"The Left is Dead! — Long Live the Left!"
— Platypus, Chicago

Vicissitudes of historical consciousness and possibilities for emancipatory social politics today

Chris Cutrone for Platypus

"The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."
—*Karl Marx*, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (*1852*)

"The theorist who intervenes in practical controversies nowadays discovers on a regular basis and to his shame that whatever ideas he might contribute were expressed long ago—and usually better the first time around."
—*Theodor W. Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and the Law Today" (1963)*

ACCORDING TO LENIN, the greatest contribution of the German Marxist radical Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) to the fight for socialism was the statement that her Social Democratic Party of Germany had become a "stinking corpse" as a result of voting for war credits on August 4, 1914. Lenin wrote this about Luxemburg in 1922, at the close of the period of war, revolution, counterrevolution and reaction in which Luxemburg was murdered. Lenin remarked that Luxemburg would be remembered well for her incisive critique at a crucial moment of crisis in the movement to which she had dedicated and ultimately gave her life. Instead, ironically, Luxemburg has been remembered—for her occasional criticisms of Lenin and the Bolsheviks!

Two lessons can be drawn from this story: that the Left suffers, as a result of the accumulated wreckage of intervening defeats and failures, from a very partial and distorted memory of its own history; and that at crucial moments the best work on the Left is its own critique, motivated by the attempt to escape this history and its outcomes. At certain times, the most necessary contribution one can make is to declare that the Left is dead.

Hence, Platypus makes the proclamation, for our time: "The Left is dead!—Long live the Left!"—We say this so that the future possibility of the Left might live.

Platypus began in December, 2004 as a project for an international journal of critical letters and emancipatory politics, envisioned by a core group of students of University of Chicago professor Moishe Postone, who has studied and written on Marx's mature critical theory in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* towards the imagination of postcapitalist society since the 1960s.

Platypus developed and grew in Spring 2006 into a reading group of our students interested in pursuing the continued purchase of Marxian critical theory. The Platypus Affiliated Society is a recently established (in December, 2006) political organization seeking to investigate possibilities for reconstituting a Marxian Left after the demise of the historical Marxist Left.

We take our namesake from the platypus, which suffered at its moment of zoological discovery from its unclassifiability according to prevailing science. We think that an authentic emancipatory Left today would suffer from a similar problem of (mis)recognition, in part because the tasks and project of social emancipation have disintegrated and so exist for us only in fragments and shards.

We have grown from at first about a dozen graduate students and teachers to over thirty undergraduate and graduate students and teachers and others from the greater Chicago community and beyond (for instance, developing corresponding members in New York and Toronto).

We have worked with various other groups on the Left in Chicago and beyond, for instance giving a workshop on the Iraqi Left for the new SDS conference on the Iraq occupation in Chicago in February. In January, we held the first of a series of Platypus public fora in Chicago, on the topic of "imperialism" and the Left, including panelists Kevin Anderson from *News and Letters* (Marxist Humanists), Nick Kreitman from the newly refounded Students for a Democratic Society, Danny Postel from *Open Democracy.net* (see "Remember Our Real Iranian Friends," page 2—ed.), and Adam Turl from the International Socialist Organization.

We have organized our critical investigation of the history of the Left in order to help discern emancipatory social possibilities in the present, a present that has been determined by the history of defeat and failure on the Left. As seekers after a highly problematic legacy from which we are separated by a definite historical distance, we are dedicated to approaching the history of thought and action on the Left from which we must learn in a deliberately non-dogmatic manner, taking nothing as given.

Why Marx? Why now? We find Marx's thought to be the focal point and vital nerve center for the fundamental critique of the modern world in which we still live that emerged in Marx's time with the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century. We take Marx's thought in relation both to the preceding history of critical social thought, including the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, as well as the work by those inspired later to follow Marx in the critique of social modernity, most prominently Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno. Hence, Platypus is committed to the reconsideration of the entire critical theoretical tradition spanning the 19th and 20th Centuries. As Leszek Kolakowski put it (in his 1968 essay "The Concept of the Left") the Left must be defined ideologically and not sociologically; thought, not society, is divided into Right and Left: the Left is defined by its utopianism, the Right by its opportunism. —Or, as Robert Pippin has put it, the problem with critical theory today is that it is not critical (*Critical Inquiry*, 2003).

Platypus is dedicated to re-opening various historical questions of the Left in order to read that history "against the grain" (as Benjamin put it, in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 1940), attempting to grasp past moments of defeat and failure on the Left not as given but rather in their unfulfilled potential, regarding the present as the product not of historical necessity, but rather of what happened that need not have been. We struggle to escape the dead hand of at least two preceding generations of problematic action and thinking on the Left, the 1920s-30s and the 1960s-70s. More proximally, we suffer the effects of the depoliticization—the deliberate "postmodernist" abandonment of any "grand narratives" of social emancipation—on the Left in the 1980s-90s.

But the "tradition" of the "dead generation" that "weighs" most heavily as a "nightmare" on our minds is that of the 1960s New Left, especially in its history of anti-Bolshevism—expressed by both the complementary bad alternatives of Stalinophobic anti-Communism (of Cold War liberalism and social democracy) and Stalinophilic "militancy" (e.g., Maoism, Guevarism, etc.)—that led to the naturalization of the degeneration of the Left into resignation and abdication, originating in the inadequate response by the 1960s "New" Left to the problems of the post-1920s-30s "Old" Left. In our estimation, the 1960s New Left remained beholden to Stalinism—including the lie that Lenin led to Stalin—to the great detriment of possibilities for emancipatory politics up to today.

In attempting to read this history of the accelerated demise and self-liquidation of the Left after the 1960s "against the grain," we face a problem discussed by Nietzsche in his essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" (1873):

> *"A person must have the power and from time to time use it to break a past and to dissolve it, in order to be able to live. . . . People or ages serving life in this way, by judging and destroying a past, are always dangerous and in danger. . . . It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were, a past after the fact, out of which we may be descended in opposition to the one from which we are descended."*
>
> [Nietzsche translation by Ian Johnston at: *http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/history.htm*]

However, as Karl Korsch wrote, in "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923):

> *"[Marx wrote that] '[Humanity] always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or are at least understood to be in the process of emergence' [Marx,* Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (*1859*)]. This dictum is not affected by the fact that a problem which supersedes present relations may have been formulated in an anterior epoch."
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> [Karl Korsch, "Marxism and Philosophy," *Marxism and Philosophy* (NLB: New York and London, 1970), 58]

"Vicissitudes" continues on page 3

Politics as a form of knowledge: A brief introduction to Georg Lukács

Marco Torres

HUNGARIAN LITERARY CRITIC and political theorist Georg Lukács is generally recognized, along with thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg, as one of the most influential intellectual figures of twentieth century Marxism. And while Lukács' reading of Marx is possibly the most sophisticated and intellectually rigorous to be found in the century and a half long trajectory of historical materialism, his legacy suffers from the "misfortune" that, unlike Gramsci and Luxemburg, he survived what is known as the heroic period of Third International Marxism: the late teens and early twenties. Not sharing the embattled demise and much deserved martyrdom of these figures of these figures, it has become easy for many subsequent Leftists to malign a thinker who unfortunately followed his convictions to the historical train wreck that they came to—namely, the left after Stalin—a train wreck that in the present threatens to obscure our vision of his contribution. Those of us that are today interested in the political possibilities of a serious re-engagement with Marxian critical theory have much to lose if the image of 'Lukács the cranky Stalinist party-intellectual'of the fifties and sixties succeeds in eclipsing the memory of 'Lukács the radical dialectician' of the early twenties—we have much to lose if the carnage and decay that followed the brilliance of his insights scares us into seeing them merely as complex rationalizations for the use of political terror.

Marxism at a Crossroads

In 1918, upon the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Georg Lukács joined the Hungarian communist party, a decision that was regarded, by close personal acquaintances, as sudden and unexpected. Yet in a work like *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács' greatest accomplishment preceding his turn to politics, one can already observe a synthesis of elements—a Hegelian approach to history, a Weberian critique of instrumental reason, and an anarchist-utopian undercurrent—that, in retrospect, make the thinker's turn to Leftist politics seem more than predictable. In addition, this was indeed the moment for the introduction of a dose of realism into the Hungarian intellectual's long-held utopianism: The weakness of the liberal Karolyi government that replaced Austrian rule in Hungary, the wave of revolutionary consciousness and organization that swept Europe in the immediate aftermath of the war, and the success of the Bolshevik revolution made it seem that the moment for the radical transformation of all human society was at hand.

Lukács immediately began to publish brilliant polemical works attacking ideas of intellectual opponents of Marxism. Examples of these works are "The Question of Intellectual Leadership", a retort to the criticisms raised by his old friend Karl Polanyi against the Communist International, and "What is Orthodox Marxism?", a critique of the revisionist Marxism of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. The latter theoretical current consisted of an attempt to remove what Eduard Bernstein, its most notorious proponent, called the "philosophical trappings" of Marx's theory, namely its Hegelian and revolutionary dimensions. For the revisionists, to do this would allow Marxism to become a kind of neutral, "objective" economics, an analytical tool that could calculate the destructive aspects of capitalism in a way that previous political economies had not been able to. With this tool in hand, it would then be possible to make small reforms so that, in time, the economic system could be controlled in a way that would smoothly, gradually bring the transition from capitalism to socialism. Because of this vision of social progress, for Bernstein and company social revolution would doubtlessly have been counterproductive.

Despite all their honest liberalism, Europe's social democratic parties stood as a major conservative force in a postwar situation that left Europe's future hanging on the balance between revolution and all-out right-wing reaction. *It is in this context that we must regard the political substance of Lukács' early Marxist essays.* And while Lukács was an adamant supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution, to take the common view that his writings are limited to a mere philosophical defense of the tactics of the Bolsheviks undermines his relevance to the present. Starting with "What is Orthodox Marxism?" Lukács dedicated himself to attacking a tendency that would become all too familiar throughout the twentieth century: the attempt to reduce Marxism to the framework of an affirmative ideology or a positive science. Commonplace instances of this tendency were to be found not only in Social Democratic revisionism but also, later, in the thought of Stalinist intellectuals (including the later Lukács himself). Examples of this kind of thinking include the understanding of Marx's thought as a political economy in favor of the working class; the attempt to use historical materialism as an anthropological tool exempt from politics and capable of explaining human relations throughout all historical periods; and, finally, the holding up of Marxism as a description of the mechanism by which human progress will inevitably come about. What these misapprehensions have in common with each other is the idea that the insights to the problems of history and society that Marxian theory offers provide direct, unmediated knowledge of the way social reality works— that, like the positive sciences, Marxism can stand outside of the movement of history and, as an objective observer, make its formulations and predictions objectively.

Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat

In this context, we must regard Lukács' most important work, the essay *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*, as an account of the social origin of this kind of positivism and as an attempt to work through it and go beyond it using Marx's own categories. For this purpose, Lukács puts the Hegelian dimension of Marx's thought front and center, pointing at its political significance. He does this by introducing two concepts: the phenomenon of reification and the idea of the proletariat as 'the identical subject-object of history'. The purpose of these concepts is the dialectical parsing out of Marx's use of the categories of ideology and alienation. In a Hegelian way, Lukács does not see ideology and alienation merely as *bad things*, but as the elements that condition thought in modern society, which tends to a conservative justification of things as they are while simultaneously opening the way to a potential transformation of all human relations.

The concept of reification, which literally means 'to make thing-like', is elaborated by Lukács into the phenomenon that characterizes the fate of all human relations in modern capitalist society. It is the way in which social processes become atomized and objectified in a society that universally mediates all of its productive activity by means of units of time –something most evident in, but not limited to, wage labor. As he puts it at the beginning of the essay: "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires…an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people." It is this thing-like character of time, thought, and social processes that produces the fundamental antinomy that conditions and limits all modern thought: the division between the abstract and the concrete, theory and practice, subject and object. Lukács argues that this antinomy is deeply enmeshed in modern subjectivity, and that, while it has made possible the great advances modern society has made in knowledge and productivity, it is also responsible for the kind of thinking in which problems of knowledge become dissociated from society and the aim of science, philosophy and politics becomes limited to calculating the processes that shape the world instead of judging them qualitatively with the aim of fundamentally transforming them. As Lukács puts it: "The more highly developed [knowledge] becomes and the more scientific, the more it will become a formally closed system of partial laws. It will then find that the world lying beyond its confines…*its own concrete underlying reality* lies, methodologically and in principle, *beyond its grasp*."

This separation of thought and its object—of the faculties of understanding and the reality that underlies them—makes the laws of social mechanisms seem to be out of the reach of knowledge. They appear, not as historical products of our own activity, but as the fixed, eternal laws of nature. A very clear example of this is the way that economists of the 18th century understood certain basic economic laws as being natural laws of human interaction extending to the dawn of history. Such a condition of thought, in which the social world appears to present its conditions as necessary, is Marx's definition of ideology. It is a product of what Lukács calls the reified or thing-like character of social life. But again, highlighting the dialectical, Hegelian character of Marx's thought, Lukács describes this not only as a one-sided process of alienation that is to be simply avoided or eliminated, but as a way in which society acquires knowledge of itself, a knowledge that presents the opportunity of self-overcoming; it is the way in which society is able to make itself into an object of critique.

"Lukács" continues on page 3

November calendar

The Platypus Review features a monthly calendar highlighting cultural, political and educational events of interest to Chicago leftists. Beginning with Issue #2, a series of event reviews—open to submissions—will accompany the calendar, providing a space for reports-back, follow-ups and critiques.

Send events and review proposals to *platypus191weblog@yahoogroups.com*

Film Screening: Crude Impact
11/2–11/4,
multiple screening times
Facets Cinemateque, 1517 W Fullerton

James Jandak Woodʼs stunning documentary on the historical impact of oil extraction on indigenous peoples & their environment.

www.facets.org

2007 Midwest Socialist Conference:
Building a Revolutionary Alternative
11/3–11/4
University of Illinois at Chicago,
750 S Halsted

http://www.mayspace.com/midwestsocialism
http://www.socialistworker.org

The Conference will bring together socialists across the region, from opposing the war to organizing against the death penalty, for immigrant rights, and for national health care. Registration begins at 9am on Saturday. First workshops begin at 10am.

Funding the Revolution: Participatory Economics & Funding Activist Organizing in Chicago: Discussion with Z-Magazine's Michael Albert
11/5, 6pm–8pm
Jane Addams Hull House, 800 S Halsted
Sponsored by 49th St Underground, AREA Chicago, Jane Addams Hull House Museum, Chicago Area Participatory Economics Society

http://www.chicagoparecon.org/

The 3 Rs: Reform, Revolution & Resistance
The Problematic Forms of Anti-Capitalism Today
11/6, 7pm
The Institute Auditorium, 280 S Columbus

Panelists: Michael Albert of Z Magazine; Chris Cutrone of Platypus; Stephen Duncombe of New York University; Brian Holmes of Continental Drift &University Tangente; Marina Holmes of Students for a Democratic Society

VAP Lecture Series – Art and Politics
Donald R. Russell, Executive Director, Provisions Library: Resources for Arts and Social Change
11/7, 6pm
SAIC auditorium, 280 South Columbus Drive

Donald Russell has over 25 years experience directing arts, non-profit, philanthropic and publishing ventures. He has special expertise in engaging the arts as a catalyst for social change.

For more information call (312.443-3711 or email *events@saic.edu*.

The Movement for a Democratic Society
National Convergence
http://movementfordemocraticsociety.org
Loyola University
11/8–11/11

Film Screening: *Fire Factories*, 2006, Dario Azzellini
11/8, 7:30pm
Mass Hall, 6932 N Glenwood

http://6thundergroundz.org/

Workers in some shuttered factories in Venezuela inspired by the cooperatively run factories in Argentina, took over and reopened their workplaces. The titular fire factories were reactivated with the government's permission and involvement. Still, the film provides a window onto this interesting phenomenon.

Teachers for Social Justice Curriculum Fair
11/10, 11am–5pm
Orozco School, 1940 W 18th
Co-sponsored by Rethinking Schools

The Curriculum Fair is like a Science or History Fair, except that teachers "present" or "exhibit" their curriculum oriented toward social justice, we have a whole group discussion, and we have a number of workshops.

Nayan Chanda, Director of Publications at Yale Center for Study of Globalization
11/12, 12pm
Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, 1902 Sheridan, Evanston, IL

www.cics.northwestern.edu

Pomegranate Health Collective General Meeting
11/13, 6–8pm; 11/25, 1–3pm
Harold Washington Library, 6th Floor South Study Room. (Wheelchair accessible)

A group of DIY health activists in Chicago dedicated to making health information accessible to everyone, with a focus on information and referrals. Contact info@pomegranatecollective.org for information on how you can join the collective.

"Gender-Based Violence in Turkey"
Yesim Arat, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
11/14, 4pm
Roberta Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, 1902 Sheridan Rd, Evanston, IL

http://www.bcics.northwestern.edu/Events_Speaker_Keyman.html

This conference will try to reset the agenda for the investigation of a competitive model of the rise and decline of Empires using a comparative approach that centers on the particulars of economic leadership in the Ottoman Empire, the Spanish Empire, the British Empire and their Dutch and French rivals.

Conference : "The Rise and Decline of Imperial Leadership" Keyman Family Program in Modern Turkish Studies
11/30, 9am–6pm

http://www.bcics.northwestern.edu/Events_Speaker_Keyman.html

LGBT Adoption and Custody
11/14, 6:30pm
The Howard Brown Health Center,
4025 N Sheridan

www.howardbrown.org

A Howard Brown legal presentation for the LGBT community. RSVP at *rsvp@howardbrown.org* or call Hope at (773) 388-8906.

VAP Lecture Series – Art and Politics: Andrea Bowers and Marcos Ramirez ERRE
11/15, 6pm
SAIC auditorium, 280 South Columbus Drive
Co-sponsored by Gallery 400, UIC

Los Angeles-based artist Andrea Bowers' work is situated at the intersection of art and activism. Marcos Ramirez ERRE creates large-scale public installations informed by a political and social consciousness and addresses the dynamics of the border between the United States and Mexico.

For more information call (312) 443-3711 or email *events@saic.edu*

"Oligarchy and Elite Rule." Jeff Winters, Department of Political Science
Faculty and Fellows Colloquium
11/16, 12pm
BCICS Conference Room, 1902 Sheridan Rd, Northwestern University

www.cics.northwestern.edu

VAP Lecture Series – Art and Politics: Andy Bichlbaum from the YES MEN
11/28, 6pm
SAIC auditorium, 280 South Columbus Drive

The Yes Men are a group of culture jamming activists who practice what they call "identity correction" by pretending to be powerful people and spokespersons for prominent organizations. They create and maintain fake websites similar to ones they want to spoof, and then they accept invitations received on their websites to appear at conferences, symposia, and TV shows.

Admission: $5 per person for general public; $3 per person for SAIC alumni, students, faculty, and staff of the Art Institute of Chicago. For more information call 312.443-3711 or email *events@saic.edu*

The

Platypus Review

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www.platypus1917.org/theplatypusreview

Editorial Statement

Taking stock of the multifaceted universe of positions and goals that constitute the multitudinous Left today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that perhaps a deeper commonality underlies this apparent variety: what exists today is built on the desiccated remains of what was once left to be possible.

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 claims to be emancipatory politics of the present. Doing this work implies a reconsideration of what we mean by "the Left".

This task necessarily begins from what we see as a prevalent feature of the Left today: a general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by "carrying on the fight" but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique.

Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The editorial board of The Platypus Review is motivated by a sense that the 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 inclusion for its own sake**, but rather to provoke productive disagreement, to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past might be elevated to an ongoing critique that seeks to clarify its object.

The editorial board wishes to provide an ongoing public forum wherein **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 not find a place within existing Left discourses, locally or internationally.

As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

—The Platypus Review Editorial Board

Articles can range in length from 500–1,000 words. We will consider longer pieces but would prefer that they be submitted as proposals. Please send article and event calendar listing submissions, and any inquiries about this project to:
platypus191weblog@yahoogroups.com

All final editorial decisions, whether they concern length or content, will be discussed with and approved by the writer.

Review: "La Commune"

Soren Whited

IN 1871 THE PARIS COMMUNE, a revolutionary body formed during the deep unrest following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, rose against the post-war provisional government of Adolphe Thiers and briefly held power in France. Two months after it took power, the Commune was brutally suppressed by the French army. In his film "La Commune," released in 2002, director Peter Watkins orchestrated and documented a theatrical re-enactment of the Commune. At Nearly six hours, the film explores the events of the Commune as well as its relevance for the present, and in so doing it is compelled to negotiate the myriad ways in which history bears on the present. It is through its investigation of the relation between past and present that the film arrives at its most insightful as well as its most shortsighted conclusions.

"La Commune" was filmed over a 13-day period on a soundstage in Paris. The filmmakers conducted historical research for two years prior to filming. The cast included more than 200 people, many of whom were not actors by trade. Many of these participants were respondents to ads placed in newspapers by Watkins. Each one of them did his or her own historical research prior to filming. It is of note that these participants played characters to which they were politically sympathetic. A set was designed and built to suggest the 11th district of Paris in 1871, the poorest area at the time and the epicenter of the Commune.

Why make a film about "La Commune?" And why now? These were my questions before I watched the film. It becomes evident early in the film that Watkins revisits this failed but highly charged revolutionary moment because the present is completely lacking in even the potential for such a moment. Watkins clearly hopes that by exploring the history of the Commune – which is rarely studied in depth, or at all, even in France – he might entice his audience to question the nature of the present and to search for ways in which anti-capitalist politics might be forged in it.

Watkins' key insight is that the communards (and the world population at large) were subject to the same form of social organization – capitalism – that we are today. More importantly, he recognizes that despite differences in the form it takes, the nature of capitalism is today the same as it was in 1871 and, furthermore, that this form cannot change other than to be overcome entirely.

However, in recognizing this sameness Watkins often conflates the past and the present. He fails to recognize that any particular moment in history has its own particular manifestations and that this specificity must be accounted for in the analysis of the moment. In other words, one must recognize and take into account the differences between the respective historical moments in order to be able to identify that which is fundamentally the same. Only then can one form an adequate analysis of the unchanged factor and from it derive a truly revolutionary politics. By neglecting this crucial aspect of any *consequential* historical critique Watkins is unable to take his film beyond an under-specified and flat-footed opposition to capitalism.

But the film does demonstrate the importance – the *necessity* – of interrogating history, as well as the inherent obstacles and dangers in doing so. While it may not, in the final analysis, offer a completely satisfying critique of the Paris Commune, of the present, or of the relation of the one to the other, it succeeds in stressing the importance of *critically* appropriating history, and specifically those moments in history when possibilities of social emancipation opened only to be slammed shut again. |**P**

A prelude to the History of the Left

Platypus Historians Group

THE PLATYPUS HISTORIANS GROUP is a collective of members of Platypus who are researchers into the history of the Left. We will be publishing this series on the History of the Left under this collective authorship to indicate the collaborative nature of our research and the questions it raises. Each article under this byline will be written by one or several members of this collective, but with contributions and review by as many others of this group as possible and appropriate to the topics essayed.

Preparation for these articles on the History of the Left was done through a series of lectures and discussions conducted in Chicago in summer 2007 by members of the Platypus Historians Group. These lecture-discussions addressed a broad overview of movements and events in the emergence and trajectory—and passing—of the revolutionary Marxist Left, in an attempt to formulate a perspective on this history that is specific to the Platypus project. Hence, the development of our perspective on the history of the Left is our development of a theory of the present.

In subsequent issues Platypus will serialize a "History of the Left". The phrase has a strange ring to it! A human being has a history, a nation, a people have a history. One is not the "same person" one was twenty years ago perhaps, yet one can not make sense of who one is now without a sense of who one "was" even if that person has come to seem as alien as a stranger. A people too may "remember" its past, its becoming, its suffering, its ancient glories and yet no living member of that people may have experienced any of these. Such remembering and rethinking what has been whether personal and collective is obvious to us. But "the Left"?

What sort of object is this "Left" whose history we seek to explore? Certainly it is not something that is a permanent part of our species being. It has existed for perhaps a mere seven generations, and ours could easily become the last of them. For thousands of years human beings existed without a "Left", miserable and exalted, oppressed and oppressors, creators and transmitters of culture, complex curious creatures like ourselves, political beings even, for politics in one sense—the dominant sense it seems nowadays so deep is our regression— is quite independent of the categories of "Left" and "Right". (Before there was a "Left" there could not be a "Right" either. By a peculiar irony whose effects are already beginning to be felt, only the memory of the Left seems to make possible the historical continuity of the Right today.)

To pose therefore the fragility of the Left, its lack of necessity, its potential to be lost, or to disintegrate into incoherence, is therefore to read "history against the grain" . It means accepting, indeed deepening, our alienation from the present, for the twofold task of both not betraying the past and the even more important task of not betraying the future—a future that has not been promised to us—a future that is not *certainly* ours. (But how wonderful the past faith of generations of leftists that Socialism was the promised bridegroom of humanity at the end of History!) Yet if this "future" is not promised, if it is not certainly ours, it is still *potentially* ours. Capitalism precisely in its creative destructiveness gives us reason to hope. Those who denounce "greed" miss the point. It is not "greed" that is the problem but lack of imagination. And behind this failure of imagination lies a failure of nerve.

Has it not all been tried before? Do we not know how it all turns out? The Gulag and the Guillotine. Are not these the inheritance of the "Left"? Long gone are the glorious invocations of 1789 and 1917. Those who have inherited the mantle of the left seem no longer to wish to be the victors of history. Indeed the idea strikes them as obscene. Is the "left" not always with the losers? With the oppressed, the mute, forgotten, subaltern? And are they not always there, outside of history, looking in?

Is this not why a history of the Left causes a certain embarrassment? A resistance, unconscious or semi-conscious, rises up against an historical conception of the Left. To think this way is immediately to raise so many Red Flags. It is to remind people of so many things better left unmentioned, of uncomfortable "sectarian" words like "Stalinism" and "Trotskyism," that have no "relevance" anymore. Indeed it seems to many who consider themselves "leftists" that nothing of relevance happened before this year's class of entering college freshmen was born 1989. History became a blank slate that year. Or, if one is more generous, or is a bit older and burdened with a personal history that was already quite event-filled by 1989, then perhaps the history of the Left began in 1968. The Sixties were glorious, weren't they? But then Ronald Reagan was elected. (How did that happen?) Admittedly, "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll" are here to stay. But it appears that none of these are as emancipatory as was once believed, and all of them are quite compatible with

"Left History" continues on page 3

Process point

Marisa Holmes for SDS

STUMBLING INTO THE WAR RESISTERS OFFICE, I found Josh Russell and Madeline Gardner wearing headsets and pacing. It was a week before the convention and they were having yet another discussion as to whether or not the planning committee had the authority to decide whether or not they had the right to make any decisions. In the words of Lisa Fithian, we were processing ourselves to death.

The new Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) seem to take their namesake seriously. Ideals put forth in the Port Huron statement such as participatory democracy are not only discussed, but are executed throughout the organization. Members are encouraged to step up if they don't normally speak and step back if they're monopolizing the decision-making process. In planning for the convention, this approach presented a number a problems. Going into the event, SDS had no vision, no structure, and no way of holding members accountable. Those who held positions on the planning committee were self-motivated volunteers acting without oversight. Knowing that this model wasn't all that democratic, the committee stressed that the convention would help to change the dynamic. In fact, so much emphasis was placed on the convention, that it became a catch all for any problem in the organization. If it were broken, then the convention would fix it.

I arrived in Detroit unsure of what would actually be accomplished. Members and affiliates from across the country came in anticipation of what had been termed the Constitutional Convention. From the East Coast came council structure proposals, from the Midwest a secretarial approach, and from the Salish Sea came less structured, direct- democracy proposals. It was a make or break moment for the organization, everything was on the table.

In the halls of Wayne State University we gathered together, unsure of one another's motives. Feeling out the competition, we looked for ideological underpinnings. In the middle of a discussion on vision, the auditorium erupted into song as one side began singing Solidarity Forever while the other, holding little red books, changed the tune.

After the first round of discussions, it seemed unlikely that we would be able to compromise. We feared that the organization could not withstand sectarian divides. Slowly, it became evident that these concerns were shared. Regardless of where we were coming from, everyone seemed to agree that SDS was greater than the sum of its parts.

Members began deliberating on the true meaning of democracy. What did it mean to have a say in the decisions that affect our lives? What did it mean to participate? How would we go about creating a structure? These questions plagued us as we grappled with the task at hand.

Conversations ran late and sleepless nights ensued, yet I had never felt so awake. These were not apathetic individuals, but a group of committed revolutionaries.

By the end of the weekend we were working together on proposals, debating, and making compromises. This resulted in two major milestones. A vision proposal put forth a provisional document to be re-worked over the course of the next year, where we would clarify who we were as an organization. This would then be finalized at the next convention. Also, and most importantly, we came to a compromise on the structure of the organization. The less structured proposals and council proposals were merged and re-submitted as a final document. When Monday morning approached the vote was cast. SDS had a structure!

For a moment the infighting had subsided, we had put the organization before ourselves. The process had actually worked in our favor. The seemingly endless conference calls and discussions had allowed for us to listen to one another.

Michael Albert had been present throughout the convention, observing the mini dramas, conclusions, and breakthroughs. In a closing reflection he addressed the new SDS. He stated, "The answer isn't war," the audience chuckled, "but it also isn't ignoring that these divisions exist. You should know each other's views."

He seemed genuinely impressed by what had taken place, and couldn't help but compare the current movement to that of his youth. He continued, "Somehow, you have imbibed, from somewhere, a degree of insight that we lacked at the end of our activism, forget the beginning. That's quite an accomplishment." |**P**

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As Adorno wrote, in Negative Dialectics (1966):

> *"The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice. . . . The interrelation of both moments [of theory and practice] is not settled once and for all but fluctuates historically. . . . Those who chide theory [for being] anachronistic obey the topos of dismissing, as obsolete, what remains painful [because it was] thwarted. . . . The fact that history has rolled over certain positions will be respected as a verdict on their truth content only by those who agree with Schiller that 'world history is the world tribunal'. 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 will lead back to it in changed situations."*
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> [T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum: New York, 1983), 143-144]

Platypus is concerned with exploring the improbable but not impossible tasks and project of the reemergence of a critical Left with emancipatory social intent. We look forward to making a critical but vital contribution towards a possible "return to Marx" for the potential reinvigoration of the Left in coming years. We invite and welcome those who wish to share in and contribute to this project. |**P**

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an oppressive capitalist society. And the *politics* of the 60s? Well, let's not think about that too closely. Let us rather focus on the *spirit* of the 60s which is so much more *edifying*. Hilary Clinton it is rumored to have once had posters of Yasser Arafat and Che Guevara up in her dorm room. Of course, this may only be one of the pornographic fantasies of Fox News, but surely one wishes it to be true! For it speaks so much of the ironic truth about our time.

It is against the common sense conception of contemporary "Leftism" that seeks, at worst, "unconsciously," in its blind "Bush hatred," and, at best, with a kind of "honest bad faith," the election of Hilary Clinton, that this series on the history of the Left is intended, and Platypus itself as a project conceived. We will of necessity seem archaic because we still believe in a *potential* future for humanity which we identify frankly with the task of abolishing capitalism—and with enlightenment towards that end. We will not shy away from "meta-narratives." Nor will we shy away from the crucial word "defeat". We must not be afraid of this word. Without admitting the possibility of defeat, we deny ourselves the possibility of victory. It is only in the context of past defeats that the present can be understood. At times like the present, if one is not completely numbed, a great animal-like cry of pain, a howl from the depths of one's being, might seem the only appropriate response, but that would be a mistake. A great man, one of the fathers of the Enlightenment, which was the ground out of which the Left grew, chose as his motto *"Humanas actiones non ridere , non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere."* ("We should with human actions neither laugh, nor cry, nor curse but seek to understand.")

With that motto, let us too go forward. |**P**

Taking issue with identity: The politics of anti-gentrification

Laura Schmidt

THE PERCEPTION OF GENTRIFICATION in Chicago mirrors would-be progressive groups' social imaginations and the heterogeneity of their goals. Gentrification is the reconstitution of a neighborhood which occurs when lower-income areas with lower land value are re-developed with higher-value housing into a decidedly wealthier neighborhood. During this process the class-composition and character of the neighborhood is changed;those already living in the neighborhood cannot sustain the rise in property taxes and must move elsewhere.

In Chicago, like other cities, the process occurs along racial and ethnic lines, since many of the lower-income residents that are displaced are disproportionately non-white, and the "gentry" that reoccupies the neighborhood is disproportionately white. Gentrification's socioeconomic implication as a geographic shuffling of people and community in the global context of capitalism makes it a local-level rallying point for anti-capitalist practice. Although groups opposed to the displacement of residents frame this phenomenon as in keeping with the laws of capitalism (understood as an abstract force), the most immediate mode of problematizing gentrification is identity politics, since it by definition involves groups of people.

Locating the politics of gentrification is difficult precisely because to want something to happen with respect to gentrification is to desire reform as the end goal. In order to transform the inevitability of gentrification, capital must be overcome. However, failing this, identity politics, which is reformative in that it doesn't seek universal emancipation but focuses on one interest group, is opted for.

Gentrification occurs at the community level, so the displacement of people occurs from one neighborhood to another. Chicago is called the city of neighborhoods, but it is also notoriously segregated. This is also clear in gentrification; usually (but not in all cases), the "old" neighborhood and the "new" neighborhood are ethnically or racially different. It is held that those gentrifiers, consistent with the disproportionately wealthy, are white yuppies, while those who are displaced are either Latino or black lower-class families. From empirical studies, we can see that this is not the case. Yet the pervasiveness of identity politics in the liberal or progressive personality allows for anti-yuppie paraphernalia to be found abundant in coffee shops, cultural cornerstones of gentrification.

This translates into a falsely-political dichotomy. Leftist groups—which here includes anything from progressive community organizations to activists, to college students with latent leftist leanings—tend to come down on the "anti-gentrification" side. This is misleading, however, because if there are such things as sides, the "pro-gentrification" side consists of either those yuppies who move to the new area, or those who see a positive "urban renewal" with the process of gentrification. This polarization does not provide an articulation of the direction in which we should all head. Opposing gentrification is not a political judgment, and it is different than "being opposed" to displacement. The localized nature of gentrification politics lends itself to the formulation of immediate solutions to problems, reforms, thus preventing an immanent critique of capitalism, which would opt for social change at a mass level.

It makes sense that the contemporary progressive stance associates the idea of anti-gentrification with anti-capitalism; in progressive circles the market is commonsensically conceived of as an abstract villainous force. On par with such anti-capitalist sentiment is the objectification of anti-capitalism into identity, as though one group of people were inherently emancipatory by virtue of their oppression. Hence, the solution to gentrification in West Town/Humboldt Park boils down to to declaring the space as naturally Puerto Rican, thus inviting all Puerto Ricans, regardless of class, to settle in the area. This political gesture results in gentrification by middle and upper class Puerto Ricans. Pilsenites can't keep out yuppies and artists by arguing that the space is for poor Mexicans without wanting the place to remain Mexican.

The discourse of anti-gentrification politics does nothing to suggest that poverty itself needs to be undermined, but instead seeks to keep those who are poor in their place, and those who are rich in theirs. And if it is progressive to back these efforts, one who doesn't fit the identity of either neighborhood is excluded from arguing for its emancipation. There is a tendency in Chicago to anticipate an anti-capitalist character of those who are challenging displacement via gentrification from the standpoint of identity, as though those two plights were the same. The problem isn't that one should ignore displacement or efforts to study and remedy it.

Nor should one write off identity. If there is one thing to be leaned from how gentrification is ideologized as a struggle for the urban soul, it is that progressive political movements don't know how to handle the identity factor. reveal another short coming for progressive politics: more affordable housing should be had, but shouldn't we aim at overcoming the underpinnings of poverty, rather than apologizing for it on the one hand, or moving "it" away from immediate sight (displacement) on the other?
In order to imagine this, the framework will have to move beyond the confines of identity while clearly defining a stance on that contradiction of communal and general goals. In other words, they must actually be the same. |**P**

Lukács, continued from page 1

This, Lukács argues, is the purpose of working-class politics—it is the reason for which the Hegelian term "identical subject-object of history" can be applied to the working class and its *political* consciousness. While remaining a product and a necessary part of modern capitalist society, the working class, its demands, and the theoretical elaboration of these demands into a system of political thought are placed at the same time in immanent opposition to it. For this reason, the working class stands, in Lukács account, both within and against society. Leftist politics—understood as the politics of the working class—is thus this society's self-knowledge and self-criticism, both the subject and the object of historical change. Politics is seen in this way as a form of knowledge that understands the world not as static, but as historically bound and in a constant state of becoming.

A Problematic Legacy

Unfortunately, by the time Lukács published *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* in 1922, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in which he participated as minister of culture and military official, had already been defeated by right-wing forces—likewise, other socialist revolutions of the period were defeated or simply self-destructed. The late twenties and early thirties witnessed the Stalinization of the Soviet Union and the general dismantlement of the project of world socialism which only a few years earlier seemed to be within reach. Through these, and subsequent changes, Lukács continued to participate in politics, even serving as a member of parliament in the Stalinist regime of post-World War 2 Hungary. Throughout this period he remained, for the most part, uncritical towards the further developments that devastated the Left on a world scale. In the writings of the 1960s meant to repudiate his work of the 20s, Lukács summoned up all his rhetorical brilliance to engage in precisely the kind of thinking that, decades before, he had criticized. These writings are an affirmation of things as they stood—for the Lukács of this period, the "actually existing socialism" of the eastern bloc was human freedom in the process of working itself out. His earlier critique of the very foundation of modern subjectivity had become, to him, mere "ultra-leftist" idealism—as he puts it, "an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel". These writings demonstrate less some kind of degeneration of thought than a bitter capitulation to the failure of the project he dedicated his life to. They are the sad testament of the tragic history of the decay of Leftist politics throughout the twentieth century, a century that has now begun to recede into the past, becoming historical. Today it is up to us which version of Lukács—the radical dialectician or the bitter party official—we are willing to remember, keeping in mind that regardless of our own need for an "objective" assessment of this thinker's life, this memory—this knowledge of the past—will necessarily be of a political nature. |**P**

Review: "The Common Sense"

Marco Torres

MY FIRST IMPRESSION upon entering Haseeb Ahmed's installation, "The Common Sense" was one of open space. It was an openess that contrasted sharply with the hundreds of paintings, photographs, sculptures that cluttered the rest of the many other galleries that opened that Night in Wicker Park's FlatIron Building. Such a contrast pointed out the fact that, more a piece of interior architecture than a collection of installed objects, the central element to be experienced in Ahmed's installation was space itself. But Ahmed is no Richard Serra, and he is less interested in having us judge our experience at a purely cogntive level than in inviting us to inhabit this space with our attention focused on its function as a site of social practice—this practice being, namely, Islam.

Haseeb Ahmed was born in Ohio to an observant Muslim family of Pakistani immigrants and was educated in interior architecture, sculpture and Marxist critical theory. With "The Common Sense" Ahmed's purpose—and the reason why he has received such unexpected attention (and misinterpretation) from the local press—was to temporarily convert Around the Coyote Gallery into a fully functional mosque. For other reviewers of this work, knowing the artist's origin and purpose seemed to be enough to elicit the expected exercise of the kind of politically correct rhetoric that exoticizes in the name of tolerance, a trap that tends to lead to a mere affirmation the "muslimness" of the work at a political level, while failing to investigate what the gesture of building a mosque in an art gallery does *as art*. This definition of a practice before the fact is the very problem that Ahmed addresses with this work. In asking us to inhabit his installation both as a mosque *and* as an artwork, he is asking us to simultaneously inhabit a space of aesthetic reception as a space of worship and to critique the practice of worship as one would critique the experience of an artwork.

Ahmed's mosque is there and not there; it is a kind of ghost-mosque. Its columns stand truncated, its arches are merely hinted at. They are built out of the most familiar of materials: unpainted wooden two-by-four boards. Clustered into beehive-like formations, the mosque's decorative muqarnas tiles, manufactured from commonplace polyurethane foam used to repair cracks in concrete, hang from ceilings and climb up columns following no pattern but that which their own shapes dictate. By means of this systematic incompleteness, the mosque surrenders a kind of self-legitimation, what Ahmed calls a "fog of sanctity", with the purpose of putting into evidence the subjective input that goes into the conceptualizing—into the making an object—of the practice of Islam. Striking evidence of this subjective input can be found in that many attendees spoke of "arches" as the main element in the installation while in fact the arches were absent—only there by way of suggestion.

What Ahmed proposes with his installation is paradoxical: to practice a religion while remaining critical to it—to contemplate religious practice at a distance while remaining engaged in it. Needless to say, such a critical distance is antithetical to the idea of faith. Despite the prayers and lectures that are to be given in the installation, an art gallery turned into a mosque remains an art gallery. And while it can never truly become a place of worship, the isolation of religious practice from the rest of the world by way of aesthetic distancing has the potential to de-naturalize a clear-cut relationship between society and religion, thus putting this relationship into question, leaving it up for reconceptualization or dismissal. The way Ahmed puts this problem is, "all things in society can and must be unfolded from the universal as the summation of society as a whole. It is only from this perspective that we can finally ask 'What is the future of Islam?', which actually means, 'Should it have one at all?'" |**P**

Ahmed's exhibition, "The Common Sense" opened from September 5 to October 14 at Around the Coyote Gallery, in Chicago.

Remember our real Iranian friends

Danny Postel

DURING HIS VISIT TO NEW YORK this week to address the UN General Assembly, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is scheduled to go to Columbia University to address faculty members and also to meet with a group of American religious leaders.

His arrival was preceded by weeks of commotion and dispute: should Ahmadinejad have been allowed to visit ground zero? Should Columbia have agreed to host him? Should he even have been granted a visa to enter at all? In a spasm of infantilism, Republican presidential hopefuls and the right-wing punditocracy have seized the occasion to demonstrate their toughness, decrying the Iranian leader's mere presence on US soil.

This cacophony, as cacophony so often does, produces confusion. In the face of this reactionary onslaught, a natural response of many on the left is to say, wait a minute - why shouldn't Ahmadinejad have been allowed to visit ground zero? Why shouldn't Columbia host him - aren't universities supposed to foster discussion, and why assume the encounter will be uncritical? (Indeed Columbia's president, Lee Bollinger, has stated publicly that he intends to put several tough questions to the Iranian head of state.) Aren't American religious leaders promoting cross-cultural understanding by engaging in interfaith dialogue with the president of the Islamic Republic?

Watching Sunday evening's 60 Minutes interview with Ahmadinejad only highlighted the problem: not unlike a Pravda reporter, correspondent Scott Pelley brazenly assumed the role of a Bush administration mouthpiece, indeed at one point even acting as courier, conveying a toughly-worded message directly from the US president to his Iranian counterpart. At the interview's embarrassing low point, Pelley asked Ahmadinejad if there was anything he admired about Bush, and responded with indignant incredulity when his guest failed to produce the desired answer.

The combination of unabashed American nationalism and know-nothing belligerence was almost enough to make one sympathize with Ahmadinejad, at least situationally. And a lot of progressives did, as was evident from listserv exchanges and online discussions following the broadcast.

There's something very wrong with this picture. To untie this knot, it might be helpful to consider an episode from 30 years ago.

In June of 1977, the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev made an official visit to Paris, where he was received "with all the ceremony France reserves for her official guests," in the words of one historian. A group of French intellectuals, however - Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre among them - decided to hold an alternative or shadow reception. They invited Soviet dissidents living in Paris to gather at the same time that Brezhnev was being feted in the corridors of state power.

"We simply thought," as Foucault put it, "that, on the evening when M Brezhnev is being received with pomp by [French president] M Giscard d'Estang, other French people could receive certain other Russians who are their friends."

Those words have as much resonance today as they did when Foucault spoke them three decades ago.

As the headlines and the hubbub this week swirl around Ahmadinejad, maybe we on the left should reach out to certain other Iranians who are our friends.

Maybe our attention and sympathies should belong to the likes of Mansour Osanlou and Mahmoud Salehi, the trade union leaders currently languishing behind bars in Iran for their organizing; to Emaddedin Baghi, the prisoners' rights and anti-death penalty activist; to the Iranians involved with the Million Signatures Campaign, a courageous grassroots movement for women's rights; to the many student activists, writers, and intellectuals currently in prison for expressing the wrong views.

While Ahmadinejad occupies center stage, we would be well served to consider another Iranian, the dissident and former political prisoner Akbar Ganji, who has just issued an Open Letter to the UN secretary general that refuses what Slavoj Zizek calls the "double blackmail": Ganji describes the human rights crisis currently gripping Iran—the severe crackdown on dissent, the crushing of progressive voices; while at the same time he denounces the Bush administration's saber rattling and underscores that Iran's democratic struggle wants no financial assistance from the US (or any foreign government), and is in fact put in grave jeopardy by such maneuvers.

"Iranian friends" continues on page 3

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The letter is signed by some of the preeminent intellectuals and writers in the world (Jürgen Habermas, Orhan Pamuk, Noam Chomsky, JM Coetzee and, appropriately enough, Zizek).

It's dangerously easy to become distracted by the circus surrounding Ahmadinejad's visit, a disfigured drama in which rightwing political figures and their stenographers in the media feverishly attempt to whip up jingoistic feelings. That rightwing assault can run an interference pattern on our thinking, where we react by protesting Ahmadinejad's shabby treatment at the hands of a bellicose political and media establishment.

And - make no mistake about it - bellicose it most certainly is. But let's not allow the right-wing warmongers to do our thinking for us. What if we looked at Ahmadinejad not through the (inverted) prism of the American media, but through that of Iranian dissidents, trade unionists and women's rights activists?

If we did that, we might discover how certain other Iranians (including religious ones) feel about the meetings between American religious leaders and Ahmadinejad. (Their meeting this week follows one in New York last year, and another one in Tehran earlier this year. Some of those American religious leaders have had admiring things to say about the Iranian leader.)

"Given the current situation we're facing," Ganji says, "these meetings with Ahmadinejad do not help to promote democracy or human rights in Iran but rather contribute to the further subjugation and oppression of the Iranian people...Back in Iran," he continues, "the regime will exploit these meetings to enhance its legitimacy by claiming that Ahmadinejad was warmly received by American religious groups. These meeting are counterproductive and make our struggle more difficult."

Upon leaving New York, Ahmadinejad will go to Venezuela to meet with Hugo Chávez, who last year honored the Iranian president with the Collar of the Order of the Liberator (the country's highest distinction bestowed on foreign dignitaries). Chávez's strong affection for Ahmadinejad has been a major contributor to the widespread confusion among many of the Venezuelan leader's leftist admirers around the world. And it has infuriated many in Iran's democratic struggle.

Echoing Ganji, a group of Iranian leftists issued a statement lamenting that the Chávez-Ahmadinejad love fest would "weaken the mass movements in Iran." "To us," they wrote, "it is possible for the Venezuelan government to have close diplomatic and trade relations with the Iranian government without giving it political support - particularly where domestic policy is concerned."

As Chávez receives Ahmadinejad in Caracas and the two leaders deepen their ties, let's receive (or at least think and learn about) certain other Iranians: the trade unionists and student activists imprisoned by Ahmadinejad's government, the women's rights campaigners whose demonstrations are crushed by the Islamic Republic's security forces, and the human rights activists and democratic dissidents who are endeavoring, in the face of grave danger, to bring about a more free and just Iran.

These other Iranians are a lot less likely to be in the headlines. But their struggle is ours. Or should be. |**P**

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