The 3 Rs: Reform, Revolution, and "Resistance"

The problematic forms of "anticapitalism" today

"After the failure of the 1960s New Left, the underlying despair with regard to the real efficacy of political will, of political agency, in a historical situation of heightened helplessness, became a self-constitution as outsider, as other, rather than an instrument of transformation. Focused on the bureaucratic stasis of the Fordist, late 20th Century world, the Left echoed the destruction of that world by the dynamics of capital: neoliberalism and globalization.

The idea of a fundamental transformation became bracketed and, instead, was replaced by the more ambiguous notion of 'resistance.' The notion of resistance, however, says little about the nature of that which is being resisted, or of the politics of the resistance involved.

'Resistance' is rarely based on a reflexive analysis of possibilities for fundamental change that are both generated and suppressed by the dynamic heteronomous order of capital. 'Resistance' is an undialectical category that does not grasp its own conditions of possibility; it fails to grasp the dynamic historical context of capital and its reconstitution of possibilities for both domination and emancipation, of which the 'resisters' do not recognize that that they are a part."
—Moishe Postone
"History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism"
*(*Public Culture*, 18.1: 2006)*

THE FOLLOWING are excerpts from the transcript of a moderated panel discussion and audience Q&A on problems of strategies and tactics on the Left today, organized by the Platypus affiliated society. Panelists: Michael Albert (*Z* Magazine, author of *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*), Chris Cutrone (Platypus), Stephen Duncombe (Gallatin School of New York University, editor of *Cultural Resistance Reader*), Brian Holmes (Continental Drift and Université Tangente), and Marisa Holmes (new Students for a Democratic Society). The event took place in the Columbus auditorium of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on November 6, 2007.

Brian Holmes: I'm Brian Holmes, I'm a writer, a theorist, and I don't represent anyone, I don't belong to a party, but through my work I try to maintain a dialogue between artists, activists, philosophers, sociologists and economists. I work at a journal called *Multitudes* in France. This is involved with a sort of second life of an Italian formation known as *Autonomia*, or autonomy, which is definitely a post-party political formation, where people try to address the condition of workers in a flexibilized knowledge economy. That is, workers who no longer resemble in very many ways the condition of a proletariat, with a proletarian identity or a proletarian class consciousness, but who nonetheless find themselves subject to exploitation and even severe exploitation in the flexible economy. It's a condition which clearly has its reality, a reality in a way prefigured over the last ten years, by what have become hundreds of thousands of activists using, broadly speaking, the vocabulary of *Autonomia,* known best in America through the writings of Tony Negri, but actually quite larger than that.

In all the activities that I'm involved with, I find that the fact of resistance is fundamental—so I don't really recognize myself in the Postone quote. It seems that a left politics always begins in the concrete experience of resistance, growing out of two basic causes: one is necessity, when people are pushed up against the wall, when they have no other recourse they finds themselves in the position of resistance, which is a defense of one's actual life, one's vital energy and it's a vital response to conditions of urgency and oppression. These conditions allow somebody to experience solidarity, and solidarity is fundamental to any leftist position and is really what distinguishes the Left from the Right. The Right is based on individualism, competition, and the desire to accumulate more. The Left has always been based on solidarity. There's a second thing that comes in, it's very important and will bring me back a little bit towards the theme of the Platypus group, and that's a revolutionary desire. Why do you desire to resist, even if you're not directly threatened? Even if you feel an urgency that is more abstract, that is something that you've come to feel through the way that you see the world—where does this desire to resist come from? One source is immediate solidarity, and the other source is philosophical, or aesthetic. It can come from experiences of a kind of prefiguration of utopia, and here I think that Stephen Duncombe and I could agree on a lot of things because we've been involved in similar types of use of aesthetic means, of surprising organizational forms, of unusual slogans, of new ways of converging to do direct actions in cities. All of which can be extremely fun, extremely interesting, and which can be successful, also. It can also come from more deep rooted processes of thought, where one considers for example the kind of ecological damage that's being done to the Earth, where one uses scientific discourses to examine the causes of this ecological damage and where one can also correlate the ecological situation with the social situation, where life is increasingly fragmented. And I think these basic philosophical issues are wrapped together with resistance, I don't think that we should see a break between concrete resistance and more long-term projects on the Left.

Stephen Duncombe: I'm Stephen Duncombe, I was an organizer of the New York City chapter of Reclaim the Streets for about five years, a group that tried to combine cultural and aesthetic resistance with political campaigns and political movements. I've thought a lot about the politics of resistance and even written a couple of books on it, but before I talk about resistance, I want to briefly dispense with the other two Rs. Reform may be possible, but I've always held that the only way one gets reform is to threaten revolution. However, revolution in this country at this moment is not in the offing, and if it was, the Left is in no place to imagine or guide it. It would not be a revolution of our own making. This leaves us with a paradox, which brings me to resistance. The politics of resistance are protean, which gives resistance its power, but also its problems. One way to try to get a hold of resistance is to think about its character historically and think about how it came to play such an important part in post 60s left-wing movements and culture. One of the things I would argue is that its political beginnings in the West are conservative; this helps to explain some of the politics of resistance. It's Edmund Burke, the British conservative, who actually counsels resistance against the radical change of the French Revolution in 1790. About 75 years later, the same call was taken up by Mathew Arnold, who essentially argues for culture as a means of resistance against the tides of anarchic progress. It's useful to remember that, around the same time, Marx and Engels, when they are writing the *Communist Manifesto*, actually single out resistance in the form of reactionary socialism as a major stumbling block to any sort of revolution. In fact, it was *capitalism* that was "resisting" this inexorable movement towards revolution and communism. Resistance has this sort of conservative cast in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Where resistance gets its radical tinge is with the anti-colonial movements in the early 20th century, for example, the Indian independence movement. Here what is being resisted is not revolutionary progress, but progress as defined by the West, which is racist, destructive and exploitative. And so it takes on a radical moment there. When it returns to our part of the world it becomes adapted by the Left with the western radical identification with third world liberation in the 1960s. Within this new context its fault lines begin to show, because what is being resisted is no longer conveniently identifiable as outside and other, that is, the British, so one must resist, in part, yourself, that is, the part of yourself that is the oppressor. Also what one hopes to return to in our world is a little bit sketchy, and that is the traditional goal of resistance: to return, or to keep away progress. As such, these resistance politics, I would argue, fail. They result in either, one, self-destruction, in which you have to destroy the oppressor which is yourself, and which leads to things like the Weather Underground and the Black Liberation Army, or, self-delusion, in which you have to create an imagined past, a sort of return to the land a la communes or through the new age. This is one of the ways to look at the implosion that happened in the 1960s in attaching itself to the idea of resistance. Resistance returns to the scene again in the 1970s in the form of cultural resistance. When, after the failures of the 1960s, radical scholars begin to look to subcultures like punks, rastas, mods, skins, for pre -political forms of resistance that might ignite the next wave of revolution. However, as the best practitioners of this school of cultural resistance understood, this cultural resistance is deeply problematic because it can easily be co-opted by the dominant cultural system as new styles for new markets. This has been written about a lot lately and was noticed as early as the 1920s by Malcolm Cowley. This problem points to a far larger problem of resistance, not only that it can be co-opted by the system, but that its very existence is dependent on the system. By this I mean that practices of resistance are parasitically wed to the dominant culture, which it relies upon for its very identity. If I am a resistor I have to have a system to resist. Perversely that means that the health of the system is in my interests.

But I don't want to end here. I could end with "resistance is futile," but I actually don't think that it is. I think what we have to do is recast resistance, to start thinking about what both 18th and 19th century conservatives and 20th century independence leaders understood, that resistance is a *means* to an end and not and end in itself. We need to think of resistance as a tactic and part of an overall strategy to bring about social change. Resistance is uniquely valuable in this way because it is performative. As such what it does is constitute a visible thread to bring about reform. It also creates a lived imaginary, a space to open oneself and experience revolutionary moments, creating a stepping stone to realizing revolution. It is only in thinking about resistance in this way, as a means rather than an end, that we can supersede resistance's dependence on the dominant system. In sum, we need to raise the stakes on resistance, asking a new, but also very old question: not resistance *to* what, but resistance *for* what?

Chris Cutrone: When we in Platypus conceived the topic of this forum on "Resistance" and the Left, we had in mind the title of a pamphlet written over a hundred years ago by the brilliant Marxist radical Rosa Luxemburg, titled *Reform or Revolution?*, which sought to argue for the necessity of revolutionary politics on the Left, not against reforms, but against a reform-ist perspective that was developing on the Marxist Left at the time, in which it was regarded that only reforms were possible—and hence that political and social revolution was not only unlikely and unnecessary, but undesirable as well.

We in Platypus seek to respond, in the present, to the development of the perspective on the Left that assumes that only "resistance" is possible. We find this to be a symptom of the degradation and degeneration of the Left over the last 40 years, since the 1960s "New" Left—and, indeed, for much longer than that. We find the current self-understanding of the Left as "resistance" to express despair not only at prospects for revolutionary transfor-

3 Rs continues on pages 3–4

The Platypus Review

Taking stock of the multifaceted universe of positions and goals that constitute Left politics 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 felt 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 saliency for an 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 and 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.

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

platypus1917webzine@yahoogroups.com

April-May 2008

04/18-20 FRIDAY–SUNDAY
Finding our Roots Anarchist conference
Finding Our Roots is a yearly conference held in Chicago to to discuss anarchist theory and action. The next FOR conference is planned with the theme of "Anarchist Organizing in the Midwest."
• Roosevelt University
430 S Michigan
chicagoanarchisttheory@riseup.net
http://mayfirst.wordpress.com/work shops/

04/19-20 1PM-3AM
NFO XPO (pronounced "info expo")
Bringing art groups, community organizations and artists together to exchange information and ideas. Described as a trade show for experimental art, emerging spaces, and radical exchange.
• Viaduct Theater
3111 N. Western
http://www.versionfest.org/
$8 ($10 for 2-day pass)

04/21 2008 7PM
Brother Outsider
The Bayard Rustin Story (2003)
Film screening and a discussion with John D'Emilio author of *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*
• University of Chicago
Stuart Hall, room 101
5835 S. Greenwood Ave.

04/26 SATURDAY 12PM
United Front Protest for Mumia Abu-Jamal
Sponsors: Partisan Defense Committee, Labor Black Struggle League, many others
• Federal Plaza
http://www.partisandefense.org/

05/01 THURSDAY 10AM
May Day March & Rally:
"Together, we are the new majority"
Justice For Immigrant Workers!
Chicago May Day
• Union Park, march to Federal Plaza
http://www.chicagomayday.com/

05/01 THURSDAY 5PM
Centering the Margin: Chicago Theory and Practice in Action
Topic: What is precarity? Can Chicago activism benefit from it?
Centering the Margin is a new and irregularly held series that will explore and crystallize the Chicago progressive/radical community's formulation of theory, strategy, and application. This event is co-sponsored by Finding Our Roots.
• Quenchers Saloon
2401 N Western Ave
A $5-$10 suggested donation is asked.
PrecarityChicago@gmail.com

05/03 2008 7PM
Palestine and Self Determination
Panel Discussion with Atiya Khan and Tomis Kapitan
This lecture series has been organized by the Platypus Affiliated Society in conjunction with the exhibition "On Naji Al-Ali," curated by Haseeb Ahmed.
• Around the Coyote Gallery
1935½ W. North Ave.

05/08 THURSDAY 6PM
40 Years of 1968
A panel discussion and audience Q&A, with distinguished veterans of the 1960s New Left, organized to reflect critically upon the social and political necessities of the present and the obstacles to an adequate emancipatory imagination expressed in the inappropriate masks of the '60s that continue to be worn in contemporary politics.
The Platypus Affiliated Society and new Students for a Democratic Society
• School of the Art Institute Auditorium
280 S Columbus Dr.
www.platypus1917.com

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4

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Cracking the looking-glass

Perception, precarity, and everyday resistance

Tim Sarrantonio

"Then she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible."
—Lewis Carroll
Through The Looking-Glass And What Alice Found There (1871)

LET US ASSUME, for a moment, the identity of Alice, the child protagonist of Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass." As we venture slowly through the mirror on the wall, we enter into a world that has been inverted. Yet when we glance back at the static and ordered room on the other side from whence we came, we notice cracks in the glass that serve as passage points between these two worlds. When we acknowledge these fractures in the mirror, our perceptions of what lies on either side suddenly shifts.

The purpose of this essay is to put forward a paradigm shift in regards to the progressive and radical left's organizing in the United States. Using Alice's looking-glass as a starting point, we will explore how our current organizing tactics need re-evaluation and how the idea of precarity can be fused into our everyday struggles against capital.

If we use the looking-glass as a metaphor for the struggles between capital and the working class multitude, we see that both sides are connected to each other but that the perception of each is different. Marxist economist Harry Cleaver defines the working class as "not only industrial waged workers but also a wide variety of unwaged workers, including housewives, children, students, and peasants whose work under capitalism consists primarily of the production and reproduction of the ability and willingness to carry out activities which contribute to the maintenance of the system" (*Reading Capital Politically*, p. 23). The things that working class people view as important, i.e. their perception of value, is drastically different than those who control the message of economic, social, and cultural value. Much working class struggle comes from these differing values of *use* versus *exchange*, where "What can I use this for" comes up against "How much can I get from this?" The looking-glass can show us both sides––where struggle and dialogue constantly shift the side of the mirror we find ourselves standing on.

Yet what of the cracks that we saw when taking on the role of young Alice? These breaks should be seen as individual points of resistance, and even though some are more expansive than others, each crack makes an impact upon the looking-glass. The larger cracks can be seen as strikes, protests, riots, autonomous zones, and other large scale forms of organizing and activism. The smaller cracks can be seen on an everyday level when an individual or group of individuals steals from their place of work, jumps a public transportation turnstile, finds a way to use services like electricity for free, or any of the other countless ways we may engage in daily acts of resistance.

The issue of changing perception reemerges once we begin to consider that we only recognize the existence of such cracks once we crossed through the looking-glass. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "there is another type of cracking, with an entirely different segmentarity. Instead of great breaks, these are microcracks, as in a dish; they are much more subtle and supple, and "*occur when things are going well on the other side*" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 198). Capital uses both a stick and carrot to create the illusion that the system is orderly and without deadly internal contradictions. The pristine/static side of the mirror shows us this intended order and proper organization. Yet the other side, the side where capital's underbelly is exposed, reveals a world that is vibrant and full of creative expression.

Up until this point, we in the United States have mostly been viewing the cracks on an individual basis. Our struggles to break through to the other side and find that one final crack to bring down the whole looking-glass have been misdirected. Hence I am proposing a broad organizing framework based around precarity. The idea of precarity is a way of looking at the system as a whole without ignoring the multitude of movements and individuals struggling for a better and more equitable society. In fact, precarity can give theoretical direction to individual actions that may seem ineffective or pointless while broadening both the reach and scope of radical theory.

Precarity is, to quote Maribel Casas-Cortes and Sebastian Cobarrubias, "the labor conditions that arose after the transition from life-long, stable jobs common in industrial capitalist and welfare-state economies, to temporary, insecure, low-paying jobs emerging with the globalization of the service and financial economy" (*Constituent Imagination*, p. 115). Specifically, we are constantly wondering how we'll pay our rent or mortgage, whether we'll keep our job, how we'll find a new job, if the public transportation system is working properly, whether the food we eat is safe, whether our friend or child will be sent to war, and countless other questions. Coupled with media that makes us question our security, our appearance, our social associations, and our politics we are faced with seemingly insurmountable odds. Organizing through precarity is embracing the myriad of personal and political struggles that occur through every moment of our lives; it is taking the looking-glass in as a whole.

While the debates about organizing across multiple constituencies have been going on in the United States since at least the Knights of Labor—the 19th Century labor union that attempted to organize across gender and race divisions—the intensification of pressure has been mounting. Precarity represents a way to not only connect with other activists already working locally and beyond , but a way to explain capital and its exploitation and oppression to those not inside the movement already. In a

"Looking-glass" continues on page 4

The sub-prime crisis

David M. Bholat

CRISIS IS THE CONDITION of everyday life in capital. Capitalism kills in silently effective ways without necessary recourse to spectacle, through institutional mechanisms like patent controls on life-saving drugs. This is why everyday squalor in the Middle East is equally, if not more, fitting a symbol for Marxists than Muslims in the 'state of exception' on Guantanamo Bay.

In this respect, calling the current wave of defaults in sub-prime mortgages and the collapse of the secondary market for securities underwritten by mortgages a 'crisis' is politically misleading. For whom, exactly, is this a crisis? Certainly turmoil among the bourgeois carries consequences for all of us. And no doubt, many first-time property owners from working and lower-middle income classes ("aspiring bourgeoisie") will find themselves facing greater indebtedness.

But this is above all a possible crossroads for the bourgeoisie and their neo-liberal banking project. A *very* rough historical context helps. Prior to the dawn of capitalism, banks as we know them did not really exist. What existed were moneylenders *and* depository institutions though not the combination; moneylenders lent on interest but did not take deposits, while depository institutions made loans only as brokers between parties entering personalized contracts. By the nineteenth century, capitalism had created the bank as an institution for pooling the resources necessary to launch global enterprise and to support the debt of governments protecting it. Legal limits on the rate of interest (usury) were substituted for prior, and more radical, religious prohibitions on interest *tout court.* Most significantly, the arbitrage activity of taking deposits at a lower rate of interest than charged on loans ("asset transformation") crystallized as the core activity of capitalist banks.

Starting in the late 1960s, capitalist banks changed as a consequence of spiraling inflation in OECD countries, a problem partly created by the monetary mismanagement of Central Banks. More than a decade of inflation reduced the real return on loan assets held by banks and the real rate of interest paid on deposits. With deposit interest rate ceilings and usury laws restricting banks in various OECD countries from raising nominal rates, many depositors withdrew their funds and put them into newly created, higher yielding institutions (e.g. money market mutual funds) and instruments (e.g. derivatives). A crisis in bank profitability resulted.

The restoration of bank profits above and beyond their pre-crisis level beginning in the 1980s was one of the great achievements of neo-liberalism. The two key factors affecting this outcome were (1) regulatory changes successfully lobbied for by the banking industry and (2) changes in the composition of banking practices. First, repeals in usury laws and the development of contracts like adjustable-rate mortgages freed banks from restrictions on interest, giving them greater flexibility in the face of changing macroeconomic conditions. Additionally, other regulatory changes allowed banks to expand the scope of their business beyond the core activity of asset transformation. So-called off-balance sheet activities such as currency and derivatives trading and brokering services surged from comprising a negligible part of bank profits to approximately half.

The process of securitization was among the central techniques of the neo-liberal banking project. Applied to mortgages, banks essentially packaged and sold mortgage payments as bonds to investors. Specifically, collateralized mortgage obligations (CMOs) were designed that sliced up mortgage payments according to factors like FICO credit scores ('prime'/'sub-prime') into tranches, allowing investors to hold higher or lower yielding assets according to credit risks posed by the underlying mortgages (risk of default statistically determined by class factors). Securities backed by sub-prime mortgages (mortgages of borrowers with FICO score lower than 660 on a scale of 800) in particular found demand among bourgeois in pursuit of high profits. Banks were happy to oblige. They could now limit the interest and default risk they faced from holding loans, as well as earn off-balance sheet fees for selling them to investors. With markets now available for the sale of CMOs and other loan-backed securities, banks appeared to have expanded their lending activities in new and riskier ways, knowing they no longer faced the primary risk from loan defaults.

Thus what might have appeared as the democratization of credit must instead be viewed from the other side of the ledger as an expansion of debt consistent with the classed hierarchy of capital. This is the profound truth expressed by Rosa Luxemburg to which Platypus returns. For Luxemburg credit not only reproduces the antagonisms of capitalist classes but accentuates them: its sudden extension, not its shrinking, is the cause of commercial crisis (*Reform or Revolution?*). In the last twenty five years, the extension of credit to Americans at high interest rates has occurred in the context of stagnant real wages. The rising proportion of debt payments to capitalist lending agencies as a percentage of total income must be viewed then as an intra-class transfer; as a consequence persons without financial stakes in these institutions have actually lost ground.

Now the bourgeoisie up the ante by increasing the costs to the public by bailing out investment banks exposed to CMOs like Bears Stearns -and this may be only the opening move. Bourgeois are actively lobbying for further bailouts and are likely to get them. As Myron Scholes—Nobel Laureate, famous for helping create the Black-Scholes formula for pricing options, infamous for having his own hedge fund bailed out by a consortium of Wall Street investors organized by the Federal Reserve—recently told the *Wall Street Journal*: "They [the government] should at least be thinking about it. If you're going to do it anyway, why not do it sooner?" (March 13, 2008) To echo Marx in *Capital* Volume 1, it is characteristic of

"Crisis" continues on page 4

Half-time team talk

Trevor Bark
from editorial for *Mayday* magazine (UK) issue #2

For issue #2 (February 2008), Chris Cutrone wrote, in "On anarchism and Marxism: a response to Mayday *magazine (UK)," on behalf of Platypus, that the principal difference between anarchism and Marxism lies in the way "history" figures in any present estimations of ideology, conscious political program and organization, at the levels both of the historical specificity of struggles for emancipation beyond the modern society of capital, and in the history of capital itself, of which a Marxian approach considers the history of the Left as an essential and not extrinsic part.*

Platypus focuses on redeeming the problematic history of the Marxist Left, "against the grain" (Benjamin) of its more or less contingent or necessary outcomes, in order to discover and provoke conscious recognition of the historically obscured necessities for social-emancipatory political struggle in the present.

Political organizations and parties and their programs need to be understood both as forms of action and as forms of memory.

The Platypus critique of anarchism is in its inability to grasp and act upon the specificities of the present as a moment in the history of capital—and what it would take to move beyond and not continue to repeat this history.

Addendum: *Platypus recognizes anarchism both historically and at present as symptomatic of the failures of Marxism, as the bad conscience of the history of the Marxist Left, to be overcome only by working through and redeeming this history.*

In the following, Trevor Bark writes in further response to Platypus for Mayday.

PLATYPUS IS A NEW GROUP in Chicago that is rethinking the Marxist tradition, and they were quoted in *Mayday* issue #1. Chris Cutrone, for Platypus, has written a response to the *Mayday* issue #1 "Introduction: Open letter" in their February 2008 newsletter [*The Platypus Review* issue #2], raising many important questions, some of which will be addressed now.

Trying to force clear red water between an anarchist and a Marxist approach, Cutrone describes that a "key distinction is the relation of political organisation and historical consciousness." This historical consciousness is primary for Platypus, and we hope *Mayday* addressed enough concerns with political practice and memory to be useful. For *Mayday* experience is a crucial factor, with a concentration on struggles. This is planned to result in praxis, which includes dynamic consciousness, which is grounded in the conditions of our time rather than the past, and has lessons for political organisation. In short, *Mayday*'s aims are similar to those of Platypus.

We entirely agree that revolutionary organisations should be able to justify themselves, but they are overwhelmingly arrogant and uncritical in the UK. There is little serious discussion of politics, no regular forums, and so on. The serious questions about how political action enables transformative action, "how does political organisation enable transformative, emancipatory, and not foreclosing action? How can the Left 'live' and take form not deadly to itself?," are serious ones for us, even if the UK Left and anarchists ignore them. Specifically the danger of Left organising as a cult is a huge problem in the UK.

A recurring problem is the distinction and the differences between anarchism and the Left; for *Mayday*, we have dissolved the distinction as an impediment to theoretical and practical endeavours. For us the historical baggage either does not matter or is an impediment to greater unity and better politics; those who insist on hard lines effectively have created a sealed little bubble for themselves. Despite this argument new and interesting articles from both sides continue to appear on 1917 and after. But largely it is a debate for purists and not those looking to develop politics for now and tomorrow. The practices and methodology of Platypus however, are entirely correct for rethinking the Marxist tradition; we wish you well with your project.

We have some toes in the anarchist pool and some in the Labour movement. We are also conscious that a third pool needs to be built, and that is the area of autonomy, but that is already a few decades underway as the New Left already (in the UK at least) has inspired and contributed to the theory of existing autonomists (e.g. Harry Cleaver, University of Texas). Already autonomist practice and theory is very relevant to these discussions, and it is this hybrid, with others perhaps, which *Mayday* hopes may result in new liberation politics for our time.

One starting point for us has been the ultra voluntarism of anarchism, which demands anarchic responses to virtually all issues, but which is unsustainable because of the resulting arrest rates. That is not to say that confrontation and direct action have been relegated to unimportance for us. They have not; struggles are still our focal concern. This is similar to Platypus and their criticism (vis à vis Nicholas Spencer) of the anarchist tradition.

Platypus's highlighting of the writing of history as being urgent for emancipatory politics is very worthwhile, and there are others before us who have thought this. In the UK the Communist Party Historians Group — Andrew Morton,

"Half-time" continues on page 3

Kenya's new Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, as of April 13, 2008

Move over Grandpa

Oketch Onyango

Writing from Kenya after 10 years of what he calls "international exile," former Kenyan-Chicagoan Oketch Onyango told us that he intended on going back in late 2007 to "raise a little bit of hell in the political scene," but went "running away from the commodity and bang full circle into it in the savanna!," and so in response he's been immersed in "reading critical theory like mad" and "doing some writing which papers here don't want to touch." This is one article submitted.

THEY ARE YOUNG. They are angry. They are articulate and sophisticated. Nearly three quarters of them live in the sprawling slums of major Kenyan cities. These are a new generation of youths, mostly male, educated, jobless, idle and restless. It is a highly politicized generation, with nothing to lose and much anger to vent. They are the new Intifada.

The ruling elite and middle class Kenyans do not understand this bombshell. Putting their faith in the truncheon-welding, Robocop-looking, live bullet-firing apparatus of state, the well-fed class goes to sleep wishing for business as usual. This new generation of youth that uprooted miles upon miles of hundred year- old, narrow gage, colonial relic rail track at will, got shot to death for it, tear-gassed, bludgeoned and cordoned-off in their slums to starve to death, will still limp back and come up for more - leaner, meaner and dangerous like a catamount. That is, unless we address their anger, their frustration and their feelings of hopelessness.

In the meantime, they will not go away. And like the ferocious cats that live in the vast tourist infested parks that dot this country, these youngsters are battling for survival and very unlike the Mara dwellers, they are not faced with extinction; they are here to stay and far outnumber the ruling classes, their well-oiled children and the multiples of security apparatus. And while they might not hit a top speed of seventy miles an hour, they are a formidable quarry. You cannot wish them away, tear-gas them into oblivion, shoot all of them dead or bludgeon them into zombie states. Even if we stalk and gun them down like big game hunters, they are going to outlast and outlive most of the belligerent and intransigent, chest thumping government talking heads and that government motormouth.

Unlike their western counterparts who are caught up in the innards of *YouTube* and the highway super traffic of the Internet, where users roam, talk and pass gossip only to like-minded cyberdwellers and need never come out to engage in dialogue with non-surfers, these youngsters walk the solid earth, congregate on street corners, shopping centers and narrow alley ways with their ultimate weapon: idleness and uncongealed fury.

Their space is amorphous and expansive, full of unfriendly, pedestrian streets with no street lights and ferocious policemen, filth, overflowing open sewers, muggers, rapists, murderers, con men and women, deprivation and plain hard life. They have neither the apparatus nor the time for gimmicks like *MySpace.* For them, life is one big Serengeti all over; survival, eat or be eaten. They neither want to understand nor want to know the great pros and cons of a free market or the Nairobi stock exchange. You can quote the price of fish there all day for all they care. They just want to fulfill their dreams, put food on the table and live their lives like dignified human beings – not slum dwellers.

And yet when they get angry, we react with consternation and lament at how age old African traditions that stress humility and respect for elders has gone the way of everything else. Yet not a single one of the elders apply the same tenets of the traditions they froth at the mouth over as they consume rapaciously everything in sight – both nailed down and loose, floating or yet to be produced. Safe within the sanitized and smug life of the glitter, the super malls, the mega-marts, the beefy vehicles, and the walled and gated communities that sickeningly dot our landscape, we roll our eyes and resort to liberal empathies and finger pointing and rant about civilized behavior.

Why should we assume that these youngsters were going to accept this marginalization and class apartheid without a struggle? Why would we not expect the unexpected; that at some time there was going to be a violent reaction, a hatred of both their situation and that which they perceive to be responsible for that violation of their humanity and dignity?

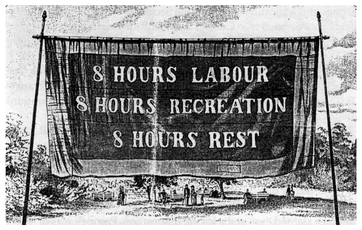
While we bicker and try to out-glare history, to outdo

"Move over" continues on page 4

Protest and regression

Notes on a recent protest

S. J. Benjamin



1856

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE BEGINS *After Virtue* with a parable: Populist demagogues declare war on the natural sciences. Every lab bombed, every chemistry department ransacked, every copy of *Nature* burned. Once the luddite swell subsides, a group of enlightened citizens attempt to reconstruct science from the remaining fragments. To us, natural science is a way of making sense of the physical world through experiment and observation. In this imaginary future, such a context has been lost. The new, reconstructed science is a wholly self-enclosed activity, like the creation of an imaginary language. Yet however hermetic this science may be, it is consistent; the proofs and the equations mean nothing, but they add up.

MacIntyre intended his parable to illustrate the state of modern morality, but it applies just as well to contemporary protest politics. Protest, as a form of political action, begins in the age of the bourgeois revolution. In Paris, Boston, and Berlin men and women marched as citizens to demand a just and free political order. The demands shifted over time, but the form and structure remained. A line of continuity connects the 'Women's March' of 1789 to the march over the Edmund Pettus bridge in 1965.

On the 20th of March, the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, some two thousand protesters gathered for a rally in downtown Chicago's Daley Plaza and marched north into the Magnificent Mile, the jewel in Chicago's mercantile crown. The crowd demanded the immediate withdrawal of US military force from Iraq. Just as in Paris, the marchers demanded freedom and justice. Just as in Selma, they decried the barbarism of the status quo. But the similarities are misleading and dangerous. A catastrophe, nearly invisible, separates contemporary protest from the past: the loss of a political context.

To take the streets in 1789 or 1965 was to join a thriving world of left politics; to participate in a movement large and powerful enough to change the structure of the polis. If the protesters in St. Petersburg in 1917 demanded the end of imperialist war, it was in the name of a revolutionary movement poised to take power. Today, protesters also demand the end of imperialist war; but in the name of what? Some insist it is a question of right and wrong, of legality and illegality. Others speak of the right of each nation to determine its own destiny. Put aside all that is problematic about these two justifications. Note, instead, the diminution in political horizon. In 1917, protest was part of a practical and vital political struggle, in 2008, it is a way of making a statement; a scream in the dark.

The loss of mass political movement is already devastating, but the refusal to recognize the loss is worse. Take the sectarian Marxists. Some form front groups, (A.N.S.W.E.R, World Can't Wait, Not in Our Name) print placards with easy slogans and hand them out to unsuspecting liberal protesters. Other sectarians groups stalk around the rally, handing out newspapers, calling for revolution. The two methods appear radically different; one downplays Marxism, the other screams it. But they are both ways to avoid recognizing political failure. The 'opportunists' bury themselves in tactics, leeching onto the anti-war movement in the hope that anti-Bushism might metamorphose into something larger, something revolutionary. As for the 'manifest' sectarians: it would be easy enough to mock their aggressive sincerity, their insistence on the program, their passionate orthodoxy. But all of these qualities would be essential in a less wretched age. Better anachronism than whorish opportunism: But 2008 is not 1917. To continue to deny it ensures the continued irrelevance of the Marxian Left.

Only attention to history, MacIntrye argues, could help his hypothetical scientists realize the incoherence of their practices. Given the barbarism, the urgency, the violence of our world, studying history seems perverse and apolitical. If the world sinks into slaughter, it is because the Left, again and again, has failed to inaugurate a new world. As the failures piled on, the very mass support dwindled. In 1928, 12,000 filled Madison Square Garden for a Communist Party Rally. Today, "leftist" events are considered large if they can summon more than 30, and considered vital if more than a quarter of the attendees are under 50. Despite such failure and erosion, the Left stays the course: matter without spirit, habit without reason. Marches recur with diminishing returns. Millions in the street in 2003, thousands in 2008. Every blind demonstration, every thoughtless protest, moves a small step further towards total degeneration. To understand this history, and to recognize it as a history of failure is one step towards overcoming it.

This is not a call to abandon the streets and retreat into the libraries. It is a call to understand what we were doing out in the streets in the first place. **IP**

REVIEW

Introducing SDS, *Columbia Revolt*, 1969

Greg Gabrellas

A NEW CHAPTER of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was formed in February at the University of Chicago (UChicago) in tandem with chapters forming throughout the city and across the country. The new SDS is a national student organization dedicated to progressive political change, whose name was borrowed from the famous New Left organization that helped to shape the social unrest of the 1960s. UChicago SDS held a film screening and discussion in Harper Memorial Library on Thursday, March 6, of *Columbia Revolt* (1969), a documentary film by the Newsreel collective on the Columbia University student occupation and strike. Over thirty people, including students and residents of the surrounding community, attended the event which marked the first in a series of UChicago SDS film screenings dedicated to critically reevaluating the legacy of student organizing in light of the 40th anniversary of 1968.

The radical student actions at Columbia University in the spring of 1968 signaled a climax of the student movement led by the old SDS and the radicalized members of the Students' Afro-American Society (SAS). At the time, Columbia was in the process of constructing a private gymnasium in Harlem on top of a former public park, with a basement projected for use by black Harlem residents. Politicized students used the construction and placement of the gymnasium as an example of the University's complicity with imperialism and racism at home and abroad. Members of SAS and SDS, led by Mark Rudd, used direct actions and organizing to agitate fellow students, ultimately leading to a student strike and the occupation of five university buildings. The strike escalated when students rushed en masse to support black students who had barricaded themselves in Hamilton Hall. Columbia Revolt arrays a montage of audio and archive film footage collected at the scene as events transpired across the university campus and the surrounding inner-city terrain of Manhattan. This film was directed by Newsreel, a collective of media artists formed in 1967 to "show another side of the news". In keeping with Newsreel's mandate, much of the film was shot from inside the whirlwind of protests and building occupations, with the cameras "used as weapons as well as recording the events." (1) The result is a loose narrative of the rise and fall of the student protests.

The event's organizers had prepared a series of questions to guide discussion. Chief among them was "How can we shake the ghost of the '60s"? Some argued that students were simply mistaken: students used to have real political power that they no longer have. Others questioned whether taking over a university was an appropriate action to take at the time. The discussion turned towards activism today: one person stressed that students had learned to attend meetings with administrators to make change on campus; another argued that while that may be true, alternative tactics might still be necessary; a voice warned against focusing too much on tactics, and murmurs of assent were made throughout the room. Viewers undoubtedly found aspects of the film dated. Protest songs, and an impromptu wedding, for example, were met with chuckles from the younger generation, in part because they seem strange, in part because they seem uncannily familiar. Think about student protests today, don't they seem to desire a repeat of '60s camaraderie, the free spirited jubilation of past generations, and don't protest songs gain legitimacy the more they refer to Dylan? Yet the question is not what do we take and what do we leave behind; rather, students today must learn the historical development and ultimate failures of past student movements to better understand the tasks of student politics today.

The necessity of critical consideration of the events was recognized by Rudd in his essay, "Columbia: Notes on the Spring Rebellion." (2) Despite ending as a debacle, the revolt did attain modest objectives: the controversial gym was never built, and Columbia divested from a wartime contractor. The key factor that enabled the local escalation was the intensification beyond "student" issues to universal human issues: racism and imperialism. Rudd, in retrospect, conceived the SDS as "building a radical force which raises issues for other constituencies—young people, workers, others—which will eventually be picked up on to create a broader, solider revolutionary movement."(3) The "radical force" did not convince Columbia's faculty. One student interviewee remarked, "they never understood the nature of our demands, of our struggle... The only alternative they could see to the maintenance of the current system was chaos—they couldn't see beyond the present occupation of the buildings to something better."

At stake, during the post screening discussion, was whether student activists today even pose the problem of a utopian alternative. We activists defer the problem by striving for realistic objectives that seem progressive and pretend we do not need a radical movement (or worse, declare ourselves the movement!). In fact, the visions of past revolutionary struggles have much to teach us about the need for student politics today. Future installments of the new SDS film series promise to raise further awareness of the problematic legacy of 1960s student organizing. **IP**

1. Roz Payne: Early Newsreel Life. (2002). <http://www.newsreel.us/life.htm>

2. Rudd, M. (1969). Columbia: Notes on the spring rebellion. In C. Oglesby, Ed. *The New Left Reader* (1st ed., pp. 290-312). New York: Grove Press, Inc.

3. Rudd, p. 302

Yesterday, I was an anarchist

Richard Kidd

"We think too small, like the frog at the bottom of the well. He thinks the sky is only as big as the top of the well. If he surfaced, he would have an entirely different view."
—Mao Tse-Tung

I JUST TURNED THIRTY. Fifteen years on the Left—that's half my lifetime now and what it means to me has changed consistently over the years: from punk rock kid with a mohawk and tattoos on my ribs and shoulders to a union leader with a mortgage and kid and the responsibility of thousands of workers on my shoulders. I often find myself thinking back to when my politics were just forming and how simple those days and those politics were. Things were clear: America was bad, veganism was good, pacifism was good, hierarchy was bad, jobs were for suckers and school was for sellouts, squats were a pure form of existence and love was meant to be free. Anarchism was clear, it was simple and we knew how the world should be. We reached for that world by forming small collectives, putting out zines or records, doing punk concerts where we preached to our fellow punks and complained about the world. Being an anarchist meant living and thinking as an anarchist more than it meant making anarchism a reality.

Most of my time as a young anarcho-punk I had a job; I was an apprentice painter. I worked in the same place my dad worked. After years on the same job sites with him, I was only making about two bucks less than him an hour. He had a bad back from years on the job, and no way to ever even think about retiring. I never thought about doing anything to make that job better paying and safer or providing for my future; I was too busy picketing fur stores and running a record distro for punks.

This all changed when my daughter was born; it became far more important to me to make my life better for Lexy and myself. I organized a union.

At first I tried putting in place lessons I learned from the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which was very little. Mostly they had great slogans, signs, chants, songs... heck they even had IWW yo-yos and bike lights. But as a Wobbly, I didn't know how to talk to my co-workers about fighting capitalism and making our jobs better. Five years as an anarchists prepared me for nothing when it came to the actual struggle. I never got another co-worker interested.

This was my first departure from being a straight-line American anarchist. I reached out to a mainstream union, the painters' union, in order to help organize my co-workers. I was taught very little by the Painters Union, but I was able to become a union member, with health insurance and a decent life. But more importantly I was part of the mainstream of the US Labor Movement. For roughly two years I straddled an odd line: I was still an anarchist—in many ways still an anarchist punk doing things like Food Not Bombs and Copwatch—but I was focusing more and more on getting workers to organize against their bosses. After a few years of being in the Painters Union, while maintaining all of my ties to the Baltimore Anarchists Scene, I was offered training from another US union to learn how to really organize workers. I'll never forget that I was told, "you'd get a chance to organize like it was the 1920's again, because we don't care about the Labor Laws." I jumped at this chance and left the comfort of the Baltimore Anarchists I had been a part of for seven years. At the time, I really thought I was going to learn a lot and then come back to the IWW.

That wasn't to be the case. When I moved to Connecticut and later to California my ties were cut, and my ideology was no longer going to be formed by Angel who brought me into the anarcho-punk community or Flint Jones who brought me into the IWW. Those years shaped me, but it was my time in the wilderness, in the desert of southern California, where there were no leftists, that made me who I am.

It was the reality and the responsibility of organizing workers at tribal casinos that taught me that the black and white perspectives that are so common among anarchists are not simply based on ideological decisions, but rather decisions based on hopelessness or laziness. Ideology makes complex situations clear-cut, but the problem for me is this: the world we live in and organize in is not clear-cut. The simple days of Baltimore where just that, the simple days. The ideology of those days didn't fit with the reality of struggle.

For three years I lived in California and didn't see another anarchist, or, for that matter, another leftist. What I saw and lived with in California was a handful of non-ideological young union organizers. We were in a place where there was no history of the left, and no history of even liberalism or unions. We were left to make our own ideology and build our unions the way we thought made sense, from scratch, like it was the 1920's all over again.

Half jokingly, we called ourselves the "red guard of the union," but the point was that in California, anarchism was no longer a vision I could use to move forward or view my life. I spent my days knocking on the doors of poor immigrants and working class white folks, talking to them about their lives. I saw that veganism didn't matter and I dropped it. I saw that the police were not the problems, they were the tools of the problem, and so I ignored Copwatch. I saw that Food Not Bombs didn't fix a problem, it was putting a band-aid on a hemophiliac and I ended my relationship with it. I saw that my punk tattoos hurt my relationships with workers rather than helped and I covered them up.

I spent my nights with my fellow organizers/radicals/revolutionaries/friends pushing ourselves by engaging in self-criticism. We sometimes called them "struggle sessions" because of how tough we were on each other. But it was this time that refined my vision of a new world and the way to get there.

In California, theory did not matter. In California, democracy and perfection did not matter. In California, three things mattered: 1. Did you push yourself? 2. Did you push your comrades? 3. Did you push workers?

Even in this, I continued to believe that I could make my new political insights merge with my version of anarchism: perhaps anarchism wasn't about freedom, but about winning power for workers. After 12 years on the left and three in the deserts of California, I was coming back to a major city with my mind set: I was an anarchist, who believed that my goal was to build working class power and to do that by building working class organizations.

For my first two years in Chicago, I continued on the same path I had in California. I built my union and thought of myself as an anarchist. I was wrong.

A few months ago I started getting involved with group called "Finding Our Roots: Midwest Anarchist Organizing." I sat through meetings with the folks that I thought would be on the same page as me. I heard proposals on "Tribal Sovereignty," "Race and Anarchism," "Bicycle Workshops," "Democracy vs. Consensus," there was nothing about organizing. To them anarchist organizing was about "us" as anarchists or it was about what "others" are or should be doing. They could only *talk* about the "others" in tribes or in races that weren't represented; they could only *talk* about the way anarchists govern themselves and about the culture of the left through bikes or recycling or gardening.

I had come to believe that anarchism was about working class power, but the political concerns of these anarchists made me question this belief. I spent years like Mao's frog at the bottom of a well. I stared up at the sky and saw something so small. I saw the world of the folks at "finding our roots." My life made me jump out and see the world around. Our struggle is so big. We are so small and we have so much to do. I felt all alone as the ideology of half my life faded away.

The world is not black and white; the world that I am in, that I organize in is full of shades of gray. After 15 years on the left, I have emerged from the bottom of my well, and not only am I able to look at the whole world, I am comfortable seeing the dirt and the grime that has to accumulate under my fingernails.

"This, therefore, is a faded dream of the time when I went down into the dust and noise of the Eastern market-place, and with my brain and muscles, with sweat and constant thinking, made others see my visions coming true. All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible. I did." T.E. Lawrence

I think this quote gets to the heart of what it means to be an organizer. It means to see the full capacity of your class, it means to have faith in yourself and those around you and lead them into a struggle. It means to place your heart and soul on the line. It means to work for the world that you want. It means to be dangerous and it means to have the responsibility of the world on your shoulders. Yesterday I was an anarchist; today I am an organizer. I am ready to lead the working class in a struggle and I am ok that the politics are less clear. **IP**

Move over, continued from page 1

one another in a polarized and politicized public space cum market square that exceedingly belongs to those that act wildest, glare longest and yell loudest, grandly appealing to pathos, we foul the air with blame and rationalization.

What did we think the outcome would be; an entire youth population weaned on a media diet that churns out sixteen-year-old starlets sporting bare midriffs and their foul mouthed boyfriends with whom they wiggle and bounce, and shriek and moan, intoxicated supplicants of an industry that created Britney Spears and *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*?
Almost ninety years ago, Max Ehrmann, that master of the desiderata wrote, "and however much you condemn the evil in the world, remember that the world is not all evil; that somewhere children are at play, as you yourself in the old days."

You should see the massed wild life crossing the streets of Westlands in Nairobi any given weekend night. Forget the Mara. **IP**

Crisis, continued from page 2

bourgeois enemies of government to seek in times of their crisis recourse to government.

For Marxists, crises have often been seen as moments of opportunity for revolutionary class action, but if the 1960s teaches us anything it is that such moments also provide the opportunity for the bourgeoisie to become a 'class for itself,' as everyday competitors come to realize their shared predicaments and explicitly reconstitute their social relationships to maintain the capitalist order. Already the Federal Reserve has taken the unprecedented step of allowing security dealers to borrow at the discount (interest) rate, a privilege previously reserved for commercial banks. To call this a crisis for capital is a mistake. It only becomes one if we make it. **IP**

Looking-glass, continued from page 2

practical sense, precarity is embracing the connections that movements have with each other. It is embracing dialogue about our everyday lives and drawing inspiration from those complaints about work or our social options to aid with larger political questions. Percarity is connecting the cracks into a larger perspective, creating a broad movement based around what directly affects us, as opposed to the organization we belong to or the theorist we quote. It is drawing on the creativity of autonomous action, the diversity within our society, and the aspirations we all have for a better life. When we return to Alice, we come to understand that her world was one based in a dream. Yet, for us the looking-glass is very real. The dreams still exist and it is not only possible but essential that we start making them a reality. Only then will the ordered and static perception cease to exist. **IP**

On the election violence in Kenya

Zeb Dingley

IT MAY BE THAT THE POLITICAL MEANING of the recent violence in Kenya will exceed the explanatory capabilities of the news media, but the question itself has not yet adequately been posed. In place of a serious engagement with the crisis, coverage of the events has been characterized by genuine shock that this could have happened in Kenya. This has typically been accompanied by the deployment of the bankrupt trope of tribalism by way of explanation. But what these responses have failed to recognize or reckon with are the apolitical character of Kenyan politics, the dialectic in Kenya of ethnicity and politics, and the inability of the Kenyan state to deal with violent historical trauma. Although an exploration of these elements may not bring the political meaning of Kenya's recent violence to light, it may help us to ask the question properly.

This most recent round of election violence began in early January with the announcement that President Mwai Kibaki, formerly of National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), currently of Party of National Unity (PNU), had defeated Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). What was left out of the discussion of ruling and opposition parties, however, is that there is no political spectrum in which they may be contextualized. There is no room for a 'Left' or a 'Right' in a form of politics based solely on the consumption and redistribution of wealth in the form of property, employment, cash, or beer. Political parties themselves have begun to resemble the segmentary lineage structures of British social anthropology. Politicians will split from older, well-established parties to form new ones in which they and their close associates occupy higher, more lucrative positions. The desire for an elevated position in a party of one's own is in tension, however, with the desire to access the more substantial resources (financial and personal) of the older party. During the months leading up to the recent election a number of new parties were created, liquidated, and recombined in rapid succession as career politicians jockeyed for position. Neither PNU nor ODM, the ruling and opposition parties at the time of the most recent election, existed during the previous election. Several candidates who stood in this election as members of ODM had been prominent members of Daniel T. arap Moi's dictatorship before Kibaki came to power in 2002. The profusion of parties in the 1990s at the insistence of Western creditors must be seen in this light and not be mistaken for increasing democratization. What ODM opposes, in short, is not PNU's policies; their own would be identical, the only difference being the beneficiaries. That difference is the result of an historical dialectic of ethnicity and politics that can only be outlined here.

The beneficiaries of a politician's redistributive policies tend to be their own constituency exclusively. This is the understanding between voters and candidates, and any politician who is unwilling or unable to steal enough to redistribute to their constituency is soon replaced. The constituency, especially in local elections, frequently belongs to the same ethnic group as its elected representative. Although ethnicity cannot be said to determine whom one votes for, it can easily take on a certain significance during election campaigns. But if ethnicity influences political allegiances, politics must be understood to have a profound effect on ethnic allegiances. During the Mau Mau war and the State of Emergency between 1952 and 1960, the Kalenjin ethnicity was consciously created out of a number of smaller tribes by the British government in an effort to consolidate an anti-Gikuyu power bloc in western Kenya. And in the late '60s and early '70s, President Jomo Kenyatta led an oathing campaign among Gikuyus in central Kenya in response to the creation of a rival political party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU), by several Luo politicians who had split from his own Kenya African National Union (KANU).

Kenya's most violent historical crisis, the Mau Mau rebellion, lay precisely at this nexus of ethnicity and politics. Mau Mau was as much a struggle over what it meant to be a Gikuyu as it was a war for "land and freedom." Its violence, moreover, was profoundly existential rather than political. To the degree that Mau Mau's violence was aimed at "freedom" (and whether this was the case is debatable), the question "what kind of freedom?" was never deliberated, and when the political crisis ended and Kenya gained independence in 1963, the political meaning of Mau Mau remained unclear. Kenyatta would later say, famously, "we all fought for freedom," but official efforts to repress Mau Mau from the national consciousness have only resulted in a compulsion to repeat its violence in new forms. In the final years of the Moi regime, for example, a neotraditional Gikuyu organization called Mungiki appeared, styling itself after Mau Mau and shaking down commuter taxi routes, charging Nairobi slum residents protection fees, and operating as a militia-for-hire for Gikuyu politicians in opposition parties. In western Kenya more recently, the Sabaot Land Defense Force, operating from the forests of Mt. Elgon near the Uganda border, has set itself up as a parallel state, forcing residents to pay taxes to support its fight, again, for land and freedom. And one need only look at the pictures of rioters in the recent election violence posing for the cameras with machetes and homemade weapons to identify a national compulsion to repeat the violence of Mau Mau. Beyond that, in the accusations and counter-accusations of "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing" by politicians, one detects a perverse fantasy of eradication. These accusations of genocide, it must be remembered, were not aimed at provoking western intervention. Both sides insisted throughout the crisis that the situation would be resolved domestically, proudly reminding western commentators that Kenya was no longer anyone's colony. Also, the claims of genocide were not the basis of calls for retaliatory violence or "defense." Thus the question becomes, why might one claim for oneself the status of a victim of genocide if not for outside help or to justify one's own actions?

Further complicating the question is the dramatic rise in ethno-nationalist sentiment in the wake of the violence, which was itself far from a spontaneous eruption of ethnic hatred. The politicians' mutual accusations of genocide are accurate to the extent that they implicate each other and each other's militias for funding and carrying out the violence. But both the willingness of groups of young men to participate in the initial clashes and the ex post facto characterizations of Gikuyus, which have begun to approach the depths of 20th Century anti-Semitism in their vulgarity, must be understood to be part of the same phenomenon. Neither can be accounted for by something so banal as unemployment and each has taken place despite the mediation of one's daily interactions with members of other ethnicities and political affiliations. The introduction of capitalist political, economic, and social forms under colonialism that freed Kenyans from dense and corrosive networks of obligation also produced new forms of uncertainty, dependence, and violence. The events surrounding the recent election must be understood with these latter forms in mind. The political meaning of the post-election violence cannot be accounted for by the claim that Kalenjins, Luos and Gikuyus were killing each other because they could not see through the ancient mist of tribalism. The situation is more upsetting than that. Kenyans were killing each other and burning each other's homes precisely because they knew it was wrong, and that they were getting away with it. **IP**

Half-time, continued from page 1

Donna Torr, Eric Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson et al already stated this in 1956—the year so many people left the Communist Party because of repression in Hungary; we "must become historians of the present too." These British Marxist Historians are important forerunners of the traditions we would like to emulate, and we wholeheartedly concur with understanding "what changes while remaining the same?" The British Left/Labour movement problem however is at an advanced stage; our Left, the oldest in the world perhaps, has unique characteristics of its advanced fossilization.

Our practice already is with the best parts of this tradition, though we are not in a position to overcome it, yet. We also draw wisdom from Antonio Negri, that "organisation is spontaneity that reflects upon itself," which is a good description of where we are at. *Mayday* personnel currently derive from different experiences, gatekeepers of at least three important cycles of struggles, were all participants, and we view the next struggles to be as important as the older ones. We want to have an informed basis for the new struggles to come. They will not be totally new, there will always be some connections with the past, but we do aim, with Lukács, to be "those who can see the furthest."

Platypus further raises an important issue of "when" was the Left, not only "where" it was or where it is. Indeed, this is an interesting historical note, and theirs is a great point; we cannot better it: "We do not live in some timeless and perpetual present of oppression and struggle against it, but in... 'the time of now' [*Jetztzeit*], a time of particular and fleeting possibilities and the ambiguously obscure history that brought them—us—into existence." **IP**

3 Rs, continued from page 2

mation, but also for substantial institutional reforms.

Platypus as a project seeks to develop critical consciousness of the history of the Left, which we think is necessary for the possibility of emancipatory politics both today and in the future. We consider how we might suffer from a more obtuse grasp, a less acute consciousness, of socially emancipatory politics than those on the Left that came before us were able to achieve.

In Rosa Luxemburg's phrase [after Engels], the world in the crisis of the early 20th Century faced the choice of "socialism or barbarism." But socialism was not achieved, and so we consider that perhaps the present is the descendant and inheritor of barbarism—including on the "Left."

We follow Marx as a critic of the Left to the extent that we find that the conception of emancipation remains inadequate if understood as deriving primarily from struggles against exploitation and oppression. Rather, following Marx and his liberal predecessors, we seek to specify the freedom-problem expressed in the history of capitalist society, to clarify how capitalism is bound up with changes in the character of free humanity.

We find the true significance and meaning of anti-capitalist politics in its expression of how capital itself is the product of and continually creates possibilities for its own self-transformation and self-overcoming. Modern categories for emancipatory social struggles should be understood as part and parcel of capital and how it might point beyond itself to its own transformation and self-abolition.

We find evidence of failure to grasp capital in this double-sided sense to the extent that the very conception of emancipation—as the freedom-in-becoming of the new, rather than the freeing of the priorly-existent—to be virtually tabooed on the Left today. The Left today almost never speaks of freedom or emancipation, but only of "resistance" to the dynamics of change associated with capital and its transformations. The spirit of Marx's observation that in bourgeois society, under capital, "all that is solid melts into air," has been displaced by his other famous observation from the Communist Manifesto that "history is the history of class struggle"—but even this observation has been debased to the sense of the perennial suffering of the oppressed, taking the subaltern in their alterity, and not, as Marx meant in his notion of the proletariat, in the figuration of the new—and the new not as an end, but as an opening onto yet further possibilities.

With the reconsideration of Marxian critical theory must come to our mind the reconsideration of the meaning of the history of subsequent Marxism. But this means treating the tradition of the revolutionary Marxist Left of the turn of the 19th and 20th and of the early 20th Century, especially of its best and most effective exponents, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, not in terms of what this Left actually accomplished, which was, from the standpoint of emancipation, minimal and quickly stifled and undone, but rather what the historical revolutionary Marxist Left strived for but failed to achieve.

Platypus seeks to reconsider the legacy of Marxist politics in order to understand our present as being conditioned—and haunted—by its failure, so that we can marshal this suppressed and buried history, its unfulfilled emancipatory potential, to the service of the critique of and the attempt to overcome the most fundamental assumptions of the present, including and especially those on the "Left."

Michael Albert: I think that I have so many disagreements with the panelists that it's hard for me to comment, but I'll try two things. One, there seems to be a lot of pessimism about prospects. I think that the US right now is an organizers' paradise, but we are not very competent organizers. I would be more hopeful if we were better in what we are trying to do. I put the blame more with us than with the state of the world. One other thing, there is a lot of reference up here to Marx and Marxism, and going back to that and discovering the worth of that. Well, reading anybody who is an intelligent commentator is generally a positive thing. I wouldn't try to put my energy there at all. Marxism, Leninism in particular, the whole intellectual framework has a flaw, a big flaw: it has nothing to do with the emancipation of the working class, so it has nothing to do with socialism. Socialism, meaning, self-management, meaning, the people who do the work control their own lives. Why do I say that? Well, for the same reason that Marx would say, "you don't look at religion and say, 'what do they say they are for?'" Instead you look at the structures and the relationships and see what it actually delivers. The institutions and concepts of Marxism and Leninism not only generate political authoritarianism, but they generate a change in the economy which does *not* create a classless society. Rather, it elevates intellectuals, people who have control over knowledge, technology, and circumstances, basically people who monopolize empowering work to the dominant position in society. So it's a movement, not for working people, but for the sector of society that working people in fact, in a gut way, are most antithetical to.

CC: I want to follow up on the idea of resistance as a starting point and on the idea of "prefigurative" politics. I think that one of the things that everyone has mentioned is the problem of a kind of vision of an emancipated future. And what I wanted to get at is to say that we live with the accumulated effect of defeats and failures on the Left. In other words, that the present is not only determined in a one-sided way by the powers that be, capitalism, the rich, et cetera—but rather, the conditions that we experience today are actually the Left's own doing—the Left needs to be understood as sort of integral to history, and therefore, whether we know it or not, we live with the past mistakes of the Left, and the past failures of the Left, and so, reflecting on those, and specifically reflecting on the way the 1960s New Left failed to digest the problems of the preceding generation of the Left (of the '20s and '30s)—in two ways: one was a kind of a Stalinophobia (the idea that the Bolshevik Revolution necessarily led to Stalinism); and the other being a Stalinophilia (which is the Guevarism and Maoism that was endemic in the 60s). Both failed to digest the problems of the Old Left, and we live with that. There remains today a kind of fear of organization, a specific scorning of party politics on the Left, and a kind of procedural mania or procedural obsession that most people who have been to any kind of leftist organizing get into. And that's also another dimension that I wanted to mention, that "resistance" as a category plays into: a kind of fear of actually organizing the Left—and the *fear* of the consequences of social revolution. In other words, there's actually a *desire*, on the one hand, but also a fear. And that is definitely a Cold War relic that we still live with.

Q & A EXCERPTS

Q: Mine is a two-part historical question. First, and it's addressed to all the panelists, what do you think the attitude of the Left today should be towards the historical legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath? An event that obviously had a huge effect on the 20th century. And, the other is, what do you think that the attitude of the Left should be towards understanding the 60s? Because the 60s seem to have a paradoxical effect on the Left: on the one hand they seem to be a period of radicalization and yet the nature of the Left seemed to have changed in the sixties and subsequently. And *since* the 60s, there seems to be a steady period of retreat and defeat, we seem to be going more or less steadily backwards.

BH: I think it's interesting to look at the modernizing vision that the Bolshevik Revolution had—the relationship to exactly the power of science and industry that was basically professed and then managed by a vanguard party. I think we need to actually have that kind of ambition today. But without any of the rest, because I think times have really, seriously, changed, and so to try to emulate the program, a modernizing program like that, would be quite disastrous today. However, the degree of ambition to harness science and technology that the Bolsheviks had is really tremendous, and this is something that can be really learned from and transformed. I think there's been a fear of that in the sixties in particular—a very reasoned fear, a reasonable fear, a necessary fear. But that fear has led to a lot of romanticizing, and a retreat from the actual task of trying to steer the world somewhere else than the direction it's going—the direction it's going is piloted by the people who have the most concentrated knowledge, because in our society knowledge is power. So we somehow have to regain control over this equation of knowledge and power and find a way to make it more humane and directed and then—here I would finally agree with Michael quite very much—directed towards everyone and not towards the desires of this specific elite.

CC: One thing that I wanted to say about the invocation of the Bolshevik Revolution: this is one of these things about the history of the 20th century, that the Bolshevik Revolution had a kind of a multiple legacy. Maybe its strongest legacy, especially in the understanding of it in the 1960s, was as an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, modernizing revolution of a backward country. And I think that in some ways that's the least important aspect of the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution, to my mind, was an international event, there were actually many social revolutions that issued out of the end of WWI, including Germany, Hungary—there was a strong movement in Italy that Gramsci had been associated with. And, in fact, that moment is, historically, the high water mark for anti-capitalist social struggle and revolutionary politics in the last 200 years. It had a profound effect, even though it ultimately failed. The 1917–19 moment was a moment of an attempt that *failed*. And the nature of the Soviet Union was conditioned by that failure. In other words—and this is an old story—the isolation of the revolution. Specifically, the Marxists prior to WWI had a vision of a transformation of global capitalism, not a vision of simply national revolutions. I think that that vision, the vision of attacking capitalism as a global system, is something that we need to seriously reconsider. It's something that was essentially taken for granted as not really possible in the 1960s. In other words, there was a notion of solidarity with Third World revolutions that took for granted that revolution in the metropole, in Europe and the United States, etc., was essentially impossible. So we have to at least take notice of the fact that 100 years ago there was a millions-strong workers' movement throughout the developed industrialized world that aimed at a global transformation. We haven't really seen anything like that in a long time.

Q: Hi. My name is Nick Kreitman and I am also a member of the new SDS. I would like to pin down some of these speakers on "reform," on the concept of reform. What reforms do you feel are relevant in today's society? Strategically I'd like to pin you down on a few ideas that you think have a lot of potential for today's situation, because all this talk about strategy is kind of irrelevant if we don't *advance* a strategy to go along with it. Specifically, Michael, what reforms do you see having promise for eliminating the division of labor in today's society? What kind of reforms do the panelists believe are relevant and can be incorporated into a revolutionary movement?

MA: Well, there is a lot, I think. Let me give one example: suppose we said that the average work week in the United States was forty hours, I suspect it's more like fifty or sixty, but suppose it was forty. So we might demand that instead of forty hours we want a thirty-hour work-week. But we might go a little further, so we say that when we go down to a thirty-hour work-week all those who are currently working forty hours and earning under sixty thousand dollars a year keep the salary they have now. So their salary has gone up, they're working three quarters of the time and they're getting the same salary they got before. For everybody over a hundred, their salary goes down proportionate to that quarter loss. So they keep the same hourly salary. So we have a tremendous redistribution of wealth, we've freed up a tremendous amount of time, but now there's another problem: the doctors are working three quarters of the time they were before; the engineers are working three quarters of the time they were before. So we say in addition, we want to have education programs inside workplaces so that working people begin to fill up the gap in the work that has occurred. So now we're beginning to challenge the division of labor. So that's a demand that you can imagine fighting for right now, that it would be very hard for most people to be against because their incomes would go up if they were at the bottom and wouldn't go down if they were higher, and yet their lives would be liberated to a degree because they'd have more time, and so on. That's one possible idea that just comes off quickly.

CC: One thing that is obviously needed, and a couple of people on the panel have done work thinking about this, is a very traditional demand, which is organizing the unorganized, in other words, revitalizing the workers' movement. In other words, not necessarily reforms that are pitched at the level of immediate state policy differences, but organizing more unions, thinking about how working class people might be organized today differently than in the past. But fundamentally the same challenge exists, because as working-class organizations, unions, have declined, there has been less and less social power available for "resistance," but even for constraining the kinds of things that can go on in the economy, and therefore undermining the ability to engage in further reforms. So I think that one thing that has come up here—and certainly Brian, for instance, has done work on this, we've been reading about it in Platypus—and a question that came up from the audience in terms of changes in the workforce and changes in work patterns over the past forty years: I think it's a chicken or egg paradox. Meaning that, on the one hand, there is a flexible work regime, on the other hand I think that this was made possible by the fact that there's been a decline in the workers' movement. In other words, I think that some of this would have to be reversed and not merely hypostasized as the "new form of capital." Rather, the new form of capital needs to be understood as the result of the decimation of the workers' movement. **IP**

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