts to promote democracy around

expert Larry Diamond contends, however, that

countries were dictatorships; today, more than

half are democracies. Leading democracy

In 1974, nearly three-quarters of all

tounding coeditor, the Journal of Democracy.

Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and

Nonmembers \$30; President's Circle, Corporate

national Studies; American Research Institute for

Center for Middle East Studies; Center for Inter

for East European and Russian, Eurasian Studie.

Sponsored by: The University of Chicago; Center

Professor at the Max Plank Institute for Social

Presented by: Lale Yalcin-Heckmann, Associate

Center for East European and Russian/Eurasia

aries and Citizenship from Below" research group

Anthropology, and Head of the "Caucasian Bound-

Speaker: Larry Diamond, senior fellow, the

Young Professionals \$10; Members \$20;

Hilton Chicago, 720 South Michigan Ave

Z/18, 5:30-7:30pm

The Spirit of Democracy

in particular it looks at the role of miss

versity Library, 2nd Floor South Tower,

www.pcics.norinwestern.eau

a film by Jean-Marie Teno

970 Campus Drive

Cost: \$10; \$8 members

Born To Be Wild

Chicago History Museum

The unabridged editorial statement can be found at http://platypus1917.org/

Senior Editors: Pam C. Nogales C., Editors: Ben Blumberg, Tana Forrester,

Copy Editors: Ashleigh Campi, Tana Forrester

Designer: Dakota Brown Webzine Editor: Laurie Rojas

Advertising Manager: Ashleigh Campi

Submission guidelines

Articles can range in length from 500-1,000 words. We will consider longer pieces but prefer that they be submitted as proposals Please send articles, event calendar listing submissions, and any inquiries about this

platypus1917webzine@yahoogroups.com

The

Platypus Review

Issue #2 | February 2008

www.platypus1917.org/theplatypusreview

Organization, political action, history, and consciousness: on anarchism and Marxism

the production of empty signifiers and the tendency

A response to Mayday magazine (UK) inaugural issue #1 (Winter 2007-08)

Chris Cutrone, for Platypus

"Socialism is the first popular movement in world history that has set itself the goal of bringing human consciousness, and thereby free will, into play in the social actions of mankind... to try to take its history into its own hands; instead of remaining a will-less football, it will take the tiller of social life and become the pilot to the goal of its

> —Rosa Luxemburg. The Crisis of German Social Democracy (1915)

PLATYPUS HAS EARNED recognition from the new British publication Mayday: magazine for anarchist/libertarian ideas and action, in its inaugural issue #1 (Winter 2007–08) "Introduction: Open letter" (pp. 2-7). Mayday cites the initial Platypus statement, "What is a platypus? On surviving the extinction of the Left:

Attempts at progressive political renewal are occurring all round the world... Platypus in their 2006 document "Or Surviving the Extinction of the Left" say: "We maintain that past and present history need not indicate the future. Past and present failures and losses on the Left should educate and warn, but not spellbind and enthrall us.

Hence, to free ourselves, we declare that the Left is dead. -0r more precisely, that we are all that is left of it. This is less a statement of fact than of intent. —The intent that the Left should live, but the recognition that it can, only by overcoming itself. And we are that overcoming!" (2–3)

Mayday goes on to say:

This is a spirit which Mayday has much in common with, although we include the anarchist movement in this assessment, and it is through engagement with such groups who are beginning again that serious progress may occur. (3)

The Platypus assessment of the "death" of the "Left" also

applies to anarchism. But we should distinguish a Marxian approach from anarchism to clarify our engagement. A key distinction is the relation of political organization and historical consciousness. Critical historical consciousness is primary for Platypus, and we are currently addressing classical issues in the history of revolutionary Marxism 1900–40 through a series of discussions in Chicago, reading Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky to approach the relation between

history and organization on the Marxist Left, how and why theory and political programme are essential forms of historical memory and consciousness on the Left. Platypus asks: What is the purpose of "revolutionary" organization? Revolutionary "leadership?" —Or, as present "anarchist" aversion to organizational leadership would have it, are such formulations contradictions in terms? The Mayday "Introduction: Open letter" states that

"Mayday was produced because experience within political movements led to dissatisfaction with what already passes for politics and political organisation" (3). Mayday critiques the organizational "conservatism" and "hierarchies" of political groups "more concerned with the continuation of themselves rather than the growth of an independent and free workers movement" (3). Mayday ascribed this phenomenon to "Leninist tactics which are designed to perpetuate the organization not the class struggle" (3). But Mayday thinks "anarchist" groups are not exempt from this problem: "Rather than enabling progressive politics, existing practice was rather sectarian in approach; they practice self-isolating politics, rather than an inclusive and growing approach, and this even from anarchists" (3) Mayday notes the legacy of 1960s New Left activism that the "movement is full of lions led by donkeys," due to an "anti-intellectualism" that is "also suggestive of hidden hierarchies inside outwardly democratic appearances" (3). Mayday thereby disarticulates a usual but unwarranted and problematic identification of intellectualism with

pitfalls of leadership Platypus considers that there might be reason for the self-perpetuation of avowedly "revolutionary" organizations, but that this should not be taken for granted and needs to be justified. Perhaps there is a specific relation of organization to consciousness and emancipatory action that is lost in the classic antinomy of spontaneity vs. organization. As Rosa Luxemburg's biographer J. P. Nettl pointed out, Lenin and Luxemburg each addressed different, complementary questions, but towards the same purpose: How does political action enable transformative organization; and how does political organization enable transformative, emancipatory, and not foreclosing action?

How can the Left "live" and take form not deadly to itself? Nicholas Spencer, in his 1997 essay "Historicizing the Spontaneous Revolution: Anarchism and the Spatial Politics of Postmodernism." stated the issue as follows:

[T]he Marxist model of a rational or scientific understand ing of historical processes... culminate[s] in a class-based revolution at the end of dialectical time.... Conversely. those of an anarchist persuasion have often criticized the Marxist emphasis on rational history as a counterrevolutionary justification for the authority of the state and political party leaders. Both anarchists and Marxists consider themselves the spokespersons for the authentipolitical revolution... Luxemburg supported the need for party leaders and organization to guide revolutions according to the historical science of dialectical materialism... According to anarchist philosophy, belief in history is the guarantor of political authority, since change over time implies the need for a centralized body to guide the processes of change. The anarchist appeal to spontaneous revolution is one symptom of the rejection of history.

> Platypus pursues the revolutionary Marxist tradition to ask guestions of the relation between organization and

-www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwegsa/revolutions/Spencer.htm

historical consciousness. What role, if any, does histori-

cal consciousness play in emancipatory politics? What is

meant by "historical" consciousness?

The relevance of history is not given but made. But "made" in a dialectical sense. As Marx put it in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, humanity makes history but not under conditions of its own choosing. History is made but in ways that also produce us. We make history with what is given under certain conditions, and so need to be conscious of how history is made and reflect upon its significance, rather than taking it for granted. This is why Walter Benjamin spoke, in his 1940 "Theses on the Phi-

losophy of History," of the "writing" of history, historiogra-

phy on the Left being urgent for emancipatory politics. From a Marxian approach to capital, there are two registers for apprehending history: the specificity of modern, capitalist society as an epochal problem distinguished from other historical forms of society; and the historical transformations that occur within the epoch of capital in which social-emancipatory movements take part, since Marx's time of the Industrial Revolution and related socia and political changes starting in the mid-19th Century and the emergence of the modern workers' movement, to the present. The issue of capital thus becomes the question of: What changes while remaining "the same?"

sense that historical moments might not have pertinence to the present in a linear-progressive way. Rather, these historical constellations appear as structuring figures in the constitution of the present, as sets of enduring

Benjamin's concept of "constellation" refers to the

problems yet to be worked through. As Benjamin put it, this is a matter of making the past present. Hence something that happened more recently might not have a more immediate relevance to problems of the present than something that happened long ago. Something later might expire faster because it is less essential to the present than something earlier might allow us to grasp

Such constellations in the appearance of history are importantly involuntary: as Benjamin put it, they "flash up:" as Marx put it, they "weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living." So history cannot be a simple matter of an inventory of "lessons already learned." For, as Beniamin put it, "even the dead are not safe." The significance of the past changes as a function of the present. History haunts us as a problem in the present. This is why

Benjamin spoke of regarding history from the standpoint of its redemption. What value, if any, do past thoughts and actions have for us now? The history of the Left furnishes us with a set of questions and problems that we are tasked to answer in the present. But, as Adorno put it in Negative Dialectics (1966), "What has been cast aside but not absorbed theoretically will often yield its truth content only later. It festers as a sore on the prevailing health; this

The question of organization can be seen in a limited,

will lead back to it in changed situations.

one-sided respect if it is treated merely in terms of effective action in the present, if it is not also seen as a problem of historical continuity, through moments of change in which conscious actors have taken part. The organization of emancipatory politics should be understood properly as a matter of self-transformative action. What organization allows for itself to be transformed in and through actions it makes possible? Thus we can see that the present fossilization of the Left, in both theory and practice, presents problems of organization in a certain light. We need to understand the reasons for and significance of this inertia

and how it is a problem that we don't have the choice to

bypass but must try to overcome

Programmatic organization might be necessary precisely because it can objectify and thus make available for critical reflection problems of changes in consciousness Problems of organization are not only deplorable in terms of resulting incapacity for effective and sustainable transformative action under changing conditions, but might be important symptoms whose task it is for us to work in and through, and not merely oppose. Perhaps we need to be "conservative" in our "revolutionary" politics in order to be actually radical in the present

"History" can be accumulated in forms of organizational programme as a problem of consciousness in and of the present, in the results of attempts (but failures) to consciously act effectively. But organization transcends

"Mayday" continues on page 3

Scholar, Department of Philology, University seked duestions.

1902 Sheridan Road, Evanston

Faculty and Fellows Colloquium

WAGE); University of Chicago, History Depart Center for World Affairs and the Global Economy of Chicago Workshop. Sponsored by UW-Madisor Joint University of Wisconsin and University sint ni estedicitaed and participate in this

students and faculty from all disciplines are he boundaries of political history. Graduat nunity of scholars interested in reassessing Wisconsin-Madison and establish a com-University of Chicago and the University of workshop will help build a vibrant cross-insal history. This second annual collaborative

608) 265-8038, Contact: Deborah Meiners -ree and open to the public Room, Social Science 224 niversity of Chicago, John Hope Franklin Crisis and Continuity in a Globalized

ubə.əsiwblərəniəməl

Colonial (Colonial Misunderstanding)," vote, the arrogance of politicians and everything Documentary Film Series: "Le Malentendu discusses his book, the growing libertarian the Left, the Right, and Threats to Our Liberties, confd become democracies within a generation. with entrenched regimes like Iran and China (312) 222-7871 of (312) 222-4860

Nov. 9, 2008, in honor of the election season. Get free admission to the museum now through 445 M. Michigan McCormick Iribune Freedom Museum, mq08:7-9 ,21/2 A Talk with David Boaz

seasonal farm workers. brimary health care services to migrant and Partnership, an IL organization that provides conversationalists from the Community Health will cook from a menu designed by her fellow organizers of the Growing Tennessee exhibitioi Lora Lode, artist, teacher, and one of the

http://chpofil.org/ 2/12, 7pm & Community Health Partnership Conversation and Curated Meal with Lora Lode

also sheds new light on the United States and the end of the French empire, Marnia Lazreg from 1954 to 1962. By tracing the psychologi through a close examination of the French ship between torture and colonial dominatio ook, which looks at the intimate relation-University of New York will discuss her new College and the Graduate Center of the City Marnia Lazreg, protessor of sociology at Hunte

www.bcics.nortnwestern.euu 1900 East 57th Street Room, Scott Hall, 601 mqd-0E:4 81/2 rom The Caucasus and the Middle East From Algiers to Baghdao Torture and the Twilight of Empire:

or www.socialistworker.org (1/13) 222-464U, chicago_socialistsldyahoo.com, phonsored by international Socialist Urganization

1968, a time of peace and love, violence and war.

national, and global events that took place in Oohrn provide an historical overview of the local,

Former activists Bill Ayers and Bernardine

Cost: \$10; \$8 members

md/, '7, L/7

Aagıc Bus.

Chicago History Museum

You Say You want a Revolution?

loader.asp?target=hall.asp?event=3808

1968. The series includes a special bus four,

look at how politics, culture, and music shaped

Forty years later, this three-part series takes a

Three programs and bus tour: \$72; \$60 members.

Ticket for all three programs: \$30; \$23 members

Call 312.642.46UU for more information

rad Veterans Against the War Benetit

Strategy Forum; and the Jewish United

International Affairs, DePaul University

Law Institute at DePaul University; the Nation

Presented by International Human Rights

Vice President for Community Government a

The Washington Institute for Mear East Policy

and Mehdi Khalaji, visiting Fellow at Thvisitii

Center for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv Universit

Panelists: Dr. David Menashri, Director of the

pertus Institute, 610 S. Michigan Ave. Chicago

Ol loods diw students not eer

Iran: Insights into its Religion, Politics,

women's groups of the 1960s-1970s

History of one of the most influential leftist

New World Resource Center, 1300 N Western

Chicago Women's Liberation Union Presentation

Moderated by Ambassador J.D. Bindenagel

Chicago History Museum

Danny's, 1951 W. Dickens

2/12, 2/29, and 2/26

The '68 Experience

рісадо/діхам.огд

JAJL s'bnu7

(315) 327-4770

mq8-6,11/2

[773] 227-4011

www.protestrnc2008.org

Organizing Conference

Republican Convention Protest

progressive media professionals & activists

(708) 447-1547 or walterb306/acs.com

Metwork, Chicago Media Action and Chicago area

Sponsored by Metro Chicago Progressive Media

19w World Resource Center, 1300 N Western

the New York Public Library through January

Balkans, 1910–1935," currently on display at

Graphic Modernism from the Baltic to the

http://ceeres.uchicago.edu/flyers/mansbach.pdf

Center for East European and Russian/Eurasian

Mansbach is the co-curator of the exhibit

Another History of Modern Art"

Networking Party: Being Our Own Media

mq£ ,01\2

mq£, , 9\2

\$10 General Public;

UIC, 750 S Halsted, Room TBA Crisis, Capitalism and the Coming 312.663.4413 ext 27 or cloweryldlan

National Museum of Mexican Art ьтеедот то маггу кесертоп

eissbourd Fund, CEERES and the Anthro

Sponsored by the Society of Fellows, the

Studies Events, SSRC, University of Chicago Center for East European and Russian/Eur From Max Weber to Public Sociology" Burawoy: "Social Sciences and Politics:

Innual Weissbourd Lecture by Michael Loyola University, Chicago

for the Future, presented by Dr. John Pincince ncarcerated women. Dowdell of Grace House & panel of formerly scussion follows with Pastor Bernadine

creening of work-in-progress documentary. Wellington Church, 615 W Wellington and the Children They Leave Behind Film: War on the Family; Mothers in Prison

slavery disclosure & reparations movement Activist & civil rights veteran discusses the

Open University of the Left, 2040 N Milwauke Slavery and The Demand for Reparations Bob Brown: nplications of all this activity? What is next?

What impact did this have? What are the la arge numbers of practitioners, activists, and this work. Feel Tank and AREA both mobilized in Chicago making it an international hub for elated to critical art practices in the last year

вло ов выпочения в почения A8T noitsooLostion TBA Feel Tank and AREA, and the public Dan S. Wang moderates a discussion bet

0087-887 (844) African American History Month Celebration St Sabina Church, 1210 W 78th Place Cornel West

www.gayliberation.net ook County Marriage License Bureau, Marriage Equality Day Protests

dience Q&A by Ayesha Siddiga, Manan Ahmed,

280 S. Columbus Drive main auditorium chool of the Art Institute of Chicago,

and future Perspectives on the crisis, its past, present, The Failure of Pakistan The Platypus Affiliated Society presents:

cyange ideas about recent trends in academic scholars to present findings, research and exdom Conference is to provide a board forum The objective of the DePaul Acader

Iniversity of Illinois-Chicago Bill Ayers, Professor, College of Education Department of History, University of Chicago Austin; Peter Novick, Professor (Emeritus) school of Journalism, University of Texas Michigan; Robert Jensen, Associate Profes Professor, Department of History, University of nia state University-Stanislous; Juan Cole, Politics and Public Administration, Cali

sity; As'ad Abukhalil, Professor, Department of

Center for Middle East Studies, Harvard Unive

Speakers: Sara Roy, Senior Research Scholar http://academictreedomchicago.org/ DePaul University De Paul Academic Freedom Conference

and Russian/Eurasian Studies Events Presented by Center for East European driving current research interests. presented in our curricula as well as what is

tance, and to take stock of how Islam is being pofh historical and contemporary imporsophisticated understanding of a topic that is of aim to reach a more broadly grounded and Through "Islam, Modernity, and Eurasia" we

http://ceeres.uchicago.edu/flyers/ for the Humanities, 1100 East 57th. The University of Chicago. The Franke Institute workshop on teaching and researching Islam, Modernity, and Eurasia:

tional, 8th Day Center for Justice Against Police Torture, victim Darrell Cannor Panelists: Flint Taylor & Joey Mogul of People

Grace Place, 637 S Dearborn Torture in Chicago: The Burge Case

International House, 1414 E. 59th

my, presented by Dr. Ayesha Siddiga Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Ec www.bcics.northwestern.edu 1902 Sheridan Road, Evanston

Representation in South America" presents "Civil Society and Unequal Political Faculty Fellows Colloquium: Jason Seawright

February calendar

REVIEW

"The Past and Future of Militant Anti-Capitalist Street Protest in North America, a discussion at Mess Hall

Marco Torres

THERE WAS A GATHERING of about fifteen people on the evening of December the 13th at Mess Hall, a small artist-run storefront in Rogers Park dedicated to community education and organizing. Organized by the 49th St. Underground and the Industrial Workers of the World, the topic of the event was described as "anti-capitalist street protest" but the presenter made it clear from the beginning that he was going to talk about the Seattle anti-WTO summit protests of 1999 and their aftermath. He said that he was associated with a Black Bloc, but emphasized that he was not a representative. According to him, less than an organization, a Black Bloc is a strategy, a kind of network of small affinity groups who, by using their own brand of "direct action," have been attempting to undermine events such as the one in Seattle, or, in another well-publicized example, the G8 summit at Genoa in 2001

Like the talk given by the presenter, the pamphlet distributed at the meeting "How to Fight a War?" (1) had at its center the assumption that the "Battle of Seattle" of 1999 had been an unqualified victory for "radical politics" la term that was used by the presenter and most of the attendees as something with unquestionable value and self-evident meaning.) The Black Bloc strategy had gained currency during these protests, since they provided the most public exposure to their tactic of confrontational. open protest—a tactic of property destruction and rioting. A great amount of nostalgia surrounded the events in Seattle, and the guestion that the discussion at Mess Hall was meant to address was that of the diminishing impact of "radical politics" in the years since these protests. According to this account, despite the satisfactory results of mobilizations such as the one in Genoa, the "summit hopping" model of anti-globalization protesting had become exhausted. The anti-war movement that followed, in turn. had been taken over by what the presenter described as "Marxists and other authoritarian types." Since the high point of Seattle, things had thus gone downhill, and a new wave of radicalization was now in order.

The two-hour long open discussion that followed the presentation thus focused primarily on tactics. There were

Should this kind of anarchist direct action be allied with trade unions? Should there be a centralized organization for this kind of protest or should it continue be based on affinity groups? The issue that seemed to be present in everyone's minds but somehow necessarily ignored was the issue of purpose—of determining a goal to these activities. The answer for many in the room, especially those associated with the Black Bloc, was something along the lines that life should be lived as class struggle; that the end-goal of being a "radical" was to cause enough damage so that the "spells cast by corporate hegemony" could be destroyed. It is important to mention that, despite using the verbiage of class struggle—this terminology was not used in the Marxian sense. While for Marx class struggle was the expression of a contradiction in society to be overcome by producing real historical change, for those associated with the Black Bloc, class struggle consisted of a kind of lifestyle. That is, it consisted of a way of living somehow "outside capitalism"—a way of life that constantly gives the finger to those in power in solidarity with those who are oppressed. Underlying the perspectives on tactics and strategy in this meeting—which was populated by self-avowed an-

many questions: Is property destruction a good idea?

archists—was the conviction that in spite of the necessity to fundamentally change society, to even think of taking power was out of the question. Throughout the discussion a palpable and irrational fear that any kind of empowerment for an organized movement on the Left would produce horrible 'hierarchies' was coupled with a a belief that real change in society is ultimately impossible. The stasis to which those associated with the Black Bloc conceded seemed to be the inheritance of a long series of defeats on the Left throughout the 20th century. And this is no wonder: from Russia in '17 to China in '49 to France in '68, the most substantial attempts of the Left to overcome capitalism have produced little but more of the same horror and waste. What the undercurrents of the discussion summed up to was a sense of desperation—a sense of desperation that made the central question in the minds of those in the meeting not "why should we fight this fight?" but instead "how much damage can we make?"

The darkest manifestation of this kind of attitude was that from time to time those involved in a black bloc would bring up the guestion of whether hurting people would be right or wrong in their struggle. This kind of preparedness for violence was deeply unsettling. It was as if, having run out of options, all that anti-capitalism had before it was not only property destruction but also, possibly, terrorism. |P

REVIEW

Jeff Wall: The Return of the Modern?

Laurie Rojas

ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHT EXHIBITIONS of the summer of 2007 in Chicago was the Art Institute's retrospective exhibition on the work of Jeff Wall. This occasion marked the first time that the Art Institute exhibited a solo show of a photographer. Jeff Wall's large-scale color transparencies, mounted in light boxes, covered the same walls that have previously displayed Rembrandts, Girodets, and Manets. The exhibition provided the opportunity to reconsider the present condition of photography as art.

Predestined for extensive art historical consumption and critique, Wall's work is characterized by an extensive use of cinematic, literary, and art historical references. Following Baudelaire's notion of "painting of modern life" and 19th century pictorial practices, his work is an attempt to redeem the task of modernism through photography. This historically motivated attempt seeks to recover photography from the detour promoted by postmodern art and criticism that emerged in the late 60's. As a result, Wall works through the possibilities available in the medium of photography as a response to the historical turn against modern art that still exists today under the broad banner of 'conceptual art

In conceptual art practices that emerged in the 70's photography lost its specificity as a medium and abandoned its identity as a historical or aesthetic object. Instead, photography began to be treated as a theoretical object, that is, as a means to critique formalism, representation, originality, and, notably, the claims made in favor of the autonomous work of art. This marked a refusal of everything that art practices in the mid 19th century had opened up.

Wall's earlier photographs, the now canonical Destroyed Room, and Picture for Women, demonstrate how his work encapsulates a response to the 'photographic legacy of conceptual art' by alluding to a multitude of work in the history of modernism. By 1978–79, Wall reintroduces historical discourse back into art photographic practices through carefully planned and highly staged photographs that recall for example, Eugène Delacroix's 1827 painting, Death of Sardanapalus. By recalling Delacroix's highly composed history painting, Wall links himself to a longstanding tradition of art concerned with history.

During the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, history painting stood as the dominant form of academic painting. Traditionally, the subjects of history painting would cover ancient mythology, Greco-Roman history, literary and biblical subjects, but in the late 18th century modern historical subjects, current events and figures in contemporary dress, were introduced. Paintings by Jacques-Louis David depicted contemporary events of the French Revolution throughout their immediate unfolding. In the middle of the 19th century, during the rise of modernism, the traditional subjects of the paintings were replaced by commoners mired in their everyday activities. In the work of Eduard Manet, referenced by Wall in Pictures for Women, the subjects confront the beholder by returning the gaze, creating an uncomfortable tension between the beholder and the work of art. In this way, the viewer confronted by the expectation

Many of Walls photographs carry a resemblance to, or at least an echo of nineteenth-century painting. The imagery in Walls's 1993 photograph, *Restoration*, is not clearly discernible from afar, and yet by standing a few feet away,

of the object is implicated as the subject of the work.

. "How to Fight a War Pamphlet" online: http://www.infoshop.org/

one gets the momentary impression of standing within

the spatial boundaries of the depicted architectural space. This impression is typical of many of Wall's monumental photographs, but in *Restoration*, this effect is overtly pronounced by the scale (over sixteen feet long), the position of the camera, and the distortion produced by the wide angle of the lens. In approaching the image one begins to notice the painted landscape in the background covering a cylindrical wall that extends throughout the four corners of the photograph. The scale of this wall changes drastically, objects and individuals are much smaller towards the center of the image and function as indicators of the depth of the space. Restoration slowly reveals itself to be a photograph taken inside a panorama depicting a scene of a snow-covered town surrounded by mountains with

Panoramas emerged in the middle of the 19th century as a popular form of public attraction and entertainment satisfying a desire for an overall fictional and illusory experience. Visitors to a panorama were not deceived, but rather suspended their disbelief in order to contemplate the scene surrounding them.

The Wall photograph presents a product in high demand during the nineteenth-century, the history painting rendered as panorama. Painted in Lucerne by Edouard Castres, the Bourbaki Panorama is dated from 1881, and portrays French troops under the command of General Bourbaki. The troops depicted had been granted internment in Switzerland after the defeat of the French during the Franco-Prussian war (1870–71). During this period, a new international law had established that foreign troops could find refuge on neutral ground under the conditions that they relinquish their arms in order to be stationed in camps until the end of the war. In Switzerland's case the authorities allowed General Bourbaki's troops to cross the border at Les Verrières near Neuchâtel. The troops were to remain in Switzerland until a formal cease-fire would allow their release. Most importantly, the defeat of the French brought about the end of the French Second Empire, the reign of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, and resulted in the unification of the German Empire that would last

Throughout the surface of this historical imagery lie small rectangular strips of paper indicating the incomplete task of the restoration process. This process was an attempt to remove over 100 years of material accumulated on the surface of the panorama, aiming to provide the clearest presentation of the work by bringing it closer to its original conception. The restoration of any work of art requires intensive, time-consuming, and meticulous labor, with the purpose of allowing future generations the possibility of experiencing the object from a past historical

Some might see Wall's work as merely a rehearsal of old themes, as pastiche, or even as regression. And yet, if it is a manifestation of regression, this might say more about the present inability of art to move forward, to progress beyond its current limitations. However, Wall's work is at least a re-opening of an art historical discourse that had been lost in conceptual art's use of photography. These reminders of art's past: the references to 19th century panoramas, history and realist painting, provoke an understanding of Wall's work, even at a surface level, that seeks to be part of the historical development of art.

Contemporary art photography practices have yet to work through the medium-specific possibilities of photography as art, i.e., as an end in itself. It has yet to properly ask the question, what makes a photograph art? What makes a photograph more than *mere* representation? In other words, it has yet to ask the most difficult question of all: what makes art modern? |

Castoriadis, Marx, and Freud

On the Relationship between Psychoanalysis and

on Time and Emancipation

Emancipatory Politics:

ON TWO OCCASIONS, Sigmund Freud observed that politics, pedagogy, and psychoanalysis are all impossible professions. Cornelius Castoriadis attempted to make sense of this cryptic observation in a 1994 essay entitled "Psychoanalysis and Politics," in which he argued that, not only are these three "professions" structurally analogous, they are also entangled with each other such that the "impossible" realization of pedagogical or psychoanalytic aims is ultimately conditional upon an emancipatory political transformation.

The impossibility of psychoanalysis as well as of pedagogy lies in the fact that they both attempt to aid in the creation of autonomy for their subjects by using an autonomy that does not yet exist. This appears to be a logical impossibility.... But the impossibility also appears, especially in the case of pedagogy, to lie in the attempt to produce autonomous human beings within a heteronomous societv.... The solution to this riddle is the "impossible" task of politics—all the more impossible since it must also lean on a not vet existing autonomy in order to bring its own type of autonomy into being. [1]

Castoriadis's analysis of the "impossible possibility" of emancipatory politics, while deformed by his tendency to treat dynamic social formations as static states of being (i.e. "autonomy"), conveys, in a partially veiled form. certain important dimensions of Marxist politics. First, by analogizing social emancipation to pedagogy and psychoanalysis, Castoriadis squarely positions social emancipation along a temporal axis, indicating that Marxists should strive to bring about a break, in time, between an era characterized by "personal independence founded on objective dependence," (2) and a subsequent era characterized by a more thoroughgoing form of social freedom. The essentially temporal (rather than spatial) nature of this hoped-for "break" has often been forgotten on the Left—an amnesia that has had disastrous consequences for the project of social emancipation.

Second. Castoriadis's paradoxical formulation concerning the (non-)existence of the conditions for social autonomy indicates, albeit in a highly attenuated manner, something significant about the ground upon which a possible socialist future might be built. As Marx argued in the Grundrisse, an emancipatory transition to a postcapitalist society would entail the abolition of the value form of social mediation and the freeing up of the social wealth, and human capacities accumulated in alienated form under capitalism (3). In other words, the social form that currently frustrates social emancipation—namely, capital—would also constitute the ground upon which a socialist society would be built. Thus, in a sense, it is right to say that there is no currently-constituted social basis for emancipation, but that the basis for emancipation can nevertheless be found in contemporary society. Were this not the case, as Marx observed in the Grundrisse "then al attempts to explode [capitalist society] would be quixotic" (4). As Moishe Postone argues:

The specificity of capitalism's dialectical dynamic, as analyzed by Marx, entails a relationship of past, present, and of historical development....In capitalism, objectified historical time is accumulated in alienated form, reinforcing the present, and, as such, it dominates the living. Yet, it also allows for people's liberation from the present by undermining its necessary moment, thereby making possible the future—the appropriation of history such that the older relations are reversed and transcended. Instead of a social form structured by the present, by abstract

. Cornelius Castoriadis, World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination, Ed. & Trans., 2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin and

labor time, there can be a social form based upon the full utilization of a history alienated no longer, both for society in general and for the individual. (5)

In a brief footnote attached to this passage, Postone

One could draw a parallel between this understanding of the capitalist social formation's history and Freud's notion of individual history, where the past does not appear as such, but, rather, in a veiled, internalized form that dominates the present. The task of psychoanalysis is to unveil the past in such a way that its appropriation becomes possible. The necessary moment of a compulsively repetitive present can thereby be overcome, which allows the individual to move into the future. (6)

With this footnote, we return to the analogy between psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics with which we began. In what follows, I want to try and open up some inroads into thinking through the significance of this analogy—is it merely a coincidence, or can we offer an explanation as to why Freud formulated a theory of individual emancipation that was so strikingly analogous to Marx's formulation of the relationship between history and emancipation? One way to make inroads into this comparison of Marx

and Freud's conceptions of time and emancipation is through an examination of Freud's theorization of the "compulsion to repeat"—a hypothesized compulsion that, in his metapsychological essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud finds evidence for in a number of social and psychological phenomena (from a number of developmental phases and historical eras). He goes so far as to suggest that this "compulsion" might properly be understood as an "urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces" (7). The paragraph in which this quote is embedded is directly preceded by a discussion of the psychotherapist's attempt to help their patient overcome a compulsively repeated present, indicating that Freud conceptualized the psychotherapeutic aim of helping a patient move into the future as somehow continuous with, or relevant to, a broader world-historical problem concerning the socially general "death instinct"—a problem that he would explore more extensively in "Civilization and Its Discontents." Freud's rapid and under-theorized switching of levels of analysis in these paragraphs, as well as at other points throughout his writings, leads me to hypothesize that Freud partially identified his individual patients with society, and that, in developing his psychoanalytic practice, he was—in part—formulating a veiled model for how society might overcome the "compulsion to repeat" imposed by the value form of social mediation and thus realize the possibilities for human emancipation immanent in the present. Assuming that this explanation of the analogy between psychoanalysis and emancipatory politics is plausible, we (as Left historians) can formulate an ambivalent historical evaluation of Freud: on the one hand, he fostered a conception of the temporal dimension of emancipation at a historical moment during which many Left social theorists were shifting into a snatial frame of reference shift that still haunts the Left; on the other hand, by partially identifying individuals with society (instead of—like Marx or Adorno—analyzing the manner in which, under capitalism, the individual mediates society), Freud prepared the ground for Herbert Marcuse and other New Left Freudo-Marxists, who replaced social emancipation with a reified "desire" as the desideratum of Left politics.

5. Moishe Postone, Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 377.

mund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," The Freud Reader, Ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton and Co., 1989) 612.

Laclau, continued from page 1

I think one can think of globalized capitalism as a force that is marginalizing many people but not necessarily in terms of their position in the process of production. For instance globalized capitalism creates ecological problems, and you can have people resisting the installation of factories in some areas because of the polluting effects; you can have an imbalance between different sectors of the economy created by international finance. So you are in a society that is creating more and more dislocations through the process of globalization. The theory of Marxism finally is a theory of an increasing homogenization of social structure under capitalism. It said, as a result of capitalist development, the middle classes and the peasantry will disappear, and the end of the conflict of history will be a simple show down between a homogenized working class and the bourgeoisie. But this is not what has happened. What has happened is that there is an increasing heterogeneity in the social structure, but this heterogeneity has not brought about a diffusion of social conflicts. What has been generated is the proliferation of points of rupture in capitalism that as a result has brought to the fore the need of creating a unification through political means of what classical Marxism thought was going to be an automatic result of the development of economic forces. So if you look today at the anti-globalization movement or the alter-globalization movement—you see this proliferation of things. In the meetings in Porto Alegre, you see that there are all kinds of specialized workshops—women's empowerment, homosexuals in California, anti-institutional groups and so on, each with their particular organization and separate issues. On the other hand, there is the attempt to create themes that circulate among all these different groups, creating some kind of global consciousness. Now this is very different in terms of internationalization than the classic internationals of the 19th or 20th century, which were based in the common identity of the worker through the trade union and the parties. Here you have a very heterogeneous social base, but

Accepting the fact that we can no longer see an analysis of wage labor as revealing an inherent contradiction in social reality under capitalism that will lead to a necessary emancipatory movement in politics—would you none the less agree that Marx's analysis of capital, as a reified form of expression of value continues to be useful in analyzing the organization of social life? To what extent do you see the problem of the universality of the commodity form in mediating productive activity, and the resultant subordination of other forms of social wealth, as an obstacle to progressive politics?

I think it is, to that extent I would accept your point, but I want to be precise about what this means. I think there is a logic of commodity production which Marx has clarified better than anybody else, much better than, for instance, classical political economists: Smith or Ricardo. On the other hand, we have to see exactly where the antagonism created by the commodity form lies. I would agree that the commodity form, and especially the commodity form $% \left\{ 1\right\} =\left\{ 1$ as incorporated by capitalism, is the source of strong antagonistic potentials. But where does the moment of antagonism lie? There are two possibilities, which I have tired to analyze in my work. Firstly there is the possibility that the very form of commodity is the source of the antagonism, or there is the possibility that the form of commodity clashes with something which is external to itself. Let me explain what I want to say: in some sense, the analysis of Marx leads to the idea that the contradiction between worker and capitalism is to be derived from the very logic of capital. If it is going to be derived from the very logic of capital, you have to reduce the social actors to that very logic. For instance, capitalism doesn't count as a capitalist with a particular psychological structure etc., it has to count only as a buyer of labor power. And the worker has to be reduced to the category of seller of labor power—if the antagonism is inherent to the economic form: worker and proletariat. But the problem comes that if you reduce that relationship to the economic form, there is no antagonism at all. Why? Because you can say perhaps, well—there is an antagonism because the capitalists extract the surplus value from the workers. But that is not

The Failure of Pakistan

A Concise History of the Left

Platypus Historians Group

THE PRESENT-DAY CRISIS in Pakistan resists adequate historicization in favor of pithy news headlines. Yet its concrete expressions include the autocratic state-ofemergency imposed by General Musharraf, the violent rise of Islamic fundamentalism -- first in the anarchic north-west, but increasingly also in the cities -- the overdependence on economic as well as military assistance from the U.S., the massive expansion of the army into civilian sectors, especially commerce, and the ever growing socioeconomic disparities—in short: the failure of Pakistan. And while, at first blush, it appears that Pakistan was crippled from its origin by indelible contradictions, it is anachronistic to think that the "choice" politically was always between theocratic Islamism or secular despotism. For what this view effaces is that there was once a vital Left in Pakistan. The aim in the brief political history which follows is to argue that the contemporary meltdown in Pakistan is the stark consequence of the cumulative (self-)defeats of the Left.

Pakistan inherited a Left under the ruinous impress of Stalinism. Committed to the theory of revolution in stages, the Comintern under Stalin entreated communists in India to support the creation of Pakistan in 1947, in effect prolonging the policy of the "Popular Front." The incipient Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) floundered in West Pakistan: its attempts to organize workers under the rubric of the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation were undercut by the state-favored All Pakistan Confederation of Labor which had lined up with the American Federation of Labor: its ranks were further thinned after its hand in plotting a coup d'état, the thwarted Rawalpindi conspiracy. was revealed in 1951. Meanwhile in East Pakistan, the CPP tried a different tack—galvanizing the peasantry. The militant, CPP-backed All Pakistan Kisan Sabha was able to exact modest land reforms that were implemented in East Bengal in 1950, the main effect of which was to drive out Hindu landlords. However, the resolve to arm the

peasantry on the model of the Chinese Revolution marked another volte-face in policy, one that was now in step with the "ultra-Left" blueprint outlined in the first report of the newly formed Cominform. Between 1948–58 there were no parliamentary elections in Pakistan; when regional elections were held in East Pakistan in 1954 as a first step toward enfranchisement, the main party in the west the Muslim League, was routed by a coalition of Bengali nationalists, the United Front, with succor from the CPP. For its role the CPP was banned in late 1954. On the inter national front, as India allied itself with U.S.S.R, Pakistan steered toward an anti-Soviet alliance in the Baghdad Pact of 1955. To skirt the authorities, a Leftist umbrella group, the National Awami Party (NAP), was founded in 1957. NAP was expected to be a member of the coalition that was touted to win the national elections scheduled for early 1959 when, in October 1958, General Ayub Khan wrested the reins of the state. For a decade General Ayub stewarded Pakistan on a

state-centric course of development. Between 1955-65, the first "Five-Year" schemes led to increases in the GNP the rate of industrialization, and total capital imports, but also underlined the limits to the developmentalist model. On the one hand, the influx of capital from the U.S. allowed Pakistan to find its role in the world-market. However, in its effort to build a national economy, the state mandated a series of impediments to capitalization. In addition, the state siphoned off surpluses to fund projects that favored West Pakistan while permitting high unemployment rates and landlessness to fester in the East, which further alienated the discontiguous halves. The Left fueled this sense of difference in counter-intuitive ways after the Sino-Soviet split in 1964. Once "Red" China made overtures toward General Ayub, the Maoists in NAP, based primarily in East Bengal, made strange bedfellows with the military dictatorship. By contrast, the Moscow-aligned Stalinists, who had reservations about the role of the "peasantry," found

themselves now opposing the regime by emphasizing the relative backwardness of the East. And, after another disastrous war with India in 1965, the rust on General Ayub's armor started to show

Like their French and Latin American counterparts, the student-led demonstrations set into motion in 1968 had a modest start but quickly spread to all the main cities— Karachi, Lahore, Dacca, Peshawar, Multan, Hyderabad, and Jehlum. The call to mass strike from the student Left in December was heeded by workers/trade unionists and segments of the peasantry. After five months the Left had a momentary success: General Ayub was forced to resign in March 1969. Nevertheless, when faced with the task of proclaiming control of the state no Leftist party was in the van. The Left had failed to think beyond the collapse of the regime. It was in this context that a new social-democratic party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), surfaced in West Pakistan under Zulfigar Ali Bhutto, an ex-minister in the Ayub cabinet, while an older Bengali nationalist party, the Awami League, was revitalized in East Pakistan. Both were

bolstered by the incorporation of Leftists who brought with them trained cadres as well as attractive ideology. Pressured further by the growing labor unrest of 1968-69, the interim head-of-state, General Yahya Khan, was forced to hold parliamentary elections in 1970. The outcome of these elections led to war involving India and the secession of East Pakistan to become Bangladesh during which up to three million were killed (a topic which would require much further discussion than can be done here). For much of the seventies, especially after the world-wide economic collapse of 1972–73 reached Pakistan on the heels of the ruinous Bangladesh War, the nation limped on in spite of the PPP's slogans: "Food, Clothes, and Shelter" and "'Islam is our faith; democracy is our polity; socialism is our economic creed: All power to the people!" Bhutto tried to salve the beleaguered state apparatus including the military but was unable to stem the exodus of either unskilled workers or the middle class, rendering Pakistan largely dependent up to today on remittance from these groups abroad. Bhutto was eventually overthrown and executed. Developments in Pakistan in the eighties shadowed events more globally. The decimation of the Left in the seventies had culminated with the election of Thatcher in the U.K. and Regan in the U.S., both of whom raised shrill

Bhutto, tendered Pakistan as an Islamic bulwark. Thus while the C.I.A. trained the *mujahideen* in the mountains General Zia set about promulgating firebrand Islamism, there was the introduction of Shar'ia courts, interest-free banks, mandatory prayer in schools, and blasphemy was outlawed. In other words, the influence of the mullahs was allowed to run rampant. After General Zia's mysterious helicopter crash in 1988, which popular folklore attributed to U.S./C.I.A. hands, what can only be characterized as neoliberal cronyism set in during the nineties. That is, in the absence of the Left or a middle-class force in civil society, the army, blessed by the clerics, asserted its dominance, including as a capitalist, buying up property and businesses of all kinds. The lack of a progressive Left in Pakistan continues to be felt in the politically opaque

The news from Pakistan has been abject. There were food shortages reported in the markets in Lahore. Eid al-Adha celebrations in rural Sherpao were undone by a suicide attack at the local mosque. Karachi remains terrorized in the run-up to elections by the gang violence of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement loyal to the prevailing regime. And in the capital, Islamabad, the last challenges to the presidency of General Musharraf were smoothed over by a new bench on the Supreme Court. The truth is that there is little to be hopeful about politically; the entire field of actors—Benazir Bhutto's PPP, Nawaz Sharif's PML-N, the embattled judiciary led by the ex-chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, or the panoply of Islamists (this includes the Taliban-like Jamaat-i-Islami as well as the softer Islamism of the Tablighi Jamaat and the Tarikhi-Insaaf led by the ex-cricketer Imran Khan)—is marked by its opportunism. The perfidy of Bhutto and Sharif is wellknown, as is the threat by groups such as the Jamaat-i-Islami. The sole liberal light appears to be the group of attorneys protesting in the streets (backed up by a small number of human-rights activists). But their battle, while commendable, offers little to build on; their demands mean a return to the corrupt status-quo of what was, replete with its tolerance for Shar'ia. The absence of the Left only heightens the sense that it would take a revolution to secure even modest reforms in Pakistan. Yet there is a certain resignation or possibly even a kind of libidinal satisfaction amongst Pakistanis in the knowledge that the election of whoever may follow General Musharraf will only substitute one form of incompetence with another. |P

Who Needs the Left?

(Reflections on Joining the Industrial Workers of the World)

Joe Grim Feinberg

IN THE SPRING OF 2006, after years of activity on the Left. I joined the IWW. I joined because it cared little for Leftism. And because it began every meeting with a song.

After years of dodging the crossfire of competing claims to revolutionary truth, I breathed happily at last in meetings where no one tested my position on Cuba or the Green Party or state capitalism vs. deformed workers states At last: an organization that, instead of building walls around itself, tried to tear down barriers and build "one big

together can we end the system of wage slavery. No party programs no denunciations of false revolutionaries only one repeated call: to organize. Is it—can it be—enough? I decided that the problem of the Left is much deeper

union" of all workers, believing that only when we struggle

than its endless guarreling over trifles. I realized: the Left is bad at organizing not only because it is so unpleasant that few people want to be a part of it, but more importantly because its entire structure of being leads it in other directions.

The state of affairs was different in earlier days of the left, when the "international workers movement" was almost synonymous with the movement for "socialism." Socialism was widely identified as the set of ideas and practices that developed when workers organized and

logic and something which is outside it—as it is from the

perspective of the worker, there is no reason to think that

the only resistance to capitalism is going to come from the

worker, because as we were saying before it [capitalism]

can create ecological problems, it can create imbalances

between economic spheres, center and periphery, and so

on. And in that sense you are dealing with more heteroge-

neous antagonisms to capitalism that have to be created

through political articulation, and the theory of hegemony

In approaching politics, do you think we should under-

stand capitalism as representing a historically specific,

reified form of social relations that poses a challenge to

the greater social control over production? In confront-

relations, should we think of our politics in terms of a

radical break with capitalism, or should we look toward

ing the ubiquity of the commodity form in capitalist social

is exactly about the logics of this creation.

lem, and possible solutions?

struggled for change. Intellectuals might synthesize and add nuance to these ideas or suggest changes in these practices, but socialism as a whole was integral to the organized activity of the working class

A crucial change took place in the twentieth century, when Leftists began to argue that simple "trade union consciousness" was not enough for revolution, and that large social democratic parties could betray the working class even when most of the working class was organized within them. The change was first inspired by the Bolshevik interpretation of the Soviet and German Revolutions, but the new attitude soon spread among anarchists as well as Communists, and later among the young radicals of the New Left. The Left became a sphere of its own, where correct revolutionary ideas could develop and compete for ascendancy. It became a base where groups of conscious militants could gather to form competing parties or cells, to agitate and show their ideas to the people to hurl propaganda of words and deeds at capitalism, in hope that the people would follow them when the smoke clears. The Left now acted for the people, but 'the people

was now clearly distinct from the Left. But this in itself is not the trouble. The Left was quite right to recognize that its ideas are not simply those of the people. But just what is the relationship between the people and Left ideas? The Left has made itself into an almost-ethereal sphere that floats above and in front of society, casting down its aspersions and advice—and then swearing in exasperation when people refuse to listen. Maybe it's time that leftists began to think of ourselves as people.

Cold-War rhetoric in the wake of the Soviet intervention

in Afghanistan. General Zia ul-Haq, who had overthrown

It's time that we developed ideas not only of what should be done and what the world should be, but of how our ideas relate to the people we are, organized in the ways we are organized, relating to other people in the ways we really and potentially relate to them. It's time that we asked how people could participate in remaking our ideas and in changing the world with them. It's time, in short, that we took to heart the realization of Feuerbach that "even in thinking and in being a philosopher, I am a

man among men. It is not just that Leftists should act humanely to other people, but that we should understand ourselves as a part of the people, in specific social relations that structure our actions and ideas. We should study our own sociality and transform it as we transform society around us. And we should organize as people who aim for a world governed not by the Left, but by us all

And so I joined the IWW, a group of people dedicated to working together through our world and our ideas. Turning from Left to left, descending from rarefied heights, I lived through a minor Copernican revolution, learning to look at the world and its transformations "from below." A Copernican revolution, because it was not simply a change in strategy, but a change in perspective. The task of the left now appeared to me anew: not to ignore the goal of revolution, but to see the goal constituted in a process of social organizing. Not to think up how (other) people should act to change the world, but to place ourselves and our ideas among people who might change the world, and to find the standpoint necessary for this change. The IWW became, for me, such a point on which to

stand. It is not the only possible standpoint, and it faces many problems. But what sets the IWW apart from most other organizations is that it organizes toward revolution. Beginning from the premise that not all "trade union consciousness" is the same, the IWW develops ways of organizing that can generate revolutionary consciousness: by organizing democratically and autonomously, we feel our collective power, and we come to understand the obstacles that lie ahead

> Democratically: because socialism will come not when Leftists take power, but when people, together, turn leftism into revolution

And autonomously: because our organization enables us to control our own destiny, however slightly, in ways not fully determined by the structures of capital. Because it is not so much our Leftism that enables us to act democratically and autonomously, but our forms of organization that enable us to be leftists.

And with a song: because a song that brings people together is also an organization. In song, the Industrial Workers of the World develop together our ideas. We look together at the wage system. We build up our fellowship and our resolve. And we strike. |P

There are several questions there. Firstly, social control ness, you have to have the notion of a contradiction which Mayday, continued from page 1 is at the level of the relations of production which is exthe immediate act; it is its own cause and effect. Hence

this is a problem of how we recognize history in the guise of problems of organizational forms, not simply as a matter of their inevitable obsolescence. Not simply that groups and programmes on the Left have become "dead," but how and why this has become so, for what they were trying to accomplish has hardly become irrelevant but remains to be fulfilled. Such is the only way this history can be made relevant, if at all, to the present. So Platypus asks: What did historical Marxism seek but fail to accom-

> plish that might yet succeed through our efforts? Hence, the Platypus declaration that "the Left is dead!" is not only a characterization of the present as a place or condition in which we happen to be, but is more importantly a historical characterization of the present, a hypothesis and provocation for recognition of what has led to the present and what it might take to lead ourselves out of it. So it is not merely a question of "where" we "are" vs. where we "were," as Mayday, among others, asks, but also and perhaps more importantly "when" we are—and "when" was the historical Left? How can the historical Left, specifically the history of revolutionary Marxism, help us situate ourselves in and despite the historical moment of today?

> For we do not live in some timeless and perpetual present of oppression and struggle against it, but in what Benjamin called the "time of the now" (Jetztzeit), a time of particular and fleeting possibilities and the ambiguously obscure history that brought them—us—into existence. The present might not be an opportunity for a break so much as for recovery and reinvention. As Lenin wrote, in the title of his 1901 article that became the basis for What is to be done?, "Where to begin?" —Or, how? Platypus proceeds now that emancipatory social politics is necessarily at a preliminary phase of potential development. Beginning this way gives the history of the Left and questions and problems of our consciousness of it relevance for being able to grasp the very possibility of emancipatory politics today, and what is most essential towards this. |P

the description of an antagonism in the least; it is simply is control by whom? Because if it is an instance that one a technical way of organizing production. The antagonism only arises if the worker resists the extraction of surplus calls the state, the question is to what extent this state is a representative of the social will or to what extent value by the capitalist. But you can analyze logically the category of seller of labor power as much as you want, and this state is some kind of institutional excrescence which is separated from the social will, because the question you will not see at any point that the notion of resistance true consciousness is a logical consequence. So, the resistance comes if you is how to constitute a social will, and how to have this introduce something external to the relations of producsocial will crystallized in an institution. The attempt to tion. For instance if you say, we don't want wages going think that automatically the state represents the social below a certain level because the worker cannot subsist will lead to the whole disaster of the Soviet experience life, cannot send his children to school, so on and so forth. So if one thinks in a more democratic mediation of the But in that case the antagonism is not inherent in the relasocial will, the problem is how particularity and univertion buyer-seller of labor power, but between the relation sality can be combined in such a situation. I completely of production and the way in which the worker is constiagree that savage capitalism in which the mechanism of tuted outside the relations of production. In that case two the market controls everything is a disaster as well, as consequences follow: firstly, that the resistance is not an much as the bureaucratic state of the Soviet system. But automatic effect of the relations of production and in fact, the whole problem, which is the problem we have been in different circumstances and changes in the level of discussing from the beginning, is how this social control is wages, workers react in very different ways. Secondly, and going to be constituted: through what kind of institutional this is the most important point, if now we are dealing with mechanisms, how the will of the people will act, how you the capitalist relations of production, with the capitalist supercede the opposition between the particularism of the

are in the center of a hegemonic project. Secondly, lets go to a category like reification; I totally reject that category. But the reason is that that category is part of the whole scheme. The category of reification was invented by Lukács, actually, although it is some ways present in Marx in the analysis of commodity fetishism. But basically the problem of Lukács was that he saw that the workers were not directly advocating socialism: that in many cases, workers could be co-opted into the system. $\,$ And he said they had reified consciousness, which he called false consciousness. There is, he said, a distinction between the materiality of the class in which this process of reification operates, and the consciousness of the prole tariat, because it is not in the class as a materiality-empirical workers—it has to be crystallized in an instance different from the materiality of the workers, which is going to be the party. So the party plays the role of fulfilling the other forms of social organization for the root of the prob-

class-consciousness of the proletariat. The point is that

in order to speak of reification, alienation, true conscious-

different wills and the different social elements so that we

actly what we were putting into question before by saying that there is there a moment of heterogeneity, because to say alienation means that you had to have something as a If you compare, for instance, Lukács and Gramsci,

you immediately see the difference. For Lukács the agent of revolutionary change, or emancipatory change, not necessarily revolutionary, is the working class, so for him the position of the worker in the relations of production is what destines the worker to be a revolutionary or emancipatory agent. Now the problem was that he saw that the workers as empirical agents did not live up to this emancipatory project, which their position destined them to be. Now he said they are alienated because they have been reified by capitalism, and so between the place where the consciousness of the proletariat is constituted and the materiality of the proletariat as a class, there is going to be a gap. So this makes necessary the instance of the communist party, and the communist party had to be the true embodiment of the class-consciousness of the proletariat that the proletariat as a class cannot develop. Now the position of Gramsci is completely different: globalized capitalism creates a multiplicity of conflicts, and the task is to bring about this consciousness in something that would be a revolutionary, an emancipatory project but this emancipatory project does not have a privileged point of anchoring, as it does for Lukács, in the relations of production. So this hegemonic construction—the construction of working class hegemony, is a necessary process related to a class position within the relations of production. This construction means that you are bringing a set of heterogeneous elements through which capitalism creates different types of imbalances and dislocations around a center. The argument works in a completely different way than in Lukács, and there is no place there for categories such as alienation or reification.