Politics of the contemporary student Left

Pam Nogales, Carlos J. Pereira Di Salvo, and Laurie Rojas

At the Left Forum hosted by New York's Pace University in April of this year, a panel discussion was held on the subject of Politics of the Contemporary Student Left: Hopes and Failures*. Organized by Alex Hanna of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), the panel consisted of Pam Nogales of Platypus, Carlos J. Pereira Di Salvo of USAS, and Laurie Rojas of Platypus. What follows is a transcript of each panelist's formal presentation and the subsequent Q&A session. Video of the panel discussion is available at <archive.org/details/ContemporaryStudentLeftLeftForum-2009NYC041809>.*

Opening remarks:

Laurie Rojas: What does it mean to be part of the radical student Left today? My political practice is informed by my participation in two very distinct organizations: the Students for a Democratic Society [SDS] and the Platypus Affiliated Society [Platypus]. Platypus began as a reading group at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in May of 2006. Its primary aims are to develop an understanding of the reasons for the historical failure of the Left and to clarify its present and future necessity.

In 2008 I joined the new SDS, for which I organized discussion groups across Chicago campuses on immigration rights. I also helped to coordinate SDS's participation in the May Day immigrant's rights rally, so that for roughly nine months I worked for SDS on an almost daily basis. At first, I thought I was in Platypus to do theoretical work that my "out in the streets" practice in SDS would complement. I was hardly alone in misunderstanding the relationship between theory and practice in this way. In fact, the most significant obstacle I found in my experience with youth politics in SDS is the fact that we have all naturalized the idea that leftists are either intellectuals or activists. This division cripples revolutionary practice as well as revolutionary thinking.

In Chicago there is a protest or a rally everyday, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to figure out what these protests are for, or what effect they have. Of course, I would be the last to deny that there have been certain "successful" campaigns, rallies, and sit-ins, such as the recent action at the Chicago Window and Door Factory, in which more than 200 laid off workers refused to leave the factory until they received the two months of salary and benefits that were due to them. But how does this "success" weigh in comparison to the general situation of unions in the U.S.?

Among my friends, colleagues, and comrades who attend as many of these events as possible, there is a widespread and deeply rooted anti-intellectualism. It seems that the more protests each attends the more prone he or she is to tell me that Platypus does not do anything, to which I reply, "Since when did thinking become understood as inaction?" My experiences in SDS convinced me that this form of anti-intellectualism, which we have inherited from the past, has led to our generation's depoliticization, whether in the form of activism or passivity.

The new SDS was founded in 2006 and is currently one of the largest political student organizations in the country. I was the master of ceremonies for the New SDS 2008 National Convention, which I have come to understand as a microcosm of the contemporary young Left: As a result of a series of interrelated problems, the convention was an organizational disaster. These problems include, first of all, SDS's lack of formal leadership or any sort of official national structure. Directly related to this, vague but powerful sentiments of "anti-authoritarianism" undermine any attempts to organize. It is therefore common that the *de facto* leaders of SDS are met with resentment for their "tyrannical" willingness to take on responsibilities. An overwhelming obsession with proceduralism coupled with the constant fear of being "un-democratic" makes it nearly impossible to arrive at even the most basic practical decisions. At the same time, leading concepts of the group's current foundational documents, not to mention its historical legacy—concepts such as "revolution" and "democracy"—are largely left at the level of empty abstractions. Their actual clarification has hardly any place within today's SDS, so that whatever political conversations do occur often prove to be frustrating. One suspects this is the reason for a tacit agreement to avoid ideological conversations. The result is predictable enough—whisper campaigns against individuals who dare to speak openly about their ideological positions.

Although the convention concluded with the formation of an interim leadership and an organizational structure, I came to recognize that the organization as a whole had already proven incapable of achieving its own goals. I was especially disillusioned when I observed a widespread reluctance to address the unresolved problems of the original SDS of the 1960s. In particular, there was a lack of interest in—or perhaps a fear of beginning to address—the most basic question facing the organization: What is it that we are trying to change, anyway?

In place of any serious discussion of aims or strategy, SDS tends to proliferate innumerable "direct action" campaigns, which entail the planning of various interventions or the enacting of civil disobedience. In the absence of effective leadership and long-term goals, these campaigns amount to a politics of acting out, an unreflective and compulsive desire for "agitation" and "resistance." The new SDS has become nothing more than an umbrella organization for participating in activism and resistance without strategy or goals. The activism-for-its-own-sake in SDS indicates that it "refuses to reflect upon its own impotence," as Adorno once said of the student activism in the 60s.

In his "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx wrote, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." The point today would be to invert that phrase, to say that in order to change the world we need to understand it. Or, rather, to say that one cannot be attempted without the other.

At Funk the War 3, a student organized protest/street party in Washington, D.C., on March 19, 2008.

Carlos Pereira Di Salvo: I would like to give a critical assessment of the anti-ideological perspective of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) in which I argue that this "anti-ideology" actually conceals a profound, unquestioned commitment to identity politics. I conclude with the argument that this commitment is a crucial factor in USAS's inability to develop a progressive and critical labor politics.

One of the central concepts USAS advocates is the idea that campaigns, not ideas, are what really matter. This position is stated explicitly in their "Principles of Unity," in which members are informed, "We do not impose a single ideological position, practice, or approach; rather, we aim to support one another in a spirit of respect for difference, shared purpose and hope." This is also a palpable feature of conferences, where any attempts to put forward issues of ideology or theory are routinely stonewalled. Consequently, USAS produces organizers who think that ideological debates are a waste of time, and that "organizing" is what really counts.

This does not mean that USAS claims to have no principles at all. In fact, their "Principles of Unity" contain many political ideas. But these are stated so vaguely as to offer hardly any guidance; they amount to rhetorical Rorschach inkblots onto which people can project their own political positions.

The trouble with the non-ideological or anti-ideological position is its incoherence. As was stated when the group was founded and has been reaffirmed at conventions and meetings many times since, the organization exists to address a certain social problem. Like other social justice organizations, USAS presupposes a theoretical analysis in the very identification of the problems they set out to solve as well as in their proposals for how these problems can be solved. This presupposed analysis is necessarily informed by a social theory—that is, by a theory of how society works. Yet the analysis is always left implicit.

Since the anti-ideological perspective is not a position on which one can build an organization, what, then, is the specific perspective that actually informs USAS organizationally? Although largely a vague and loosely related set of pronouncements, the "Principles of Unity" nevertheless have a unifying theme: postmodern identity politics. Thus it reads, "We struggle against racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of oppression within our society, within our organizations, and within ourselves." This is a relatively definite expression of consensus activist ideology, though, as we shall see, there are other aspects of that consensus less clearly expressed.

"Student Left" continues on page 4

15

www.platypus1917.org

Table of Contents

1 **Politics of the contemporary student Left**
Pam Nogales, Carlos J. Pereira Di Salvo, and Laurie Rojas

2 **The sport of protest**
Resistance to the Olympics coming to Chicago
Chris Mansour

2 **Book Review: Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington***
Greg Gabrellas

3 **Book Review: Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy***
Chris Cutrone

The Platypus Review
Issue #15 | September 2009

Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once 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 saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The Platypus Review is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The Platypus Review hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–2,500 words, but longer pieces will also be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editorfatplatypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

The Platypus Review is funded by:
The University of Chicago Student Government
School of the Art Institute of Chicago Student Government
The Platypus Affiliated Society

Staff

Editor-in-Chief
Spencer A. Leonard

Managing Editor
Nathan L. Smith

Assistant Editors
Chris Cutrone
Ian Morrison
Pam C. Nogales
Laurie Rojas
Richard Rubin

Copy Editor
Nathan L. Smith

Proof Editor
Sunit Singh

Designer
Laurie Rojas

Web Editor
Laurie Rojas

Issue #15 / September 2009

Book Review: Karl Korsch. *Marxism and Philosophy*.

Edited and Translated by Fred Halliday. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008.

Chris Cutrone

> [Marx wrote,] "[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."[1] This dictum is not affected by the fact that a problem which supersedes present relations may have been formulated in an anterior epoch.
>
> As scientific socialism, the Marxism of Marx and Engels remains the inclusive whole of a theory of social revolution... a materialism whose theory comprehended the totality of society and history, and whose practice overthrew it.... The difference [now] is that the various components of [what for Marx and Engels was] the unbreakable interconnection of theory and practice are further separated out.... The umbilical cord has been broken.
>
> — Karl Korsch, "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923)

KARL KORSCH'S SEMINAL ESSAY, "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923), was first published in English, translated by Fred Halliday, in 1970 by Monthly Review Press. In 2008, they reprinted the volume, which also contains some important shorter essays, as part of their new "Classics" series.

The original publication of Korsch's essay coincided with Georg Lukács's 1923 landmark collection of essays, *History and Class Consciousness* (*HCC*). While Lukács's book has the word "history" in its title, it follows Marx's *Capital* in addressing the problem of social being and consciousness in a primarily "philosophical" and categorial manner, as the subjectivity of the commodity form. Korsch's essay on philosophy in Marxism, by contrast, is actually a historical treatment of the problem from Marx and Engels's time through the Second International to the crisis of Marxism and the revolutions of 1917–19. More specifically, it takes up the development and vicissitudes of the relation between theory and practice in the history of Marxism, which is considered the "philosophical" problem of Marxism.

Independently of one another, both Korsch's and Lukács's 1923 works shared an interest in recovering the Hegelian or "idealist" dimension of Marx's thought and politics. Both were motivated to establish the coherence of the Marxist revolutionaries Lenin and Luxemburg, and these Second International-era radicals' shared grounding in what Korsch called "Marx's Marxism." Their accomplishment of this is all the more impressive when it is recognized that it was made without benefit of either of the two most important texts in which Marx explicitly addressed the relation of his own thought to Hegel's, the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (first published in 1932) or the notes for *Capital* posthumously published as the *Grundrisse* (1939), and also without access to Lenin's 1914 notebooks on Hegel's *Science of Logic* (1929). Due to a perceived shortcoming in the expounding of revolutionary Marxism, the problem for Korsch and Lukács was interpreting Marxism as both theory and practice, or how the politics of Lenin and Luxemburg (rightly) considered itself "dialectical." Both Lukács and Korsch explicitly sought to provide this missing exposition and elaboration.

Lukács and Korsch were later denounced as "professors" in the Communist International, a controversy that erupted after the deaths of Luxemburg and Lenin. (Another important text of this moment was Lukács's 1924 monograph in eulogy, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*.) In the face of this party criticism, Lukács acquiesced and made his peace with Stalinized "orthodoxy." Eventually disavowing *History and Class Consciousness* as a misguided attempt to "out-Hegel Hegel," Lukács even attempted to destroy all the existing copies of the unpublished "Tailism and the Dialectic," his brilliant 1925 defense of *HCC*. (Apparently he failed, since a copy was eventually found in Soviet archives. This remarkable document was translated and published in 2000 as *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*.)

Korsch responded differently to the party's criticism. Quitting the Third International Communist movement entirely, he became associated with the "Left" or "council" communism of Antonie Pannekoek, Paul Mattick, et al. Though making a choice very different from Lukács and distancing himself from official "Marxism-Leninism," Korsch also came to disavow his earlier argument in "Marxism and Philosophy." Specifically, he abandoned the attempt to establish the coherence of Lenin's theory and practice with that of Marx, going so far as to critique Marx's own Marxism. Thus, in "The Present State of the Problem of 'Marxism and Philosophy': An Anti-Critique" (1930), included in *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch argues that, to the degree Marx shared a common basis with Lenin, this was an expression of limitations in Marx's own critical theory and political practice. Indeed, for Korsch it was a problem of "Marxism" in general, including that of Kautsky and Luxemburg. Ultimately, Korsch called for "going beyond" Marxism.

The complementary, if divergent, trajectories of Korsch and Lukács are indicative of the historical disintegration of the perspective both shared in their writings of 1923. Both had understood the "subjective" aspect of Marxism to have been clarified by Lenin's role in the October Revolution. The figure of Lenin was irreducible, and brought out dimensions of the Marxian project that otherwise lay unacknowledged. As Theodor W. Adorno put it in private discussion with Max Horkheimer in 1956,

> I always wanted to produce a theory that would be faithful to Marx, Engels and Lenin.... Marx was too harmless; he probably imagined quite naïvely that human beings are basically the same in all essentials and will remain so. It would be a good idea, therefore, to deprive them of their second nature. He was not concerned with their subjectivity; he probably didn't look into that too closely. The idea that human beings are the products of society down to their innermost core is an idea that he would have rejected as milieu theory. Lenin was the first person to assert this.[2]

In this discussion, Adorno also proposed to Horkheimer that they "should produce a reworked [version of the] *Communist Manifesto* that would be 'strictly Leninist.' "[3]

No less than Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, Korsch's "Marxism and Philosophy" inspired the work of the Marxist critical theorists associated with the Frankfurt School: Horkheimer, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Adorno. But the reputation of Korsch's work has been eclipsed by that of Lukács. What the usual interpretive emphasis on Lukács occludes is that the Frankfurt School writers grappled not only with the problem of Stalinism but "anti-Stalinism" as well. Both Lukács's and Korsch's post-1923 trajectories were critiqued by the Frankfurt School writers.[4] As Adorno put it in *Negative Dialectics* (1966),

> First Karl Korsch, later the functionaries of Diamat [Dialectical Materialism] have objected, that the turn to nonidentity would be, due to its immanent-critical and theoretical character, an insignificant nuance of neo-Hegelianism or of the historically obsolete Hegelian Left; as if the Marxist critique of philosophy had dispensed with this, while simultaneously the East cannot do without a statutory Marxist philosophy. The demand for the unity of theory and praxis has irresistibly debased the former to a mere underling; removing from it what it was supposed to have achieved in that unity. The practical visa-stamp demanded from all theory became the censor's stamp. In the famed unity of theory-praxis, the former was vanquished and the latter became non-conceptual, a piece of the politics which it was supposed to lead beyond; delivered over to power. The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and the ban on thinking contributed to bad praxis; that theory wins back its independence, is the interest of praxis itself. The relationship of both moments to each other is not settled for once and for all, but changes historically. Today, since the hegemonic bustle cripples and denigrates theory, theory testifies in all its powerlessness against the former by its mere existence.[5]

In this passage Adorno was addressing, not the Korsch of the 1923 "Marxism and Philosophy," but rather the later Korsch of the 1930 "Anti-Critique," distanced from the problem Adorno sought to address, of the constitutive non-identity of theory and practice. Adorno thought, like Korsch and Lukács in the early 1920s, that Lenin and Luxemburg's theoretical self-understanding, together with their revolutionary political practice, comprised the most advanced attempt yet to work through precisely this non-identity.

In Adorno's terms, both the later Korsch and official "Diamat" (including Lukács) assumed "identity thinking," an identity of effective theory and practice, rather than their articulated non-identity, to which Korsch had drawn attention earlier in "Marxism and Philosophy." Such constitutive non-identity was, according to Korsch's earlier essay, expressed symptomatically, in the subsistence of "philosophy" as a distinct activity in the historical epoch of Marxism. This was because it expressed a genuine historical need. The continued practice of philosophy was symptomatic expression of the need to transcend and supersede philosophy. Instead of this recognition of the actuality of the symptom of philosophical thinking, of the mutually constitutive separation of theory and practice, Korsch, by embracing council communism and shunning Marxian theory in the years after writing his famously condemned work, succumbed to what Adorno termed "identity thinking." By assuming the identity of theory and practice, or of social being and consciousness in the workers' movement, Korsch sought their "reconciliation," instead of discerning and critically grasping their persistent antagonism, as would necessarily be articulated in any purported politics of emancipation.

Just as Adorno tried to hold fast to the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* in the face of Lukács's own subsequent disavowals, the first sentence of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* reiterated Korsch's statement in "Marxism and Philosophy" that, "Philosophy cannot be abolished without being realized" (97):

> Philosophy, which once seemed outmoded, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world is itself crippled by resignation before reality, and becomes a defeatism of reason after the transformation of the world failed.[6]

Philosophy's end was its *self*-abolition. What Korsch prefaced to his statement helps to illuminate what Adorno meant. Korsch specified precisely what "the realization of philosophy" involves:

> Just as political action is not rendered unnecessary by the economic action of a revolutionary class, so intellectual action is not rendered unnecessary by either political or economic action. On the contrary it must be carried through to the end in theory and practice, as revolutionary scientific criticism and agitational work before the seizure of state power by the working class, and as scientific organization and ideological dictatorship after the seizure of state power. If this is valid for intellectual action against the forms of consciousness which define bourgeois society in general, it is especially true of philosophical action. Bourgeois consciousness necessarily sees itself as apart from the world and independent of it, as pure critical philosophy and impartial science, just as the bourgeois State and bourgeois Law appear to be above society. This consciousness must be philosophically fought by the revolutionary materialistic dialectic, which is the philosophy of the working class. This struggle will only end when the whole of existing society and its economic basis have been totally overthrown in practice, and this consciousness has been totally surpassed and abolished in theory. (97)

This was the original Marxist "defense" of philosophy that Adorno reiterated in *Negative Dialectics*. Over four decades previously, in 1923, Korsch had explicitly tied it to Lenin's treatment of the problem of the state in *The State and Revolution* (1917). Just as, with the overcoming of capitalism, the necessity of the state would "wither," and not be done away with at one stroke, so too the necessity of "philosophical" thinking as it appeared in the epoch of capital would dissolve. This side of emancipation, "theoretical" self-reflection, thought's reflecting on its own conditions of possibility, remains necessary, precisely because it expresses an unresolved social-historical problem.

In "Marxism and Philosophy," Korsch analyzed Marxism as emergent from and historically continuous with the "revolt of the Third Estate," of the "bourgeois" liberal-democratic revolutionary epoch that preceded it. Korsch was concerned with Marx's continuity with Kant and Hegel. A problem that occurred to them, namely, of theory and practice, repeated itself, if in a more acute way, for Marx. It is a problem of the philosophy of revolution, or of the "theory of social revolution." This problem presents itself only insofar as it is conceived of as part and parcel of the social-historical process of transformation and not as contemplation from without. As it was for Hegel, Marx's fundamental "philosophical" issue is this: How is it possible, if however problematic, to be a self-conscious agent of change, if what is being transformed includes oneself, or, more precisely, an agency that transforms conditions both for one's practical grounding and for one's theoretical self-understanding in the process of acting?

Korsch addressed the question of revolution as a problem indicated by the liquidation and reconstitution of "philosophy" itself after the crisis and "decay of Hegelianism" ("Marxism and Philosophy," 29). Why did philosophical development take a hiatus by 1848 and only appear to resume afterwards? What changed about "philosophy" in the interim? For Korsch recognized there was a curious blank spot or gap in the history of philosophy from the 1840s–60s, the period of Marxism's emergence. Korsch divided the relation of Marx's thought to philosophy roughly into three periods: pre-1848, circa 1848, and post-1848. These periods were distinguished by the different ways they related theory and practice: the first period was the critique of philosophy calling for its simultaneous realization and self-abolition; the second, the sublimation of philosophy in revolution; and the third, the recrudescence of the problem of relating theory and practice.

Korsch's third period in the history of Marxism extended into what he termed the "crisis of Marxism" beginning in the 1890s with the reformist "revisionist" dispute of Eduard Bernstein et al. against the "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International—when the "revolutionary Marxism" of Luxemburg and Lenin originated—and continuing into the acutely revolutionary period of 1917–19, from the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the German Revolution and civil war of 1918–19, to the Hungarian Soviet Republic (in which Lukács participated) and the workers' council movement in Italy (in which Antonio Gramsci participated) in 1919.

It was in this revolutionary period of the early 20th century that "Marx's Marxism" circa 1848 regained its saliency, but in ways that Korsch thought remained not entirely resolved as a matter of relating theory to practice. In "Marxism and Philosophy," Korsch found that while Lenin and Luxemburg had tried to better relate Marxian theory and practice than Second International Marxism had done, they had recognized this as an ongoing task and aspiration and not already achieved in some finished sense. In the words of the epigraph from Lenin that introduces Korsch's 1923 essay, "We must organize a systematic study of the Hegelian dialectic from a materialist standpoint" ("On the Significance of Militant Materialism," 1922). If Marxism continued to be subject to a "Hegelian dialectic," thus requiring the "historical materialist" analysis and explanation that Korsch sought to provide of it, this was because it was not itself the reconciled unity of theory and practice but remained, as theory, the critical reflection on the *problem* of relating theory and practice—which in turn prompted further theoretical development as well as practical political advances. As Adorno put it to Walter Benjamin in a letter of August 2, 1935,

> The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather it is dialectical, in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness.... [P]erfection of the commodity character in a Hegelian self-consciousness inaugurates the explosion of its phantasmagoria.[7]

Marxism was caught in the "phantasmagoria" of capital, while "exploding" it from within.

For the Korsch of "Marxism and Philosophy," Lenin and Luxemburg's "revolutionary Marxism" was bound up in the "crisis of Marxism," while advancing it to a new stage. As Korsch commented,

> This transformation and development of Marxist theory has been effected under the peculiar ideological guise of a return to the pure teaching of original or true Marxism. Yet it is easy to understand both the reasons for this guise and the real character of the process which is concealed by it. What theoreticians like Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Lenin in Russia have done, and are doing, in the field of Marxist theory is to liberate it from the inhibiting traditions of [Social Democracy]. They thereby answer the practical needs of the new revolutionary stage of proletarian class struggle, for these traditions weighed "like a nightmare" on the brain of the working masses whose objectively revolutionary socioeconomic position no longer corresponded to these [earlier] evolutionary doctrines. The apparent revival of original Marxist theory in the Third International is simply a result of the fact that in a new revolutionary period not only the workers' movement itself, but the theoretical conceptions of communists which express it, must assume an explicitly revolutionary form. This is why large sections of the Marxist system, which seemed virtually forgotten in the final decades of the nineteenth century, have now come to life again. It also explains why the leader of the Russian Revolution [Lenin] could write a book a few months before October [*The State and Revolution*, 1917] in which he stated that his aim was "in the first place to *restore* the correct Marxist theory of the State".... When Lenin placed the same question theoretically on the agenda at a decisive moment, this was an early indication that the internal connection of theory and practice within revolutionary Marxism had been consciously re-established. (67–68)

Korsch thus established the importance for what Adorno called the "historically changing" relation of theory and practice, making sense of their vicissitudes in the history of the politics of revolutionary Marxism. Furthermore, by establishing the character of the crisis of Marxism as a matter of theoretical reflection, Korsch re-established the role of consciousness in a Marxian conception of social revolution, why the abandonment or distancing of the practical perspective of revolution necessitates a degradation of theory.

Departing sharply from this perspective, in his 1930 "Anti-Critique," Korsch wrote,

> When the SPD became a "Marxist" party (a process completed with the Erfurt Programme written by Kautsky and Bernstein in 1891) a gap developed between its highly articulated revolutionary "Marxist" theory and a practice that was far behind this revolutionary theory; in some respects it directly contradicted it. This gap was in fact obvious, and it later came to be felt more and more acutely by all the vital forces in the Party (whether on the Left or Right) and its existence was denied only by the orthodox Marxists of the Centre. This gap can easily be explained by the fact that in this historical phase "Marxism," while formally accepted by the workers' movement, was from the start not a true *theory,* in the sense of being "nothing other than a general expression of the real historical movement" (Marx). On the contrary it was always an *ideology* that had been adopted "from outside" in a pre-established form. In this situation such "orthodox Marxists" as Kautsky and Lenin made a permanent virtue out of a temporary necessity. They energetically defended the idea that socialism can only be brought to the workers "from outside," by bourgeois intellectuals who are allied to the workers' movement. This was also true of Left radicals like Rosa Luxemburg. (113–115)

According to Korsch, the Revolution of 1848 and the role of the workers' movement in it had provided "a rational solution for all the mysteries" of the contradiction between theory and practice that later Second International Marxists tried to sidestep by simply adopting Marxism as an ideology. Korsch commented that,

> [A]lthough [Second International Marxism's] effective practice was now on a *broader basis* than before, it had in no way reached the *heights* of general and theoretical achievement earlier attained by the revolutionary movement and proletarian class struggle on a *narrower basis.* This height was attained during the final phase of the first major capitalist cycle that came to an end towards 1850. (116)

Since the mid-19th century, Marxism, according to the Korsch of the "Anti-Critique," had grown ideological. Even Marx's *Capital* expressed a certain degeneration:

> [T]he *theory* of Marx and Engels was progressing towards an ever higher level of theoretical perfection although it was no longer directly related to the *practice* of the worker's movement. (117)

In other words, the mature theory of Marx (and its development by Engels and their epigones) was itself "anachronistic" and thus unassimilable by the resurgent workers' movement of the last third of the 19th century.

Korsch abandoned his 1923 conception of Lenin and Luxemburg's rearticulation of 1848 in the theory and practice of 1917–19, the "transformation and development of Marxist theory... effected under the peculiar ideological guise of a return to the pure teaching of original or true Marxism." Marx's Marxism, especially in his mature writings, could only be the elaboration of 1848, in isolation from the workers' subsequent actual political practice, to which it became ideologically blind and blinding. No adequate "theory," that is, no "general expression of the real historical movement," had emerged since. This non-identity and divergence of theory and practice that began in the period of Marx's maturity and continued into the 20th century meant, for the Korsch of the 1930s, that Marxism, even in its most revolutionary forms, as with Lenin and Luxemburg, had developed, not to express, but rather to constrain the workers' movement. Marxism had become an ideology whose value could only be relative, not qualitatively superior to others.[8] When he died in 1961, Korsch was working on a study of Marx's rival in the First International Workingmen's Association, the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.[9] **IP**

---

1. Karl Marx's Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).
2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "Diskussion über Theorie und Praxis" (1956), quoted in Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 233.
3. Ibid., 233. Furthermore, while "Marx wrote his critique of the [SPD, German Social-Democratic Party's] Gotha Programme in 1875[,] Adorno had for some time planned to write a critique of the Godesberg Programme [in which the SPD formally renounced Marxism in 1959]" [Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 598].
4. The reverse was also true. Korsch, in distancing himself from his 1923 work that was so seminal for the Frankfurt School writers, also came to critique them:
   > [Korsch] intended to try and interest Horkheimer and the [Frankfurt] Institute [for Social Research] in Pannekoek's book *Lenin as Philosopher* (1938) [which traced the bureaucratization of the USSR back to the supposedly crude materialism of Lenin's 1909 book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*]... [Either] Korsch [or, the Director of the Institute, Horkheimer himself] would write a review for [the Institute's journal] the *Zeitschrift*... Yet no such review appeared... [Korsch suffered] total disillusionment with the Institute and their "impotent philosophy." Korsch [was] particularly bitter about the "metaphysician Horkheimer." [Phil Slater, *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 73–74].

   The record for Korsch's deteriorating relations with the Frankfurt Institute in exile is found in his private letters to Paul Mattick, editor of the journal *Living Marxism: International Council Correspondence*.
5. Translated by Dennis Redmond, 2001, <efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>. The first sentence of this passage, mentioning Korsch, is inexplicably missing from the 1973 Continuum edition of *Negative Dialectics* translated by E. B. Ashton (see "Relation to Left-Wing Hegelianism," 143).
6. Translated by Redmond, <efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>.
7. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* Vol. 3 (1935–38), (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54–56; Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), 111–113.
8. Such eclecticism on the Left has only deepened and become more compounded since Korsch's time, especially since the 1960s. However Marx may come up for periodic reconsideration, certain questions central to the Marxian problematic remain obscured. As Fredric Jameson has written,
   > A Marx revival seems to be under way, predating the current [2007–09] disarray on Wall Street, even though no clear-cut political options yet seem to propose themselves... The big ideological issues—anarchism, the party, economic planning, social classes—are still mainly avoided, on the grounds that they remind too many people of Communist propaganda. Such a reminder is unwanted, not so much because it is accompanied by the memory of deaths and violence... as simply and less dramatically because such topics now appear boring. ["Sandblasting Marx," *New Left Review* 55 (Jan.–Feb. 2009):134].

   For further discussion of the fluctuating currency and fortunes of Marxian approaches as a feature of modern history, see my "Symptomology: Historical Transformations in Social-Political Context," *The Platypus Review* 12 (May 2009).
9. A. R. Giles-Peter, "Karl Korsch: A Marxist Friend of Anarchism," *Red & Black* (Australia) 5 (April 1973). Available online at <geocities.com/capitolHill/Lobby/2379/korsh.htm>. According to Giles-Peter, Korsch came to believe that the "basis of the revolutionary attitude in the modern bourgeois epoch would be an ethic Marx would have rejected as 'anarchist,' " and thus "explicitly rejected the elements of Marxism which separate it from anarchism." As Korsch himself put it, in "Ten Theses on Marxism Today" (1950), translated by Giles-Peter in *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975–76) and available online at <libcom.org/library/ten-theses-korsch>,
   > Marx is today only one among the numerous precursors, founders and developers of the socialist movement of the working class. No less important are the so-called Utopian Socialists from Thomas More to the present. No less important are the great rivals of Marx, such as Blanqui, and his sworn enemies, such as Proudhon and Bakunin. No less important, in the final result, are the more recent developments such as German revisionism, French syndicalism, and Russian Bolshevism.

Student Left, continued from page 1

So what? Why is postmodern identity politics problematic? To answer this, we have to look at the role this politics plays in the organization. This role could be characterized in a number of ways: as a perspective informing the analysis of the causes of the problem of sweatshop production, as a perspective on how to effectively organize ourselves to address the problem, or perhaps as some other thing entirely.

It is fairly clear that identity politics does not inform USAS's analysis of the problem. Not even USAS believes that the problem of sweatshops is primarily a problem of discrimination on the basis of identity. It is, at the very least, a problem of inequality and exploitation, although I would argue it should be understood as a phenomenon of the present stage of global capitalism, one that cannot be eradicated without challenging the entire social structure. Sweatshop workers are not primarily victims of racism or sexism—even though most of them are in fact women of color—and they are certainly not victims of "classism," whatever that is. They are victims of neoliberal capitalism's drive to accumulate wealth by finding the cheapest possible supply of labor. In the apparel industry, the rise in sweatshop production in the Third World was a direct result of the phasing out of a protectionist system of quotas called the Multi Fiber Agreement, which was dismantled throughout the 1990s and early 2000s following the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations.

So if identity politics is not used by USAS to grasp the problem of sweatshops per se, then maybe its utility lies in helping students think about how to organize themselves in order to effectively address said problem. I think this has a little bit more traction. Integral to USAS's structure and to the structure of its conferences are the so-called "anti-oppression training" and the "caucus system." I will not describe these at length because they are staple elements of the Left today; suffice it to say that about half the conference time at national conventions is devoted to anti-oppression and caucuses. Moreover, the organizational structure includes representation of the Womyn/Gender Queer, Queer, People of Color, and Working Class caucuses.

The justification for this structure given in the "Principles of Unity" is that each individual, and particularly each American college student, harbors racist, sexist, heterosexist, classist attitudes, and is privileged by the unfair outcomes these attitudes create in society. These attitudes, it is further believed, plague our organizing efforts. By fighting the "-isms" in ourselves, we are said to become better able to fight them in society.

So what does this all have to do with sweatshop workers hundreds of miles away, whose primary problems are extremely low wages, extremely long working hours, physical and verbal abuse, and awful working conditions? After all, this is the specific problem USAS constituted itself to address. From the perspective of sweatshop workers, all that matters is that we act as effective "allies," that we bend the arm of Nike by hitting them where it hurts (university licenses, market share, and public image) so that the workers' efforts to organize are not undercut by capital flight. It is obvious that workers—and I have spoken with some personally about this—are looking to USAS to play this specific role.

The question, then, is this: Does anti-oppression training make us any better at being good allies? I would argue that it does not. The kinds of tactics USAS employs in order to pressure universities and corporations, like phone and letter campaigns, mock actions, non-violent direct action, and so on, are not more effective when they are executed by people with guilty consciences about their privilege, than when they are executed by people who give no thought to this. The consciousness raised by anti-oppression training simply does not enter into the strategizing for campaigns. Diverse groups such as my own at Purdue University, where the majority of members were in fact women and people of color, are not necessarily more effective allies than groups such as Indiana University's, which was predominantly white and male during the period of my involvement.

If it is unclear whether anti-oppression makes us better allies to workers in the apparel industry, why is so much time spent on this stuff? Why has it not been rejected organizationally in light of challenges to it at recent national conferences? The reason, I would suggest, is anti-oppression training is used to convince students that workers, merely by virtue of being workers, are more progressive than themselves and their own organizations, and that therefore we ought to declare solidarity uncritically with their struggles. This attitude goes hand in hand with the idea that ideological debates are pointless, and that it is not our place to say, on the basis of some analysis or the other of this society, what the appropriate political responses ought to be in light of a certain situation or problem.

This is not to say that there is necessarily much to be criticized in the organizing efforts of Third World sweatshop workers. But there is one recent American case that particularly highlights the problems that derive from USAS's uncritical relationship to the labor struggles it attempts to support.

Many of you may be aware of the unfolding fratricide between the UNITE! and HERE sides of UNITE! HERE, and of the ambition of SEIU [Service Employees International Union] to absorb either one or both of the sides once the dust settles. This is a case in which we might expect a student movement primarily concerned with labor issues to have an open discussion and maybe even formulate a position. Instead, a contact in USAS's inner circle informs me that posts relating to these issues were deliberately deleted for over two weeks from the listservs of the organization, and that the top leadership are loath to take a side. In fact, only recently did an email with a few articles on the issue go out, the purpose of which seems to have been more to obfuscate than to educate. This is but a single instance of how USAS's anti-ideological attitude constrains the organization's ability to champion an independent and progressive labor politics. The organization's anti-ideological stance serves to maintain internal organizational divisions according to ascriptive identities rather than political factionalization. This actively inhibits the political education of members and undermines the organization's efficacy.

The recent period of flux in USAS provides a valuable opportunity for reflection regarding USAS's potential as an organization. The significance of this question should not be underestimated: Consider that at least five former Purdue USAS organizers in the past six years are now with major unions. Hence, as a large recruitment ground for union organizers, USAS is a potential resource for a desperately needed renewal of the American labor movement. USAS's current uncritical workerist stance will not produce the kind of organizers needed to meet this challenge.

If identity politics is abandoned, what is there to take its place? Well, prescribing is always harder than critiquing, of course, and I do not know that there is a politics ready-made at present that can take the place of identity politics. But I can at least say that part of the challenge will be for USAS to foment an organizational culture capable of producing such a politics by seriously engaging theoretical debates and formulating political positions. Central to this, in my view, will be the inclusion of discussions on the nature of capitalism, imperialism, and neoliberalism into its conference agenda.

Student activists occupy the New School's Graduate Faculty Building in December 2008.

Pam Nogales: I would venture to say that it is unclear whether or not the recent wave of occupations [at the New School in the spring of 2009] is a step forward for the student Left. Watching the video documentation of the April 13th emergency assembly held at the New School, I realized that much of what I had found compelling about student politics in New York is at risk of being absorbed into the murky waters of protest politics.

During the emergency assembly Pat Korte, a radical student member, delivered a partial critique of the students' response to the recent turn of events. Korte noted that present political activities should not be limited to ousting the school's President, Bob Kerry, but ought rather to challenge the corporate structure of the university. Student radicals, he felt, should not accept uncritically the overarching structure of the institutions in which they are enrolled. But as the meeting progressed, Korte's comments quickly faded into the background. Reports and condemnations of police brutality added to the already festering outrage that dominated the question and answer session, and in a manner of minutes the critique of structural limitations, the context in which someone like Bob Kerry functions, became obscured by immediate concerns.

I wondered if this was an unconscious exclusion, a temporary amnesia in part caused by the blatant misconduct of the New School administration. I should say that I do not take police brutality lightly, and the fact that the New School administration has threatened the students with imprisonment for conducting a teach-in at a campus building is an action that should not be allowed to pass unnoticed and unchallenged. But it is precisely because I sympathize with the defense of those students' rights to organize, and because I oppose police brutality and incompetent university administration, that I would like to see a coherent challenge that does not confuse the question of limitations of the current structure for the source of the structure's unfreedom. This is a very important distinction for me.

After several students spoke up at the emergency meeting, an older man who introduced himself as a student protester at the 1969 University of Chicago sit-in gave his word of advice. He cautioned the students that they should veer away from the critique of capitalism, an inquiry that in the past, according to him, led to the Stalinist mumbo-jumbo that eventually fractured and destroyed the New Left. What we are fighting here, he said, is the malignancy of those in power, a malignancy that is still spreading. A loud applause followed. This incident points to a dominant trend in today's student Left: A vague and ill-defined anti-authoritarianism that effectively inhibits student politics. It also highlights plainly the way this problem represents an uncritical repetition of the past.

The vague anti-authoritarianism so many leftist organizations share has led to ideological incoherence and to a student Left that exists as a tenuous unity quickly running up against its limitations. Without discussion and debate of the content and meaning of political activity, occupations and protests serve only as a means for coordinating more occupations, more protest, more agitation, which are, by the sheer fact of happening, supposed to galvanize a political consciousness in onlookers. The content of this politicization is rarely called into question; it is expected, rather, that the struggle itself takes care of ideological problems. Ideological debate soon dissolves into the question of whether or not one is willing to "fight the good fight."

It would be unfair to cast the entire student Left in this light. There are those like Pat Korte who will say that the development of ideas is an integral component of developing a radical culture. And yet there is little room in the movement for this kind of activity. There is little follow-up on the kind of organizational work necessary to foster an examination of history, an analysis of political positions, and the development of theory.

Old political problems are still with us. They are the stuff that our perspectives are made out of, whether we are conscious of it or not. It is incumbent upon those of us who call ourselves leftist to inquire into the nature of our ideological inheritance and into the meaning of our political activity. Neglecting this necessary work of political practice means simply relegating our politics to our instinctual responses to current conditions, and ultimately tethering ourselves to the barbaric immediacy of our present. Historical consciousness was meant to tackle exactly this problem of the limitations of political shortsightedness. Although the idea of historical consciousness has prompted a great deal of confusion, there is no serious political alternative today.

The conscious struggle against the limitations of the present is shaped by three defining approaches to our reality: what is possible, what is necessary, and what is desirable. The radical features of our politics are defined and redefined by how we deal with these questions. That which is desirable can appear as an impossible goal, unrealizable under present conditions. That is why it is necessary for political practice to push the boundaries of what is possible, so that our politics do not become a slave to the present.

But how, in the absence of an international Left, can one fight for an emancipatory politics? How we approach this bleak reality is the first question we Leftists today should ask ourselves. We are the inheritors of a failed politics, and how we make sense of this failure necessarily shapes our political goals, our ideological perspectives. If we shy away from this task it will lead only to confusion. The principle of uncritical inclusivity that seems so important for student leftists today assumes that all ideological work is done in people's private time. The political perspectives of individual members are pushed aside for the good of the organization as a whole, even while it remains unclear how this extremely fractured whole will move forward without an in-depth inquiry into the nature of its politics. "We must be realistic in our utopianism," as C. Wright Mills put it. We must put forward a thorough understanding of what we are actually against. We must ask, What are the defining features of our present forms of unfreedom?

Platypus does not define itself in terms of organizing protest strikes or building coalitions. We have worked with groups that do this kind of work, and although that work is necessary, our project is different. Our work is geared toward the ideological clarification of the most striking political condition of our time: the absence of an international Left. We believe that this inquiry is the necessary groundwork for rebuilding an emancipatory politics in the present. This ideological work is carried out through public discussions, reading group meetings, film screenings, and interventions, activities that require an organizational structure adequate to long-term goals. What we would like to foster in the current student movement is a culture of debate and discussion. We would like to see students participate in the clarification of their political positions. And we would like this debate to affect the direction of the movement. The student movements, whether consciously or unconsciously, affect the conditions in which a radical politics develops. It is both the context and the force for its efficacy. Only if the student Left directs its activities towards conscious realization of this development will it advance the struggle for freedom.

After the panelists' presentations, members of the audience were invited to ask questions.

What lies behind the mindless actions that characterize the student Left today and the false positivity that it entails?

Nogales: I think there is a belief that agitational activity will somehow bring in those who have been standing on the sidelines, who have thought about being political but have not gone all the way. There is a mistaken belief that growth in numbers alone will somehow create a better politics.

Pereira Di Salvo: There is a lot of Situationist thought in these circles that actually convinces people that the moments when you are holding the signs are the moments when capitalism is being ripped apart. This is very dangerous; if you think that those are the moments when you are really free, then nothing is ever going to change.

Do you think that a lot of this anti-authoritarian identity politics is really a mask for, in many ways, right wing impulses, and basically anti-Marxist impulses?

Rojas: Anti-authoritarianism is definitely bound up with anti-ideology. It is something we have inherited from the 1960s New Left, but even they dealt with it more directly and self-consciously than we do today. At the SDS convention there were people with serious political disagreements, but there was no space dedicated to addressing or clarifying those disagreements. Instead, participants carry away from these conventions altogether obscure notions of what traditions and concepts such as anarchism, Marxism, ideology, and democracy might actually mean.

I wanted to point out two things. First, anti-ideology is a form of ideology. Secondly, groups like the Black Panthers actually put revolution on the table, and this gave a lot of impetus to other political movements at the time. We need something like that now, an actual revolutionary movement.

Nogales: I agree that anti-ideology is itself a kind of ideology, but I am puzzled by your claims regarding the Black Panthers. It seems that what you are calling for is greater militance in the movement. But I would say that consideration of the substance of one's own politics is a necessary step that should come before posing any political demands, militant or otherwise. Many people in the Radical Student Union at the New School do in fact look to the 1960s for the content of their politics, but they are unwilling to actually work through that past. So there is an unconscious inheritance that causes them to prioritize certain tactics and goals without first thinking about what those priorities actually entail and whether they are appropriate.

What is the state of student movements and radicalism globally? What kind of international student movement currently exists?

Pereira Di Salvo: I do not think that there really is any sort of international student movement or that students have much contact with one another on a global scale. I will speak to my own experience at Purdue University, where there was an interesting division of labor by which one organization took upon itself the task of having ideological debates, of taking ideas seriously and debating them earnestly. This organization debated the relevance of what USAS was doing, and every single person in this organization also belonged to the USAS group. We were very critical, we wanted to change things from within USAS, but I think we ultimately failed to articulate that well enough. Our critical positions did not make an impact. I am hoping that my future involvement with USAS will in some sense try to address these failures.

Rojas: There are definitely things going on with students internationally. There are student rallies and protests in Iran, there are anti-authoritarian groups in Germany, and there is a Facebook group for an international student Left. But what do these things amount to? I am a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which in my experience has a pervasive anti-activist and anti-political atmosphere. This makes it very hard to be "political," to present oneself as a political person. What I might be calling for is a radicalization of intellectuals. That is what I would like to do on my campus: politicize these students who are very smart, who read the same things I read, but do so apolitically. On some campuses there is a widespread fear of politics. So there is the matter of dealing with anti-intellectualism within activist groups, but there is also dealing with anti-political impulses within intellectual circles.

When you are trying to build a movement in the United States or internationally, where the majority of the working class are people of color, immigrants, and gays and lesbians, is it not necessary to address the relationship between white skin privilege and these oppressed groups? The problem is that the reaction to the type of postmodern identity politics manifested in USAS turns into a reaction against all identity politics. Do you not need some form of identity politics to fight racial oppression, sexual oppression, and so on?

Pereira Di Salvo: I would hate it if people came away from here thinking that I think fighting racism and sexism is a waste of time. That is not at all the point I am trying to make. I am arguing that the primary problem that USAS constituted itself to solve was the problem of sweatshops. In that context, the primary problems that workers are dealing with relate to their situation as workers. They face cases of sexual discrimination. For instance, women who work in sweatshops are often forced to undergo pregnancy tests. These are obviously problems and I think USAS should denounce such practices, but denouncing the violations that female sweatshop workers face as women is not going to change the fact that they are working in sweatshops and that sweatshops exist. So we have to get down to what the problem really is about. This does not mean that we keep silent on issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation, it just means that we have to take seriously what our goal in USAS is and we have to work backwards from that.

In terms of theoretical investigation, when you speak of the "failure" of past revolutions, do you not risk starting from square one, and thereby overlooking the tremendously emancipatory dimensions and achievements of those earlier revolutions?

Rojas: When I say "failure," I mean it in the sense that we still live under capitalism. The Left has not overcome capitalism, and until we have done so, we have ultimately failed.

Pereira Di Salvo: Yes, we need theoretical investigation, and yes, we are not starting from nowhere. I do not think that any of us has suggested otherwise. But as Laurie said, the project of the Left is, or ought to be, the overcoming of capitalism. We have failed in this task so far, and I think we have to take that failure very seriously. This involves looking at our history critically. **IP**

Transcribed by Soren Whited

Student activists "take back" New York University in February 2009.

The sport of protest

Resistance to the Olympics coming to Chicago

Chris Mansour

No Games Chicago protest at Chicago's Federal Plaza on April 2, 2009.

NO GAMES CHICAGO WAS FOUNDED in the summer of 2008 when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that Chicago was among the bid cities for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. The group's aim is to prevent Chicago from hosting the games—nothing more, nothing less. The reason for No Games Chicago's opposition is that, if Chicago wins the bid to host the Olympics, the city's working class would bear the bulk of the costs. They substantiate their claim by pointing to the experience of previous host cities, the lack of transparency in the decision process within Mayor Richard Daley's Chicago Bid Committee, and economic statistics that show Chicago is already too financially strained to host the games.

Certainly, No Games Chicago is right to highlight the experience of other host cities, as previous Olympic bids have been rife with administrative duplicity, including back room deals, frivolous spending, and financial maneuvers that favor big businesses at the public's expense. It is evident from recent Olympics history that the Games tend to bring more problems than benefits to host cities. Nor is there any particular reason to imagine, as No Games Chicago rightly insists, that the 2016 Olympics in Chicago will be any different from the past and current experience of other host cities. As the world is now experiencing a financial crisis, No Games Chicago argues that it is even more imperative for the city of Chicago to be careful with how money is spent. Additionally, they emphasize that Mayor Daley's fiscal irresponsibility, legacy of corruption, and lack of concern for public welfare would only be amplified if the Games were to be hosted through his office. The Olympics would most likely lose—not raise—revenue for the host city, though many of Mayor Daley's crony contractors would make a killing before the spending bonanza ended.

It is true that Chicago's ability to finance and support the Olympics without overburdening taxpayers is highly suspect, as is the political capacity of Chicago's democracy to oppose hosting the games. Before recently reversing on the issue, City Alderman Manny Flores raised public skepticism regarding Chicago's ability to host the 2016 Games in a manner commensurate with the city's other needs. Flores's call for greater transparency and a cap on total city spending for the games echoes, and was almost certainly influenced by No Games Chicago, which has retained its stance of "unconditional resistance" to the Olympics Games being held in Chicago, despite Flores's change of heart.

But if No Games Chicago is truly not against the Olympic Games per se, as they claim, is it not misguided to center the attack on the Olympics rather than the conditions that create the problems experienced by host cities? Do they not risk addressing the symptom while doing nothing to eliminate the disease? As it is, if the Olympics are stopped from coming to Chicago through the actions of No Games Chicago—and they will likely claim responsibility if Chicago does not receive the bid, whatever the reasons—this cannot be counted as a total victory. The absence of the Olympics in Chicago will only burden another city with the same problems that Chicago avoided, while doing little to make the broader changes necessary to ensure these problems do not arise in the future. Where is a vision of how Chicago—or any other city—could host the 2016 Games without adversely effecting the working class? It is worrisome that because of its self-limitations No Games Chicago will likely have little impact on the larger, long-term fight in Chicago for greater political and social freedom, because No Games Chicago never squarely addresses this greater fight.

The socioeconomic problems that coincide with hosting the Olympics are felt across the globe in every city. Yet, there seems to be no real solidarity between No Games Chicago and similar movements elsewhere, leaving Chicagoans to fight for themselves. Indeed, it remains unclear to what extent there exists any real desire to extend support to other cities. Rather, the consensus position seems to be simply negationist.

Granted, in part, No Games Chicago can only take on the tasks of organizing and protesting as fast as the other cities move and organize themselves. But there is no development of a coherent language in No Games Chicago beyond the local self-interest of keeping the Olympic Games out of Chicago. It is troublesome to hear Tom Tresser, one of the chief organizer's of the group, say on *Chicago Tonight*, a local television news show, "We [No Games Chicago] say take the games somewhere else," and to read Ben Joravsky ask the IOC, in an open letter published in the *Chicago Reader*, to "please do us all a favor: Give the games to Rio. Or Madrid. Or Tokyo. Send them anywhere but here." The concern over the social problems caused by the Olympic Games does not seem to extend beyond Chicago.

It is ironic that the prospect of the Olympics coming to Chicago—a series of games meant to bring about an international, shared experience of athleticism to the world's citizens—has sparked such an insular protest politics. Throughout their public statements, protest actions, and outreach to other Chicago-based political and community groups, No Games Chicago's chief concern has been to raise awareness of all the things that are wrong with Chicago. But, after demanding "better hospitals, housing, schools, and trains" instead of the Olympics, there has been little attempt to actually address the root causes of these problems, much less to begin considering how they might be overcome.

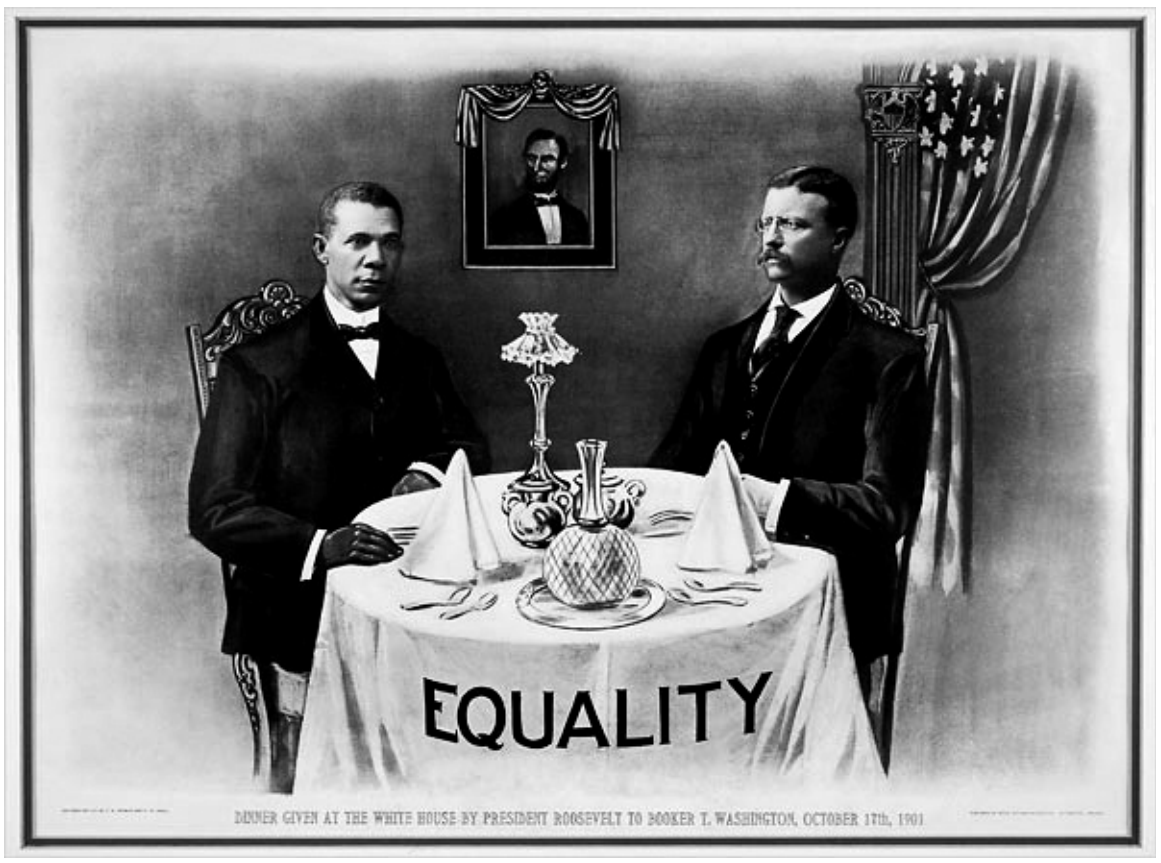
Without any vision for the future of how Chicago could become a city that can and should host colossal international events, No Games Chicago will likely remain a venue for angry complaints with little ability to move beyond Chicago or to make positive change after this single issue is settled, one way or the other. In order to fulfill its goals, No Games Chicago would have to change its goals. It would have to substantially redirect its operations and rhetoric towards future goals beyond simply halting the 2016 Summer Olympics bid. Otherwise, it will continue to remain a fixture of protest culture with no positive program beyond riling up local citizens to achieve a hollow sense of empowerment. At best, it will successfully deflect misfortune away from Chicago to another city.

The lack of ambition to be found in No Games Chicago has become an altogether usual problem for movements that consider themselves "progressive." Far too often, activists concentrate on the moment of "resistance," as if this will automatically help change things for the better. Solely resisting political maneuvers in the system cannot substitute for an alternative programmatic view for the future, which is where the real struggle for change begins. Resistance—or protest—as an end in itself typifies the helplessness and powerlessness of so-called activists in our time. Although movements like No Games Chicago maintain a sense of urgency for the necessity of social and political change, the lack of vision or how to organize themselves towards these overarching goals means that their resistance can never make the leap to emancipation. In effect, No Games Chicago, like other single-issue protest groups, ends up mirroring the activities of the Olympics: The act of protesting turns into a sport that has little to no bearing outside the immediate outcome of the game. If there is a true will to overcome this demoralized state, protest groups must envision their actions as a means to organize toward goals that go beyond mere resistance. **IP**

Book Review: Michael Rudolph West. *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations*.

New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Greg Gabrellas



Lithograph commemorating Booker T. Washington's 1901 White House dinner with President Theodore Roosevelt.

IF THE COLOR LINE WAS THE PROBLEM of the American 20th century, then the 20th century did not manage to solve it. *De jure* segregation ended some forty years ago, and American social norms mostly bar the public expression of racist sentiment or stereotype. Yet by any measure—access to quality healthcare and education, rate of incarceration, etc.—black Americans remain proportionally *worse* off than their white peers. There remains a color line, but why? This question has bred a whole genus of specious answers. Take the Bell Curve genetic inheritance theory: poor genes make for poor IQ, poor IQ makes for poor minds, and poor minds make for poor people. For slightly less controversial variations, substitute "welfare queen" or "single mothers." Rightly uncomfortable with transferring blame for a social pathology onto its victims, anti-racism activists offer another explanation. Racism, they claim, persists—invisible, yes, but inherent in oppressive social structures caused by the instincts of white society. For instance, when faced with two equally qualified candidates, employers will hire the one with the white sounding name. Such unconscious discrimination stalks black Americans, dooming them to social death. The persistence of the color line, this "anti-racist" explanation suggests, is a problem of race relations. Change the race relations—through multicultural education, affirmative action, and supporting black-owned businesses—and the color line will vanish. Call this the "race relations paradigm."

Michael Rudolph West, in his recent study, argues that the race relations paradigm begins with Booker T. Washington. This is an unusual suggestion: Few consider Washington as a theorist of much of anything, let alone the inventor of a paradigm. Depending on one's viewpoint, Washington is either a pragmatic race leader, doggedly working for the advancement of his people, or an Uncle Tom, a race traitor who sells out to segregationists. But West neither glorifies nor excoriates his subject, nor does he portray Washington merely as the clever tactician he certainly was. West's Washington appears as a theorist of the "Negro question," struggling to find political possibility in the wake of Reconstruction's failure. Like other theorists of the Negro question, for instance Thomas Jefferson or Gunnar Myrdal, Washington is out to understand and resolve the place of black people in America. But West also suggests that this may not be the right question, that there might be another, more fruitful way of understanding Washington as a theorist of the Negro question. Thinking race *qua* racial difference delinks the problem from broader questions of politics, class, and capitalism. The problem of race after this delinking appears susceptible to resolution without broader social change. Jefferson's "solution" was simply to ship adult slaves back to Africa, and undo the whole problem. Although Jefferson's idea of colonization never had broad appeal, Washington's solution, by contrast, has had a real, lasting legacy. West calls this solution the theory of "good race relations."

Unlike other biographies of its subject, West's *Education* stands out as a unique synthesis of political and social history, psychology, and ideological critique. As West shows, Washington's education was not the "industrial education" he later advocated for others. Rather, Washington's theories of race and the meaning of history for understanding the "Negro question" must be understood with reference to the unfinished, but stymied, history of Reconstruction itself—what Eric Foner has called "America's unfinished revolution." West argues that the race relations paradigm, which he calls Washingtonianism, displaced the radical democratic aspirations of Reconstruction. Washington himself participated in Reconstruction electoral politics as a teenager. For example, he put radical Republican ideas into action as secretary of the Tinkersville, West Virginia Republicans (160). Before the collapse of the Freedman's Bureau and, with it, black participation in Southern governments, black politicians overtly fought for mass political franchise, the redistribution of land and property, and social integration. Yet out of his disappointment with his experience as a freedman and Republican activist, Washington fashioned a new mission. In the wake of Reconstruction's failure, instead of fighting for social power, Washington argued that blacks should work hard and whites should play nice.

There was a real appeal to the idea of "good race relations" in post-Reconstruction America. This way, despite the grim retrenchment of landlords and capitalists, progressives could still feel like one was advancing the cause of black people. Washington, a good-hearted opportunist to the core, did what opportunists usually do: He accepted defeat, while refusing to call it by that name. Reconstruction attempted, and failed, to bring real social equality to the emancipated slaves. Washington offered a comfortable solution that seemed to work; hard work and mutual respect might not fully substitute for the radical Republican agenda, but they could offer harmony and "progress." Washington and his race relations paradigm helped to bury radical Reconstruction by claiming to share many of its goals. West argues, it was only in the context of this political failure that Washington found a broad hearing among sympathetic liberals, and established himself as *de facto* race spokesman and leader. But Washington not only reconciled blacks to their exclusion from the polls, he was complicit with it. "Progress" was Washington's name for (and affirmation of) the diminished political horizons blacks faced after the collapse of Reconstruction: political disfranchisement and segregation. If American society is basically well-ordered, but segregated, and if emancipation had finally secured the precondition of black improvement despite the conflicts engendered by Reconstruction, then at least blacks could control their lives more by improving themselves and others' perceptions of them. Washington himself, in his Atlanta Address of 1885, gives the best explication: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Separate and unequal, but working real hard.

West's story of late 19th century radical defeat closely resembles another trajectory closer to our own time: the decline of Civil Rights and the rise of Black Power, the ideological consequences of which remain with us today. After ending *de jure* segregation, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement attempted to address and resolve the *social* position of American blacks. Bayard Rustin urged cooperation with the labor movement, but the means of attack proved inadequate, and the attempt failed. Militant activists then turned to slogans such as "community self-determination," and exhorted their colleagues to promote racially segregated cooperatives and institutions. The Black Panthers seem to have little in common with old Uncle Booker; like the race relations paradigm, however, the politics of Black Power marked a turn towards internal racial transformation rather than transforming the political and economic order. Today's proponents of "good race relations" take a less militant tone, but they, too, look inwards. Multiculturalism views respect between racial communities as imperative to progress. Yet, capital accumulates among a wealthy few and social disparities between the rich and the poor continue to increase. When activists substitute "good race relations" for social politics, the entire working class—white and black—suffers.

If the ideology of "good race relations" obscures crucial aspects of anti-black racism and poverty, then the critique of this ideology should point toward the overcoming of racism. However, West leaves us critical of the race relations paradigm but unsure where to turn for a more adequate analysis of American racism. Most fundamentally, West leaves the long-term defeat of radical Republicanism largely undiagnosed. After all, post-Reconstruction politics were not solely dominated by Washingtonianism. Populist, socialist, and communist movements all tried and failed to eliminate racism through the late 19th and 20th centuries. The failure to ground his analysis of the race relations paradigm more firmly in the history of the Left thus leaves underspecified West's implied critique of 20th century anti-racist politics. For instance, although he suggests that the civil disobedience strategies of the Civil Rights Movement were effective because they broke the shallow consensus of segregation endorsed by Washington and his followers, it is unclear where the forerunners to Civil Rights fit into the story. West's work is therefore only a promising beginning to reassess the ideology of the Civil Rights Movement; nevertheless, it still performs a vital service. By tracing the race relations paradigm to the rise and ignominious defeat of Reconstruction, West calls attention to the historical roots of what has become common sense about race today. He challenges us to imagine the possibility of a movement for social reform that is not satisfied with the scraps the ruling classes are willing to throw its way. **IP**