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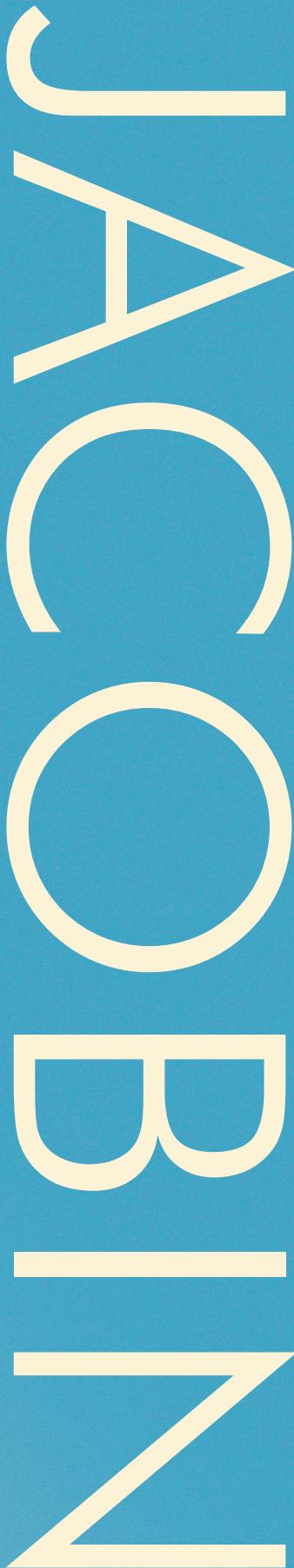
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Praxis

Don't call it a comeback. Months ago, at the height of last winter's Occupy eruption, I wrote that we were "in the last throes of the era of Ezra Klein."

But then came rebuttals from the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. The editorial class demanded, "More Ezra!"

Maybe "epoch" would've been the fitting word.

Of course, my premature announcement took Klein as representative of a broader ideology in decline. There is much to like about the wunderkind blogger – the clean prose, the friendly disposition, the intellectual curiosity. He is the best example of a technocratic liberalism that prospered in the center-left over the past decade. If anything, *Jacobin* expects to be, with others, part of a radical resurgence that shares Klein's rigor and accessibility, but benefits from a structural critique of capitalism and a dynamic theory of politics. Here's to hoping.

But there's more than just hoping. An intellectual transformation of this sort will depend on conditions on the ground.

Spring is here and work is underway to renew the Occupy movement. The planned May Day actions will be important, though calling them a "general strike" does a disservice to that tactic and its legacy. To paraphrase labor journalist Laura Clawson: you only call a day of action a "general strike" if you've lost hope that a real general strike is possible. Far more is actually realizable, we just have a long way to go first.

The potential of Occupy Wall Street went far beyond those active in it day-to-day, much less the minuscule core that laid its foundation. It rested in the millions of Americans who saw in it their discontent with austerity regimes, wage cuts, unemployment, and financial abuse. If it's acknowledged the movement could be

more successful in engaging these people, the question then becomes, "What needs to change?"

So far, the creative tactics and the grunt work of coalition building in Occupy have come largely from anarchists, not the socialist left. But the larger strategic questions have yet to be addressed, and must be resolved democratically. They can't be if socialists refuse to be confident partners in the discussion. This edition of *Jacobin* is another contribution to this exchange of ideas.

Yet too much navel-gazing is a danger, as well. As an intellectual journal, albeit one with the pretense of being a magazine, *Jacobin* must look beyond its doorstep. In this spirit, we offer a special section on the European left, edited by Seth Ackerman. The publication also continues to grapple with the problematics of work and technology, while offering spirited critiques of contemporary liberalism's tropes and its purveyors.

It's an out-of-style shtick, but I think we've done well. Too well maybe. At press, *Jacobin*, once just the pet project of a twenty-one-year-old editor, stands at over one thousand subscribers and boasts a much larger online audience. By the standards of radical publishing, our growth over the past year has been astounding. And, in addition to revamping our web content, we hope to climb to three thousand subscribers by Bastille Day 2013.

Our rise is testimony to the existence of an audience to the left of liberalism interested in ideas and the possibility for substantive political action.

But "by the standards of radical publishing" are the operative words here. Surrounded by mediocrity, being the tallest building in Topeka doesn't mean much. We can await Ezra Klein's downfall, but the future may not have shit to do with us either. Here's to hoping some more.

—Bhaskar Sunkara

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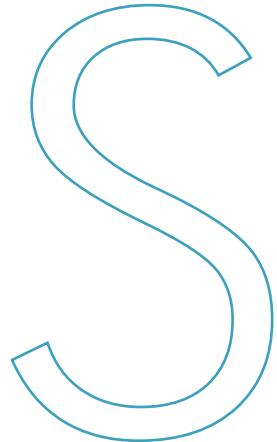
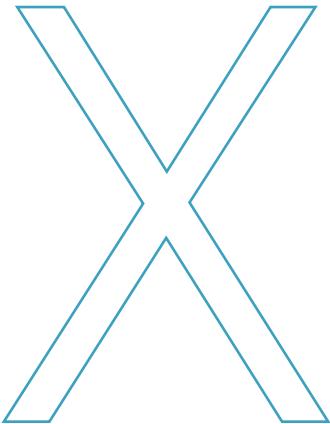
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Tom Friedman's War on Humanity



by Belén Fernández

THOMAS FRIEDMAN, three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*, once offered the following insight into his modus operandi: “I often begin writing columns by interviewing myself.”

Some might see this as an unsurprising revelation in light of Edward Said’s appraisal: “It’s as if... what scholars, poets, historians, fighters, and statesmen have done is not as important or as central as what Friedman himself thinks.”

According to Friedman, the purpose of the auto-interviews is merely to analyze his feelings on certain issues. Given that his feelings tend to undergo drastic inter- and sometimes intra-

columnar modifications, one potentially convenient byproduct of such an approach to journalism is the impression that Friedman interviews many more people than he actually does.

For example, while one of Friedman’s alter egos considered blasphemous the “Saddamist” notion that the Iraq War had anything to do with oil, another was of the opinion that the war was “partly about oil,” and another appeared to be under the impression that it was entirely about oil, assigning the blame for US troop deaths in Fallujah to Hummer proprietors. Despite Friedman’s identification as “a liberal on every issue other than this war,” competing layers of

his persona defined said conflict as “the most radical-liberal revolutionary war the U.S. has ever launched” as well as part of a “neocon strategy.”

Meanwhile, Friedman’s interviews with other people have resulted in anthropological discoveries. Chatting with the owner of a Victoria’s Secret factory in the village of Pannala in 1999 turned up the fact that “[t]he people of Sri Lanka” understand that it is “stupid” to oppose US-directed corporate globalization. Friedman testifies that, “in terms of conditions, I would let my own daughters work in” the factory – an offer that is not revisited in 2012 when Friedman produces a glowing report on an Apple factory in China.

The gist of the report is that, because the factory reached a daily output level of over 10,000 iPhones simply by rousing 8,000 workers from their dormitories in the middle of the night and administering them each a biscuit and cup of tea, Americans must understand that “average is officially over.” Friedman’s exuberance at the above-average abilities of the Chinese factory workers is occasioned by a “terrific article in the *Times* by Charles Duhigg and Keith Bradsher about why Apple does so much of its manufacturing in China.” Unmentioned is that the same Duhigg produced another coauthored article four days after the terrific one, discussing other aspects of Apple factory life in China, such as explosions, exposure to poisonous chemicals, and worker internment in overcrowded dormitories surrounded by safety netting to impede suicides – raising questions about what sub-average American laborers will have to do to woo jobs back to the US.

This is not to imply that none of Friedman’s personalities harbors any potential sympathy for the concept of workers’ rights. In a 2001 column, for example, he acknowledges that “human beings simply are not designed to be like computer servers. For one thing, they are designed to sleep eight hours a night.” (In the same column, his own above-average qualifications in fields like journalism, technology, and logic are cast into doubt with his reasoning: “I still can’t program my VCR; how am I going to program my toaster?”)

In *The World Is Flat*, a 660-page treatise on globalization written under the supervision of corporate CEOs, Friedman manages a rare favorable citation of someone whose *weltanschauung* exists in fundamental opposition to his own. Despite such personal convictions as that “[t]he most important thing [Ronald] Reagan did

was break the 1981 air traffic controllers’ strike, which helped break the hold of organized labor over the U.S. economy,” that “the easier it is to fire people, the more willing companies are to hire people,” and – more recently – that “we are entering an era where to be a leader will mean, on balance, to take things away from people,” Friedman writes approvingly:

In her 2004 book, *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers’ Rights at Wal-Mart*, journalist Liza Featherstone followed the huge women’s discrimination suit against Wal-Mart. In an interview about the book with Salon.com (November 22, 2004), she made the following important point: “American taxpayers chip in to pay for many full-time Wal-Mart employees because they usually require incremental health insurance, public housing, food stamps – there are so many ways in which Wal-Mart employees are not able to be self-sufficient. This is very ironic, because Sam Walton is embraced as the American symbol of self-sufficiency ... If anything, Wal-Mart should be crusading for national health insurance. They should at least be acknowledging that because they are unable to provide these things for their employees, we should have a more general welfare state.”

Of course, Friedman’s second-hand ode to workers’ and citizens’ rights occurs approximately one hundred pages after his enraptured discussion of “the Wal-Mart Symphony” in multiple movements – with no finale,” which is how he characterizes the company’s perfected cycle of “delivery, sorting, packing, distribution, buying, manufacturing, reordering, delivery, sorting, packing ...”

Wal-Mart is furthermore honored in the book as “one of the ten forces that flattened the world,” an honor that appears even more out of place when Friedman pleads that isolation and insularity are in fact the cause of flagrant workers’ rights violations on the part of the world-flattening symbol of global integration:

It is hard to exaggerate how isolated Bentonville, Arkansas [the location of Wal-Mart HQ], is from the currents of global debate on labor and human rights, and it is easy to see how this insular company, obsessed with lowering prices, could have gone over the edge in some of its practices.

One example Friedman provides of a possible

over-the-edge Wal-Mart practice is that of “locking overnight workers into its stores.” Given his recent elation with regard to midnight practices at the Apple factory in China, however – especially when juxtaposed with his assessment in *The World Is Flat* according to which “Wal-Mart is the China of companies” – it seems that the Arkansas-based behemoth may have instead been demonstrating a commitment to cutting-edge labor policies.

I had the fortune to meet Liza Featherstone in person a few weeks ago and thus did not have to rely on an interview with myself to determine how she felt about her cameo in Friedman’s magnum opus. According to Featherstone, the disproportionate reader response she received after appearing in one paragraph of the tome was a rude awakening as to the extent of Friedman’s reach.

Besides laborers cavorting to the tune of the Wal-Mart Symphony, other beneficiaries of the Friedmanian reach include Afghan civilians who, in exchange for being slaughtered by US weaponry, earn immortalization inside quotation marks on the pages of the *New York Times* in 2008:

Think of all the nonsense written in the press – particularly the European and Arab media – about the concern for “civilian casualties” in Afghanistan. It turns out many of those Afghan ‘civilians’ were praying for another dose of B-52’s to liberate them from the Taliban, casualties or not.

Friedman does not divulge the source of his insights into Afghan prayers, though the tried and true auto-interview is certainly a possibility. Friedman’s foray into Umm Qasr, Iraq, a month after the 2003 invasion, meanwhile turns up further evidence of the inadvisability of seeking indigenous opinions on relevant issues: “It would be idiotic to even ask Iraqis here how they felt about politics. They are in a pre-political, primordial state of nature.”

The following month, Friedman appeared on public television, and – despite having recently debunked the notion of a link between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden – proceeded to outline the “real reason” for returning Iraq to the primordial era: Iraqi citizens needed to “Suck. On. This.” as punishment for 9/11. Other popular Friedmanian fatwas issued over the years have ranged from the determination that Palestinians

are “gripped by a collective madness” to the idea that Israel’s mass bombing of Lebanese civilians in 2006 “was not pretty, but it was logical” to the notion that Iraqis do not “deserve such good people [i.e. the U.S. military, i.e. the administrators of the ‘Suck. On. This.’ directive] if they continue to hate each other more than they love their own kids.”

Friedman’s predilection for delivering haughty apocalyptic lectures to the more than 1.5 billion Muslims in the world who are not suicide bombers leads to the coinage of such proverbs as: “A civilization that does not delegitimize suicide bombing against any innocent civilian is itself committing suicide.” It is not explained why the – historically more lethal – US tradition of non-suicidal bombing of innocent civilians poses no civilizational risks, or why an American columnist who regularly encourages the killing of Muslims is not thrown into the same category as Muslims who kill other Muslims: “completely disconnected from humanity.”

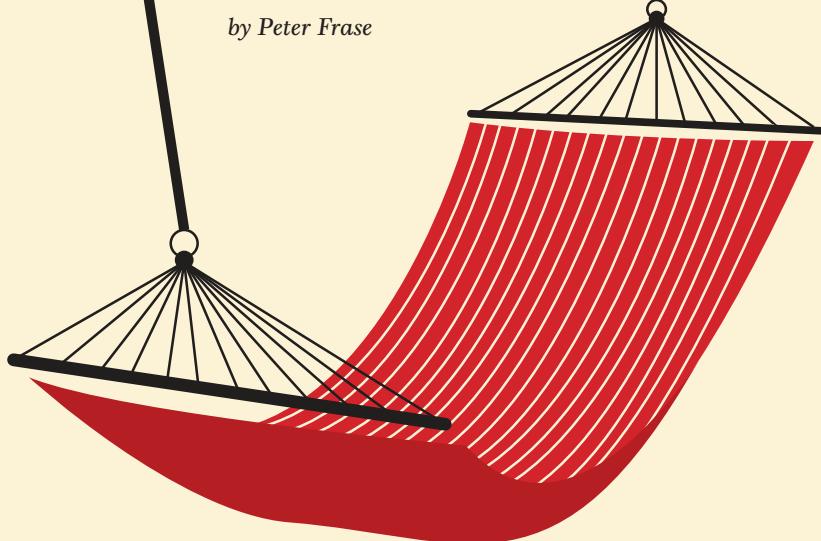
Friedman has done a superb job of delegitimizing himself as a journalist by peddling an array of schizophrenic postulates against a solid backdrop of warmongering apologetics on behalf of empire and capital. It says much about the dismal state of contemporary journalism that his unabashed advocacy for collective punishment, both military and economic, has facilitated rather than jeopardized his prominent perch at the US newspaper of record, his elevation to the rank of Top Global Thinker by *Foreign Policy* magazine, and his occasional service as dispenser of personal advice to Barack Obama.

It is unlikely that Friedman will ever begin a column by interviewing himself about why his expressions of human empathy are reserved for events such as mealtime in the dining hall at the US military base in Kirkuk and the adoption of “proglobalization” strategies by China, India, and Ireland – which, we are told in *The World Is Flat*, prompts him to “get a little lump in my throat.”

We might thus take the liberty of casting Friedman in the role of “supply chain” in the following scenario, which he offers in response to Featherstone’s critique of Wal-Mart but which is just as applicable to a discussion of the corporate media symphony starring the *New York Times*: “[W]hen you totally flatten your supply chain, you also take a certain element of humanity out of life.” ■

The Politics of Getting a Life

by Peter Frase



WORK IN A CAPITALIST society is a conflicted and contradictory phenomenon, never more so than in hard times. We simultaneously work not enough and too much; a labor famine for some means feast for others. The United States has allegedly been in economic “recovery” for over two years, and yet 15 million people cannot find work, or cannot find as much work as they say they would like. At the same time, up to two thirds of workers report in surveys that they would like to work fewer hours than they do now, even if doing so would require a loss of income. The pain of unemployment is well-documented, but the pain of the employed only occasionally sees the light, whether it’s Amazon warehouse employees working at a breakneck pace in sweltering heat, or Foxconn workers risking injury and death to build hip electronics for Apple.

When work is scarce, political horizons tend to narrow, as critiques of the quality of work give way to the desperate search for work of any kind. And work, of any kind, seems to be all that politicians can offer; right and left differ only on who is to blame for the scarcity of it. Go to the web site of the Barack Obama campaign, and you will be told at the top of the “Issues” page that “The President is taking aggressive steps to put Americans back to work and create an economy where hard work pays and responsibility is rewarded.” Likewise the site of the AFL-CIO labor federation, where a man in overalls grins behind the words “work connects us all.” This is how the virtuous working class appears in the liberal imagination: hard-working, responsible, defined, and redeemed by work, but failed by an economy that cannot create the necessary wage labor into which this responsibility can be invested.

When the Right rejects this romanticism of workers as ascetic toilers, it is only to better shift the blame for a weak economy from capital to labor. University of Chicago economist and sometime *New York Times* contributor Casey Mulligan tried to define the recession out of existence by insisting that collapsing employment reflected only a diminished desire to work, rather than a shortfall in demand. Meanwhile, the more culturally-minded reactionaries fret about the waning of the work ethic as a herald of civilizational decline. Charles Murray, who made his name promoting pseudoscientific accounts of the shiftlessness and mental inferiority of African Americans, has recently returned with dire warnings about the decay of the white working class. White men, he says, have lost their “industriousness,” as demonstrated by declining labor force participation rates and shorter average work weeks among the employed.

The practiced liberal response is that such statistics reflect an absence

of opportunity rather than a lack of gumption. But this leads only to calls for job creation which emphasize the value of “hard work” without reflecting on the nature of that work. The grueling toil of the Amazon warehouse is certainly hard; so too, in a way, are the eighty-hour weeks and intense stresses of a Goldman Sachs trader. Yet the former can hardly be said to be healthy or improving for the human spirit, while the latter only creates wealth for the few and economic chaos for the rest of us. Murray’s “industriousness” is the attitude ridiculed by the wayward Marxist Paul Lafargue in his 1883 pamphlet “The Right to Be Lazy,” a strange delusion” that afflicts the proletariat with “a furious passion for work.”

Lafargue is part of a dissident socialist tradition, which insists that a politics for the working class must be against work. This is the tradition picked up by political theorist Kathi Weeks in her recent book, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Weeks identifies advocates of *more* work and those who want *better* work, and finds each lacking. As an alternative, she holds up the straightforward and unapologetic demand for *less* work. In the process, she powerfully articulates the case for a politics that appeals to pleasure and desire, rather than to sacrifice and asceticism. It is, after all, the ideal of self-restraint and self-denial that ultimately legitimates the glorification of work, and especially the ideology of the work ethic.

PERMUTATIONS OF THE WORK ETHIC

THE FURIOUS PASSION for work is not a constant of human nature but rather something that must be constantly reinforced, and successive versions of the work ethic have been used to stoke that passion. At the dawn of capitalism, the call to work was a call to salvation, as Weeks ex-

plains in her reading of Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. She recognizes, that far from providing an idealist alternative to Marx’s account of the rise of capitalism, Weber complements historical materialism by describing the construction of a working-class *ideology*. The word is used in Althusser’s sense: “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” The Protestant ethic allowed workers to imagine that when they worked for the profit of the boss, they were really working for their salvation, and for the glory of God.

By the twentieth century, however, the calling had become a material one: hard work would ensure broad-based prosperity. Each of the century’s twin projects of industrial modernity developed this calling in its own way. Soviet authorities promoted the Stakhanovite movement, which glorified exceptional contributions to the productivity of the socialist economy. In Detroit, meanwhile, the social-democratic union leader Walter Reuther denounced advocates of shorter hours for undermining the US economy in the struggle against Communism. In neither case was the quality of industrial work called into question; it was simply a matter of who was in control and who reaped the spoils.

The industrial work ethic ran aground on the alienating nature of industrial labor. Workers who still remembered the Great Depression might have been willing to subordinate themselves to the assembly line in return for a steady paycheck, but their children were emboldened to ask for more. As Jefferson Cowie recounts in his history *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, the 1970s were characterized by pervasive labor unrest and what was popularly called the “blue collar blues,” as “workers were harnessed to union pay but longed to run free of the deadening nature of the work itself.” In the realm

Thus we arrive at a third iteration of the work ethic in the post-industrial era, where work is now represented neither as a path to salvation nor as a road to riches, but as a source of personal identity and fulfillment.

of left theory, this development was reflected in the vogue for “humanist” critiques of work, rooted in the young Marx’s theory of alienation. Weeks highlights the Freudian-Marxist Erich Fromm, who argued that “the self realization of man ... is inextricably linked to the activity of work,” which will again become authentic and fulfilling once it is freed from capitalist control. In recognizing the limitations of demanding more work, the humanists instead called for *better* work.

But this critique proved to be doubly unsatisfying: it either points backwards to austere primitivism or forward to another iteration of capitalism. In the hands of feminists like Maria Mies, the critique of alienated work becomes a call to produce only for immediate use, rather than for exchange; this, Weeks notes, is “a prescription for worldly asceticism of the first order.” If the productivist form of Marxism trafficked in the illusion that capitalism’s forces of production could be upheld and preserved independent of the class-based relations of production, then the romantic call for a return to small-scale or craft labor attempts to split apart another of Marx’s dialectics, that between exchange value and use value. But use value, like productivity, is ultimately a category internal to capitalism; the demand that what we produce be “useful” is inseparable from the work ethic itself.

The most influential line of argument against industrial labor, how-

ever, has not been the ascetic one but instead what the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call the “artistic critique.” Under this critique, industrial labor is condemned not because it separates exchange and use, but because it restricts the autonomy, freedom, and creativity of the worker. The solution is not to reconnect work to earthy craft labor, but to elevate workers into flexible, autonomous, self-fashioning individuals, truly able to realize themselves in their work.

But this position quickly curdled into apologia for the precarious world of post-1970s capitalism, in which individuals were encouraged to celebrate unstable jobs and uncertain income as forms of freedom rather than insecurity. Intangible benefits were offered as an alternative to a share in rising productivity, which became decoupled from wages. Thus we arrive at a third iteration of the work ethic in the post-industrial era, where work is now represented neither as a path to salvation nor as a road to riches, but as a source of personal identity and fulfillment. This ethic is exemplified by hip Silicon Valley firms like Apple, which reportedly told employees, in response to their wage demands, that “Money shouldn’t be an issue when you’re employed at Apple. Working at Apple should be viewed as an experience.”

In these circumstances, Weeks argues, calls for “better work” are not only inadequate, they tend to reproduce and extend a form of capitalism

that attempts to colonize the lives and personalities of its workers. Hence “worker empowerment can boost efficiency, flexibility can serve as a way to cut costs, and participation can produce commitment to the organization ... quality becomes quantity as the call for better work is translated into a requirement for more work.” Any attempt to reconstruct the meaning of work in a non-alienating way must begin, then, by rejecting work altogether.

Yet the manipulative invocation of the autonomy of labor is only possible because the artistic critique did address real desires. Given the shortcomings of the old industrial labor paradigm, it hardly seems possible or desirable to return to an older proletarian ideal of long-term, protected employment with a single firm. Yet some are still attempting to resurrect the idea of better work. In *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, economist Guy Standing identifies the new mass of insecure workers as a “precariat” rather than a proletariat, one which desires “control over life, a revival of social solidarity and a sustainable autonomy, while rejecting old labourist forms of security and state paternalism.”

Like Weeks, Standing is a proponent of an unconditional basic income – a regular payment provided to every individual regardless of whether or how much they work – as a way of providing income security without locking people into jobs. Yet he still grounds his appeal on the concept of work, now expanded beyond the boundaries of wage labor. “The fact that there is an aversion to the jobs on offer does not mean that ... people do not want to work,” he argues, for in fact “almost everybody wants to work.” Subsequently, however, he speaks of “rescuing” work from its association with wage labor: “All forms of work should be treated with equal respect, and there should be no presumption that someone not in a job is not working or that someone not working today

"Can we want, and are we willing to create, a new world that would no longer be 'our world,' a social form that would not produce subjects like us?"

is an idle scrounger." This evokes the notion of a social factory in which we contribute various kinds of productive activity that is not directly remunerated, ranging from raising children to coding open source software.

But no amount of redefinition can escape the association of work with the capitalist ethos of productivism and efficiency. The contrast between work and "idle scrounging" implies that we can measure whether any given activity is productive or useful, by translating it into a common measure. Capitalism has such a measure, monetary value: whatever has value in the market is, by definition, productive. If the critique of capitalism is to get beyond this, it must get beyond the idea that our activities can be subordinated to a single measure of value. Indeed, to demand that time outside of work be truly *free* is to reject the call to justify its usefulness. This is a central insight of Weeks' consistent anti-asceticism, which resists any effort to replace the work ethic with some equally homogenizing code that externally validates the organization of our time. Time beyond work should not be for exchange or for use, but for itself. The point, as Weeks puts it, is to "get a life," as we find ways "to sustain the social worlds necessary for, among other things, production."

POLITICS OF THE DEMAND

WHAT IS THE POLITICS of getting a life? It is easier to reject the ideology of work in theory

than it is to craft a political strategy that advances an anti-work agenda in practice. Neither side of twentieth century socialism's reform-or-revolution dialectic is particularly helpful in this regard. Social democracy has managed to partially liberate workers from work, by providing public services and income supports that lessen the dependence on wage labor. Yet this decommodification of labor has been halting and uneasy, due to a preoccupation with maintaining full employment and conserving jobs. The insurrectionary seizure of state power, meanwhile, if it leaves the structure of capitalist labor relations intact, merely puts the workers in charge of their own exploitation – meet the new boss, same as the old.

Weeks attempts to transcend these limitations by elaborating a concept of the political *demand* that merges the reformist and revolutionary impulses. The demand is seen here as a call for a specific reform, but also as something more. The demand, and the way it is articulated, can be a tool for ideological demystification and for what Fredric Jameson calls "cognitive mapping," charting the relationships between various spheres of production and reproduction. A demand can be something to organize around, a way to build collective capacity. Finally, a demand can set the stage for radical struggles and transformations in the future, even if it does not challenge the foundations of the system immediately.

This concept of the demand is evocative of André Gorz's idea of the "non-

reformist reform," although Weeks shies away from the implication that a demand could have radical implications while still partaking in the reformist terrain of policy proposals and tactical compromises. In a move that is reminiscent of some of the anxiety about "demands" in the Occupy Wall Street milieu, it seems at times that Weeks wants to preserve her radical credentials by denying that the system could ever really accommodate the demands she puts forward.

Yet the two specific demands she discusses, though they are ambitious, are within the horizon of reformism: an unconditional basic income and a shortening of the work week. These are common enough proposals among leftists of an anti-work persuasion, but Weeks' treatment is distinctive because it grounds both demands in the politics of feminism. Basic income is offered as a successor to "wages for housework," a signature demand of the Marxist feminists who emerged from the Italian workerist scene. The objective, says Weeks, is to highlight "the arbitrariness with which contributions to social production are and are not rewarded with wages," thus making visible the enormous amount of unwaged reproductive labor performed by women. Against those who reject basic income as an unearned handout, we can respond that it is capitalism which arbitrarily refuses to pay for a huge proportion of the labor that sustains it.

Shorter hours, too, is inherently a feminist demand. The proletarian of the Left's romantic imagination has always been implicitly a male figure, the full-time worker relying on the reproductive labor of a woman in the home. However, Weeks is careful to reject calls for work time reduction premised on making more time for the family. Such arguments may contest the work ethic, but they do so only by reinforcing an equally pernicious family ethic. Time in the home comes to be portrayed as inherently better or less

alienated than time in the workplace, and the need for such time becomes naturalized. This ignores the alienating and oppressive qualities of the family, which led an earlier generation of feminists to seek the relative freedom and autonomy of wage labor. What's more, the self-denying asceticism of the work ethic has not been overcome but merely displaced, from the workplace to the home. Shorter hours, asserts Weeks, should be offered not as a prop to the traditional family but as "a means of securing the time and space to forge alternatives to the present ideals and conditions of work and family life."

WORKERS AGAINST WORK

THE REJECTION OF WORK has a rich history in left theory, but a more intermittent presence in mass politics. It crops up sporadically, from the nineteenth century ten hour day movement to the Italian Hot Autumn of 1969. One great difficulty is that by jettisoning the work ethic, anti-work politics simultaneously takes up the cause of wage laborers while undermining their identity as wage laborers. It insists that their liberation must entail the simultaneous abolition of their self-conception as workers. This is in contrast to the more traditional Marxist vision, in which the working class first realizes itself in the metaphorical "dictatorship of the proletariat" before ultimately dissolving itself into a totally classless society. Yet even as orthodox a Marxist as Georg Lukács observed in *History and Class Consciousness* that "the proletariat only perfects itself by annihilating and transcending itself." Its ultimate destiny is to be not just a class for-itself but "against itself."

This is not a problem unique to the struggle against capitalism, and it is perhaps inherent in any truly radical politics. It is always easier to pose demands on the terms of the enemy than it is to reject those terms altogether,

whether that means racial minorities demanding assimilation to white society or gays and lesbians demanding admission to the institution of bourgeois marriage. By asking workers to give up not just their chains but their identities as workers, anti-work theorists relinquish the forms of working-class pride and solidarity that have been the glue for many left movements. They dream of a workers' movement against work. But this requires some new conception of who we are and what we are to become, if we are to throw off the label of "worker."

Writers in the anti-work tradition have often sought these new identities in the outlooks and practices of figures who are marginal to the production process and outside the working class. Lafargue lapsed into noble savagery, comparing the deluded proletariat to "the Spaniard, in whom the primitive animal has not been atrophied," and who therefore recognized that "work is the worst sort of slavery." For Oscar Wilde, the artist showed us the future of life after our liberation from work and property, when everyone could finally develop a "true, beautiful, healthy Individualism." Labor was, for him, not the source of a meaningful life but its antithesis, and the promise of modernity was that it could be overcome for the many as it was once overcome for the few:

The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. And when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a depressing East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things

for their own joy and the joy of everyone else.

Lafargue and Wilde's arguments have Nietzschean overtones, with the defense of work portrayed as a form of *resentiment* and the work ethic as a detestable slave morality. Weeks makes this connection as well in her final chapter, joining Nietzsche to the iconoclastic Marxist Ernst Bloch as a theorist of utopian politics. To give up *resentiment*, Weeks suggests, means to ask, "Can we want, and are we willing to create, a new world that would no longer be 'our world,' a social form that would not produce subjects like us?" This brings about the difficulty raised above, as it pertains to the politics of rejecting work: "its mandate to embrace the present and affirm the self and, at the same time, to will their overcoming; its prescription for self-affirmation but not self-preservation or self-aggrandizement."

Elsewhere, Weeks remarks that we should not underestimate just how much hesitation about anti-work positions is rooted in fear. Fear of idleness, fear of hedonism – or to borrow a phrase from Erich Fromm, fear of freedom. It is relatively easy to say that in the future I will be what I am now – a worker, just perhaps with more money or more job security or more control over my work. It is something else to imagine ourselves as different kinds of people altogether. That, perhaps, is the unappreciated value of Occupy Wall Street encampments and similar attempts to carve out alternative ways of living within the interstices of capitalist society. It may be, as critics often point out, that they cannot really build an alternative society so long as capitalism's institutional impediments to such a society remain in place. But perhaps they can help remove the fear of what we might become if those impediments were lifted, and we were able to make our exodus from the world of work to the world of freedom. ■

Against Law, For Order



by Mike Konczal

T'S TAKEN DECADES AND MILLIONS OF LIVES, but elite opinion is starting to move against mass incarceration. The *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books* ran detailed exposés on the scale and violence of the penal state. Conservative leaders like Grover Norquist have said that mass incarceration violates the principles of “fiscal responsibility, accountability, and limited government,” while GOP darlings like Mitch Daniels have tried to take the lead in state reform. Soon the common wisdom will shift from “we need to get tough on crime” to “we jail too many people for too long for the wrong reasons.”

The next question is what to do

about it, and here the answers are harder. There are those that think that it’ll be fairly easy – follow European examples and decriminalize drugs, for instance. Some, like public policy professor Mark Kleiman, believe we can change punishment techniques to have both less crime and less incarceration. There are others that think this will be difficult, requiring liberals to reassess their commitment to less harsh punishment and society as a whole to live with more crime. Even then, reformers will have to deal with powerful incumbent interests like prison guard unions and private prison lobbyists. Still other groups listen to liberals saying the phrase “prison crisis” and hear

“prison opportunity.” Conservative policy groups like ALEC want to reduce prison populations with privatized solutions, such as having private parole boards bid to insure prisoners for release.

What all of these approaches take for granted is that government policy runs downhill. We elect leaders, those leaders debate and legislate within a set of institutional frameworks, and the final product is something called “policy.” Hence we can take the result called “criminal justice policy” off the shelf, rewrite the rules and replace it.

An alternative account holds that our policy of mass incarceration recon-

figures both the idea of the state and the way it carries out its duties. In this story, a government that creates mass incarceration is the obvious result of the ideologies of neoconservatism and neoliberalism that have come to dominate in the wake of the New Deal liberal order's collapse.

To see how mass incarceration has reworked our expectations about governance, we need to understand the relationship of policing to the two major political ideologies of the past thirty years and the governance project that came out of them. How did a neoconservative movement that describes itself as being for limited government and liberty become the engine behind a prison state more expansive than that of Russia or Rwanda? And how does the government of the neoliberal imagination, which, by definition, fails at everything it attempts, expand its activities in the one area – imprisonment and the use of force – that has such a high risk of abuse?

NEOCONSERVATIVE

WHEN NEOCONSERVATIVES say that they are the party of “law and order,” it is important to remember that they care less for the rule of law than they do for the rule of order.

The modern law and order movement kicks off in 1964 with Barry Goldwater’s speech accepting the GOP nomination. Then a minor issue, law and order had particular resonance in the South, where George Wallace was gaining a following with a similar message. Goldwater, while suffering a major loss in the election, did particularly well among Southern states using this message, something Richard Nixon would put to good use in the next election.

There were good reasons behind the law and order movement’s success in bringing the South into the GOP. Some of these reasons have to

do less with a neoconservative project than with a very old conservative project. As historian Robert Perkinson explores in his book *Texas Tough*, there has always been a distinctly repressive character to the Southern prison, with its chain gangs, forced labor, and limited attempts at reform. These vicious practices, born out of the era of slavery, remain and shape the modern prison. As Perkinson says of the penal labor farms in East Texas, “Nowhere else in turn-of-the-millennium America could one witness gangs of African American men filling cotton sacks under the watchful eyes of armed whites on horseback.”

As political power moved to the Sunbelt and conservatives successfully realigned the South rightward, these brutal tactics became wedded to the Republican Party. The prison is part of the conservative project of race control. As Michelle Alexander argues in *The New Jim Crow*, mass incarceration locks people of color into permanent second-class citizenship much as the Jim Crow system of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation did in the past. Legalized discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and segregation, instituted through techniques like job licensing restrictions and legal requirements for voting, are features of both regimes.

“Law and order” isn’t just the rallying cry of Southern traditionalists, however. It also forms a core of the neoconservative governance project. Take the influential 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* essay “Broken Windows” by the neoconservative thinker James Q. Wilson. Wilson’s previous theory of the criminal was that “Wicked people exist... Nothing avails except to set them apart from innocent people,” a view that began the country’s long path into high levels of incarceration. He expanded on his vision of law enforcement in “Broken Windows,” a vision that is a clue to the heart of neoconservative thinking.

For Wilson, society took a wrong

turn when it viewed the ideal role of policing as detectives solving a crime or a system following clear rules agreed on in advance. The real purpose of the policeman was to preserve order, pushing the limits of his or her authority in an improvisational, eternal combat against an almost self-conscious disorder. “[T]he police in this earlier period assisted in that reassertion of authority by acting, sometimes violently, on behalf of the community... Solving crimes was viewed not as a police responsibility but as a private one.” The ideal agent in the courtroom isn’t an impartial jury deliberating, but a prosecutor engaged in the same form of combat in the courthouse. The concept of the night watchman is re-purposed: instead of the quiet, passive night watchman looking over the rules of property and law, the government is active, participating, constantly at war with disorder, pushing the laws against its constraints to save the system. This expansion of police power, discretion and punishment isn’t matched by an equal emphasis on those accused.

As Bernard Harcourt examines in *The Illusion of Order*, broken windows policing is predicated on separating neighborhoods into regular, ordered insiders and disordered strangers. Wilson’s view is that regular insiders are the “decent folks” who need to be protected from the disorder generated by strangers. The police, rather than upholding laws and the rights of citizens, uphold order by regulating the behaviors of disorderly insiders and excluding the disorderly outsiders. Criminals lose their insider status in this telling, and excluding them from the community becomes a goal of law. The approach is based on a privileging of order over law, for a lack of order is what attracts criminal behavior, always waiting in the wings to descend.

Wilson believed that a “growing and not-so-commandable utilitarianism” leads many to believe that the police should only intervene in crimes where

there are harms between people. What these people miss, in Wilson's neoconservative approach, is that disordered individuals, even if they aren't directly causing harm to people, may sow the seeds of disorder that can take down an entire community of order. Wilson argues that "Arresting a single drunk or a single vagrant who has harmed no identifiable person seems unjust, and in a sense it is. But failing to do anything about a score of drunks or a hundred vagrants may destroy an entire community."

This view of policing as less a practice of rules than a perpetual struggle to properly administer violence and maintain hierarchy echoes the link between conservatives and violence that political theorist Corey Robin establishes in his book *The Reactionary Mind*. Conservatives display "a persistent, if unacknowledged, discomfort with power that has ripened and matured." Rule that has become complacent and assumed has become weak and debilitating. Robin shows how conservatives have always looked for ways to struggle to renew their dynamism. He argues that many conservatives view "American decadence, traceable back to the Warren Court and the rights revolutions of the 1960s, [as the result of] the liberal obsession with the rule of law." The supposed liberal imagining of the police – as boring rule administrators or competent investigators – is anemic compared to the reinvigorating struggle of police as a force against disorder.

NEOLIBERALISM

MICHEL FOUCAULT defined neoliberalism as a mode of governance that "does not ask the state what freedom it will leave to the economy, but asks the economy how its freedom can have a state-creating function and role, in the sense that it will really make possible the foundation of the state's legitimacy."

When the state intervenes in the functioning of markets, it isn't to rectify injustices but instead to further create and maintain the rigor of the economy itself. And when neoliberalism calls for the government to leave markets to their natural order, it refocuses the function of government power on the regulation of activities that fall outside the formal market. This is exactly how law-and-economics scholars view criminal behavior, as well.

There are numerous examples of conservative believers in the free market criticizing bloated, ineffective government at the same moment they call on it to be even more active as a police presence. Consider the following 1983 speech from President Reagan:

[T]his is precisely what we're trying to do to the bloated Federal Government today: remove it from interfering in areas where it doesn't belong, but at the same time strengthen its ability to perform its constitutional and legitimate functions.... In the area of public order and law enforcement, for example, we're reversing a dangerous trend of the last decade."

Right-neoliberal ideology has naturalized this transition for many, even though it strikes those on the Left as incoherent.

However, as Bernard Harcourt argues in *Illusion of Free Markets*, theorists of the naturalness and supremacy of market exchange have historically also theorized governments that function competently solely within the penal sphere. Indeed, criminality and disorder form the boundary of the rational, ordered free market. The eighteenth-century physiocrat François Quesnay, a major influence on Adam Smith, argued that "All that is required for the prosperity of a nation is to allow men to freely cultivate the earth to the greatest possible success, and to preserve society from thieves and rogues" and that the "only object

of man-made, positive law is to punish severely men whose passions are out-of-order." Early liberals called for laissez-faire while also claiming the term "night watchmen" for the ideal state. The utilitarian Jeremy Bentham believed the government should "be quiet" when it came to the market, while envisioning an all-seeing panopticon prison.

There are two distinct lineages that bring us from there to the Chicago School's law-and-economics approach to crime. There are those who follow in the footsteps of Bentham, such as the economist Gary Becker in his 1968 "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach." This approach involves applying the concept of optimization and rational behavior modeling to crime and the law. And there are those following Friedrich Hayek, like the law professor Richard Epstein, who adheres to a natural law theory. These views are in tension – Hayek believed that Bentham and the other Utilitarians were Continental theory-influenced betrayers of the British constitutions who "introduced into Britain what had so far been entirely absent – the desire to remake the whole of the law and institutions on rational principles."

Where these two intellectual traditions intersect is the Coase Theorem, which states that in a world with no transaction costs, negotiations between individuals will always lead to the results that maximize wealth. Coase, a student of Hayek, incorporates Hayek's notion of "spontaneous order," and rejects the idea that government could improve on the outcome created by rational individuals bargaining among themselves. Criminal punishment, as Epstein would argue, creates the boundaries of the free market, and as such is the place where the government should focus. Epstein notes, "I do think that the prohibition against force and fraud is the central component of a just order."

That criminality does not simply act

as, but creates the boundary of the free market is even more explicit on the utilitarian side. As the libertarian law and economics jurist Richard Posner has written, incorporating Coase's notion of transaction costs, "[t]he major function of criminal law in a capitalist society is to prevent people from bypassing the system of voluntary, compensated exchange – the 'market,' explicit or implicit – in situations where, because transaction costs are low, the market is a more efficient method of allocating resources than forced exchange."

This idea of crime as "market bypassing" means that criminal activities not only harm victims but harm society as a whole, as the central mechanism of markets – determining prices and the value of exchanges – is undermined. A thief bypasses both the market for the good she stole and the labor market where she might get the money to purchase the good legally. Posner is unafraid to take this to its logical conclusion, arguing that "[t]he prevention of rape is essential to protect the marriage market." Since these behaviors are not consequences of the market or embedded within it, this is where the government finds its proper role. Where the government should keep a hands-off approach in all matters economic, it should take a strong and punitive stance on all the criminal activity that takes place outside the natural order of the market.

A NEW FORM OF GOVERNANCE

THE NEW DEAL governing philosophy worked, however imperfectly, to create a space of economic security in a market economy. By encouraging full employment, mass consumption, and unionization along with a safety net for those who fell through the cracks, the chaos that comes with the convulsions of market economics could be mitigated and the business cycle itself could be managed. However

incomplete that project was at the beginning, it imploded in the urban crises of the 1960s and the profitability crisis and stagflation of the 1970s.

One way to understand how governments govern is to examine the ideal subject they work upon. Historically, in the United States, these subjects have ranged from the landowning farmers of the early Republic to the freedmen of the nineteenth century. The "war on crime" turns the ideal subject of governance from the industrial worker of the New Deal into two opposed figures: the potential criminal and the potential victim in need of redress.

The neoconservative and neoliberal worldviews described above can be seen as reactions against the New Deal order. The government as manager of regulatory and service agencies in the New Deal, judged by its ability to provide mass prosperity, becomes an agent of order intent on policing activities and people beyond the realm of market logic. And, crucially, government policy is seen to be legitimate only when it follows the logic of framing problems as analogous to crime and crime control.

The sociologist Loïc Wacquant has described the new government rationality associated with these intellectual revolutions as a "centaur state." The state governs with "a liberal head mounted upon an authoritarian body" – laissez-faire for those at the top, but "brutally paternalistic and punitive downstream."

The neoliberal vision of economic regulation involves, at most, providing economic incentives for those at the top and, to use the popular term of behavioral economics, "nudging" people against their behavioral quirks towards optimal behavior inside "choice architectures." Policy might, for example, subtly encourage long-term savings decisions and discourage poor nutrition choices. Other than fixing these quirks, the government should get out of the way of the free market.

The regime for the poor and those within the criminal justice system is both policed and punitive and – in accordance with behavior that exists outside natural, market ordered society – heavily regulated and ordered by the state. Welfare and aid programs become a disciplinary mechanism for the working poor, with government monitoring and sanctioning taking an increasing role in guiding behavior. According to law professor William Stuntz, the courtroom has become a factory for processing; 95 percent of criminal convictions now come from a guilty plea, avoiding a trial. Arrests have risen almost sevenfold with only 60 percent more prosecutors needed. Meanwhile, prosecutors have been able to pull off the impressive trick of increasing the number of plea bargains while also raising the average length of imprisonment during this time period. The lived experience of prisons is also more punitive. Our current prison system is characterized by severe overcrowding, inadequate medical care, infection rates for HIV, Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, and staph far higher than on the outside world, the degradation of the custodial experience, high costs of keeping social ties intact, punitive long-term isolation, and the ever-present threat of violence and rape.

The extensive government regulation of behavior extends after the prison. As UCLA law professor Sharon Dolovich argues in "Creating the Permanent Prisoner," those leaving prison enter into a dense web of government management, simultaneously punitive and neglectful. People who leave prison face "[b]ans on entry into public housing, restrictions on public-sector employment, limits on access to federal loans for higher education, and restrictions on the receipt of public assistance... The American Bar Association Criminal Justice Section recently embarked on a project to catalogue all state and federal statutes and regulations that impose legal

consequences on the fact of a felony conviction. As of May 2011, the project had catalogued over 38,000 such provisions, and project advisers estimate that the final number could reach or exceed 50,000.” Together, these create a new kind of subject, someone who exists permanently on the outside of our civilization, never meant or able to reintegrate back into our social spaces.

This reworking of governance expands beyond the realms of economic regulations and the social safety net to government broadly, as Jonathan Simon argues in his book *Governing Through Crime*. Governments are seen to act legitimately when they act to combat activities that can be analogized to crimes. The concepts and technologies of the criminal justice system permeate all government activities. The neoliberal vision of government finds this to be the proper role of government, and the neoconservative vision calls for the state to perpetually be pushing the boundaries in any space that allows for combating potential disorder.

Consider urban policy as a policy space where these two ideologies mix. The anthropologist Neil Smith argues that gentrification has created a “revanchist city,” where the goal is to reclaim the lost frontier of urban spaces from undesirables. This is a mix of creating good economic incentives for developers and desirable citizens while also creating heavily policed zones against undesirables. Public spaces are quasi-privatized through funding and maintenance when they aren’t private spaces with public access obligations. Benches are designed so people can’t sleep on them, public restrooms disappear from public spaces, and privatized parking meters require credit cards to park. Numerous other design choices shift the public sphere away from those at the margins, while extensive police presence claims the remaining spaces.

The “War on Terror” has made government agents, from presidents

to CIA interrogators, into actors who aren’t concerned with rules-based governance but instead improvise against disorder and the courts that would try to limit their abilities. This mirrors the police officers fighting against broken windows.

The use of long-term detention to exclude “enemy combatants” based on group associations with outsiders, rather than individual guilt, mimics the logic of mass incarceration and neighborhood order preservation. Conservatives attacked John Kerry for arguing that the “war on terror” should be a law and order issue. They had the same foes as James Q. Wilson – courts, juries, rules, and evidence.

Immigration has been transformed from an issue of assimilating new people and cultures to an issue of policing entirely read through the language and logic of crime management. A new focus on guarded walls, from the border with Mexico to private communities, informs the landscape. In a 2002 opinion from Attorney General John Ashcroft, the government found that local and state police have an “inherent authority” to enforce federal immigration laws. Critics argued that, beyond the lack of practical resources and ability to actually enforce civil complaints related to immigration status, local police enforcing federal immigration status would blur the distinction between criminal and civil enforcement of immigration law, and bring immigration under the policy architecture of the war on crime. The Secure Communities program, pushed under the Obama administration, makes an immigration check part of the booking process police administer, collapsing this distinction further.

In education policy, resources and priorities for education policy in struggling school districts have turned away from ideas of racial equality towards managing and a population of youths as potential criminals and victims. Metal detectors, undercover police,

and persistent surveillance technologies are a new feature of the school landscape. Two Houston-area school districts have started a pilot program of issuing students identification badges with radio signals that allow administrations to track them. (It’s the same technology used for cattle.)

More broadly, policy has been redesigned to be concerned with “moral hazard.” Everything from health care mandates to laws surrounding mortgage and student debts are less about providing goods broadly to citizens than making sure nobody is shirking or behaving irresponsibly. Managing crime also becomes the best justification for advancing other, especially right-wing, policy agendas. Pro-life efforts to create “personhood” status for zygotes have failed, but efforts to create a special class of crimes against pregnant women have experienced major successes. Managers have shifted from using high “efficiency” wages in order to get the best work out of their employees to surveillance and security techniques. And those techniques, from widespread drug testing to monitoring against “time theft,” borrow their urgency from the language of crime.

As recently as the 1960s there was a wave of literature arguing that the prison was becoming obsolete. Now the prison stands as a key mechanism for how the government has dealt with its own powers, and this has reconfigured the role of government. The law-and-order movement invokes a radically different role of the state in relation to its citizens than the one of the post-New Deal era. Though an incomplete project, the New Deal had a model of the state as a guarantor of economic security and freedom. Now the state primarily interacts with society as a maintainer of order. For those hoping to rebuild freedom through the state, finding a new vision of how government works needs to be at the front of the agenda. ■



Keynes' Jetpack

by Mike Beggs



I draw the conclusion that, assuming
no important wars and no
important increase in population,
the economic problem may
be solved, or at least within sight of
solution, within a hundred
years. This means that the economic
problem is not – if we look into
the future – *the permanent problem
of the human race...*

—John Maynard Keynes,
“Economic Possibilities for our
Grandchildren,” 1930

THE SHORT RUN had never looked as bleak to Keynes as it did in 1930: “a slump which will take its place in history amongst the most acute ever experienced.” In Britain, the twenties had not so much roared as spluttered. But when Keynes visited Madrid to give a

lecture, he chose to adapt one he had been trotting out to students for more than two years, attacking both revolutionary and reactionary doomsayers. Pessimism had made people “blind to what is going on under the surface.”

In the long run we are all dead, but not all at the same time. Keynes’

message was simple: extrapolate conservatively the economic growth rate of the modern age so far, and imagine the wonders one hundred years hence: 2030. His audience would not live to see it, but many of their grandchildren would. The great-grandchildren, born in the last quarter of the twentieth cen-

tury, would climb a stairway to heaven and bask in unknown pleasures from middle age. The generation after that would be born into paradise.

In the best traditions of science fiction, the author fudged the precise workings of the technology behind the wonders. Keynes evidently had little growth theory to draw on: he talks in monetary terms of the wonders of compound interest. Investments simply grow at around 2 percent a year – ask not why. Technology improves, for an improvement in “technical efficiency” of 1 percent a year. Making generous room for more of the “disastrous mistakes” that had brought forth the depression, he predicted that living standards would “in the progressive countries” be four to eight times higher a century on. There would be a phase of “technological unemployment” as labor productivity outpaced the finding of new uses for labor, but ultimately we would work out how to spread the dividends so that everyone worked an average of three hours a day.

Science fiction tends to be at once too radical and too conservative in its visions of the future. We don’t have jetpacks, a moonbase, robot butlers, or a mission to Mars, but we do have the internet. Keynes turns out to have been on track in his numerical guesses. According to the long-run data assembled by the late Angus Maddison, per capita real income in the United Kingdom was in 2008 4.4 times that of 1930. Extrapolating that average 1.9 percent annual growth rate forward to 2030, and Keynes’ great-grandchildren (not literal ones; he had no kids) would have on average 6.6 times the real income of his contemporaries in 1930. The United States is right at the upper bound of Keynes’ estimate, having grown on average 0.2 percentage points faster per year: 5 times the real income of 1930 in 2008 and 7.9 times by 2030. (It works out to 7.6 times if we extrapolate from the slower average growth rate since 1970.) Extending the

arithmetic to all the countries Keynes considered “progressive” – Western Europe and the Anglo colonies (Japan was still a long way behind in 1930 and Latin America a mixed bag) – we find real per capita income 5.5 times that of 1930, heading towards a 9-fold increase by 2030. Maddison’s figures give us estimates in the same ballpark for the world as a whole, but extrapolating from the different 1950–2000 data in the Penn World Table, Fabrizio Zilibotti finds a more astonishing 17-fold rise, due to a few extra tenths of a percentage point in annual growth.

And yet, could “the economic problem” seem any less solved? Where is our fifteen-hour workweek? Had Keynes been right about how society would use its productivity growth, we would not find his predictions borne out in the per capita income statistics – these measure only the production of commodities. It can be argued that we have taken some of the dividend in leisure at the end of our individual long runs: life expectancy has risen while retirement ages have fallen since 1930: the average American male enjoys an extra thirteen golden years. But even including this, the average European works almost double the proportion of their lifetime waking hours that Keynes predicted, and Americans two-and-a-half times. People everywhere are being told to lower their expectations and buckle down to years of austerity. Europeans are rioting, Americans occupying.

§

KEYNES REPRESENTS the strange intersection of two traditions. On the one hand, he is an heir to a Victorian stream of aesthetic, moralistic anti-capitalism – with roots in an aristocratic worldview whose genealogy has been traced by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*. He is contemptuous of the “strenuous purposeful money-makers,”

suffering from “a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease.” He looks forward to a

return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue – that avarice is a vice, that the exactions of usury is a misdemeanor, and the love of money is detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow.

On the other hand, Keynes belongs to a tradition of technocratic liberalism, which he played no small part in modernizing himself. Here, the economic order is justified not on the grounds of private property and tradition, but on utilitarian ones. It is a system that works, and to the extent it doesn’t work, experts need to tune up the machine, ignoring the misguided short-term self-interest of labor and capital. Thus the speed at which the economic problem is solved depends on “our willingness to entrust to science the direction of those matters which are properly the concern of science.”

This combination of attitudes explain how Keynes can be seen as both conservative and radical. “Economic Possibilities” is not the only work in which Keynes seems to wax socialist. There is, for instance, the “euthanasia of the rentier” passage at the end of the *General Theory* in which he looks forward to the end of capital incomes and the “functionless investor” who earns them. There too, he stresses that the transition “will be nothing sudden, merely a gradual but prolonged continuance of what we have seen recently in Great Britain, and will need no revolution.” Actually existing socialists, and sometimes the working class itself, disgusted him. In 1925 he asked, “How can I adopt a creed which, preferring the mud to the fish, exalts the boorish

proletariat above the bourgeois and intelligentsia who, with whatever faults, are the quality of life and surely carry the seeds of all human advancement?" He never had much interest in distribution or inequality, except insofar as they were of functional importance to the system: how much would the poor spend out of increments to their income relative to the rich?

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THE SECOND, liberal technocratic side to Keynes remains a vigorous strain in economic thought, but the aristocratic anti-capitalism has been bred out. For the modern neoclassical it is obvious why Keynes' predictions went astray – he was simply wrong about preferences. He projected the ethic of Bloomsbury or the Cambridge Apostles onto the public at large. In the future, everyone would be an aesthete: everyone will learn from "those people who can keep alive, and cultivate into a fuller perfection, the art of life itself and do not sell themselves for the means of life," those people most "able to enjoy the abundance when it comes."

Keynes believed that people had "absolute needs" which could be sated, and could be morally improved to stop caring so much about "relative needs," which are only enjoyed to the extent that we have more than others. As the marginal utility of commodities fell, people would react to the income effect of productivity gains by steadily expressing a preference for more leisure.

Wrong on all counts, says the neoclassical: our indifference curves are evidently not shaped in that way. People have taken their income gains mainly in commodities. For every satiable desire, new desires have arisen, and leisure is too costly in terms of these new needs. We could have done otherwise. Nothing prevents us from working a few hours a week and enjoying all the middle-class comforts 1930

had to offer. It is an affordable option by the very definition of "real income," but we choose not to take it.

This is the baseline argument in a 2008 book of essays by eminent economists looking back on Keynes' 1930 predictions. Around the baseline, a range of respectable opinion offers variations around it. Some contributions are interesting mainly as examples of Keynes' continuing ability to provoke frothing at the mouth among the Right. Edmund Phelps' essay seems to have



infinitely elastic supply curve when it gave us the conservative blogosphere.

People may complain about their First World problems, but this shows only a lack of perspective on their part, or an expressed preference for bitching. As Benjamin Friedman points out toward the end of the collection, this way of thinking has a very long history: Adam Smith, in *The Moral Sentiments*, wrote that "all men, sooner or later, accommodate themselves to whatever becomes their permanent situation."

Where is our fifteen-hour workweek? Had Keynes been right about how society would use its productivity growth, we would not find his predictions borne out in the per capita income statistics – these measure only the production of commodities.

been ghostwritten by a pompous secretary of the chamber of commerce in a mid-sized town, scattering names from Aristotle to Cellini to Cervantes to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, giving his sections titles like "Keynes Disdainful of the Quest for Wealth" and "Keynes Blind to the Intellectual Satisfactions in Business Life." Michele Boldrin and David K. Levine are gracious enough to allow that Keynes was "perhaps not a fool... perhaps, indeed, he was brilliant, possibly so much so that he never had to bother with logical consistency and facts." He was, "we are told" a "giant of economics," and standing on his shoulders they at least "learned something about how not to theorize about human needs and their determinants." If this is your kind of thing, you are in luck: technical progress delivered an

Alfred Marshall, more than a century later, remarked that "after a time, new riches often lose a part of their charm." With standard neoclassical choice theory it is easy to show that people are materially better off than they were a year ago if they could still afford everything they bought back then, and then some – and it is not much of a stretch to put a value on the "then some," because market prices do it for us. If you can do it from one year to the next, it seems no problem to string the gains together across any number of years. Extend the chain long enough, and it seems you can quantify objectively how much better off the average person is today than the average person in 1930. You might argue that real income as a whole comes with diminishing returns of satisfaction – surely we are not

really five times better off. But if that were so, would people not be moving along their indifference curves to enjoy more leisure? Evidently free time is not much more valued relative to the commodities that can be bought with a wage than it was eighty years ago.

Once you start to think about the trend to ever higher living standards, Chicago economist Robert Lucas once said, "It is hard to think about anything else" – anything trivial like stabilization or distribution. If the pie grows fast enough, even the people with the least will see their pieces expand faster than they could hope from a bigger share. Who cares about inequality in the rich world when just about everyone is better off than the upper classes of a hundred years ago and much better off than their contemporaries in poorer countries?

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SOCIALISTS would surely agree with Keynes that while there is no cure for the human condition, the economic problem can indeed be solved. We would disagree that the solution will emerge smoothly and naturally out of capitalism. *Jacobin* writers have repeatedly made the case that both equality and liberation from toil should be at the center of the socialist program. But how do we respond to the optimistic and pessimistic liberal positions?

The tendency of capitalism to awaken new wants even as it satisfies old ones has been discussed by Marxists since Marx himself. But rarely have we taken neoclassical choice theory seriously enough to dispute its implications. One exception is G. A. Cohen, deep in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. He draws a distinction between the *pursuit* schedule – the standard neoclassical demand schedule, which reveals itself in actual market behavior – and the *satisfaction* schedule, which orders bundles of goods

(including leisure) in terms of the satisfaction the individual would actually get from them – which may be unknown to the individual. What individuals demand is not necessarily best for the individuals.

Neoclassical demand theory abandoned reliance on concepts of "utility" for some good reasons – the impossibility of observing it, measuring it, or even saying clearly what it is. It was replaced by a conception of ordinal preferences: we can talk of what someone prefers to something else but not by how much they prefer it. Cohen's suggestion looks like a throwback, and one with the unpleasant connotation that the researcher knows better than the individual about what's good for them. However, the purported measurement of satisfaction had already been smuggled in the back door with the treatment of rising living standards in terms of real income per capita. The relative amounts of money individuals prove themselves willing to pay for each good implicitly becomes a measure of satisfaction. The rigorous neoclassical must admit that choice theory provides the grounds for no such move. All it can say is that *in any given period*, assuming rationality, everybody chooses the available bundle of goods and leisure which they most prefer.

The theory deliberately says nothing about the motivations for such choices. In practice, people express their preferences for certain things over others not necessarily because they bring more pleasure, but also perhaps out of habit, impulse or to avoid dissatisfaction. The other side of the Cohen argument is to emphasize that these reasons do not originate from some mysterious well deep in each individual's soul, but arise in a social context which has formed the person's norms. How the other people around us live affect our expectations for our own lives. It is difficult to resist the pull of norms around us, because we feel not only the satisfactions of

the things we have but the lack of the things we could have. To live with the 1930 commodity bundle in 2012 is not to get 1930 satisfactions, but to feel a lack of everything we have come to expect since then – a lack which the extra leisure will not make up for. So hardly anyone chooses to do it.

Finally, capitalism is structured with an extremely strong bias to redeploying productivity gains towards output expansion. The other possibility, increasing free time, "threatens a sacrifice of profit associated with increased output and sales, and hence a loss of competitive strength." It is no iron law. Differences between Europe and the United States make clear that social norms over vacations and working hours can diverge. But there is certainly a strong tendency towards productivism, which has nothing to do with individual preferences. It is imposed on individual firms by competition and on national policy by macroeconomic considerations: witness the pressure on France's thirty-five-hour working week, or the drive in Australia to increase labor force participation, tapping hidden reserves of labor-power among mothers of young children, would-be retirees, and the disabled.

As my colleague Peter Frase has argued, drawing on the work of labor economist Lonnie Golden, many workers report a preference to be working fewer hours than they do, but the jobs on offer make it difficult to do without sacrificing income more than proportionately. A gigantic marketing effort aims to intensify feelings of want for commodities, while there are no ads for time off.

Cohen's distinction between the pursuit schedule and the satisfaction schedule implies a possible gap between what we choose, given our social and historical positions, and what we would ultimately enjoy most. But it hardly entails a paternalistic imposition of new choices: he is simply urging

a persuasive effort. It differs from the moralistic “over-consumption” argument in not blaming the individual, by recognizing that the shift will be a collective one or it will not happen at all.

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FINALLY, what of the argument that rising living standards make inequality irrelevant? It follows from the above that inequality is directly relevant, because people’s conceptions of how they could and should live are influenced by the lifestyles of those around them – the standards of the wealthy filter down to the rest of us. But even if you believe that argument to be bogus, and that living standards arise objectively from goods consumed regardless of context, inequality matters a great deal.

The quantification of growth simply in terms of “real income” misleads by giving the impression of a homogeneous mass of stuff spewed out by the black box of the economy. Ultimately, income is a claim on the produce of our collective labor and on the natural resources we appropriate. Ever increasing abundance – even if it were ecologically sustainable, and even if it did bring ever-rising satisfaction – is no answer to inequality. Why shouldn’t people have their share of what they help to produce?

Further, because it depends on augmenting the efficiency of labor and capital inputs, technical progress is quite uneven in what it cheapens relative to the average wage. Some labor processes are much more susceptible to productivity increases than others. Economic development has meant large changes in relative prices as well as a general rise in real incomes. It is unlikely, for example, that the average person will ever be able to recreate Keynes’s own lifestyle of the 1920s, no matter how high real incomes grow. (At around £230,000 in today’s pounds, Keynes’s average annual income that

decade of £5068 would still place him just within the British top 1 percent.) The reason is simply that it involved several large houses in central London, fully staffed with servants. The affordability of servants depends entirely on the ratio between their wage and their employer’s income. The value of large houses in Bloomsbury tends to rise with incomes: all the productivity improvement in the world will not cheapen them, but make them dearer.

More seriously, in places like America where middle and lower-class real incomes have stagnated, households have enjoyed not simply a boring but at least comfortably stable basket of commodities. As Larry Summers fretted in the *Financial Times* in January, thinking simply in terms of real income misses the impact of major relative price changes:

Measured via items such as appliances or clothing or telephone services, where productivity growth has been rapid, wages have actually risen rapidly over the last generation. The problem is that they have stagnated or fallen measured relative to the price of food, housing, healthcare, energy, and education.

To the extent that people care more about the cost of food, housing and healthcare than appliances and clothing, this is bad news. And the trend is

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likely to continue, because as manufactures become ever cheaper, demand shifts into areas where productivity growth is much slower. The technological cavalry is becoming weaker. This matters even in countries like Australia, where the real wage has been growing: the cost of food, housing, utilities, petrol, healthcare and education have grown faster.

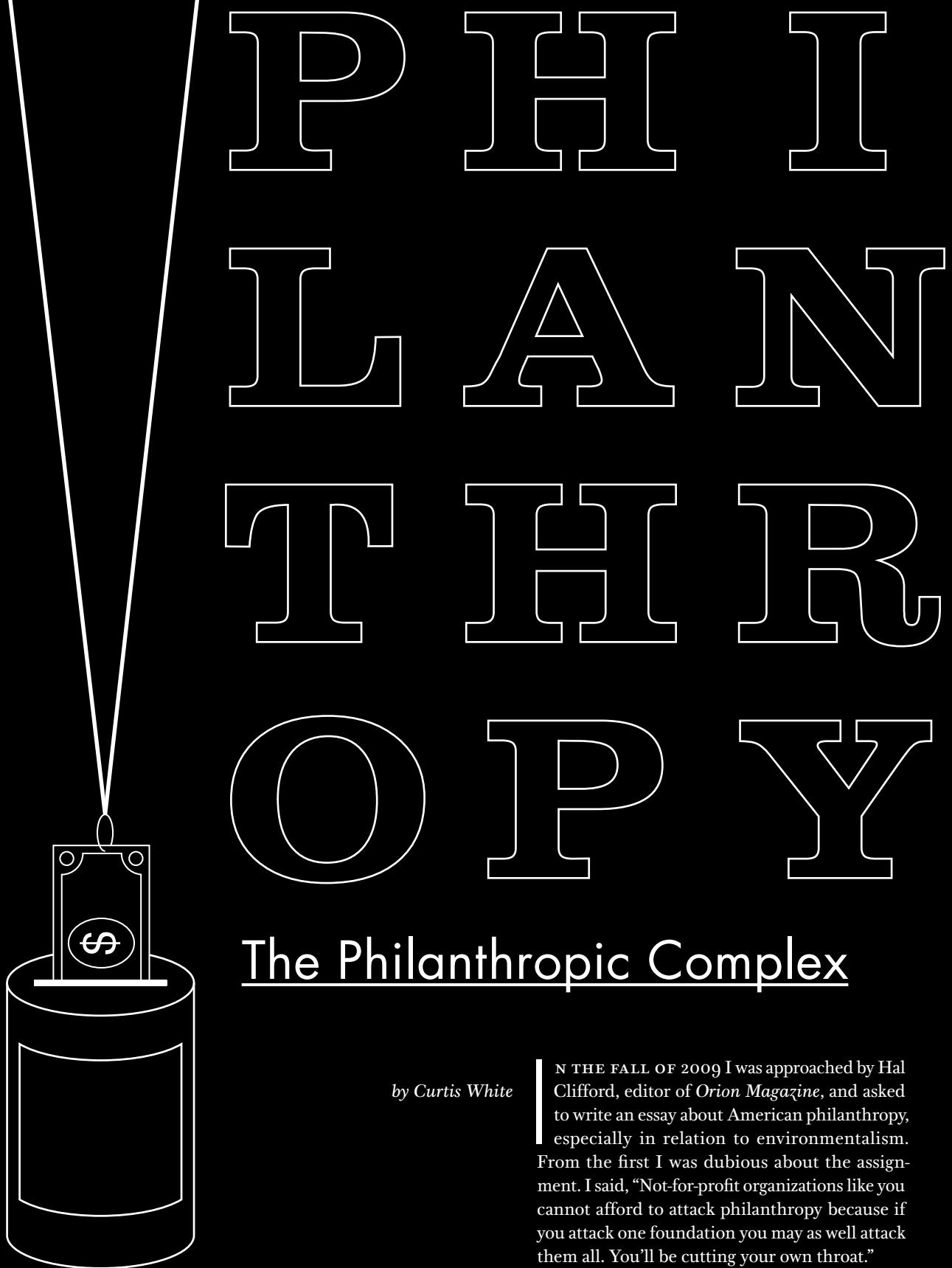
Thanks to the income effect of the cheapening of other goods, households have not on average had to cut back on necessities, but it is a close-run thing. Many households have reacted by supplying more labor. It is hardly surprising many Australians don’t feel as well-off as the commentariat say they should.

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KEYNES’S UTOPIAN VISION of the future was also a call for restraint in the present. It was a call for moderation and patience addressed to a generation tempted by radical challenges to capitalism:

But beware! The time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.

We can now see how this works out. The same message could be given to us today. William Baumol, in his essay in the 2008 retrospective, pretty much does so: “I can now ask the audience to suppose that real US income will once again increase sevenfold in the next century. Can you imagine what luxuries average-earning Americans will have at their disposal?” Will we then say the economic problem is solved? More likely, it is not a problem that will solve itself. ■



The Philanthropic Complex

by Curtis White

In the fall of 2009 I was approached by Hal Clifford, editor of *Orion Magazine*, and asked to write an essay about American philanthropy, especially in relation to environmentalism. From the first I was dubious about the assignment. I said, "Not-for-profit organizations like you cannot afford to attack philanthropy because if you attack one foundation you may as well attack them all. You'll be cutting your own throat."

Hal assured me that while all this might be true, someone had to take up the issue, and *Orion* was willing to do so. And I was the right person to write the essay precisely because I was not an insider but simply an honest intelligence. So, with many misgivings, I said I'd try.

I interviewed about a dozen people on both sides of the field, both givers and getters, and some in the middle. The people I spoke to were eager to articulate their grievances, even if they were just as eager to be anonymous. I also should acknowledge that the development of these grievances was no doubt colored by my own experiences as a board member and president of the board of two not-for-profit organizations in the arts.

After I had worked for several months writing and revising the essay, Hal Clifford announced that he would be leaving *Orion*. My first thought was "uh-oh." The managing editor, Chip Blake, took over my essay and at that point things got dicey. Ultimately he explained that he hadn't been fully aware of my assignment, that he hadn't known the essay would be an attack on "the oligarchy," that it didn't seem to be fully a part of the magazine's usual interests, and that – fatally – from the magazine's point of view, publishing the essay would be an exercise in "self-mutilation."

Which was exactly what I said at the beginning! They had come to their senses, even if it had taken a long time and cost me a lot of work to get there.

But secretly I was pleased. This editorial catastrophe was the best possible confirmation of everything I argue in the essay.

PART I: WHAT ORGANIZATIONS EXPERIENCE

IN THE UNITED STATES, everyone may enjoy freedom of speech so long as it doesn't matter. For those who

would like what they say to matter, freedom of speech is very expensive. It is for this reason that organizations with a strong sense of public mission but not much money are dependent on the "blonde child of capitalism," private philanthropy. This dependence is true for both conservative and progressive causes, but there is an important difference in the philanthropic cultures that they appeal to.

The conservative foundations happily fund "big picture" work. They are eager to be the means for disseminating free market, anti-government ideology. Hence the steady growth and influence of conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, Accuracy in Media, the American Majority Institute, the Cato Institute, the Brookings Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the Hoover Institute, and on (and frighteningly) on.

On the other hand, progressive foundations may understand that the organizations they fund have visions, but it's not the vision that they will give money to. In fact, foundations are so reluctant to fund "public advocacy" of progressive ideas that it is almost as if they were *afraid* to do so. If there is need for a vision, the foundation itself will provide it. Unfortunately, according to one source, the foundation's vision too often amounts to this: "If we had enough money, and access to enough markets, and enough technological expertise, we could solve all the problems." The source concludes that such a vision "doesn't address socio-logical and spiritual problems."

Indeed.

The truth is that organizations whose missions foreground the "socio-logical and spiritual" go mostly without funding. Take for instance the sad tale of the Center for the New American Dream (**NAD**), created in 1997 by Betsy Taylor (herself a funder with the Merck Family Fund). **NAD**'s original mission statement gave priority to "quality of life" issues.

We envision a society that values more of what matters – not just more ... a new emphasis on non-material values like financial security, fairness, community, health, time, nature, and fun.

This is exactly the sort of "big picture" that philanthropy has been mostly unwilling to fund because, it argues, it is so difficult to provide "accountability" data for issues like "work and time" and "fun" (!). (To which one might reasonably reply, "Why do you fund only those things that are driven by data?")

In any event, in 2007 **NAD** ran an enormous deficit: \$500,000 in a budget of less than \$2,000,000. In 2008, however, **NAD** staged a remarkable recovery. Suddenly, its restricted grants grew from \$234,000 in 2007 to \$647,000 in 2008. The cavalry, apparently, had arrived. **NAD**'s savior was the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation, which had given a restricted grant of \$350,000 for 2008.

Good news, except that the money did not fund **NAD**'s vision; it was restricted to a narrow project. **NAD** was now in the bottled water business, as in "don't buy bottled water." **NAD**'s 2008 *Take Action!* section in its newsletters was devoted to the Goldman Gospel: get local athletic teams off bottled beverages, etc. In short, a visionary organization had become a money chaser.

One source summarized the general situation in this way: "Progressive funders say all things are connected, but act as if all things are disconnected. Conservative funders never argue that all things are connected, but then they act – and spend money – as if they were."

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ONE OF THE MOST maddening experiences for those who seek the support of private philanthropy is the lack of transparency; that is, the difficulty of knowing why the foundation makes the decisions it

makes. In fact, most foundations treat this “lack” as a kind of privilege: our reasons are our own. One of the devices employed by philanthropy for maintaining this privilege is what I call the mystique of the foundation’s Secret Wisdom.

So you want to ask, “What do you know that I don’t know? What do you know that makes your decisions wise?” The closest thing to an answer you’re likely to hear is something like this: “The staff met with some Board members last night to discuss your proposal,

what crime he has committed.

The foundation has money but it has no organic idea (no idea that is native to its being) what to do with it. Perhaps the foundation really would like to help someone somewhere, but it can’t quite bring itself simply to trust the organizations it funds and set them free to do their work, in part because it fears that once freed this intelligence and competence might produce results not in keeping with the interests of the foundation.

Not wanting to acknowledge that

how the endowment is invested often leads to conflicts with the stated social purpose of the foundation.

For example, one of the emerging controversies in the world of private philanthropy is the 95-5 question. Foundations are required to give away just 5 percent of their endowment each year. The other 95 percent is invested. But invested where? Environmentalists are particularly sensitive to this question, because if the money is invested in companies that continue to pollute, you have a very disturbing reality: 5 percent does (theoretical) good while 95 percent does demonstrable bad, chasing profits in the same old dirty and irresponsible way.

This issue came to a head when the *Los Angeles Times* concluded a long investigation into the investment practices of foundations by revealing that the Gates Foundation funded a polio vaccination clinic in Ebocha, Nigeria, in the shadow of a giant petroleum processing plant in which the Gates Foundation was invested.

The *Los Angeles Times* report states:

But polio is not the only threat Justice [a Nigerian child] faces. Almost since birth, he has had respiratory trouble. His neighbors call it “the cough.” People blame fumes and soot spewing from flames that tower 300 feet into the air over a nearby oil plant. It is owned by the Italian petroleum giant Eni, whose investors include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (“Dark Cloud Over Good Works of Gates Foundation,” 7 January 2007, Charles Pillar et. al.)

... progressive foundations may understand that the organizations they fund have visions, but it's not the vision that they will give money to.

and we’re very interested in it. But we don’t think that you have the capacity [a useful bit of jargon that means essentially that the organization should give up on what it thought it was going to do] to achieve these goals. So what we’d suggest is that you define a smaller project that will allow you to test your abilities [read: allow you to do something that you have little interest in but that will suck up valuable staff time like a Hoover]. Meanwhile, we’d like to meet with your Board in six months and see where you are.”

And on you go one year at a time. But cheer up, you’ve made your budget for the year!

The uncertainty and opacity of this reality leave organizations frustrated and bewildered. No matter how many meetings are held, no matter how carefully the questions are posed, the fundamentals remain maddeningly elusive. It is as if grant seekers were Kafka’s K in *The Trial*, searching absurdly for someone to tell him exactly

brutal fact, all that the foundation is left with is the chilling satisfaction of its own undiminished and unaccountable authority. None of this, of course, can be said, least of all by the organizations that are still hoping for support.

Like the system of patronage that served the arts and charity from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, private foundations have the rarest privilege of all: they do not have to explain themselves. They do not have to justify the origins of their wealth, nor how they use that wealth, nor what the real benefit of their largesse is.

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IN THE END, what the foundation can be trusted to understand is not forest health, or climate change, or the imperatives of recycling; what it can be trusted to understand is the thing that gives it its privileges: its endowment. Unfortunately, managing

Say what you like about the need to invest wisely for the future of the foundation, but this is prima facie evidence of a deep moral conflict not just at Gates but in all of private philanthropy. The simple fact is that most boards actually don’t know if their investments and their missions align. When pushed on the matter, most foundations respond as Gates did: investments are the foun-

dation's private concern and no business of yours.

But the problem remains: when organizations receive funding, what confidence do they have that this happy money is not itself the expression of a distant destruction? (Perhaps your funder owns stock in British Petroleum. Of course, for the people of Louisiana, that's anything but distant.) When philanthropy proceeds without acknowledging this reality, it proceeds without conscience. It proceeds pathologically. It destroys the thing it claims to love. And it makes the organizations it funds complicit.

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BECAUSE THIS CULTURE of unaccountable authority is rarely challenged, especially by the organizations that receive funding, the foundations become little more than, as one source put it, dramas of "self-aggrandizement" – the lavish year-end celebrations in which many indulge being a particularly noxious demonstration. They like to be thanked for their generosity, and they like the warm feeling of virtue that washes over them when they receive their thanks.

It is as if they could not tell which was the more worthy: the organization for its work or the foundation itself for its generosity. You can sense this tension in the films that the big foundations underwrite for PBS. "Support is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation," emblazoned on the screen with heraldic force, as if it had been struck with a single blow into brass.

Without an understanding of this psychology, it's difficult to explain the most perplexing question asked of private philanthropy: why do most foundations give away only 5 percent of their endowment each year, the legal minimum?

Let's say the funding is going to address the problem of global warming.

If that problem *must* be successfully addressed within the next two decades, if it's really the critical moral issue of our time, or any time, why spend only 5 percent? For a simple reason: spending 5 percent annually will allow the foundation to do its work into eternity. Sadly, a world without a livable climate is easier for the philanthropist to imagine than a world without the dear old family foundation.

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MOST OF THE SOURCES that I contacted for this essay requested anonymity. The reasons for this may be obvious and hardly worth mentioning except that what's hardly worth mentioning is a powerful emotion: fear. Fear of losing a grant or a job, fear of harming a client, or fear of becoming persona non grata in the field. Everyone has skin in the game, so

"discretion is the better part of valor," as Falstaff put it. One source spoke of being threatened with blackballing by one wealthy donor. His error? He'd supported Ralph Nader rather than Barack Obama.

Mark Dowie reports in his book *Losing Ground* that in the early 1990s the Pew Charitable Trust entered the fray over public land forestry. Josh Reichert, Pew's environmental program officer, created a foundation coalition, the National Environmental Trust, to address forestry, among other issues. Once the money was held out, large organizations like the Sierra Club fell in line, talked the talk, and took the money.

The downside was that this program was not allowed to consider a "zero cut" position. The organization would be about moderating policy on behalf of corporate interests. Smaller, more principled organizations like the Native Forest Council were "left out in the cold." But Reichert was unapologetic. According to Dowie, "Reichert stipulated that no one advocating zero cut, criticizing corporations by name, or producing ads that did so would be eligible for membership in the forest coalition – or for funding."

All of this leads to the reasonable assumption that to criticize is to invite punishment. All that's left is a lot of smiling and bad faith.

PART TWO: WHY ORGANIZATIONS EXPERIENCE WHAT THEY EXPERIENCE

NTHE END, philanthropy wants the wrong thing. It may think that it *ought* to want what the lovers-of-nature want, but its actions reveal that, come what may, it loves other things first: the maintenance of its privileges, the survival of its self-identity, and the stability of the social and economic systems that made it possible in the first place.

This is not an inhuman feeling. As Nietzsche put it, it is “all-too-human.” The people who live within the culture of wealth can’t do the things that grassroots environmentalists want them to do without feeling that they are *dying*. They can’t fund the creation of ideas that are hostile to their very existence; they can’t abandon control over the projects they do fund because they fear freedom in others; and they can’t give away all of their wealth (“spending out”) without feeling like they’ve become the Wicked Witch of the West (“I’m melting!”). Instead, philanthropy clings to the assumption of its virtues. Its very being, it tells itself, is the doing of good. It cannot respond to criticism because to do so might lead it to self-doubt, might lead it to *honesty*. And that would be fatal.

The great paradox of environmental philanthropy is this: How do institutions founded on property, wealth, and privilege (in short, plutocracies) seek to address the root source of environmental destruction if that source is essentially the unbridled use of property, wealth, and privilege? And yet when we ask that foundations abandon their privileges and simply provide funding so that we activists can do our work without hindrance, what the foundation hears is a request that they will their own destruction. Not unreasonably, they are bewildered by the suggestion and unwilling to do so.

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THERE’S AN OLD SAYING on the Left that goes something like this: capitalism accepts the idea that it will have enemies, but if it must have enemies it will *create them itself and in its own image*. In fact, it needs them in the same way that it needs the federal government: as a limit on its own natural destructiveness.

The periodic Wall Street meltdown aside, the most dramatic problem facing capitalism for the last thirty years

has been its tendency to destroy the very world in which it acts: the environmental crisis in all its manifestations. The response to this crisis has been the growth of the mainstream environmental movement, especially the Environmental Protection Agency and what we call Big Green (e.g. the Sierra Club). But it should go without saying that Big Green was not the pure consequence of an upswell of popular passion; it was also the creation of philanthropic, federal, and corporate “gift giving.”

For instance, the Natural Resources Defense Council was *created* by the Ford Foundation, just as Pew created the National Environmental Fund. (Pew itself was first endowed with money from the Sun Oil Company. At its inception, Pew’s political views were deeply conservative. It advocated free markets and small government, and funded the John Birch Society.) These large environmental organizations are more dependent on federal and foundation support, and accordingly tend to take a “soft” line on economic and industrial reform. As Mark Dowie reports, “They are safe havens for foundation philanthropy, for their directors are sensitive to the economic orthodoxies that lead to the formation of foundations and careful not to do anything that might diminish the benefactor’s endowment.”

As with the Environmental Protection Agency, Big Green is not so much an enemy as a self-regulator within the capitalist state itself. The Sierra Club is not run by visionary rebels, it is upper management. It really does have effects that are beneficial to the environment (many!), but in no way are those benefits part of an emerging new world that is hostile to the industries that are the most immediate origin of environmental destruction.

Consequently, a given industry may attack environmentalism when it interferes with its business, but the plutocracy as such is dependent on Big

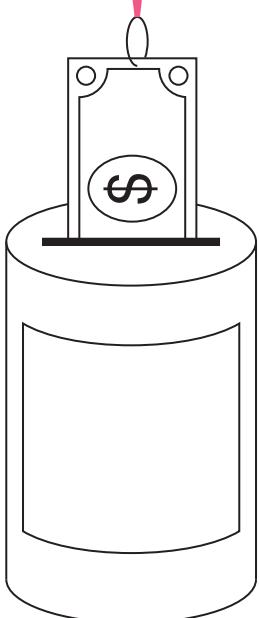
Green and will regularly replenish its coffers so that it may stay in existence, never mind the occasional annoyance for an oil company that wants to spread its rigs and pipelines across delicate tundra.

Capitalism has taught environmentalism how to *protect it from itself*. Federal and philanthropic funding allow Big Green to play a forceful national role, but it also provides the means for managing and limiting the ambitions of environmentalism: no *fundamental* change. Sadly left out of negotiations between government, industry, and environmental NGOs are the communities of people who must live with whatever decision is reached. As Paula Swarengin of Beckley, West Virginia, commented after House Republicans stripped the EPA of its authority to refuse a permit for yet another project for mountain top coal mining, “The people of Appalachia are treated like we’re just disposable casualties of the coal industry. We live in the land of the lost, because nobody wants to hear us.”

Will environmental philanthropy ever convince the federal government to limit the ability of the coal industry to destroy mountaintops in West Virginia? Maybe. But will they seek to curb that industry’s constitutional freedom to deploy capital in their ruinous “pursuit of happiness”? No. Absolutely not. In the aftermath of the British Petroleum disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, no one understands the importance of environmentalism better than the stockholders of BP. They will be very happy for environmental groups to put pressure on the oil industry to provide more safety for deep sea drilling. But they are most unlikely to welcome the end of deep sea drilling itself, and putting an end to the reign of corporations is utterly beyond the pale.

Philanthropy and the organizations it funds are what they are. They are not in the revolution business. They are in risk management. ■

Pink Different



by Kate Redburn

BEFORE THIS YEAR, you probably never gave much thought to where the Susan G. Komen Foundation gives its money. Not because you don't care about ending breast cancer, which kills over 400,000 Americans each year, but because you were busy extricating yourself from a giant pile of pink consumer crap. Who has time to read nonprofit financial reports when you're staving off a rising tide of lipsticks and loungewear?

In her 2001 report on her own experience with breast cancer and the accompanying cult of infantilizing kitsch, Barbara Ehrenreich sees a classified ad for a "breast cancer teddy bear" – complete with pink ribbon – and prays, "Let me die of anything but suffocation by the pink sticky sentiment embodied in that teddy bear." Thanks to Komen CEO Nancy Brinker, Americans can buy pink colored products from a huge number of chain retailers with the peace of mind that they are purchasing "with purpose to end breast cancer forever." "Awareness' beats secrecy and stigma of course," concedes Ehrenreich, "but I can't help noticing that the existential space in which a

friend has earnestly advised me to 'confront [my] mortality' bears a striking resemblance to the mall." Everything from halftime shows to handguns has been blazoned with the Pink brand. Not to mention the cottage industry required to affix pink ribbons to the remaining products which cannot be literally "pinkwashed."

It's no small feat that this monster charity has successfully branded a color, making pink synonymous with fighting breast cancer. According to an old *New York Times* profile, Brinker is well aware of her achievement. Thanks to Brinker, "breast cancer has blossomed from wallflower to the most popular girl at the corporate charity prom." Her numbers are indeed impressive. Brinker brought in \$420 million in FY2010 alone, and spent a whopping \$141 million on public education campaigns. In a public health climate scrambling just to keep ahead of emergency care, that kind of investment in prevention is extraordinary. Brinker has responded to criticism that she is branding a disease, by telling the grey lady that "America is built on consumerism [...] To say we shouldn't use

it to solve the social ills that confront us doesn't make sense to me."

Of course, it was confronting those social ills that got Brinker and the Foundation in a world of trouble when they announced plans to stop the flow of \$700,000 to Planned Parenthood. Although Komen's FY2010 report proudly highlights that foundation assistance helped fund 650,000 breast screenings, they apparently weren't so thrilled with that *other stuff* going on at Planned Parenthood.

We all know what happened next. The reaction to such blatant politicization of women's health was met with wrath from across the chattersphere. The outrage was palpable, and even compelled the ever-generous Mayor Bloomberg to announce a gigantic personal contribution to Planned Parenthood. In a matter of days, short a top official and quite a lot of PR capital, Komen retracted the decision. Media attention dissolved almost instantaneously, except to report the slow bleed of high-ranking Komenites in the wake of the disaster. Defenders of Planned Parenthood declared collective victory, including millions in new donations to the institution, and then went home to watch the Superbowl.

We should not be so hasty. The Komen Foundation PR debacle may be over, but it illuminates a much larger disaster built into the charity model of social justice. If there were adequate public funding for health care, including preventive screenings, the private pullout would barely register on our radars. And coming from a group whose CEO served as an Ambassador for Bush41, this kind of politicization should hardly surprise us. What do you expect when the social safety net is replaced by corporate benevolence?

This is the very definition of the nonprofit industrial complex: the state abdicating management of public goods to the private sector. Women's health is determined in a boardroom, untouched by the pesky trappings of

democracy. Having inhaled too deeply at the altar of neoliberalism, politicians eschew public programs in favor of the nonprofit sector, then turn around and praise the white knights of charity work for their noble contribution to society. "Our nonprofits," according to Obama, "can provide the solutions," apparently because he's too spineless to fight for them directly. A better solution, I'd venture, does not require selling a single cross-promotional beanie baby. It is a bizarre effect of the professionalization of social justice work that the nonprofit structure is the primary vehicle for promoting change, when everything from the internal organization to the executive pool are sewn of corporate cloth.

Nonprofits are simply not set up to challenge the economic status quo. Indeed, nonprofits are *exactly the same* as other businesses, save one difference. As economist Burton Weisbrod explained a quarter-century ago,

Contrary to their name, nonprofit organizations can be and often are highly profitable. They are restricted not in how much income they can generate, but rather in how it is distributed.... it must be devoted to the tax-exempt purpose of the organization. It is the profit motive, therefore, not the profit itself, that is restricted.

Thus we have huge institutional nonprofits proclaiming that their ultimate goal is to succeed themselves out of existence, as if a business would ever close up shop while the getting was still good.

The result is that vulnerable women do not receive necessary help, while rich women race for the cure. In the glossy 2010 Komen report, the Foundation touts \$40 million in community grants targeting women of color. That's a nice chunk of change, but is nearly \$10 million less than the foundation spent on advertising in the same year.

Ironically, Nancy Brinker sees her emphasis on consumer product tie-ins as the "democratization of a disease." Lots of consumers undoubtedly feel the same way, assuaging their guilt, fears, and grief at the check-out counter. But buying a key chain isn't democratic participation. As citizens concerned about public health, we should be demanding publicly funded healthcare for all, and insisting on a health system whose egalitarianism would be ingrained in its very structure, not cited as an incidental byproduct of corporate goodwill.

Some of the Komen Foundation's corporate relationships are quite remarkable in this regard. Consider "Buckets for the Cure," an actual initiative wherein some of KFC's grilled chicken proceeds went to the Foundation. Both parties apparently agreed to nix the genius plan this year, after an onslaught of criticism stemming from the fact that obesity is a known risk factor for breast cancer. Komen is hardly the only nationally prominent charity brand to face this type of criticism. Fifty percent of Gap's income from Bono's AIDS charity brand Product(RED) goes to his foundation, which sounds great until you learn about the horrific labor practices of many Gap suppliers. It almost absolves Old Navy of the cognitive dissonance necessary to applaud itself in the fight against breast cancer when a mere five cents of every dollar earned through their Komen-sponsored t-shirt line actually goes to the charity.

But it wouldn't matter how much of the proceeds were actually going to charity. *Komen Foundation v. Planned Parenthood* has been decided in the court of public opinion, but the larger problem remains. The controversy helps identify the twin evils that we face: the privatization of basic life chances, and placation of progressive political impulses through capitalist accumulation. ■



Introduction: Europe Against the Left

by Seth Ackerman

FOR MOST OF THE twentieth century, the hopes and frustrations of the global left were stitched into the two red flags of communism and social democracy, political traditions marked indelibly by their European origins. Of these tattered traditions, Europe today, along with Latin America, stands as a last remaining redoubt.

Of course, the final decades of the twentieth century saw European socialism in its various guises lose much of the soil in which it had grown for gen-

erations, as the continent's industrial towns decomposed and its leftist parties and trade unions were hollowed out. Still, despite everything, the socialist idea retains in Europe a cultural resonance and legitimacy, as well as an institutional base, that exceed anything comparable in the democratic world. If the twenty-first century were to bring any global resurgence of socialism, Europe would likely be among the first regions to feel the tremors.

This special section of *Jacobin* looks into the prospects and problems

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of the European left in the new age of austerity. Why now? What makes this perennial sad story worthy of another reexamination? I'd like to suggest that Europe today is witnessing developments that may soon bring an end to the last forty years' trajectory of steady left decline; whether what comes next will be a revival or a final collapse will be determined by events that lie closer than we think.

The default mode of left politics in Europe in the past four decades has been a steady narrowing of political horizons, a lowering of expectations. This path has led from François Mitterrand's 1972 Common Program, with its exuberant call to "*changer la vie*" via a "rupture" with capitalism, to his "U-turn" into austerity a decade later, to his helpless plaint a decade after that, when pressed on France's endless mass unemployment, that "we tried everything." It led from the socialist vision of the British Labour Party's Alternative Economic Strategy, inaugurated in 1973, to New Labour architect Peter Mandelson professing to be "intensely relaxed about people

getting filthy rich" a generation later. And it led, more modestly, from the "reform euphoria" of the Willy Brandt era in Germany – the electoral high-point of the Social Democratic Party's 140-year parliamentary history – to an altogether different sort of "reform" euphoria under Gerhard Schröder, whose unprecedented assault on the German welfare state a decade ago forms a key moment in Alexander Locascio's account of the rise of the German Left Party in this section.

In grasping for explanations of social democracy's historic decline, commentators on the Left have tended to fall into two opposite traps. The first – a staple of vernacular left-wing analysis – is that of political voluntarism, in which a story is told of treacherous center-left politicians conniving to sell out their co-opted working-class constituencies at the first opportunity. This version gains its plausibility from a long history of social-democratic governance in which the imperatives of capitalist management have always, in the last instance, had to trump the interests of social progress.

The problem with fixing the blame on craven politicians, however, is that it explains too little. Why did the social-democratic betrayals of the postwar Golden Age typically represent failures of nerve regarding promised social *advances*, while the betrayals of the past forty years have so often amounted to the brazen championing of *retreats*?

When the question is posed this way, a different type of answer is often forthcoming – this one falling into the opposite trap, that of economic determinism. In this version, unfathomably profound tectonic forces within world capitalism are said to have changed the rules of the game in the 1970s, rendering social democracy unviable and obsolete. Politicians, in this account, though perhaps still two-faced, ultimately had no choice but to comply with the dictates of falling profit rates, or entrenched overcapacity in global manufacturing, or the end of "Fordism." Where the voluntarist perspective gains its radical sheen by scorning "reformists," the deep-structural explanation gains it through an ostensibly Marxist stress on the illusions of "reform."

The starting point for understanding social democracy's slow collapse since the 1970s is to grasp the economic underpinnings of its success in the Golden Age. As the Dutch political scientist Ton Notermans documents in *Money, Markets, and the State*, a penetrating history of social-democratic economic policy since World War I, the precondition of left governance under capitalism has always been the ability to reconcile full employment, requiring expansionary monetary policy, with price stability; and this depends on the availability of mechanisms to control inflation directly at the source, by repressing or moderating wages or prices without having to resort to the weapon of unemployment.

In the absence of such price-repressing instruments, maintaining a tolerable level of inflation requires

the bludgeon of permanently high unemployment achieved through tight money. Social democracy under such conditions is impossible, since the only tools that politicians can now credibly claim to boost employment are microeconomic: “reforms” that attack union bargaining power, minimum wages, job protections, social insurance contributions, and the like. To make matters worse, the regime of high interest rates necessitates chronic austerity, as public debt increases faster than national income and social spending has to be constantly cut back. As Chris Maisano explains in his essay, this is the world Europe has been living in since the 1970s.

In the postwar Golden Age, a panoply of wage and price-repressing institutions were available to Western European governments – in some cases taking the clumsy form of wage and price controls, but more often various incomes policies and social pacts negotiated with unions to moderate their wage demands. By achieving inflation control through *microeconomic* means, they freed left-wing governments to focus on maintaining full employment through *macroeconomic* means – almost always via a steady supply of cheap money (rather than the somewhat mythical “Keynesian deficit spending” so often invoked in retrospect).

This Golden Age strategy began to come unglued during the boom of the late 1960s, when ultra-full employment gave workers an unprecedented degree of bargaining power on the shop floor. In the hothouse atmosphere of Vietnam era radicalization and generational change within the working class, union leaders were no longer able to contain rank-and-file workers’ wage demands, and a “wage explosion” set in around the turn of the decade. Repeated attempts to negotiate social pacts with union leaders foundered amidst wildcat strikes and local “wage drift.”

For a few years, there were hopeful

signs throughout Europe – from the Meidner Plan in Sweden to the Social Contract in Britain – that these conditions might foretell a push *beyond* social democracy, toward some fundamental transformation. But after 1973, when the West was hit by the quadrupling of oil prices and a worldwide productivity slowdown, inflation and unemployment *both* surged simultaneously, and each seemed suddenly impervious to the usual remedies.

It cannot be overstressed how shocking and confusing these events appeared, not only to finance ministers and central bankers, but to left-wing party activists and trade union militants at the base. While in retrospect there is good reason to think that the adverse shift in the inflation-unemployment tradeoff was a temporary reaction to the instability of the mid 1970s, to them it did seem as if the rules of the game had suddenly changed, and they could only interpret the flow of events during these years as so much incoming data, revealing the grim new laws of motion of a transformed economic world.

Of great importance in shaping perceptions was the relative stability that Germany’s Bundesbank achieved for a few years in the mid-to-late 1970s after switching to a strict anti-inflation monetarist regime, while in France an attempted stimulus in 1975 made no dent in unemployment, but sent inflation soaring to 12%. Observers drew the appropriate lessons. In 1976, the right-wing French government shifted to its own contractionary policy, explicitly justifying it by pointing to German success, and two years later French president Valéry Giscard D’Estaing decided to tie France to the mast of austere German monetary policy by creating, with Germany’s Social Democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the European Monetary System of fixed exchange rates.

The last act of this morality play arrived when François Mitterrand

came to power in 1981 on a radicalized Keynesian reflation program that had been devised a decade earlier. Inevitably, applying it in the new context of Europe-wide monetary rigor led only to a series of forced devaluations and, ultimately, to the Socialists’ ignominious March 1983 retreat into orthodoxy and realignment with Germany. This retreat was then institutionalized by Mitterrand’s agreement to a plan for a single currency under a German-style central bank – making France’s and Europe’s subordination to Teutonic monetary policy irrevocable, and sanctifying it with a halo of “European” idealism. By this point Germany itself was no longer immune to deflation. Unemployment rates, having averaged less than 1% in Germany and 2% in France in the decade before the oil shock, rose to heights of 8% and nearly 10% by the mid 1980s. With the exception of a few years in the late 1980s, they have largely stagnated in that range.

For a while, the partisans of old-style postwar Keynesianism, especially in its traditional American bastion, put up a fight. In 1984, Nobel laureate James Tobin bewailed the “prevailing attitudes” of “fatalism and complacency”: “The lesson learned by many policymakers, influential citizens and economists is that unemployment cannot be cured [by expansionary policies] without unacceptable risks of inflation. This view is more solidly entrenched in Europe than North America.” Tobin judged that analysis a “misreading of, or at least an overreaction to, the events of the 1970s.”

But by the mid 1990s, the vast transnational apparatus of neoliberal policy economics – central banks, finance ministries, international institutions, academic departments, and elite economic journalists – had converged on a single, hegemonic intellectual framework for understanding these economic relationships, one that quickly hardened into an almost un-

thinking *doxa*.

The centerpiece of the received view is the concept of the “non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment” – the NAIRU, or “natural” rate of unemployment, a construct that grew out of Milton Friedman’s late-1960s macroeconomic counterrevolution. At any given moment, the theory holds, an economy has an equilibrium rate of unemployment at which inflation will be stable. In the short run, policymakers can try to force the actual unemployment rate below the NAIRU by stimulating demand; but this course will show its futility by yielding ever-rising inflation rates, until the policy is finally reversed and unemployment restored to its equilibrium level – at which point inflation will stabilize, but now at its new, higher rate. (The reverse is also held: a negative shock that pushes unemployment *above* its natural rate will cause ever-falling inflation, until it is pushed back down again by demand stimulus.)

The natural rate, then, sets the limit of a capitalist society’s economic ambitions. Critical, therefore, is the question of how the NAIRU’s level is supposedly determined. As Friedman first argued in his celebrated 1968 presidential address at the American Economic Association, the level of the NAIRU is that which is “ground out” by the “actual structural characteristics of the labor and commodity markets,” including, first of all, their “market imperfections.” By preventing wages from adjusting to productivity, labor market imperfections (or, to use the current term of art, “rigidities”: unemployment insurance, union collective bargaining rights, disability benefits, employment regulation, payroll taxes, minimum wages, etc.) doom a country to a high NAIRU, and hence to mass unemployment.

The only solution is a comprehensive round of “structural reforms,” the going euphemism for the systematic dismantling of the social-democratic

achievements of the twentieth century.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, this orthodoxy of rigidities, natural rates, and “structural reforms” was lent an air of plausibility by the ubiquitous comparison with the “flexible labor markets” of the United States, where unemployment rates were continuously held well below those of the major European economies without sparking inflation. And it was ruthlessly enforced by the actual policy of the European Central Bank itself, which made no secret of its opposition to the use of monetary policy to reduce unemployment, since, in its words, “the level of employment [is], in the long run, essentially determined by real (supply-side) factors... notably property rights, tax policy, welfare policies and other regulations determining the flexibility of markets.”

Thus the post-1980 regime of social-democratic decay has its origins in the interaction between two specific historical developments: first, subjectively, a creeping loss of belief – shared across the political spectrum and grounded in the traumas of the 1970s – that full employment could be sustained; then, objectively, the gradual “locking in” of this belief into the structures of European monetary and governance institutions, systems from which dissent and divergence became increasingly costly or even impossible. The inexorable logic laid out by Ton Notermans swiftly set in: once full employment via macroeconomic means was ruled out – by *acts of political choice, though under the pressure of events* – social democrats hoping to “manage the system” were all but forced to become microeconomic neoliberals. Meanwhile, microeconomic incomes policies that once aimed to stabilize domestic inflation in a Golden Age world of abundant demand degenerated into modern “social pacts” aiming, in beggar-thy-neighbor fashion, to pilfer scarce demand from foreign competitors by undercutting their wage

and price levels. Capitalists and their political allies, naturally, were quick to capitalize on the Left’s defensive stance to push the counterrevolution even further.

But the global crisis of 2008 has set in motion forces that threaten the smooth functioning of this neoliberal regime. The first threat is intellectual. It is not simply that the crisis has tended to discredit neoliberalism in general. More specifically, the vast rise in American unemployment has dealt a serious blow to the specific NAIRU-based intellectual edifice supporting the status quo. By itself, the simple fact that America’s vaunted flexible labor markets have coexisted with sharply depressed employment rates – in 2010, the US working-age population had a lower employment rate than every West European country except Italy, Spain, Greece, and Ireland – already makes it difficult to blame European unemployment on rigidities.

But even more damaging has been the behavior of US inflation. In 2009 and 2010, when unemployment skyrocketed beyond all reasonable estimates of the NAIRU, mainstream center-left economists who accepted the consensus, such as Paul Krugman, duly predicted that inflation would fall continuously, even to the point of deflation. Instead, by the end of 2010, inflation stabilized and even rebounded; by the canons of mainstream theory, this should mean that the natural rate of unemployment – supposedly determined by slow-moving fundamental economic structures – had suddenly jumped to European levels. To most mainstream economists, especially those within the Democratic orbit, this was one credulity-straining bridge too far. Moreover, the parallel with the European experience of the 1980s was disturbingly evident.

At first faintly, but then louder, a long-neglected alternative theory began to make itself heard in policy debates. In 1986, Larry Summers and

Olivier Blanchard published a paper, motivated by concern about the situation in Europe, suggesting that the “natural” rate of unemployment could shift simply due to a change in the *actual* unemployment rate. Borrowing a term from physics, they called this concept “hysteresis”: a situation in which the present state is influenced by the history of past states. Although the difference may seem technical, it overturns the fundamental logic of the Friedmanite view that only microeconomic rigidities and imperfections determine the NAIRU.

If an elevated NAIRU can be caused by high unemployment itself, then a protracted period of tight money can produce an unemployment rate that at first exceeds the NAIRU, pushing down inflation, but that eventually pulls the NAIRU up towards itself, congealing into a new “permanent” equilibrium. This sequence seems to describe the European experience of the 1980s. Presumably, then, the reverse would be true as well: a period of expansionary policy, though initially inflationary, could eventually push the NAIRU down and result in a permanent reduction in unemployment. Blanchard and Summers suggested a number of mechanisms that might produce this effect, but their concept found few supporters within the firmament of mainstream macroeconomics.

When the 2008 crisis hit, more than twenty years later, Summers was assuming the role of chief economic adviser in the Obama White House; Blanchard was chief economist at the International Monetary Fund. As Laurence Ball, a prominent macroeconomist at Johns Hopkins, wrote in 2008, “Blanchard and Summers have been poor stewards of their hysteresis idea” – either ignoring or explicitly denying the possibility of hysteresis in the twenty years since publishing their paper. “When even the creator of an idea doesn’t seem to believe it, the idea loses credibility,” he added wryly.

Ball himself was a lonely voice in the profession producing a raft of evidence for hysteresis, showing that extended periods of high unemployment do indeed raise the NAIRU, specifically by increasing the share of long-term unemployed, who gradually become detached from the labor market, exerting less and less downward pressure on inflation. Ball showed empirically that it was those countries whose central banks refused to reverse their tight monetary policies in the 1980s, even in the face of soaring joblessness, that experienced large increases in equilibrium unemployment (in contrast to the US experience). And he demonstrated that those few countries that have achieved large *declines* in equilibrium unemployment have done so following periods of rising inflation – suggesting that these success stories were brought about by expansionary policy or other forms of demand stimulus, not supply-enhancing “reforms,” which should tend to reduce inflation.

Versions of this sort of unreconstructed Keynesian view of the labor market were once the basis of macroeconomic policymaking by social democrats, but for decades now they have been virtually banished from the councils of mainstream economics. Under the pressure of the crisis, however, the consensus has recently begun to buckle. In a major paper released this March, Larry Summers finally returned to the idea he birthed almost stillborn a quarter-century ago. Written with Brad DeLong, a former Clinton administration official, Summers’ paper includes a lengthy review of the hysteresis hypothesis, citing the dissident work of Ball and others and concluding heretically that “the case that high European unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s was a result of a long cyclical depression starting in the late 1970s is quite strong” – dismissing in a footnote “the principal alternative theory” that it was a “supply-side phenomenon” caused by a reaction to “rigid labor market

institutions.”

Make no mistake: a paper by Larry Summers will not by itself change so much as a single basis point of interest rates in Frankfurt. But the thirty-year-long intellectual united front of transatlantic neoliberalism is beginning to crack – a loss of faith in long-accepted models reminiscent of the turmoil of the 1970s. And what makes this intellectual reassessment potentially so significant is that it comes just as the European institutions that embody and enforce the intellectual orthodoxy are facing an unprecedented degree of political and economic instability.

There is no need to rehearse the narrative of the endless Eurozone crisis that began in 2009. Suffice it to say it has, for the first time, thrown into question fundamental features of the monetary union first conceived twenty years ago: the no-bailout principle insisted on by Germany; the independence of the central bank; the irreversibility of euro membership. What was once seen as a bewildering technical issue has become a vital matter of day-to-day social stability in country after country. Austerity enforced from Brussels, Frankfurt, and Bonn is not only sinking Europe into an ever-deeper depression with no visible endpoint; it is searing the political connection between daily hardships and EU structures into the consciousness of the continent’s citizens. In the interview featured in this section, the French political scientist Emmanuel Todd speaks of a “vast debate on economic globalization which will inevitably take place after the [May presidential] election,” and predicts that the winner will face decisive pressure from the French middle and even upper classes, who “are now turning their backs on free trade and perhaps even on the euro.”

Moreover, the astonishing defiance of democratic norms that has become an essential feature of European Union governance – a key issue in the rise of the Dutch Socialist Party

(sp) highlighted by Steve McGiffen in this issue – is increasingly becoming its defining characteristic in the eyes of Europe's citizens. Already in 2005, after the European Constitution failed in referenda in France and the Netherlands, it was simply repackaged as an ordinary treaty and passed via national parliaments; when that treaty was then rejected by the Irish in a referendum of their own, they were made to rerun their vote like schoolchildren who had failed a test. Last fall, when Greek prime minister George Papandreou had the temerity to call for a popular referendum on the austerity package that will subject his country to years of impoverishment and social disintegration, he was swiftly forced to resign and replaced with a technocratic viceroy dispatched from the European Central Bank. The same month, a former European Commissioner, Mario Monti, was brought in to run Italy after Berlusconi lost the confidence of EU leaders.

Now the next major question will be the fate of the “fiscal compact” signed by European leaders at a summit early this year. Agreed to at the most perilous moment of last year’s debt crisis, after the head of the European Central Bank openly blackmailed heads of state by threatening to withhold a rescue of the continent’s teetering debt markets unless they signed, the document envisions a strictly enforced regime of permanent budget austerity imposed on every country in the Eurozone. It must now be sent to parliaments or popular referenda and ratified by twelve of the seventeen members of the Eurozone before next January. There have been growing signs that this effort will not be so easy. French Socialist presidential candidate François Hollande, favored to win election in May, has declared that he will insist on “renegotiating” the compact, and similar noises have been made by the German Social Democrats and Spanish Socialists – although none of these has so far ques-

tioned the treaty’s essential features. The Dutch Labor Party, under pressure from the sp, has announced that it will vote no if the current center-right government insists on meeting the 3% deficit target mandated this year by Brussels. And in Ireland, which will once again vote on the treaty via referendum, the odds are impossible to guess.

If the treaty were to fail the ratification process, no one could predict the consequences. Yet there is no guarantee of how these events will unfold. It is entirely possible, as Chris Maisano reminds us in his essay on the European center-left, that the permanent austerity regime will defeat all challenges and will end by undoing what remains of European social democracy. The balance of political forces will be decisive.

It is in this context that *Jacobin* examines a distinct new political trend that has become especially visible since the mid 2000s. As social-democratic parties have migrated to the right since the end of the Cold War, a new group of far-left challengers, many of them descended from various strands of the communist tradition, has gradually moved from the political margins to the center of political life, to fight for genuine left politics in a number of countries. Although still in its early stages, this evolution is growing in importance, and the articles by Alexander Locascio and Steve McGiffen in this section sympathetically profile two of its most important and intriguing examples: the German Linkspartei and the Dutch Socialist Party. Other examples abound throughout Europe: In Greece, the Coalition of the Radical Left (**SYRIZA**) is currently set to triple its vote share in elections this spring, polling ahead of the discredited social democrats of **PASOK** (as is the Communist Party). In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a left-wing dissident who broke off from the Socialist Party to establish the Parti de Gauche in 2008, has formed an electoral alliance with the Communist Party to contest this year’s elections; although his standing in polls has essentially matched the typical ceiling of support for the fractious French far left (around 15%), Mélenchon, a commanding orator who opens his speeches by reading from Victor Hugo, has managed for the first time since the Communist Party’s heyday to unite that vote around a single standard-bearer. And in Norway, the Socialist Left Party, while currently weak, has been that rare breed: a party of the radical left with real influence over government policy. After a remarkable grassroots campaign by the country’s unions in the early 2000s, the social-democratic Labor Party was forced to accept the once-marginal grouping as a coalition partner. Since then, Labor has been obliged to abandon much of the neoliberal program it had gradually adopted in the 1990s – privatization and marketization of health and social service, EU membership, participation in NATO wars lacking a “clear U.N. mandate.” The coalition continues today, and the current Norwegian government is, along with Iceland’s, probably the most left-wing in Europe.

Finally, the interview with Emmanuel Todd that we offer in this section presents an idiosyncratic but compelling analysis of the volatile state of French politics amid the Eurozone upheavals. One of the most perceptive observers of French society, Todd shares large parts of the radical left’s analysis of the crisis, but has little time for Mélenchon’s outsider campaign. Instead he believes that history may force the French social democrats themselves into the role of radicals *malgré eux*.

However improbable his predictions may seem, Todd’s analysis, like the other essays in this section, does much to lay bare the converging elements that promise to make the coming months and years a major turning point in Europe’s history. ■

An Incomplete Legacy

by Chris Maisano

SWEDEN HAS A LOT MORE to offer the world than just sensibly designed cars, vodka, and flat-pack furniture. In recent years it has churned out a legion of musical artists and bands, much beloved in my rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood and similar locales around the world, many of whom have been directly supported by the country's still-generous welfare state.

I don't know if indie-pop heartthrob Jens Lekman has personally benefited from this particular kind of welfare-state largesse, but the state of Swedish social democracy certainly seems to be on his mind a lot these days. For years he's been known for his light-hearted yet acerbic takes on love and everyday life, but a number of songs on his more recent releases demonstrate a growing concern for the durability of the much-vaunted Swedish social model. On "Shirin," a standout on his 2007 album *Night Falls Over Kortedala*, Jens swears to his Iraqi refugee hairdresser not to report her to the tax and immigration authorities for running a beauty salon out of her own apartment. His recently released EP, *An Argument With Myself*, has two songs that are even more overtly political. "A Promise" sees him talking to a sick friend forced into the workforce

by new active labor market policies that are perhaps a bit too active. On first listen, "Waiting for Kirsten" seems like little more than a good-natured tale of drunkenly stalking the actress Kirsten Dunst during a recent visit to Lekman's native Göteborg. But underneath the song's glossy pop veneer lies his real concern: a defense of the venerable principles of social-democratic solidarity that made Sweden "Sweden":

'Cause times are changing, Kirsten:
Göta Älv is slowly reversing;
They turned a youth center into a
casino;
They drew a swastika in your cappuccino.
And the VIP lines are not to the clubs
But to healthcare, apartments and jobs.
"Hey buddy can I borrow five grand?
'Cause my dad's in chemo,
And they wanna take him off his plan."

During the brief time I spent in Sweden, I learned quickly that left-wing Swedes are somewhat apt to overstate the erosion of their welfare state and of social democracy's ideological hegemony. The former is still probably the most comprehensive in the world, and the latter is so deep and pervasive that even the country's far-right parties are compelled to make their public appeals on the basis of solidarity and

equality (for native-born white Swedes only, of course). Still, there's no denying that social-democratic parties and policies have been in varying stages of retreat for at least the last two decades, and Sweden and the Nordic countries generally have been no exception. In the most recent national elections in 2010, the ruling center-right coalition led by the Moderate Party won reelection to a new four-year term, marking the first time in modern Swedish history that a non-social-democratic government has won two consecutive terms in office. The Social Democratic Party, perhaps the most electorally successful party in the history of parliamentary democracy, polled their worst result since World War I. Worse still, the Sweden Democrats, a far-right racist and anti-immigrant party, polled their best-ever result and have seats in the Riksdag, Sweden's parliament, for the first time.

A quick tour through the contemporary European political landscape tells much the same story. British voters tossed out the Labour Party in the spring of 2010 after three consecutive terms, bringing a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government to power that promptly embarked on an austerity program so far-reaching it might even make some Congressional



Republicans blush. Portugal's center-right parties pummeled the ruling Socialists in last year's legislative and presidential elections, and the more radical Left Bloc lost half its seats in parliament. After presiding over one of the worst recessions in modern European history, Spain's Socialists were blown out by the center-right Popular Party last fall, marking their worst showing at the polls (a mere 28.8 percent) since the transition to democracy three decades ago. Since the installation of Mario Monti's technocratic government in Italy late last year, the center-left Democratic Party has shown little inclination to fight his austerity program; indeed, they have been one of his main pillars of support in Italy's famously fractious political system.

Meanwhile, in Greece, where pundits and economists have openly called for living standards to be cut by as much as 40 percent, the previously dominant center-left party PASOK is on the brink of implosion. Utterly discredited by its administration of a savage austerity program and its support for the unelected technocratic government of prime minister Lucas Papademos, PASOK is now the fifth most popular party in Greece, behind the center-right New Democracy and three left parties – SYRIZA, Democratic Left, and the Greek Communist Party – whose opposition to austerity has attracted PASOK voters disgusted by the party's attack on its traditional social base, particularly the public-sector unions.

To be sure, not all of Europe's social-democratic parties confront similarly grim short-term electoral prospects. Last fall, Danish voters brought a Red Bloc government under the leadership of the Social Democrats to power, marginalizing the far-right Danish People's Party in the process. In France, the Socialist Party's François Hollande has long led incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy in the polls for the 2012 presidential

election, but a recent Sarkozy resurgence and a growing challenge from the Left Front's Jean-Luc Mélenchon have thrown the race wide open. And in perhaps the most inspiring electoral result since the Great Recession began, in 2009 a coalition of Social Democrats and Left-Greens won a majority of seats in Iceland's parliament, nationalized much of the nation's financial sector, and offered debt forgiveness to huge numbers of struggling homeowners.

While it may be premature to sound the death knell for social democracy, it is clear that the current crisis has accelerated the long-term decline of social-democratic politics in Europe. Social-democratic parties may still be able to win elections and form governments, but they've shown little inclination to break decisively from neoliberal policy prescriptions when in power. From Greece to Spain to Ireland to France to Germany, the principles of solidarity and social welfare that have underpinned the kinder, gentler form of capitalism embodied in the phrase "social Europe" are under attack. They may not hold up under the combined pressures of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and European Central Bank as they pursue neoliberal structural adjustment. Citizens across the continent have protested the dismantling of their social protections, sometimes ferociously, but to date they have not been able to turn the tide. At the moment, at least, an "asocial Europe" appears to be the continent's future.

§

IN THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED book *What's Left of the Left*, a group of prominent political scientists, sociologists, and policy experts attempt to make sense of social democracy's long transition from left to center-left, from opposition to capitalism to its humane and rational administration. This is not a neutral or objective piece

of scholarship. All of the volume's contributors can be counted among the partisans of social democracy and accept the putative wisdom of the center-left's rejection of socialist visions in favor of capitalism with a human face. Edited by James Cronin, George Ross, and James Schoch, and including contributions from such luminaries of the academic center-left as Sheri Berman, Gerassimos Moschonas, and Jonas Pontusson, it attempts to provide an intellectual framework to advance the project of "progressive politics in tough times." The book is far too long and detailed to permit comprehensive treatment here, so I will focus primarily on those contributions that are most relevant to our purposes. While valuable for anyone seeking to attain an introduction to the contemporary European center-left, it reflects the profound limitations of the political tradition it seeks to defend.

Before proceeding further, it's probably best to define exactly what we mean when we talk about "social democracy." This is a harder task than may appear at first blush. Throughout its history, social democracy has been protean and chameleon-like, adapting and re-adapting to the larger political-economic context in which it has found itself. Until World War I, the phrase encompassed all non-anarchist socialists, from reformists like Eduard Bernstein and Jean Jaurès to revolutionaries like Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin. After reformists and revolutionaries split first over support for the war effort and then for good after the Russian Revolution in 1917, the former laid claim to the title of social democracy while the latter typically defined themselves as Communists of one sort or another.

By the mid 1950s, most Western social-democratic parties and movements had, at least in practice, abandoned the goal of socialist transformation for the more modest program outlined by the British Labour intellectual Anthony

Croslan in his watershed 1956 book *The Future of Socialism*. Instead of aspiring to establish public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, Croslan argued that socialists and social democrats should instead seek to harness the wealth-generating capacities of modern capitalism for social ends. The task of modern social democracy was not to overthrow or transcend capitalism, but to manage it and redistribute the surplus in the interest of social equality. This perspective has attained almost total hegemony on the Western left since Croslan wrote his book, and it is wholeheartedly embraced by the contributors to *What's Left of the Left*. As Sheri Berman puts it in her contribution, "helping people adjust to capitalism, rather than engaging in a hopeless and ultimately counterproductive effort to hold it back, has been the historic accomplishment of the social-democratic left, and it remains its primary goal today in those countries where the social-democratic way of thinking is most deeply ensconced."

Most radicals would interpret this ideological shift as a repudiation of any kind of sweeping, transformative project in favor of an acceptance of the status quo; that in rejecting socialist transformation it is little more than a form of left-liberalism. But for Berman, social democracy is not simply a left-wing appendage on the body of liberalism but a full-blown political-ideological alternative of its own. "The core principle" of social democracy, "that political forces should control economic ones, was a reversal of both classical liberalism's theory and long-standing practice." The very success of the social-democratic project in post-war Europe, she contends, occluded both its novelty and how controversial it was within the broader socialist left.

Berman's argument concerning the uniqueness and comprehensiveness of the social-democratic project may have a certain degree of purchase

in the context of the Nordic countries. This is particularly true in Sweden, where the Rehn-Meidner model of full employment, generous and universal public services, and solidaristic wage policy arguably indicated a path out of capitalism and toward something approximating socialism. But as Pontusson points out in his essay on contemporary Nordic social democracy, a plan advanced by the Swedish trade unions in the 1970s to gradually socialize the ownership of private corporations (advanced by the same Rudolf Meidner who lends his name to the Rehn-Meidner model) represented much more of a radical break with the social-democratic tradition than the wave of deregulation and privatization the Social Democrats pursued to deal with the deep recession that gripped Sweden in the 1990s. The failure of the so-called "wage earner funds," and the failure of the social-democratic parties more broadly to pursue any kind of program that might upset the foundations of capitalist social relations – a failure that would ultimately undermine the foundations of social democracy itself – bears out the critique of social democracy advanced by the socialist intellectuals Ralph Miliband and Marcel Liebman in the 1980s:

What socialists confront here – or ought to confront – is an ideological, political, even psychological, construct of great strength, which is open, flexible, loose on its right, but which is very unwilling, even unable, to yield much on its left. In other words, social democratic leaders find it much easier to compromise and

consort with their conservative adversaries on the right than with their socialist critics on the left.

This rightward and self-defeating bias in social-democratic political practice is readily apparent when we consider the construction of the European Union, whose structure and logic is perhaps the greatest threat to social democracy in Europe today.

§

AMERICAN LIBERALS and social democrats tend to go dewy-eyed at the mere mention of the European Union, but while there's no doubt that EU societies are comparatively more humane than ours, such a comparison does not set the bar very high. While certain aspects of the EU have proved beneficial to the traditional social constituencies of the Left (in binding EU-wide working time directives, for instance), a neoliberal policy bias is inscribed in the very logic of European integration. This is particularly ironic when we consider that European social democrats have been integral to this process from the start, and in doing so, have undermined their own best impulses.

As George Ross explains in his essay on the history of the EU, the construction of a continent-wide polity and economy was never a left project. In the years immediately following World War II, most European leftists and social democrats were preoccupied with building and defending their own particular national-social models.

The crisis could have been resolved by either moving further toward socialism or by breaking radically toward neoliberalism. The latter option won out.

Founded in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic Community was initially conceived by center-right Christian Democratic politicians in Germany, France, and Italy who wanted to keep a lid on inflation and maintain price stability. The development of the EEC stalled after its initial burst of optimism and activity. But somewhat amazingly, in the mid 1980s leading forces in the French socialist movement came to its rescue, bringing much of the rest of the European left with them. Hitherto, the French left scorned European integration and still spoke openly about creating a rupture with capitalism and establishing socialism through the nationalization of finance and a vastly expanded public sector. But in the face of massive capital flight and economic stagnation after their watershed victory in the 1981 elections, the Socialists under President François Mitterrand and Finance Minister Jacques Delors sought to rehabilitate the party's electoral prospects in the famous "U-turn" toward liberalization and Europe. They deepened France's involvement in EU affairs and sought to turn the EU into an instrument for pursuing the social reforms they were not able to attain at the national level.

They largely failed in this endeavor, but the turn to Europe by the French left marked a turning point in European social democracy's long transition from left to center-left. The adoption of the Euro currency and the Stability and Growth Pact, which mandated that Eurozone nations cut public expenditures and keep annual deficit spending below 3 percent of GDP were daggers pointed at the heart of social democracy's traditional constituencies – unions, especially those based primarily in the public sector, and those who relied heavily on the welfare state to maintain their standard of living. These are the policy levers by which EU bureaucrats and neoliberal heads of government such

as German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Nicolas Sarkozy have forced austerity onto the restive peoples of the European periphery, many of whom have come to see the EU as little more than a plot to enrich Germany and the other rich countries of the continent's northern tier at their expense. It's difficult to imagine a social-democratic renaissance within the political and economic parameters of the EU, an institution explicitly designed to promote market liberalism and undermine the systems of social protection built by the Left and the labor movements in the *trentes glorieuses*, the thirty years between the end of the war and the breakdown of the postwar order in the 1970s.

§

PRATICALLY ALL of the contributors to *What's Left of the Left* pay lip service to the breakdown of the postwar order, but as is symptomatic of works of this kind, none of them perceive that crisis as illustrative of the limits of social democracy. The late historian Tony Judt did not contribute to this volume, but the defense of social democracy he mounted in his final book *Ill Fares the Land* also reflects this crucial shortcoming of contemporary conceptualizations of the political crisis that afflicts the center-left. Judt argued that "our problem is not what to do; it is how to talk about it." He traced the roots of this putatively discursive problem to the New Left: "The young radicals would never have described their purposes in such a way, but it was the distinction between praiseworthy private freedoms and irritating public constraints which most exercised their emotions. And this very distinction, ironically, described the newly emerging Right as well," unwittingly clearing the ground for the emerging neoliberal order.

Judt is partially correct. The contemporary left, broadly conceived,

offers no shortage of discrete policy proposals but seems unable to articulate a discursive framework that offers a coherent and comprehensive alternative to a stubbornly resilient neoliberalism. But these problems ultimately stem from the fact that by the early 1970s, social democracy had reached its political and economic limits. The welfare state strengthened the position of organized labor, reducing corporate profits and increasing workers' political power relative to capital. Social-democratic parties and trade unions began to formulate plans to encroach on capital's control over the means of production. In Sweden the unions proposed the establishment of worker funds that would gradually take ownership of firms away from capitalists. Elements of the British Labour Party pushed for more comprehensive forms of economic planning. And, as we have already seen, the Socialists under François Mitterrand moved to nationalize vast swaths of the French economy, including 90 percent of the country's banks. These political developments, coupled with the breakdown of Keynesian macroeconomic management, ruptured the underpinnings of the postwar order. The crisis could have been resolved by either moving further toward socialism or by breaking radically toward neoliberalism. The latter option won out. The political and economic power of capital was restored and left political formations were decimated.

We've lost the ability to talk about social democracy (much less socialism) not simply because of a crisis of faith. It's because the institutions with the ability to articulate an alternative discursive framework (not just left parties but labor movements as well, which have shrunk in all Western countries, the Nordic social democracies included) have been defeated as real political alternatives.

This points to the fundamental limitation of social democracy, or "social-

ist capitalism,” as Michael Harrington more accurately described it. It’s a compromise between socialism and capitalism, but one that’s made on capitalism’s terms. As Harrington pointed out decades ago in his book *Socialism*, “the fact is that as long as capitalism is capitalism it vitiates or subverts the efforts of socialists... In fact, capital fights back, it does not meekly accept the programming of social democratic ministers... economic power is political power, and as long as the basic relationships of the economy are left intact, they provide a base for the subversion of the democratic will.”

The Occupy movements and the demonstrations of the *indignados* in cities and public squares across Europe have given voice to the discontents of late social democracy. These movements don’t simply oppose the most explicit and forthright advocates of neoliberalism. They largely reject engagement with the tired and unimaginative parties of traditional social democracy, and with labor movements who have not devoted adequate attention to organizing young workers and those left out of residual systems of labor protection.

The radical energies the Occupiers and *indignados* have unleashed have been bracing, particularly for those of us who have only ever known defeat and demobilization. To a significant extent, the traditional formations of the social-democratic left deserve their scorn. Still, one cannot and should not lose sight of the fact that, as Harrington remarks somewhere, for all their limitations, the world’s social-democratic parties and movements are responsible for freeing more human beings from political and material deprivation than any other political formation in history. In building the new political movements of the twenty-first century, our impulse should not be to reject the social-democratic legacy, but to build upon and complete its unfulfillable promise. ■

“A New Deal Or ‘Papandreouization’”

Emmanuel Todd, one of France’s most original social scientists, built his scholarly reputation on work tracing the influence of kinship systems and demographic patterns on political ideologies and social structures. A member of the French Communist Party as a youth, he became known to the broad public for his 1976 book *The Final Fall*, predicting “the disintegration of the Soviet sphere” based on a close reading of social and demographic trends in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Now housed at the Institut National d’Études Démographiques, he is a prominent commentator on French and international affairs. In this interview conducted in March, he offers his analysis of the current political moment in France on the eve of the May presidential election.

Interviewer

In 2007, you described Nicolas Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal as “candidates of the void.” Do you feel the same way today about Sarkozy and François Hollande?

Emmanuel Todd

Before describing the candidates, let’s describe the historic situation: In 2007, globalization was already looming, but the consensus among the elites of the Right as well as the Left was that, although it wasn’t pleasant, it was still manageable. Today, globalization is imploding, and the left-right equivalence along with it. Nevertheless, the notion of the void remains relevant in describing Sarkozy, with his fixation on money and his negation of France. His first term is summarized by its foreign policy: he went from alignment with Bush to submission to Merkel.



Interview by Eric Aeschimann
and Hervé Algalarondo

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Translation by Seth Ackerman

Sarkozism is the affirmation of a new value of inequality, which is foreign to French culture, and the designation of scapegoats (immigrants, the young, the unemployed) to be held responsible for the crisis. In other words, an extremely hard right. In fact, a “far-right lite.” I never thought that one day, in France, we would have two far-right candidates in a presidential election, one of them supported by Germany.

Is Hollande the right barricade against that trend?

By choosing inequality, the Right has opened a space for a Left that reaffirms the principle of equality. Equality being at the heart of French culture, a contest between equality and inequality amounts to a contest between normalcy and pathology.

People made fun of François Hollande’s plea for a “normal” presidency, but in reality it was a very astute perception of the direction of history. Of course, the Socialist Party’s proposals for the crisis are all warmed over: its hundredth proposed stimulus plan would mainly, like the others before it, simulate Chinese industry.

But the alignment with German austerity supported by the UMP [*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*, Sarkozy’s center-right party] isn’t any better: it’s a guarantee of a long depression. In fact, the crisis will force new and surprising

responses that it wouldn’t be realistic to campaign on. The important thing is to choose a team that is best equipped in terms of its values and the social forces that it represents. That’s why I prefer an Hollande who returns to the principle of equality to an inequalitarian, authoritarian, xenophobic Sarkozy.

But, unlike you, Hollande believes in the virtues of globalization.

I had a lively argument with him on this question a few months ago on [the television program] “Ce Soir Ou Jamais.” So I feel particularly free to make a Pascalian wager about him: I wager on his flexibility of mind and his capacity for rallying and uniting people. He has the right profile to preside over the vast debate on economic globalization which will inevitably take place after the election. What will orient Hollande’s actions is less his personal opinions than the opinions of the middle and upper classes; and they are now turning their backs on free trade and perhaps even on the euro.

Not so long ago, you were attacking the elites.

At the time of the Maastricht referendum, I was scandalized by the behavior of the upper classes, their support for the strong franc. I still believe in this egalitarian logic. But today, we’ve advanced enormously

further into crisis. Only 1 percent, maybe even 0.1 percent of the population is profiting from a growth that, for everyone else, has translated into a drop in living standards.

Upper managers have the same fears as manual workers. French society is unifying from below, with a bloc of 99 percent of the population against the richest 1 percent, exactly like on the eve of the French revolution. These 99 percent share the same objective interest: controlling globalization, reorienting the economy toward production. It will be up to the elites to put in place the necessary reforms. A democracy works when part of the elite takes the side of the people. That’s what could happen. Hence the hope I invest in “Hollandisme Révolutionnaire.”

A funny concept ...

The elites to convert aren’t Sarkozy’s friends, who are readying the UMP-Front National merger under the aegis of the financial system, but the elites of the Left, the overeducated ones who are accused of taking over the Socialist Party and cutting it off from the working classes. And Arnaud Montebourg’s score in the [Socialist] primaries [Montebourg campaigned on a theme of “deglobalization”] proves that it’s possible to make them see reason. Joking aside, to speak of “Hollandisme Révolutionnaire” is a way of saying that only the Socialist Party, a “normal”

organization structured by a minimum of discipline, is capable of reasserting control over globalization and over a Europe that has come under the control of financial oligarchies.

Hearing Hollande declare that "my only adversary is the world of finance" must have delighted you.

The commentary on that phrase was that it was a political calculation: he wants to rally the Left in the first round before moving back to the center in the second. I think it goes further. When Hollande is elected – which is my working assumption – the question of the power of finance will be posed. The unconditional bailout of the banks shows that the financial oligarchy controls the state and the European Central Bank. The issue, then, is the reconquest of the state by the people. A leftist president will have to subjugate the banks or be subjugated.

What does that mean, subjugate the banks?

Nationalization, for example, but maintaining some pluralism and keeping some banks in the private sector. Out of habit, the commentators claim that Hollande is campaigning to the left, like Mitterrand in 1981, but that once in power, he too will bend to the forces of money. But that ignores the exhaustion of the system.

Hollande will begin moderately – the people around him are very moderate – but he will be forced to radicalize. If he wants to govern, it will be a March 1983 in reverse. A bit like Roosevelt, a man of the very moderate left at the start, with vague ideas about economics, who, under the effect of the 1929 crisis, ended up taking radical measures. For Hollande it will be either a New Deal or "Papandreouization."

Have you given up calling for a European protectionism?

No; without protectionism, Europe is condemned to decline. But it will take a generation to put in place, starting by converting Germany. If Sarkozy had any courage, as he likes to brag that he does, he would have wrangled with Merkel to get a certain dose of protectionism. Because behind the official rhetoric, the German business establishment is worried about the disintegration of the euro, which would deprive it of its European market. Sarkozy and Fillon [the prime minister] chose the opposite tack: aligning with competitive disinflation, which guarantees the continent a long-term depression. The German question will be François Hollande's first dossier.

Will he have to threaten to leave the euro?

Yes, that is France's weapon against Germany. We must accept that History is being made before our eyes. On the one hand, the crisis has forced states into negotiations – the G7, G20, and other European summits. International coordination is an important achievement – the depression of the 1930s was fed by enmities between states. But simultaneously, economic fear strengthens cultural identities; each nation becomes itself once again.

In Germany, competitive disinflation is a nationalist strategy. In France, the next president will have to stress the national value of equality. Let's agree to see the threat: Europe is becoming a hierarchical and conflictual federation, with a dominant nation that is hard on the weak, Germany, and a martyr nation on the bottom, Greece. The management of the euro must navigate between these contradictory realities.

If we can do European protectionism, let's do it.

If France is being asphyxiated, let's leave the euro. If that's too complicated, let's protect certain national sectors. In short, let us be pragmatic. But let's not forget that the confrontation with Germany is the key. In this respect, when Hollande says he wants to renegotiate the European treaty, he's once again showing a very sure-footed sense of history. There is no guarantee he will see it through. But Sarkozy has already made the choice of submission. So, between uncertainty and death, I choose uncertainty.

What about [Jean-Luc] Mélenchon (candidate of the far-left Front de Gauche – see "Introduction")?

I don't sense that he has an effective or even a radical project, and I haven't forgotten his inability to understand the Chinese economic threat. The possibility of a real fight in the second round of the election will depend on Hollande's score in the first round.

Has Sarkozy already lost?

No. Powerful forces are working for him. The rise of the inequality temptation is real, no less among the working classes. There's also the weight of the elderly, who support him massively. And yet they should abhor this poorly-behaved kid whose policies attack the healthcare system and could lead to a drop in life expectancy, like in the US. We're faced with the unheard of: a median age of forty in France, forty-four in Germany; it's never been seen before in history. Are we moving toward senilo-fascism?

One thing is certain: in a context of great risk for democratic institutions, now is the time for a disciplined left vote. ■

Kautsky's Ghost

by Alexander Locascio

SELL YOUR ISLANDS, you bankrupt Greeks!" blared the headline of an October issue of the tabloid *Bild*, Germany's largest daily paper and the flagship of the right-wing Springer media empire. Since the onset of the Eurocrisis, the German ruling class has been pursuing a two-pronged strategy: a punishing regime of neoliberal austerity for Greece and other nations of the Eurozone periphery, and a relentless racist campaign at home to win the consent of the German population. Attempting to shift blame for the crisis away from German banks and onto "lazy" and "corrupt" Greeks "living beyond their means," the elite is coaxing the German public, already suffering from decades of stagnant wages (a beggar-thy-neighbor policy that is the dirty little secret behind of the famous "export powerhouse") to stand behind a policy of foisting even deeper misery on Greece.

Only one party represented in the German Bundestag has openly rejected both the ideology of austerity and the nationalist narrative of a hard-working *Mitteleuropa* surrounded by a shiftless periphery. The Left Party (*Die Linke*) has consistently championed a position of solidarity with Greek people while placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of the European political and economic elite. Rejecting the crisis-era discourse of national unity while seeking broad support in the

German population, *Die Linke* represents a precarious balance of realpolitik and radical principals in some ways resembling the classical prewar Social Democratic Party (SPD). Last October, in a choice freighted with historical significance, the party held its first programmatic congress in the town of Erfurt, the site of the historic 1891 SPD congress whose Marxist program would define the tenets of "classical" European socialism for generations.

The Left Party, however, is not strictly speaking an "Erfurtian" party. Despite the symbolic resonance of the congress's chosen site, *Die Linke* does not represent an unmediated return to prewar socialism, a "union of the labor movement and socialism." It is more accurate to understand the Left Party as being much more a product of the *dissolution* of the classical workers' movement and socialism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the "end of history," the main parties of the workers' movement in Europe took leave of their traditional worldviews: social-democratic and labor parties surrendered completely to neoliberalism while former Communist parties moved to occupy the space thus left vacant, often as junior partners in governmental coalitions led by those very same neoliberalized social-democratic parties. *Die Linke* is not one of those social-democratized ex-Communist parties; it is, for lack of a better word,

a sort of postmodern pastiche of the various tendencies of the traditional workers' movement.

The party might be said to have something like a "Kautskyist" center, reminiscent of the pre-World War I defenders of SPD orthodoxy against the Leninists of the left and revisionists of the right; this current is represented by Oskar Lafontaine and his *Sozialistische Linke* (Socialist Left) tendency (although neither would likely identify as a "Marxist," let alone as "orthodox"); a "Bernsteinian" right wing represented by the *Forum Demokratischer Sozialismus* (Democratic Socialist Forum) and the majority of local party groups in the former East Germany; a "left wing" represented by the *Antikapitalistische Linke*, encompassing Trotskyists, ex-Maoists, and "Stalinists"; and even a postmodern tendency, which of course does not consider itself a proper tendency: the *Emanzipatorische Linke* ("Ema.Li" for short), which combines post-feminist queer and gender theory, post-autonomist calls for a guaranteed basic income, and a "libertarian" lifestylism, but also exhibits a certain proximity to the pro-government forces grouped around the FDS.

So the Left Party is neither a radical anti-capitalist formation like France's ailing *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* or Portugal's *Bloco Esquerda*, both of which define themselves as being to the left of both "official" socialist and

(post-)communist parties; nor is it a social-democratized formation such as France's Communist Party or Italy's tragically splintered *Rifondazione Communista*. Rather, it is all of these things in one formally unified, but internally contentious formation. To understand how this came to pass, some history is necessary.

ORIGINS (EAST)

AFTER THE SERIES of events that began with the September 1989 “Monday demonstrations” and culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall two months later, East Germany's ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), completely discredited and out of favor with the population, was in a state of acute crisis. At an emergency party congress in December 1989, the SED adopted a series of reforms. Foremost among these was the choice as party chairman of Gregor Gysi, a charismatic pro-Gorbachev lawyer known for his prominent defense of such dissidents as Rudolf Bahro and the dissident group Neues Forum. The party also changed its name to SED-PDS (the latter acronym standing for Party of Democratic Socialism), dropping the letters SED entirely in February of 1990.

Throughout the course of the 1990s, the PDS led a curious existence. In Russia and other Eastern Bloc countries that were integrated into world capitalism, former Communist Party apparatchiks swiftly moved to consolidate power, ditch their outmoded ideological shibboleths, and make the transition to new capitalist ruling class – a process that occurred with a fifty-four-year delay after Trotsky had originally predicted it in *The Revolution Betrayed*.

The transition was different in East Germany, because the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was never incorporated into the world system as a distinct entity. Instead, it was swallowed whole by the Federal

Republic – an *Anschluss*, if you will. West German industry was eager to obtain the “new states” as a market for industrial and consumer goods, while West German political parties moved quickly to set up an institutional foothold there, often incorporating their Eastern pendants directly, as the Christian Democratic Union did with its identically named counterpart, or as the Green Party did with the East German *Bündnis 90*. East Germany's industrial infrastructure was stripped bare or handed over entirely to West German capital – a process, led by the *Treuhändanstalt* (“Trust Agency”), which plunged the population and region into unemployment and misery (lending an ominous tone to Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker's recent reference to the *Treuhänd* as a “model” for dealing with Greece). Meanwhile, the ruling caste of the GDR was never really incorporated into the new unified Germany, aside from some politically uncontroversial middling functionaries from the small “official opposition” parties, like the aforementioned “East” CDU.

As a result, the former East Germany was in a unique position among ex-Eastern Bloc countries. Not only was the general population plunged headlong into the magical new world of neoliberal capitalism, but almost the entire former ruling caste loyal to the GDR was “expropriated,” so to speak – not just career politicians, state functionaries, secret service personnel, or university professors, but also younger people who experienced the *Wende* in their twenties after having been groomed for positions within the system, the so-called “interrupted biographies.”

So in a unique constellation of forces that the more reflective West German elites are probably kicking themselves for having allowed to exist, East Germany was left with an entire social layer of former ruling elites shut

out of influence within the new system, and the broad working-class masses victimized by the brutal transition to neoliberal capitalism. As a result, the PDS emerged throughout the 1990s as a vehicle articulating East German regional interests from a broadly anti-neoliberal perspective.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the PDS continued to consolidate its mass base, getting elected to local and state governments, acting on the national stage as a voice for East German disaffection, as well as keeping the flame burning for some vaguely understood “socialism.” In the West, the PDS never managed to become anything like a mass party, for a variety of reasons, including the continuing loyalty of German labor unions to the SPD, decades of anti-communist indoctrination from the 1930s onward, and a more general culture clash between East and West Germans that is often difficult for outsiders to grasp. (It helps to keep in mind that those born just after the Second World War spent most of their lives in separate nations, educated in different school systems, watching different television shows and listening to different musical artists, rooting for different sports teams, being familiar with different consumer brands, and so on.) Some radical leftist groups from the West experimented with activity inside of the PDS but were never able to establish a serious foothold, though a few individuals were able to achieve positions of prominence.

ORIGINS (WEST)

THE OTHER major component of the Left Party, the WASG – *Wahlalternative Arbeit & soziale Gerechtigkeit* (The Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice) – was the product of the complete neoliberalization of German Social Democracy during the 1998–2005 ruling coalition of the SPD and the Green Party. Initially, the “Red-

“Green” government moved to reverse a number of neoliberal measures introduced by the previous Kohl government, for example, reintroducing 100-percent sick pay and revoking a softening of legal protections against dismissal. But after a series of internal conflicts between Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine, Lafontaine resigned in March 1999, and Red-Green would go on to disappoint its constituency on multiple occasions, joining in the Kosovo and Afghanistan wars, but above all by producing the series of brutal labor market reforms known as “Agenda 2010” and especially the so-called Hartz IV reform.

The origins of Agenda 2010 go back to early 2002, when there was a minor scandal concerning public employment offices producing embellished job-placement statistics. The Schröder government reacted to media pressure by calling into existence the Hartz Commission, headed by Volkswagen human resources executive Peter Hartz (later convicted on corruption charges and sentenced to a two-year suspended prison sentence). The commission proposed a series of “reforms” (Hartz I through IV) which went on to be implemented by the Schröder government; but it was the Hartz IV reforms that would have major consequences both for the German welfare state and the political future of the SPD.

Previously, unemployment benefits in Germany were paid out in three different forms: *Arbeitslosengeld*, for the short-term unemployed, the amount of which was calculated as a percentage of the last wage; *Arbeitslosenhilfe*, for the long-term unemployed, also calculated as a percentage of the last wage but at a lower level; and *Sozialhilfe*, which guaranteed an existential minimum for those without previous employment or unable to work. The Hartz IV measure effectively abolished the last two and merged them into a new cat-

egory, called *Arbeitslosengeld II*. Now, after twelve months of joblessness, the unemployed worker was reduced to the level of an *Arbeitslosengeld II* recipient, with a fixed monthly benefit not tied to any previous wage level (currently 364 euros a month; 328 for those with live-in partners), as well as a draconian regime of job placement by case managers and a vast array of punitive measures for failure to comply, including the cancellation of benefits for specified periods of time. By the end of the last decade, Germany’s rate of low-wage work had gone from being among the lowest to among the highest in Continental Europe, although the trend was already underway at the time of the reforms.

Hartz IV was correctly understood as an attack on the welfare state and provoked mass demonstrations in various cities in 2004, particularly throughout the East – the so-called “Monday demonstrations,” named consciously in reference to the protests that led to the fall of the GDR. (In a lovely irony of history, “Hartz IV” has now established itself as the popular term for the ALG II benefit, causing no end of irritation for Labor Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who has urged the media to stop using it.) This movement did not succeed in stopping the Hartz reforms, but it did succeed in provoking some mid-level trade union functionaries, long-time disillusioned SPD members, and radical left activists – including the three main Trotskyist tendencies in Germany – to form a new electoral coalition, the WASG. Oskar Lafontaine, long a charismatic vote-getter on the SPD left, reemerged at this time to become a figurehead of the new formation.

RISE

AFTER THE SPD LOST the 2005 state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia – previously unthinkable, as the SPD had gov-

erned the state for almost four decades – Schröder called for a vote of confidence in the Bundestag, which he then lost, paving the way for early elections.

Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi, already present in the public consciousness as something of a political duo, proposed to run a joint electoral slate with the eventual intent of exploring a merger of the two parties. Since it is not possible for two parties to run joint electoral lists, it was instead arranged for members of the WASG to run on the PDS’s lists; as a gesture of good will, the PDS also renamed itself Linkspartei.PDS. The Linkspartei.PDS ended up with an impressive 8.7 percent of the vote, recovering from the disastrous 2002 elections when the PDS fell short of the 5 percent necessary to achieve proportional representation.

After the 2005 Bundestag election, Die Linke bounced from one success to another. Far from remaining ghettoized in the East, the new merged party managed to enter numerous state parliaments in the West – including Bremen, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Hamburg, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, and North Rhine-Westphalia. After four years of a CDU-SPD national government and two years into the global economic crisis, the 2009 national elections witnessed the Left Party’s strongest showing yet, achieving 11.9 percent of the vote – more than a percentage point ahead of the Greens.

THE PARTY AND ITS PROGRAM

WITH THE SPD and Greens once again in opposition and thus shifting rhetorically to the left, Die Linke’s standing in polls has stalled; it currently hovers between 7 to 9 percent in opinion polls. Part of this may be attributable to what the bourgeois media in Germany regards as the querulous internal culture of the party, with its constant debates between left,

right, and center concerning program, personnel, and participation in governments. But what the press sees as the party's fractiousness is better understood as an indication of its internal pluralism and culture of democratic discussion. Besides, 9 percent is still nothing to sniff at in a country with an anti-communist red-scare mentality as deeply ingrained as the Federal Republic of Germany's.

That's not to say that the disputes within the party can be dismissed entirely. There is indeed a conflict between those parts of the party, given organizational expression in the Forum Demokratischer Sozialismus, whose main emphasis is electoral politics geared towards eventual participation in coalition governments with the **SPD** and Greens, and the parts of the party, of which Lafontaine serves as the main figurehead, which seek a stronger profile as an anti-neoliberal and anti-war party. Curiously, this isn't really a conflict between social democrats and communists in the main. If anything, Lafontaine and his supporters in the Sozialistische Linke – a tendency comprised of trade unionists with a largely Keynesian policy orientation – correctly claim to be occupying the space abandoned by the **SPD** since its adoption of neoliberalism.

The party program newly adopted in Erfurt, with a whopping 96.9 percent of delegates voting for adoption, is characteristic of the pluralistic character of the party, in its blend of explicitly anti-capitalist formulations existing alongside fairly mild reformist prescriptions. The program explicitly situates Die Linke in the tradition of the “socialist, social-democratic, and communist workers’ movements,” laying claim to the tradition of Marx, Engels, and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as the historical legacy of both the **USPD** and the communist **KPD**, the two parties that broke off from the **SPD** in the crisis of 1917–18 to protest its collaboration with the Kaiser and

other conservative forces. This big-tent approach to the history of the workers movement reflects the plurality of the party itself. Thus on the one hand, the party program explicitly calls for “the transcendence of the capitalist system of exploitation.” But on the other hand, the program also states that Die Linke seeks “an economic order of solidarity” in which “various forms of property have their place: state and municipal, social, private, and cooperative forms of property.” This is rather characteristic of the program as a whole, in which a somewhat wooly notion of capitalism – often represented as the unfettered rule of large corporations and financial markets – is counterpoised to a somewhat wooly notion of socialism, the struggle for which is described as “a great transformative process of social reorganization” that will be marked “by many small and large reform steps, by breaks and social upheavals with revolutionary depth.”

However, it's too easy to scoff at the vagueness of this. The truth is, the program adopted in Erfurt is also solidly anti-neoliberal, and lays down conditions for government participation that have left some representatives of the FDS wing of the party disgruntled. In defining conditions for participation in governments, the program states that “Die Linke will only pursue participation in government when we can achieve an improvement in the living conditions of the people” and that “we will not participate in governments that wage wars and allow the deployment of the Bundeswehr for combat operations abroad, which conduct privatizations or cuts in public and social services, or whose policies worsen the public sector’s ability to fulfill its tasks.” The attitude concerning military operations continues to be regarded by the bourgeois media as a sign of the party’s “immaturity” and “unsuitability” to govern, while the clear stance against privatization and social cuts should be understood as an implicit critique of

the PDS’s controversial role as junior partner in the Berlin senate a decade ago, in which it was forced to support painful austerity measures. On the immigration question, the program took a courageous stance of explicitly calling for open borders.

Thus, at the level of programmatic and electoral politics, Die Linke represents a mixture of rhetorical affirmations of socialism and a solidly anti-neoliberal practical orientation. At the level of civil society, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), a non-profit political education foundation closely allied to the party, plays a role in carving out a discursive space for a broad left politics. Thus the RLS finances a number of initiatives that are “more radical” than the party itself; there probably isn’t a prominent Antifa group in the country that hasn’t availed itself of funds to finance glossy posters and brochures for its radical street agitation. The RLS also continues to maintain the Dietz Verlag publishing house, which keeps the *Marx-Engels-Werke* (the famous “blue volumes”) and the collected works and letters of Rosa Luxemburg in print. And among the educational offerings of the RLS is a regular cycle of reading groups of Marx’s *Capital* whose “satellite seminars” invite top-notch Marx scholars such as Michael Heinrich, Rolf Hecker, Ingo Stütze, and Sabine Nuss.

Though some groups and individuals of the radical left regard Die Linke as merely a social-democratic party occupying the space vacated by the **SPD**, while other more optimistic radicals hope to be able to push it into assuming the role of an explicitly revolutionary party, it will most likely remain for some time what it is: an electoral vehicle seeking to balance its desire to govern with its need to retain its leftist profile while creating a discursive space in German society for more explicitly anti-capitalist and socialist ideas. ■



Socialism with Dutch Characteristics

by Steve McGiffen

AS I SOMETIMES EXPLAIN to those who don't know anything about Dutch politics but who are familiar with such "socialist" luminaries as Tony Blair, George Papandreou, or François Hollande, the Socialist Party's name is misleading. This is because the SP is, in fact, a party which promotes socialism.

The SP is an unusual organization, perhaps even unique. While its policies might at first glance give the impression of a kind of progressive social democracy, its pervasive grassroots activism reveals a different reality. I was a member of a real social-democratic party, the British Labour Party, for fifteen years, and in all that time I was never once asked to attend a demonstration of any kind by the party's central leadership. (And that was before the dead hand of Blairism.) Social democracy has usually meant – to paraphrase a poster from Paris '68 – "you vote, and we'll do the rest." Although the SP's rapid growth holds dangers, it has so far resisted any temptation to abandon the streets, factories and schools, to give up its broad and rich political work for the sterile and single-minded parliamentarianism of the social democrat.

The party began its life in the early 1970s as one of a number of Maoist grouplets, winning some local representation but failing to establish any

kind of national presence. In the late 1980s it jettisoned the iconography and language of Marxism-Leninism, exchanging its dogmas for an ecumenical and popular brand of socialism, remaining unabashedly radical yet adopting a singularly pragmatic and unpretentious approach to left-wing politics. Ironically, it was what the party had learned from the key Maoist tenet of the "mass line" that arguably engendered the process of de-Maoization: embedding itself deeply in a number of cities and neighborhoods, electing municipal officials and supporting local struggles over housing, pollution, and workplace issues, the party attuned itself to the needs of its constituents, and its unusually earnest commitment to bread-and-butter working-class issues gradually led it to subordinate doctrine to practical left-wing politics.

The party began to grow, though at first quite modestly. In the Netherlands, the electoral system is absolutely proportional; there are no districts and each party puts forward a single national candidate list. When the SP first entered parliament in 1994, it did so with 1.3 percent of the national vote – enough to give it two seats.

The end of the Cold War witnessed the final deradicalization of European social democracy. The local Dutch outpost, the Labour Party (Pvda), was no

exception: "We don't speak any more about the 'Vision' or 'The Alternative' of the Labour Party," explained future prime minister Wim Kok in 1989. "There is no alternative to the existing social system and so it doesn't make any sense to strive for one." The ever-deepening project of European integration was both a cause and an effect of this mutation. The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht transformed the European project from an arena of class struggle, albeit a slanted one, into a weapon of bourgeois power. Each treaty since then has only deepened the commitment to neoliberalism, progressively neutralizing the power of democratic parliaments over economic management. Under the charismatic leadership of Jan Marijnissen, the SP developed a forceful left critique of the European Union that focused on two points: its neoliberal agenda and its suppression of democratic governance, flaws that converged in the project of monetary union. In Marijnissen's judgment, monetary union before the existence of a political union was "advancing entirely the wrong way around." The 2002 party program called for an "emergency plan" for exiting the euro (to be formulated as a contingency) and, most fatefully, demanded a referendum on any future European treaty.

In 2005, the European Constitutional treaty arrived, and to the dismay

of its supporters, it was indeed put to a referendum. The SP was the only significant party to oppose the treaty, and it effectively led the national campaign for the “No,” facing off against not only all the major parties but also major labor unions, churches, and most of the media. In the words of a 2006 US embassy cable made public by WikiLeaks, “the SP drew on its extensive grassroots networks – especially in urban areas – and party discipline to mount an exceptionally effective no campaign. Support for SP grew dramatically as a result.” Indeed, the party nearly tripled its representation in parliament the following year, winning one in six votes nationwide. But the erosion of democracy took spectacular forms. Despite the Treaty’s overwhelming Dutch rejection – as well as France’s “no” vote just days earlier, following a similar insurgent campaign led by the Communist Party and other groups on the left – the document was presented again, in almost identical words, with nothing removed but some insignificant trivia about a European “anthem” and flag, and ratified by the Dutch parliament.

Apart from the SP, there was one party that prominently opposed the European treaty: Geert Wilders’s far-right Party for Freedom (PVV). Over the past decade, the rise of Wilders’s style of populist, anti-Islam politics – he calls for banning the Koran and taxing headscarves – has constituted one of the most important and ominous factors in Dutch public life. It has also posed a serious dilemma for the mainstream social democrats, while presenting some tricky opportunities for the SP. Although the current government consists of a coalition of the two main center-right parties – the Thatcherite liberal VVD and the Christian Democratic CDA – in order to remain in power it needs the external support (or “toleration”) of the PVV, which means it generally hangs by a thread. Moreover, even as the gov-

ernment panders to the PVV’s anti-immigrant agenda, the party is still not satisfied and sometimes refuses to vote for unpopular austerity measures. This, in turn, has forced Labor to step in to keep the government in power, voting for the government’s measures – often on “European” issues – on occasions when the PVV refused to do so. This has turned into a vicious circle for the social democrats, persuading more of their support to defect to the SP or one of two other alternatives, the Green Left (which is no longer worthy of either descriptive) or the centrist but “modern” D66.

It is important to emphasize in this context that while its stigmatizing of Muslims and other immigrants is repugnant, the PVV is not a classic “fascist” or “neo-fascist” party. Overall, its rhetoric is probably less offensive than that of many Republican presidential candidates in the US, and Wilders has consistently condemned violence and rejected overtures from the French Front National and the neo-fascist Dutch-speaking Belgians of Vlaams Belang. The party is careful to attack Islam for its alleged misogyny and homophobia, and Wilders says he “hates Islam, not Muslims.” Its divisive politics, however, mean that the PVV can only ever appeal to a confused and backward section of the white working class. Dutch people of color, Muslim or not, do not vote for the PVV, nor for the most part do organized workers. Whereas the SP is able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with workers in actual struggles, as in a recent national cleaners’ strike and an ongoing series of actions by teachers, the PVV is forced by any kind of industrial action to reveal its true class nature.

It is on this – the shallowness of its “opposition” to the status quo and commitment to any kind of progressive social vision – that the SP concentrates its fire when dealing directly with Wilders and his followers. Moreover, the PVV’s recent tactic of attacking East

European immigrants – among other things, establishing a website where citizens can report migrant workers from Poland and elsewhere (“Are they causing you problems? Or did you lose your job to [an] East European? We would love to hear from you”) – has demonstrated to the Netherlands’ extensive non-Muslim immigrant communities that the PVV’s racist targets are not limited to one group.

The SP’s response to the PVV anti-immigrant campaign has been to address the issues on which Wilders’s party relies to generate support, which are more complex than simple cultural angst. The fact is that the opportunistic politics of the mainstream center-left parties have failed to address a growing xenophobia. When immigrants began to arrive in large numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, they were slotted into the traditional Dutch system of “pillarization” under which different social groups – broadly Catholics, Protestants, and the secular – had organized, with the state’s support, their own social, political, and cultural institutions. Immigrant groups were initially encouraged to do the same, so that indigenous and immigrant children often went to different schools. Problems of mutual hostility unsurprisingly resulted from this form of apartheid, and in response the dominant paradigm shifted in the 1990s toward integration via shared social institutions – an approach to which the SP lent its critical support.

If the aim had been to reduce inter-ethnic antagonisms, however, it has failed. Dutch politics has come to be characterized by a harsh anti-immigration rhetoric. It was on the back of such vitriol that the political provocateur Pim Fortuyn won immense popularity before his assassination in 2002 led to the decline and rapid disappearance of his party. Though Fortuyn’s killer was a white Dutchman, his murder was soon followed by that of a film director, Theo van Gogh, by

a fundamentalist Muslim, which gave the far right fuel to pour onto the fires of racial antagonism – encouraging an association of Islam per se with 9/11 and everything for which that sinister date has become shorthand.

Alongside the shadowy feeling of menace generated by the manipulation of such events, relatively high rates of crime amongst Moroccan and Turkish youth became a vexing subject of political discussion and lent themselves to rival explanations. For the SP, they were a result of the failure of successive attempts to integrate immigrant communities, which was expressed in high rates of unemployment amongst people of color, particularly the young, and consequent poverty and hopelessness. For the right, they indicated the “failure of multiculturalism” and the odious nature of Islam. The SP parted company from much of the Dutch left in its steadfast emphasis on integration as the way forward. Many in the North American and British left would no doubt share the critical view of this stance expressed by many in the Dutch center-left. It is, however, a reaction to a swath of policies which have led to the creation of ghettos, to “black” and “white” schools, and to a linguistically and educationally disadvantaged mass of immigrant youth. Typically of the SP, its reaction has grown out of an attempt to find practical solutions to problems which the rest of the left prefers to downplay or ignore.

The PVV’s recent scapegoating of migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe is a characteristically racist reaction to what is a very real concern, and one which the SP has been careful to address. The removal of the EU’s internal frontiers has been exploited to undermine the Netherlands’ traditional system of collective bargaining, which consists of regular tripartite negotiations involving labor unions, employers, and government. These negotiations fix a going rate for

most jobs in most industries. Eastern European workers are being hired via abusive employment agencies to work for firms looking to pay well below this agreed-upon rate – a practice which has been declared valid by the EU’s Court of Justice, one of a series of anti-labor rulings from the court that build, in turn, on anti-labor legislation from the EU. Instead of blaming the workers for this situation, the SP is campaigning to force the authorities to impose the going rate, as well as use the labor inspectorate to enforce the law to combat the illegal working conditions under which migrant workers are often employed, and the illegal slum-like temporary accommodation in which they are often housed. SP Member of Parliament Jan de Wit summarizes the party’s view of the issue: “The SP is not against people from either the ‘old’ or the ‘new’ Europe who want to come here to earn their corn, but this must of course be according to our conditions of service, working hours and working conditions and under the protection of our social security.”

This spring, the SP has been tipped in a range of polls to double its current parliamentary representation of fifteen seats. In some polls it comes out as the biggest party, in others it lies just behind the “market liberals” of the VVD. Still others put it a close third behind both the VVD and the PVV. The SP is now champing at the bit for a shot at government; whether it will get the chance depends on a complex range of factors, enough to fill another article. Labor’s election of a new leader, for example, has for the moment at least restored some of the party’s popularity, so that it is again neck-and-neck with the SP in the polls.

The openness of Dutch electoral politics offers opportunities for the radical left, but also carries dangers, tending to draw all significant dissent into parliamentary politics. It is with good reason that parliaments have been called “the graveyard of

socialists.” How the SP chooses to deal with this dilemma will be one prism through which its politics can usefully be examined, and it is impossible to say what will happen if it does enter government. What can be said is that no party resembling the SP has ever won such broad support, or ever tried to govern a firmly capitalist country. ■

Reality TV and the Flexible Future

by Gavin
Mueller

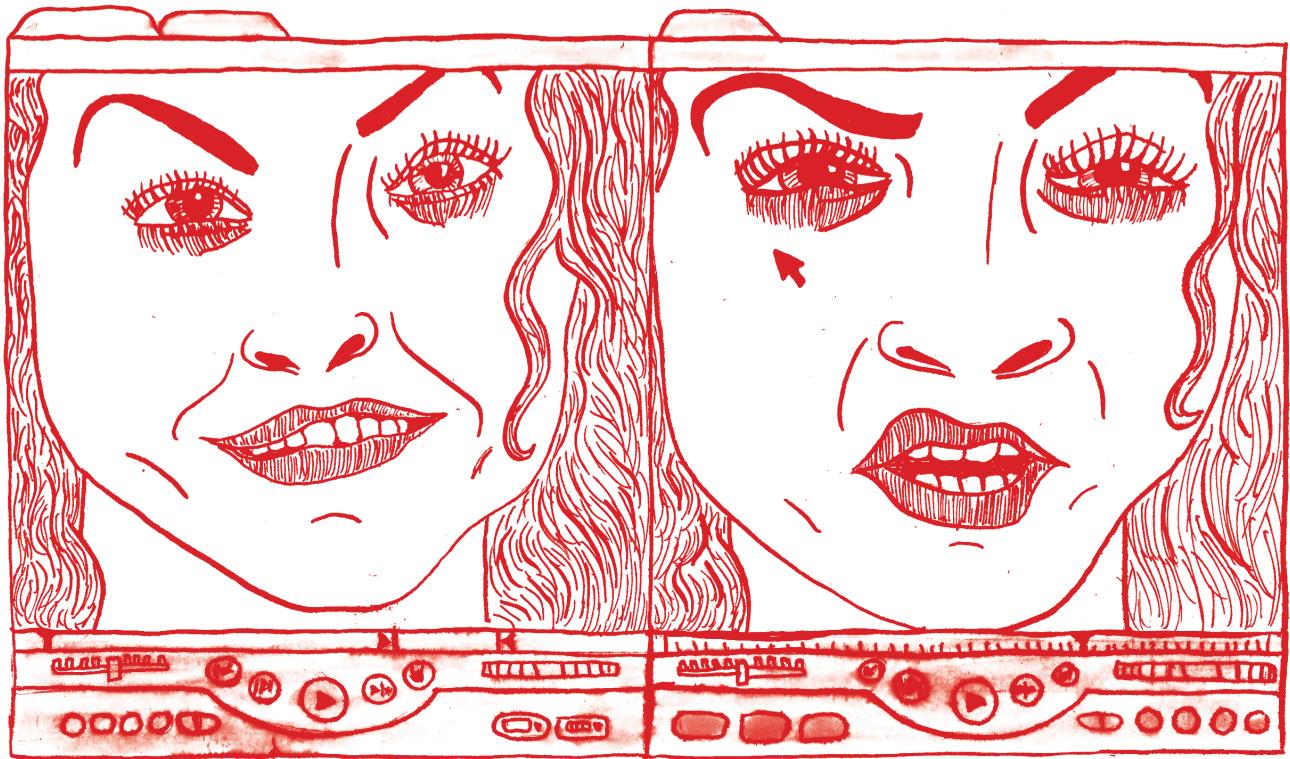
AFTER EVERY LONG DAY at the office, I go home to face my addiction: watching other people work. Whether I'm gritting my teeth as elderly miners crawl through a tunnel to chip out coal, or cracking up as drag queens scurry to complete missions assigned by RuPaul (catch-phrase: "You better work!"), there's nothing I'd rather do after a two-hour commute than watch reality television. Much of my life is spent either at work, working from home, or looking for other jobs, so you'd think that the last thing I'd want to do is relive work in an estranged, if tautly edited, form. But reality TV is better than the morosely Freudian period dramas everyone else in my demographic keeps talking about. It's far more honest about our condition, and therefore more educational.

The first thing you have to realize when you're watching reality TV – hell, *any* TV – is that everyone is on the job. So before we consider weighty concepts such as representation, desire, and whose hair is fake, we must start from the fundamentals: TV is a bunch of people trying to survive under the conditions of capitalism, and in that way are pretty much like the rest of us. As Marx reminds us, capital isn't just money, it's a social relationship. Wage labor is compulsory. Work is experienced as social domination, which is a term that aptly describes the crap they put entertainment workers through. Even the cast of *Jersey Shore*, the labor aristocracy of reality show stars, is a bleached-tip hair away from roid-raging each other to the great Shore Store in the sky. With no time off between seasons, our bronzed broletarians are so ready to escape the Sartrean hell of endless GTL and Ron-Ron Juice

that Vinny got the world's worst chest tattoo in a desperate cry for help.

So I offer a corrective to the moralizers like Charlie Brooker, who in *Dead Set* literalizes the cliché that reality and its audiences are taking part in a mutually cannibalistic frenzy. Rather, the reality show workplace is a theater, run by the biggest corporations in existence, and they're staging fantasies of work. And so to understand reality TV as ideology, we have to consider what it says about work. But if we want to see the seams of reality TV, the kind that Michael Kors would tsk-tsk on the runway, first we have to think about the part of the labor that *isn't* staged for us: the conditions of labor behind the camera, and the larger global economic contexts of work.

The story of the off-screen labor of reality TV rings familiar to anyone who's casually Googled "David Harvey." Looking to reduce costs in one of the most heavily unionized sectors of the US economy, producers hired non-union contingent workers instead. Writers were demoted to "story editors" while actors became "contestants," plucked from the massive reserve army of aspiring cinema labor barracked in Southern California. Less amateurs than entry-level workers scoring a temp job, reality "stars" get paid around \$700 a week, if they get anything at all. What a Bachelorette contestant describes sounds more like an internship: "The idea is, hopefully, opportunities come afterwards. Where maybe you can get paid to do things just to take advantage of, you know, what you've just done." The reward for work done is the possibility of more work. And this comes after shelling out to make yourself look the part for casting: whiten your teeth, pick



out the right clothes, hire a personal trainer (a friend always points out the “weird Bowflex abs” on Survivor contestants) – everything Patti of *Millionaire Matchmaker* (a show, which like so many others, stages the casting process) demands of her gold-diggers.

That reality TV is capital’s puppet-show for a labor regime is supported by how many shows are explicitly about jobs themselves, something that goes all the way back to the reality urtext *Cops*. Our current conjuncture presents two major branches of the professional reality TV sub-genre. The first is a documentary-style paeon to the decline of American industrial labor. In shows like *Coal* and *Gold Rush*, squads of aging, grizzled white men risk death to extract whatever minerals remain in the corners of America’s dwindling wilderness, while equally grizzled petty bourgeois bosses nervously bark orders at them while sweating about their investment. The meager pleasures of these shows come from watching rusty boys playing with rusty toys, the ghosts of organized labor (for these workers are anything but organized) grasping at the only thing they have left: nostalgic masculinity. As with many documentaries, we’re outsiders looking in, wondering how and why anyone could do this.

This is not the case in the second genre. Framed as a game show, full of young diverse creative types in hip urban locales, creative reality TV promotes the cultural economy that a decade ago excited Tony Blair almost as much as invading the Middle East. So far only *Top Chef* and *Project Runway* have had much staying power, but there have been similar shows for interior design, fine arts, music writing, video game testing, and making hit pop songs. It’s no coincidence that the professions in these shows match up identically to the majors at the for-profit career college where I used to work: cultural work is what remains of aspirational middle-class careers for Americans, who live in a country where two-thirds of exports are cultural goods and intellectual property.

Unlike with morphine-addicted gold miners, I never question why a young fashion designer would want to be on a reality show. After all, these jobs are *creative*: the ideology of creative labor is that instead of the alienating grind of the office or factory, these people get to be *artists* who can express themselves through their work. They’re autonomous, independent from the standardization of the Fordist model of production. And therefore their creations represent them, are a part of who they are. “This is really me, I’m

really putting myself into this squid ink tagliatelle.” As Emiliana Arturo points out, creatives tend to self-exploit: they “are willing to surrender rights and even to pay in order to obtain an identity.”

Submitting to the strains of TV production is part of that self-exploitation. The cost of the liberating autonomy of creative professions is flexibility, which goes hand in hand with precarity. As anyone who has freelanced knows, you simply cannot turn any opportunity down – and this is the real reason why exploiting yourself on reality TV seems like a natural and obvious choice. Part of the job of the freelancer – often *most* of the job – is finding more work. What Angela McRobbie calls the “enforced entrepreneurialism” of the creative career, the requirement to become image/commodity/worker-for-hire, is as obligatory as any wage labor contract.

Such “autonomous work” takes place, of course, within determinative socio-economic contexts. At the end of the day, to use a favorite expression of *Top Chef*’s overseer Tom Colicchio, everyone has a boss. Just as flexible work blurs Fordist distinctions between leisure and labor, work and art, so too do bosses become “judges”: one part customer, one part mentor, one part cracker of the whip. Tom can turn the charm on just like any boss in a praiseworthy mood, but you can see the hairs rising on the backs of the necks of the chefs when he walks into the kitchen. He’s come to announce one of the rote “twists,” in which production schedules are abruptly shortened, resources slashed, or productivity goals raised without any extra time. The same management strategies Foxconn uses to make sure iPads get to the store just in time become “challenges” that heighten the drama of the show – by squeezing workers until they burst or collapse.

By staging the conditions of the freelance labor market, creative reality presses home the futility of worker organization. “This is a competition,” contestants insist whenever they have to treat someone else like dirt. “At the end of the day,” Tom ruefully intones, “somebody’s got to go home.” Bosses are always reluctant when it comes time to fire somebody: it’s out of their hands, they insist! The game show framing has the advantage of getting everyone to work while not having to fire anyone – it’s just the rules of the game. Like workforce reductions, eliminations are forces of nature beyond control: charge it to the game, to the economy, to the downturn, to disappointing

third-quarter revenues, but please, pack up your things and go. In the real creative economy, this game mechanism manifests itself in the form of “spec work.” Instead of hiring workers and paying them fairly for what they design, companies construct a contest. The winner, whose work is used, might get paid, or might even get a longer-term contract. The losers did a bunch of work for nothing, and typically forfeit all rights to work they’ve submitted, just like how Lifetime owns every garment, winning or losing, sewn on *Project Runway*. Lately some of the reality competitions have thrown a few bones to their labor force: bonuses for winning challenges. They might have cribbed this from the playbook of our real-life Hank Scorpio, Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, who posts cash bounties for freelance open-source coders to fix software bugs. Just don’t ask him for a healthcare plan.

The workers on the shows know they’re exploited. Faced with impossible challenges, from pulling all-nighters in the desert to creating gourmet barbecue spreads, some *Top Chef* contestants rebel and go to bed; others sit glumly sipping beers, musing at how ridiculous their deadline is. Impossible production schedules have birthed the tautological banner-cry of resigning yourself to shoddy work: “It is what it is.” It’s an incantation with magical effects. Workers acknowledge their exploitation, come to terms with their inability to realize their creative visions, and yet still throw their hearts and what little energy they have left into their work. “I love being a chef, it’s all I want to do.” And if it’s all you want to do, you’re going to have to find some way to love it.

Maybe that’s why this stuff fascinates me so much. We’re not only supposed to do our jobs; we’re supposed to love them, to identify with them, to inhabit them. If we can’t love our jobs and do whatever it takes to do them, how could we know we’re being creative at all? That’s why, even though few fashion designers will ever have gigs that give them healthcare, and even though the Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates a decade without any growth in the profession, design school enrollments are booming. Reality TV gives us the model for reconciling us to the inevitability of our jobs, a flexible future of being constantly on the job and yet bereft of any security. It’s a situation best summed up by Heidi Klum’s chirpy slogan: “One day you’re in, the next day you’re out.” ■

V.S. Naipaul and the American Right

by Mark Ames

'VE OFTEN WONDERED why the American right has been so quiet about V.S. Naipaul. He's easily the most talented reactionary writer in the English language – maybe the *only* living talent left in the right-wing zombiesphere. The American right devotes an insane amount of resources into manufacturing hagiographies on anyone whom they believe makes them look good – even the Soviets couldn't compete with them when it comes to glorifying their pantheon of degenerate cretins like Ayn Rand, Phyllis Schlafly, and Friedrich von Hayek.

But I found a few passages that I think explain why they never liked Naipaul much. Basically, it comes down to this: The American right only needs "team players" – shameless, cynical hacks who can be counted on to churn out whatever rank propaganda ordered up by the Heritage Foundation. For that, you need a Rotary Club nihilist like Dinesh D'Souza, someone totally devoid of a literary ego, intellectual curiosity, or a gag reflex.

I was just reading Patrick French's brilliant biography of Naipaul, *The World Is What It Is*, and came across this interesting scene from Naipaul's visit to America in 1969. Naipaul had already started developing a reputation at that point as one of the rare examples of a dark-skinned reactionary Tory from a Third World colony,

making him one of the most despised literary figures among the trendy-left.

His first impressions of America weren't good: "They [Americans] are really now a group of immigrants who have picked up English but whose mental disciplines are diluted-European," he wrote in one letter home.

In another letter, he confessed:

I now dread meeting Americans, especially their alleged intellectuals. Because here the intellect, too, is only a form of display; of all the chatter about problems (very, very remote if you live in an 'apartment' in Manhattan: something that appears to be got up by the press) you feel that there is really no concern, that there is only a competition in concern... The level of thought is so low that only extreme positions can be identified: Mary McCarthy, Mailer, Eldridge Cleaver and so on. Ideas have to be simple... The quandary is this. This country is the most powerful in the world; what happens here will affect the restructuring of the world. It is therefore of interest and should be studied. But how can one overcome one's distaste? Why shouldn't one just go away and ignore it?"

A good question – I ask myself that just about every morning. The "relevancy" argument he raises is losing its persuasive appeal fast. (The best

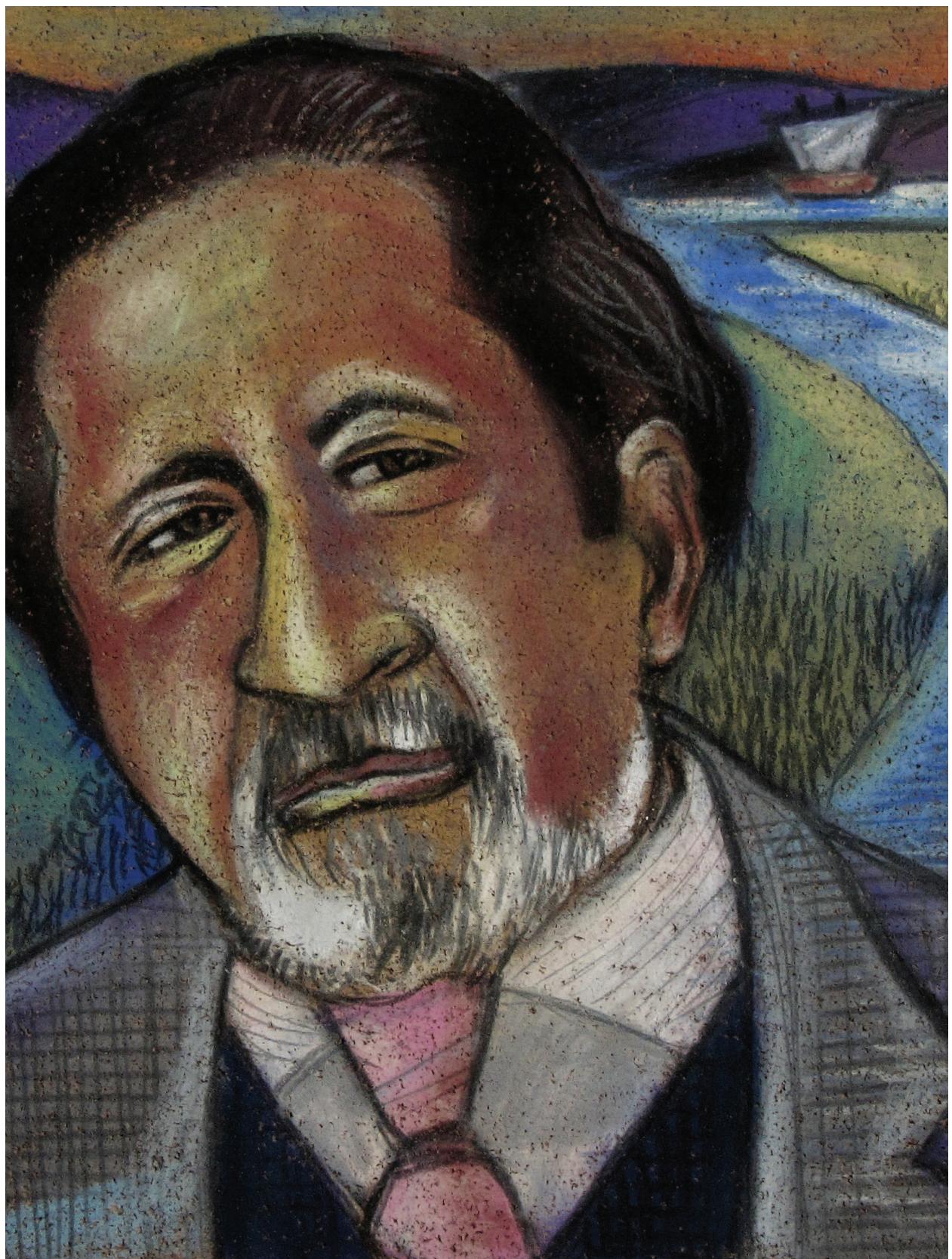
answer I can come up with is, "To make some of their lives as miserable as they've made mine.")

Anyway, it's interesting that Naipaul mentions the name of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver here in 1969, because Cleaver's name comes up again in an essay Naipaul published in 1984 on the Republican Party Convention in Dallas. This was at the height of the Reagan counterrevolution, when a reactionary like Naipaul should have come to pick up his check, make a few speeches, write a glowing account of America's turn to conservatism, and find his books turned into bestsellers via the right-wing mail-order pipeline.

But Naipaul was always too intellectually honest – and too vain. In the essay on the 1984 Republican convention, titled "Among the Republicans," Naipaul describes the degradation of Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther whom he once lumped in with all the "simple" American intellectuals he had contempt for. It's the first morning of the Convention, and Naipaul sees this announcement in his Dallas Sheraton hotel:

11:00 AM. Press conference, Richard Viguerie and Howard Phillips, Populist Conservative Tax Coalition. Subject: "Are Liberals Soft on Communism?" Guest speaker: Eldridge Cleaver, former Black Panther.

«



Eldridge Cleaver! One of the famous names of the late 1960s: the self-confessed rapist of white women, the man who had spent years in jail, the Black Muslim, the author of *Soul on Ice* (1968), not really a book, more an assemblage of jottings, but a work of extraordinary violence, answering the mood of that time. In 1969, when for a few weeks I had been in the United States, I had heard it said of Cleaver that he was going to die one day in a shoot-out with the FBI. That hadn't happened. Cleaver had found asylum in Algeria and then in France; he had become homesick there and had returned, a born-again Christian, to the United States.

In Paris earlier this year I had met a man who had made an important film about Cleaver during the revolutionary days of the late 1960s. The film man now regarded that time, which had its glory, as a time of delusion. And now Cleaver himself was part of a side-show – or so I thought of it – at the Republican convention.

It seemed a big comedown. And it was even sadder, when I got to the conference room, to find that there was no crowd; that Cleaver was not the most important person there, that he was sitting on the far right of the second row, that some people didn't seem to know who he was; that the few journalists asking questions were more interested in the other people of the Populist Conservative Tax Coalition.

So ordinary now, so safe, this black man for whom a revolutionary's desperate death had been prophesied. I had known him only from his younger photographs. He was now forty-nine and almost bald; what hair he had was gray. There was something Chinese, placid, about his eyes and cheekbones; he looked very patient. His eyebrows were thin, like penciled arcs, and his hooded eyes were quiet.

Seeing Cleaver paraded around like a defeated, conquered aborigine struck Naipaul hard, opening up deep raw

wounds: that of a colonized, backwater, dark-skinned twerp whose only way out of Trinidad was through Tory England, his conquerors.

Although a reactionary, Naipaul was never a lackey like today's right-wing "intellectuals"; he never shied away from describing the brutality of colonialism (unlike bootlicking scum like Dinesh D'Souza, who never missed an opportunity to glorify his white right-wing masters for colonizing India, despite the tens of millions of Indians who died of famine in the Raj).

Naipaul continues:

And at last Cleaver stood up. He was tall beside the CIA man. He was paunchy now, even a little soft-bellied. His blue shirt had a white collar and his dark red tie hung down long. The touch of style was reassuring.

Somebody asked about his political ambitions. He said he wanted to get on the Berkeley city council. And then, inevitably, someone asked about his attitude to welfare. His reply was tired; he gave the impression of having spoken the words many times before. "I'm passionately opposed to the welfare system because it's made people a parasitic dependency on the federal system.... I want to see black people plugged into the economic system.... Welfare is a stepping-stone to socialism because it teaches people the government is going to solve our problems."

That was more or less it. It seemed to be all that was required of Eldridge, that statement about socialism and welfare. And soon the session was declared closed. A repeat began to be prepared. As in a fair, shows were done over and over again, and in between business was drummed up.

Naipaul is so affected by the sight of this conquered, lobotomized-Republidian Eldridge Cleaver that he goes back again to Cleaver's Black Panther days and finds himself not just empathizing but actually appreciating Cleaver's

literary and intellectual talents, something Naipaul couldn't see back in the sixties:

... Away from the dark corner, Cleaver, placid, gray-haired, leaned against a wall. Two or three journalists went to him. But the very simplicity of the man on display made the journalists ask only the obvious questions, questions that had already been asked.

There was a many-layered personality there. But that personality couldn't be unraveled now, with simple questions in a formal public gathering. To find that man, it was necessary to go to his book, the book of 1968, *Soul on Ice*. And there – in a book more moving and richer than I had remembered – that many-layered man was: with his abiding feeling for religion and his concern with salvation (as a Roman Catholic, then as a Black Muslim, then as a revolutionary); his need for community constantly leading him to simple solutions; his awareness of his changing self; his political shrewdness:

And here Naipaul quotes an amazing passage from Cleaver's *Soul On Ice*:

I was very familiar with the Eldridge who came to prison, but that Eldridge no longer exists. And the one I am now is in some ways a stranger to me. You may find this difficult to understand but it is very easy for one in prison to lose his sense of self. And if he has been undergoing all kinds of extreme, involved, and unregulated changes, then he ends up not knowing who he is....

In this land of dichotomies and disunited opposites, those truly concerned with the resurrection of black Americans have had eternally to deal with black intellectuals who have become their own opposites....

In a sense, both the new left and the new right are the spawn of the Negro revolution. A broad national consensus was developed over the civil rights struggle, and it had the sophistication

and morality to repudiate the right wing. This consensus, which stands between a violent nation and chaos, is America's most precious possession. But there are those who despise it.

The task which the new right has feverishly undertaken is to erode and break up this consensus, something that is a distinct possibility since the precise issues and conditions which gave birth to the consensus no longer exist.

That was Eldridge Cleaver in the late 1960s, describing exactly what would happen over the next two decades.

Now that Naipaul could compare the two Eldridge Cleavers – the Black Panther vs. the Republican lackey – the message was clear. If Naipaul wanted to pick up that check from the American right-wing, it wasn't enough to have fought on the front lines of the ideological battle of the 1970s against the literary Marxists. He'd have to become a lobotomized, conquered version of himself, an Eldridge Cleaver. He'd have to give up everything interesting about himself.

Instead, Naipaul essentially banished himself to the whispered margins of the American right by doing what he was always best at: describing exactly what he saw at the 1984 Convention, without artifice, without pandering. Here is Naipaul describing the effect of the climactic speech by Ronald Reagan:

So that at the climax of the great occasion, as at the center of so many of the speeches, there was nothing. It was as if, in summation, the sentimentality, about religion and Americanism, had betrayed only an intellectual vacancy; as if the computer language of the convention had revealed the imaginative poverty of these political lives. It was 'as if' – in spite of the invocations and benedictions (the last benediction to be spoken by Dr. Criswell) – 'as if inspiration had ceased, as if no vast hope, no religion, no song of joy, no wisdom, no analogy,

existed any more.'

The words are by Emerson; they were written about England. English Traits, published in 1856, was about Emerson's two visits to England, in 1833 and 1847, when he felt that English power, awesome and supreme as it still was, was on the turn, and that English intellectual life was being choked by the great consciousness of power and money and rightness. "They exert every variety of talent on a lower ground." Emerson wrote, "and may be said to live and act in a submind." Something like this I felt in the glitter of Dallas. Power was the theme of the convention, and this power seemed too easy – national power, personal power, the power of the New Right. Like Emerson in England, I seemed in the convention hall of Dallas 'to walk on a marble floor, where nothing will grow.'

All of the young reactionary intellectuals I knew when I was younger eventually came around to a similar epiphany. At some point, it just couldn't be ignored: these people were scum; mean, sleazy, boring scum. It became impossible to be near them. They – we – dropped out of the Right, and wanted nothing more to do with it all. But by ruining everything in this country – economically, culturally, intellectually, militarily – the Right essentially chased us wherever we went, poisoning everything they could get their hands on. Until finally there was nowhere to go but leftward. A hardened, mean left.

Either get the Republican lobotomy (just look at poor P.J. O'Rourke), or go left: those are the only choices in this country today.

Naipaul's career developed at a time when Western reactionary intellectuals could still be formidable, dynamic and unpredictable; there was space carved out on the Right for reactionary talent like Naipaul. They had to struggle for publishing success at a time when the printed word was dominated by Marxist philistines. Those left-

wing intellectuals no longer exist today, except as phantom boogymen in the heroic fantasies of the Right. What's worse, the American right has no need of unpredictable talent like V.S. Naipaul, so they've driven his species into extinction as well, poisoning the intellectual ecosystem forever, making it impossible for a new Naipaul to threaten them again. They've replaced the Naipauls with libertarians, the fake, predictable, genetically-modified version of reactionary intellectualism – so insanely corrupt and so profoundly retarded that, like a skunk spraying foul stupidity whenever threatened, libertarianism has successfully scared away anyone with brains and dignity from bothering them while they feed.

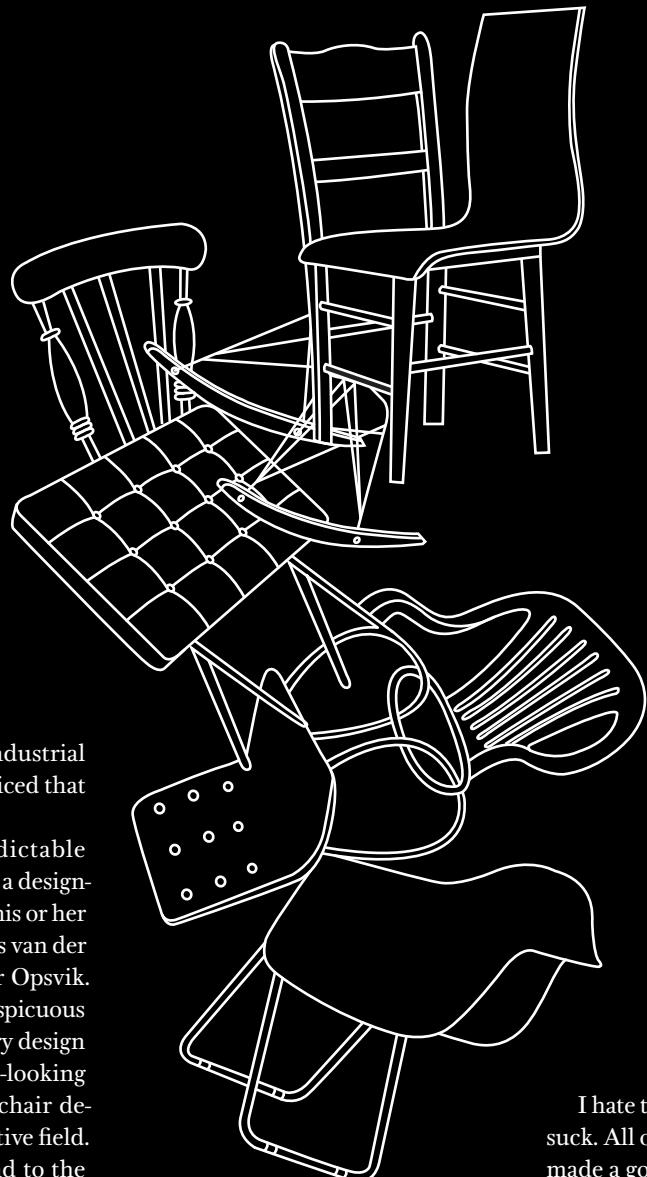
Naipaul always despised facile thinking. It was because Naipaul was so committed to merciless observation that he allied himself with reactionary intellectuals of the pre-Reagan, pre-Thatcher era – it was the Left that wore the rose-tinted glasses back then. What Naipaul didn't realize was how much worse, how much more intellectually stifling America's right-wing intelligentsia would turn out to be once in power. And sentimental to the point of disgusting – that's the other thing that comes through Naipaul's essay on the 1984 Republican Convention: the cheap, contemptible sentimentality of the American right, the very opposite of rigor.

What's left today, three decades after Reagan's victory, is a ruling class of Rotary Club nihilists. Right-wing degenerates. And they're not even interesting degenerates anymore, the way some right-wingers used to be. They just scream a lot. Scream and bang a stick on the ground – and at the end of the stick-banging, they go to pick up their checks from their billionaire sponsors.

All of which brings me back to Naipaul's original question: *How can one overcome one's distaste? Why shouldn't one just go away and ignore it?* ■



Against Chairs



If you hang out with industrial designers, you may have noticed that they're really into chairs.

In fact, tastes are predictable enough that you can often tell a designer's favorite chair maker from his or her shirt. Black button-down? Mies van der Rohe. Black turtleneck? Peter Opsvik. Low-cut black V-neck and conspicuous hair product? Campanas. Every design school graduate wants a cool-looking chair in their portfolio, and chair design can be a savagely competitive field. If you can be bothered to read to the back of *Wallpaper Magazine*, I imagine you'll find the page where they list all the job openings for the position of Famous Designer: "Need not apply unless strangely enthusiastic about crafting beautiful, terrible furniture for rich people."

by Colin McSwiggen



I hate to piss on the party, but chairs suck. All of them. No designer has ever made a good chair, because it is impossible. Some are better than others, but all are bad. Not only are chairs a health hazard, they also have a problematic history that has inextricably tied them to our culture of status-obsessed individualism. Worse still, we've become dependent on them and it's not clear

that we'll ever be free.

It sounds absurd to claim that chairs are dangerous. They're comfortingly ubiquitous and seem almost too boring to be harmful. But when one considers that the average Briton, for instance, spends over fourteen hours seated per day, relying on chairs for support while working, relaxing, commuting, eating, and sometimes sleeping, it's easy to believe that chairs could have a serious impact on public health.

It turns out that they do, and the figures are grim: last year, the American Cancer Society wrapped up a fourteen-year longitudinal study of 120,000 participants and discovered that sitting for extended periods during the day dramatically increased participants' risk of death. The result held even among participants who exercised regularly, and although there's the usual confusion over causation and correlation, the study falls atop a growing pile of evidence that long times spent seated are a contributing cause of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, depression, and practically innumerable orthopedic injuries. It does not matter if you are young, eat well, and live an otherwise active life. Just *being seated*, in excess, will hurt you.

Yet these results are misleading. They make it look like the problem is just that we sit too much. The real problem is that sitting, in our society, usually means putting your body in a raised seat with back support – a chair. Sitting wouldn't be so bad if we didn't sit on things that are bad for us.

What makes chairs so awful for the body? That's a complicated question to answer, because different chairs get different things wrong. Uncomfortable chairs typically put adverse pressure on some part of the body or require excessive muscular work in order to sit. This can cause soreness and encourage the sitter to adopt slouched postures that restrict circulation, impede respiratory and intestinal function, and lead to musculoskeletal injuries.

Comfy chairs are even worse. By encouraging the sitter to remain in a single static position for long durations without moving, they put extended, unrelieved stress on the spine, weaken the muscles that support the body's frame and prevent injury, and cause the same circulatory problems as their less comfortable counterparts. And that's just the beginning.

There was a time when idealistic furniture companies like Hermann Miller prophesied that a safe chair design would emerge from the murky sort-of-science of ergonomics. But the ergonomics literature, pockmarked as it is with controversy and confusion, offers little insight.

No one even knows what a "good" chair would have to do, hypothetically, let alone how to make one. Some ergonomists have argued that the spine should be allowed to round forward and down in a C-shaped position to prevent muscular strain, but this pressurizes the internal organs and can cause spinal discs to rupture over time. Others advocate for lumbar support, but the forced convexity that this creates is not much better in the short run and can be worse in the long: it weakens the musculature of the lumbar region, increasing the likelihood of the very injuries it's meant to prevent. There are similar debates over seat height, angle, and depth; head, foot, and arm support; and padding.

Galen Cranz, a sociologist of architecture and perhaps the world's preeminent chair scholar, has called ergonomics "confused and even silly." For designers without a scientific background, it's a clusterfuck.

Admirable efforts have been made, though with only limited success. A number of Scandinavian designers have designed ball chairs, kneeling chairs, and chairs that encourage sitting in several different positions. These are improvements but not total fixes. They also frequently don't work properly at common table heights and

their unconventional appearances make them unacceptable in most workplaces.

After decades of trying, perhaps it's time to admit that there is no way to win.

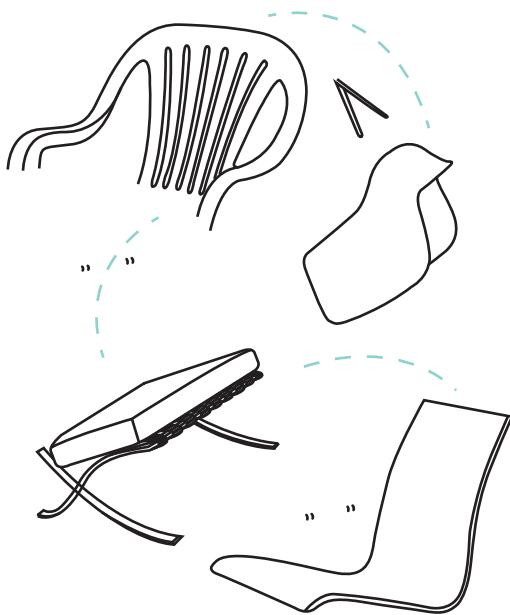
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F CHAIRS ARE SUCH a dumb idea, how did we get stuck with them? Why does our culture demand that we spend most of every day sitting on objects that hurt us? What the hell happened?

It should be no surprise to readers of *Jacobin* that the answer lies in class politics. Chairs are about status, power, and control. That's why we like them. Ask any furniture historian about the origins of the chair and they'll gleefully tell you that it all started with the throne.

Some time in the Stone Age, probably between 6,000 and 12,000 years ago, high-status individuals in some cultures began to sit on small raised platforms, just large enough to hold a single person and with a backrest to support or frame the sitter. This was an effective way to designate elevated status among people who otherwise sat on the ground – much more so than stools, which lacked a back, and benches, which accommodated more than one person. The earliest evidence of these primitive thrones comes from figurines excavated in southeastern Europe, but single-person seats with a back were important status symbols in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt as well.

Obviously our chairs today are utterly different from ancient Egyptian thrones, but the throne-like properties of chairs and their resulting importance as class markers have been the key historical factors behind their rise. The general trend at most points in Western history has been that upper-class people sit in a certain type of chair – typically the crappiest, most



damaging design available at the time – and everyone else tries to imitate them.

During the Middle Ages, chairs were not common in the Western world at all. After the Visigoths sacked Rome, their habits of squatting and sitting on the ground became the predominant ways for commoners to sit. Until the Renaissance, even wealthy feudal households had very little furniture because they had to keep moving around to avoid getting sacked themselves. The richest families would have had a single massive chair for the exclusive use of the master of the house; this chair was typically too heavy to move (to keep it from getting stolen when the house got sacked). Tables were boards on trestles, which were set up in front of the chair rather than the other way around, a practice that we still reference today in the phrase “chairman of the board.”

Eventually life got easier as rich and lavish furniture became more widespread among the upper class. Style became increasingly important in furniture design through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and chair making, previously the domain of generalist woodworkers, became a spe-

cialized trade in its own right. Tellingly, furniture in this period was typically designed based on trends in decorating fashion rather than physiological concerns. Despite increasing use, however, chairs remained an accessory for relatively affluent households until the nineteenth century. Poor people sat on stools, benches, their beds, or improvised objects like barrels and trunks.

That changed with the Industrial Revolution. Suddenly chairs were being made cheaply in factories and more people could afford to sit like the rich. At the same time, labor was being sedentarized: as workers moved en masse from agriculture to factories and offices, they spent more and more time sitting in those newly mass-producible chairs. As usual, class aspirations determined what people bought: body-conscious innovations like patent chairs, which were adjustable, and rocking chairs, which encouraged movement, sadly received only marginal acceptance from the wealthy and saw limited use.

And so it was that from the turn of the twentieth century on, chairs had society in their clutches.

As chairs became prevalent in

schoolrooms, they became a tool for teachers to control the movement of children, whose healthy tendency toward activity made them difficult to teach. Today, children in the developed world learn early that sitting still in a chair is part of what it means to be an adult. The result is that by the time they actually reach adulthood, most have lost the musculature to sit comfortably for prolonged periods without back support.

As if social and physiological dependence on chairs weren’t bad enough, designers have screwed us once again by building yet another level of dependence into our environments themselves: offices and kitchens are often fitted with work surfaces fixed at standard chair heights, chairs are a fixture in almost every form of vehicular transport, and computer monitors, lighting, and other devices are often designed in such a way that they’re difficult to use unless seated at a table. Chairs are, so to speak, part of the furniture. Not only is there no way to win, there’s no way to escape.

We’re faced, then, with a couple of depressing conclusions. One is that chairs are a sort of inanimate parasite, ensuring their continued production by addicting each successive generation of kids. The other is that they’re here to stay for the foreseeable future.

I’d love to end this essay with a cry for a cultural shift away from chairs and toward more active sitting, on the floor or squatting or whatever, but really, we’re stuck with this shit for a while. The best we can hope for from chairs right now is a lesson on the dangers of fashion and a historical counterexample to the myth that the public acts in its own collective interest. If you want to sit healthily, you’ll have to take matters into your own hands; the best habit to develop is not to stay seated for more than ten minutes at a time.

If you read at an average speed, you should get up right now and walk around. ■



AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL historians are no strangers to argument. But few have been as defined by contrarianism as James Livingston. Where others have mourned the early-twentieth-century defeat of the Populists and the Wobblies, he has made a career extolling the radical potential of the corporate order which emerged at the same time. He has hailed the volunteer army as an outstanding example of progressive politics, and defended John Dewey's World War I hawkishness against Randolph Bourne's tragically heroic opposition. In his first non-academic book, *Against Thrift: Why Consumer Culture is Good for the Economy, the Environment, and Your Soul*, Livingston argues that a bias against consumerism mars not only academia but American moral common sense more generally. "We're afraid," he writes, "that we consume too many resources, that we save too little of our incomes, and that meanwhile we produce almost nothing of real value." Americans are neurotic about our consumption, he claims, and his book is the therapy that can help us get over it.

But why is thrift a habit we need to break? Livingston's argument has both economic and cultural aspects. Like other Marxist analysts, including David Harvey and Robert Brenner, he explains our present crisis as the result of "huge shifts in income shares away from labor, wages and consumption

toward capital, profits, and corporate savings." Productivity gains in the last few decades have gone almost entirely to the rich. Their surplus profits, lacking profitable avenues for investment, are channeled into whatever bubbles are at hand. He goes farther than others in claiming that the reinvestment of profits is no longer even necessary for economic growth. This argument is difficult for non-specialists to evaluate, but Livingston documents his case with graphs showing a growth in GDP despite declining net investment. He argues that the superfluity of private investment licenses us to tax and redistribute corporate profits without fear of destroying our economic future. Instead of generating crises, our social wealth can underwrite a reduction of working time and an expansion of income and leisure for workers.

According to Livingston, our unfortunate economic orthodoxy is bound up with anachronistic moral commitments. He accuses most Americans, left and right, of being stuck in a mindset from the 1890s, one that favors production, work, and restraint over consumption, leisure, and indulgence. The tendency to attack bankers through moralistic categories, the anti-monopoly faith in small business, nostalgia for the "real economy" of manufacturing jobs – all this, he argues, is a Populist hangover inadequate to the present moment. Opposition to consumer culture is fundamentally rooted in the conviction that moral

worth comes from socially productive labor, not parasitic prodigality. These beliefs made sense in a time of scarcity. But now that our productive advances have made widely shared abundance possible, the demand that consumer culture be checked is a demand for unnecessary privation.

What to make of all this? Livingston, who elsewhere summarized the historic mission of the Left as "FUCK WORK," is unmistakably part of a venerable tradition stretching from Paul Lafargue's "The Right to Be Lazy" through Ellen Willis's "Women and the Myth of Consumerism." Whatever one makes of the details of his economic argument, the two main points – that we have the productive capacity to reduce working time and expand leisure, and that our present crisis can be explained by the maldistribution of income – will be agreeable to most leftist readers. And yet, gazing at the rack of almost identical collared shirts gracing Livingston's cover, these readers might ask themselves why he is so intent on defending the culture of capitalism.

One answer is that he's only kind of doing that. A key moment comes halfway through the book, when Livingston appears to yield some ground. To those who accuse advertising and consumerism of the "crapification" of American culture – pointless product differentiation, advertisements for unhealthy food, etc. – he concedes that this is an "ugly process." He maintains, however,

book
review

*Against Thrift:
Why Consumer
Culture is Good for the
Economy, the Environment,
and Your Soul,*
by James
Livingston

by Tim Barker

that the remedy leads through the center of consumerism, not away from it. Properly dialectical, but what does he mean, exactly? “The obvious solution is to redistribute income,” he writes, so that no one will have to eat fast food for lack of a Trader Joe’s in their neighborhood. This is a good socialist answer, one that avoids moralizing the politics of consumption by blaming the victims.

But the nature of Livingston’s defense is revealing. He doesn’t contest the “crapification” charge, or urge poor people to give in to the libidinal desires they’ve discovered through McDonald’s billboards. Instead of defending actually existing capitalist consumerism, he defends the promise of a future which will feature consumption *alongside* “redistributing income and socializing investment” – bringing it under popular control so it can be driven by social concerns rather than mere profit. (It is only fair to note that Livingston might object to this distinction by reiterating his position that “capitalism and socialism are complementary, not mutually exclusive, modes of production.” Lacking the space and expertise to address this more fully, I can only echo the historian Howard Brick, who has doubted whether Livingston and his mentor Martin Sklar provide a “means for critically assessing the recipe of the [capitalism-socialism] mix.” In *Against Thrift*, Livingston speaks of the need to socialize investment as if it hasn’t happened, so I feel comfortable distinguishing a

present and future consumerism.)

Understanding the book this way makes it easier to swallow, but it undercuts the force of its contrarianism. How many left critics of consumer culture would leave their indictments unrevised in the face of the radically different social and economic conditions Livingston proposes? He positions his book as a lonely dissent from “the celebration of craftsmanship and small business that still animates Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, Populism, and the American Dream.” But painting with such a wide brush obscures differences within the body of criticism of consumer culture, and exaggerates the distance between Livingston and his interlocutors. There are surely some – members of the Catholic Worker, perhaps, Wendell Berry, or the later Christopher Lasch – who would frown upon Livingston’s collectivist vistas because of objections to a “riotous standard of living.” But just as common are those who share the goals of reducing work and increasing living standards, but remain critical of the consumer culture we currently possess. It’s possible, for instance, to prefer leisure to hard work but still worry about the way consumerism functions in a wildly unequal society. You might accept Livingston’s point that there’s nothing *a priori* immoral or unnatural about the way advertising awakens new desires, but as long as poor people have to sate these desires through borrowing instead of a

guaranteed minimum income, it’s easy to look disapprovingly at the manufacture of need.

It’s also possible to worry that elements of actually existing consumer society block the path to a more democratic *and* more affluent society. Livingston drafts Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer into their familiar roles as elitist killjoys, tracing much subsequent anti-consumerism to the influence of their mandarin distaste. In fact, they were fierce left critics of the “pathos of productivity.” Adorno labeled anti-consumerist Thorstein Veblen a “Puritan” whose “criticism stops at the sacredness of work,” and Max Horkheimer refused to criticize those who preferred “privacy and consumption rather than production” since “in Utopia production does not play a decisive part.” Livingston is not mistaken in opposing his position to theirs – they certainly had no great love for the consumer society of their time. But they shared Livingston’s basic premise that increasingly productive human societies could and should abolish the economic discipline of work. Faced with the uncomfortable reality, however, that late capitalism had “made not work but the workers superfluous,” they naturally became deeply skeptical of the dominant culture, and searched its institutions – including consumerism and advertising – for explanations of what had gone wrong. They may have reached unusually dour conclusions, but they

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are typical of many leftists insofar as their objections to consumerism have nothing to do with small business or craftsmanship.

Livingston does address the argument that consumerism is a barrier to social change. Citing the role consumer demand played in the Civil Rights sit-ins and the Eastern European democratic revolutions of 1989, he argues that identities and solidarities based in consumption can therefore be powerful forces for reform. But when he tries to apply this model of consumer-driven social change to his most provocative claim – consumerism is “good for the environment” – he falls regrettably short. This is an important point, and not just because it occupies a third of the book’s subtitle. For most of Livingston’s potential audience, I suspect, the ecological limits to consumption are the hardest to imagine overcoming.

His brief defense, presented in only seven pages, rests on the old distinction between use and exchange values. Since consumers are concerned with specific use values, he avers, the standpoint of consumption offers the best “alternative to the endless accumulation of exchange value” presently threatening our planet. As a historical illustration, he argues that the “foodie” movement of recent decades offered a compelling consumer-driven challenge to industrialized agriculture. If corporations had their way, we’d eat bad things that are bad for the environment, so long as they are profitable. But the discerning confidence of Michael Pollan readers (backed by effective consumer demand) reshaped the production of food in line with their demand for quality use values.

This argument won’t quite satisfy those concerned that our present level and style of consumerism is bad for the environment. It counts on redistribution to enable all consumers to become as discriminating as middle-class foodies, and on the socialization of invest-

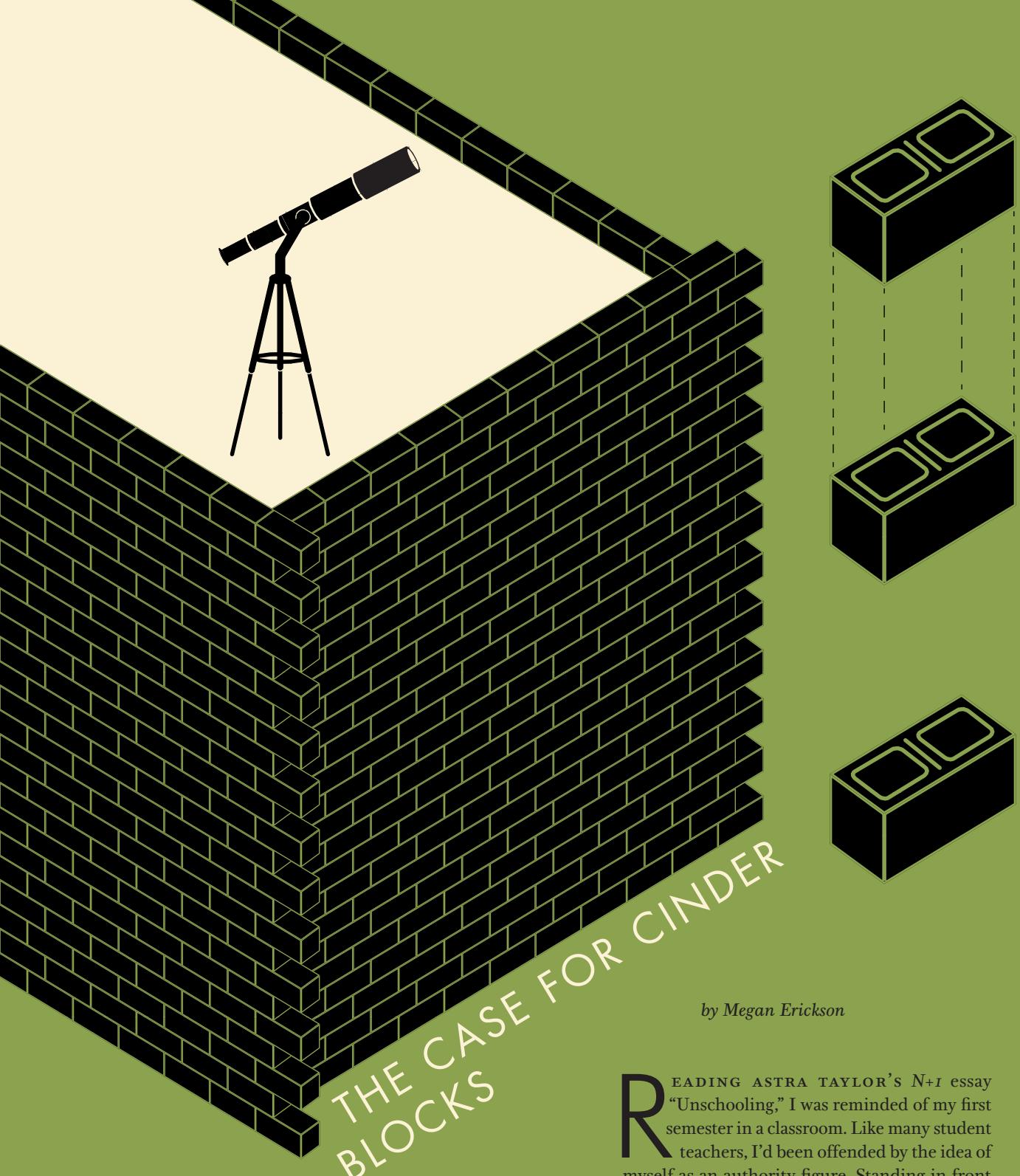
ment since the “endless accumulation of exchange value” will continue as long as finance capitalists can make a lot of money moving numbers around. But even assuming his political and economic goals can be met, Livingston has not quieted every doubt. The climate impact of higher incomes – and even of democratically controlled investment – is indeterminate. With more money to spend, won’t people fly more, and buy more meat (food revolution notwithstanding, after all, beef consumption continued to climb until the recession made people too poor to buy so much)? Why couldn’t a democratic public prove as bad at accounting for long-run externalities as private corporations have, perhaps by voting themselves a huge gas subsidy? As leftists, we should not abandon increasing the consumption of use values as one purpose of income redistribution. But, contra Livingston, a real tension does exist between this goal and another – keeping the planet livable.

There is another common argument Livingston doesn’t address, though he anticipates it. “We know without thinking,” he writes in a summary of the conventional wisdom he aims to dispute, “that [consumer goods] already contain a barbaric history of exploitation – ‘Made in China,’ the label says.” Having mentioned them on the second page of his introduction, Livingston ought to return to the human beings whose daily labor makes it possible to talk about a “post-scarcity” situation in the United States. Maybe he thinks that the Chinese need only to bide their time until they too pass through the stage of industrial discipline into the realm of consumer freedom, or maybe that enfranchised American consumers will use their organized power to demand better conditions for their overseas enablers, just like they demanded better food. But the question remains unexamined, much like a related issue: can the whole world

sustainably match the level, not just of current American consumption, but of the increased American consumption Livingston calls for? I’d sincerely like to think it’s possible, but it’s not self-evident. Without addressing consumption in its global context, Livingston leaves himself open to the charge of ethical particularism – socialist consumerism in one country, as it were.

Some will be tempted to write off Livingston’s vision of a consumer society slouching toward Utopia as reconciliation under duress. He is so eager to talk back to pessimistic cultural critics that he can sound uncannily optimistic. In a country where a guaranteed minimum income failed even in the 1960s, when a labor movement and inner-city rebellions forced the issue, it is far from obvious how we might today begin to articulate the demand for less work and more pay. Livingston gives us little guidance on this point, noting only that he believes in a kind of cultural “war of position” following the examples of (for all their differences) Antonio Gramsci, Vaclav Havel, and W.E.B. DuBois. But there are worse things for the Left than optimism, and it’s a mistake to demand a tactical roadmap from a quick-moving and light-spirited brief. It’s also unfair to accuse Livingston of complacency, given his enthusiastic participation in Occupy Wall Street and the injuries he sustained at the hands of Bloomberg’s army.

It’s hard to deny Livingston leaves some absolutely crucial questions dangling. But he draws exactly the right line of antagonism for the present moment: between the austerity class and those who demand for each of us the respectable standard of living our socially-produced wealth already allows. If *Against Thrift* helps carry this analysis a little further into the American mainstream, leftists – even those with serious and justified reservations – will owe James Livingston some gratitude. ■



THE CASE FOR CINDER BLOCKS

by Megan Erickson

READING ASTRA TAYLOR'S *N+1* essay "Unschooling," I was reminded of my first semester in a classroom. Like many student teachers, I'd been offended by the idea of myself as an authority figure. Standing in front of the class at the chalkboard felt like a lie. Was I smarter than my students? No. Did I know more about the subject I was teaching? Not always. I was so afraid of humiliating kids that I refused to call on a student unless her hand was raised.

In practice, that meant that over and over again I gave a lot of outgoing kids the chance to speak, while effectively ignoring the ones who weren't interested. When no one's hand was raised, I wasted time wondering what to do next. In the middle of the semester, my students filled out their evaluations. "Dear Ms. Erickson," one student wrote, "when no one raises their hand, it's okay to just call on someone." He was right. It was okay. I'd been protecting tenth graders from something they were perfectly prepared to face.

It is this false and misguided sense of children's fragile identity that informs the educational philosophy of "unschooling." Demographically, unschooling is homeschooling for middle-class people with master's degrees. Its heroes are Paul Goodman, John Holt, and A.S. Neill, the author of a once influential but largely forgotten book called *Summerhill*, about a boarding school run entirely by the students.

Taylor's self-education – which she says she experienced as a compromise between the wild fantasy of freely communing with other young people and the reality of submitting "to irrational authority six and half hours a day, five days a week, in a series of cinder-block holding cells" – involved reading, weeding vegetable gardens, running through the woods, publishing an animal rights newsletter, and watching reruns of the *The Simpsons* with her three siblings. Her mother facilitated.

Dana Goldstein has already written at length about the economic infeasibility of unschooling as a national philosophy for education, and Taylor has responded that her essay is not meant to be prescriptive, but instructive. It's the values we should take from radical pedagogy, the willingness "to take seriously words like 'freedom,' 'autonomy,' and 'choice,'" which have been ceded to the political right, she argues. Looking "at the radical margins may help us ask better questions about what

we really want from our educational system and how to go about getting it."

These are questions worth asking in the golden age of young adult dystopian fiction. Are schools jails? Is institutionalization an inevitably soul-crushing enterprise, meant to inculcate children into, in Taylor's words, an "ethos of boredom"? Is it time for the Left to take choice seriously?

The fundamental problem with unschooling, an essentially anarchist critique of compulsory education, is that it fails to account for the fact that privilege and authority, though intimately linked, are not the same thing. It is not only possible but preferable for teachers to guide children without "molding" or forcing them. Goodman and Holt were both committed to delaying socialization in children, regarding growth as an individual, solitary, and natural pursuit that must be protected from the corrupting influence of adults. It's a primitivist impulse. It's also sentimental and paternalistic.

Insistent as these critiques are on the primacy of individual freedom, they almost always invoke self-guided learning as a liberating answer to the oppressive teacher-student relationship. The idea is that, as Goodman wrote, "natural" learning means that the organism itself must create its own structures as it goes. One common refrain is "you don't need to teach a baby how to speak. You speak to it and it learns to speak" – in other words, let nature do her work, and everything will turn out fine.

But it doesn't always turn out fine. In fact, this contradicts everything we know about learning and cognition. Inquiry and engagement are important, but students also need scaffolding, in the form of "modeling, direct teaching, and prompting, which is gradually removed as students become adept at self-evaluation and metacognition" (Resnick and Williams Hall). Teachers use direct instruction strategies not just to bore kids, but because

they work: a combination of direct instruction and real life examples is a more effective way to teach than either is on its own.

Taylor writes, "Our solitude, to paraphrase Thoreau, was not trespassed upon. What a gift! What kind of respect for intellectual or artistic immersion is signaled by a world in which the sound of a bell means that the work at hand, no matter how compelling or urgent, must be put aside, and something else started? How deeply can anyone enter a subject in fifty minutes unless the material is broken down into component parts too small to communicate any grand purpose?"

I read this as a refutation of worksheets. And fine. Who doesn't hate outlines and graphic organizers? Before I began teaching, I promised myself I'd never go near a photocopier. Compare/contrast exercises feel reductive, mechanistic, too "Another Brick in the Wall." But it turns out that this breaking down into component parts is exactly what many students need in order to get to the grand purpose. Study after study has shown that students' ability to identify the structure of a text influences whether or not they understand and remember what they have read. One researcher found that only 11 percent of ninth graders consciously identified and used high-level structure to recall their reading, and this group was able to recall twice as much as the students who did not use the strategy. Training the other 89 percent to identify and use top-level structure more than doubled their recall performance.

The ability to recall what you have read matters a lot. The brain's working memory capacity is limited, and if it's entirely devoted to decoding a sentence, it's less likely to be able to construct and engage with meaning. This is why we have to spend years learning basic math before we get to calculus. What separates experts from novices is not some innate mystical

genius; it's the automaticity and pattern recognition that comes only from hours of practice. Sometimes, learning is work because it's work, not because it's busy work.

There's another aspect of Taylor's argument that I find troubling. Why shouldn't kids be asked to put away their crayons and go to lunch at the same time? Why do we assume that clear boundaries, a schedule, and a sense of hierarchy are so threatening to students? Why must the individual's vision be so carefully and serenely sheltered from other people, who are experienced in this framework as interruptions? There is value in being pulled out of a daydream. There is value in learning to cope with a little coercion, in knowing what it means to cooperate on a daily basis with someone who doesn't love you, someone who's not your family member.

She summarizes the debate over compulsory schooling as, "Do we trust people's capacity to be curious or not?" To me, it seems to be about sparing children the discomfort of conflict. Curiosity leads us to follow our own interests, but what about the interests of others? Conflict is what happens when we're asked to reckon with them. Just as not every child learns to read "when they're ready," some students understandably "resist the critical thinking process; they are more comfortable with learning that allows them to remain passive" (as bell hooks writes).

True, it's not important or desirable that every student become a professor. I'm not arguing against the incorporation of technical training into public schools. But, whether we're willing to admit it or not, there is a body of mainstream academic knowledge that students either have access to or don't – for example the ability to speak "Standard English" – and that access is crucial to being able to support oneself as an adult. In *Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit writes about her disillusionment with her progressive, child-

centered teacher training: "In many African-American communities, teachers are expected to show that they care about their students by controlling the class; exhibiting personal power," and "pushing' students to achieve." Teachers who don't exhibit these behaviors are regarded as uncaring.

"There are several reasons why students and parents of color take a position that differs from the well-intentioned position of the teachers I have described," she writes. "First, they know that members of society need access to dominant discourse to (legally) have access to economic power. Second, they know that such discourses can be and have been acquired in classrooms because they know individuals who have done so." Delpit sees the public schools as a place where students should be acquiring the skills and language that help them survive and transform systemic oppression.

At the heart of the anarchist vision for public schooling is the idea that if public schools don't work for you, you should stop going. Burn them down. Refuse to pay taxes. Rebell ing against the institutional part of public institutions is the defining characteristic of the anarchist response to structural inequality. Goodman sees schooling as social control, the individual thwarted, taxes squandered on "war, school teachers, and politicians." Education systems have in many cases throughout history served to reinforce the class structures of the society that set them up. But tearing them down or boycotting them and rebuilding on a local level is not a viable solution.

The fact is, we don't need more decentralization in our public schools. US schools are already highly decentralized compared to others around the world. Liberals and conservatives have long resisted the creation of a national curriculum, effectively handing the power over to Texas and California to create a de facto national curriculum because they order the most textbooks. In

2010, the Texas Board of Ed. approved a social studies curriculum which emphasizes the importance of capitalism in American life. Board members were unable to agree on whether Darwin's theory of evolution should be included.

"Unschooling" ends with a portrait of the Albany Free School, an alternative school where students pay a sliding scale tuition averaging a little over \$100 a month. "Pitching in to weed the vegetable beds or feed the chickens are fine examples of how the Free School staff turns necessity into virtue, creatively stretching their meager resources while embracing self-reliance and simple living," she writes. It's a model school, though she readily admits it isn't scalable. Nor would we want it be. The school's existence relies on fundraising, volunteering, the work of interns, and teachers who make a stipend of only \$11,000 a year with no benefits – well under the already low going rate. In doing so, it adds to the devaluing of care work on which American capitalism relies.

It's no accident that this is a microcosm of what is happening to public schools, where parents and kids are increasingly being asked to pitch in and paint the building or hawk candy bars to fill budget gaps. That's because the values of freedom, autonomy, and choice are in perfect accordance with market-based "reforms," and with the neoliberal vision of society on which they're based. Alternative, student-centered education sounds like community action, until you remember we're already paying for public schools, and patching them up after hours is an inadequate and piecemeal way to go about changing them. We need a common space that offers students access to knowledge they may be but aren't necessarily getting at home – and we need to insist, through taxation, that the wealthy contribute to it. Make no mistake: "unschooling" is a retreat from this ideal. ■

The Black Jacobin

by Remeike
Forbes

CHOOSING A VISUAL representation for a collective can be as politically fraught as the drafting of a written manifesto, and the image that graces our masthead is no exception. I presented four options to the *Jacobin* editorial board, but the debate boiled down to two. An abstract symbol ultimately lost out to our new pictorial logo, which references C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins*.

I understand where my fellow Jacobins in the abstract camp were coming from. With so much of the Left desperately plastering any image that could possibly signify rebellion onto their rally flyers – burly arm clasping burly arm, clinched fist grasping X object, Angela Davis wailing into something – the appetite for something neutral and slightly timid appears reasonable. No one wants to issue another risible facsimile of *Adbusters*, a bound pile of expensive pages with vapid content inciting suburban teenagers to purchase hemp boots.

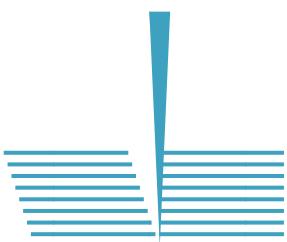
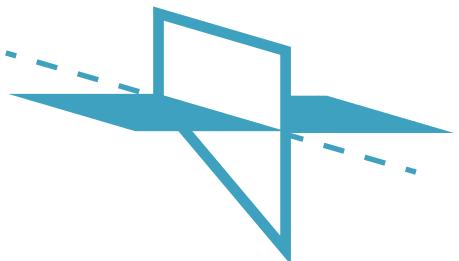
But why should leftists have to choose between honest, impassioned visual content and sober political analysis? Ironically, leftists who scoff at bold imagery suffer the same delusions of the Guy Fawkes left, opting for lazy applications of style over an attempt to grapple with a world of meaning. Even timid design has semantic consequences – if the fist-wielding activists try to beckon the world into their rebellion, simple abstraction or utter lack of design conveys a tepid intellectualism. In either case, design should be more than surface treatment.

A predilection for “modernism” recurred in the preferences of some for the “simple,” “abstract,” or “non-literal” logos, which betrayed a certain misunderstanding of modernism in graphic design and its history. Modernism refers to a diverse tradition that ranges from the highly expressive works of the twenties and thir-

ties to the “objective” treatments of the mid century, from the rigid designs of Swiss modernism to the more loose and playful forms of the New York School.

The concerns that animated modernism were always more complex than the cliché of “less is more.” It’s easy to conflate the use of abstraction with modernism, but abstract geometry was used in design for centuries before the advent of modernity. Modernism was an ideological project conditioned by certain historical, technological, and practical realities, so attempts to recycle modernist visual tropes while blind to its history inevitably betray its spirit. Stephen Heller described modernism as “[exploring] the outer limits and universality of visual communication.” That’s a tradition I can stand behind, but it has implications well beyond frivolous exercises in formal abstraction.

When I began drafting different logos, I initially tried to craft some sort of abstract mark, but I soon concluded that this wasn’t practical or appropriate. An abstract mark lends itself to repetition, whether by sheer reproduction and presence or by insinuating itself into elements of an entire design scheme. Otherwise, it just forms a weak identity. The adoption of abstract marks as central elements of corporate identities in the post-war era wasn’t just the consequence of Swiss proselytizing; it also fit the needs of large, vertically-integrated, multinational institutions. For such institutions, it is useful to have identities consist of simple forms that can be adapted to many different departments, can be placed on all sorts of collateral, made into sculptures, placed on planes, trucks, the sides of buildings, and suited to a range of cultural contexts. Large institutions have massive budgets and can thus make their identities ubiquitous; they don’t have to worry as much about their marks being too indistinct



because they can acquire recognition by sheer volume.

Recent social and economic developments since the seventies have impacted visual identity design. The Unimark empire collapsed, Helvetica – the typeface of social-democratic compromise – grew dull, and the language of corporate identity was replaced by the postmodern drivel of brand identity. Needless to say, a magazine like *Jacobin* is not constrained by the problems of large institutions, so we were in a position to judge logos on their semantic merits, rather than formal ones. But while it's easy enough to harangue my comrades, the tactless recycling of visual effects is one that graphic designers suffer from in equal measure.

Stylistic treatments abound, but few designers concern themselves with the actual meaning of their works. And some of the most powerful visual marks have been formal disasters. Take the clenched fist, perhaps the most prolific tool in the Left's graphic arsenal. It's messy and difficult to recognize at smaller scales – semantically, it is often beaten into a meaningless pulp through poor application. But it can still be powerful; the Wisconsin fist was a hideous iteration of an already ugly form, but it was still a brilliant one.

So rather than fiddle about with shapes, I put on the soundtrack to *Queimada!* and picked up a copy of *The Black Jacobins*. My search ended with the scene in *Queimada!* where the revolutionary leader José Dolores is captured by the British forces. Marlon Brando, playing imperial agent William Walker, recounts Dolores's story to an accompanying officer: "A fine specimen, isn't he? Now it's an exemplary story: in the beginning he was nothing, a porter, a water carrier. And England makes him a revolutionary leader and when he no longer serves her and he's put aside, and when he rebels again more or less in the name of those same ideals which England has taught him, England decides to eliminate him. Don't you think that's a small masterpiece?"

The black Jacobin provoked some anxiety on the editorial board. There was concern over the use of a black person as our mascot, and the inherent potential to cause offense. It was a legitimate concern, given the fact that black people have a dicey history as visual identities, hardly advancing past the boxes of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben. Still, I was perplexed, as I am myself a black Jamaican immigrant. And that very anxiety



demonstrated the significance of adopting this image.

The perversity was in presenting a black person as a universal subject, an honor only ever accorded to the white visage. This wasn't some inane attempt at subversion, creating a counter-mythology through facile acts of substitution, like those paintings of Jesus with dreadlocks where he kind of looks like one of those shirtless extras from a Tyler Perry movie.

There is hardly a greater signifier of universalism than the Haitian Revolution. The slave revolt struck at the heart of existing contradictions in the Western Enlightenment, by taking up the mantle of the Enlightenment and turning it into a genuine project of emancipation. The revolutionaries confounded, terrified, and defeated every empire on the block, from the enraged Napoleon Bonaparte who sought to strip the epaulettes off of every nigger on the island to the Southern planters of the US who refused to recognize the independent state. In profound displays of internationalism, they inspired as many as they enraged: from radical French republicans who stood by the free blacks to the Latin American revolutionary Simón Bolívar who took up refuge in Haiti.

Imagine the confusion of Napoleon's soldiers

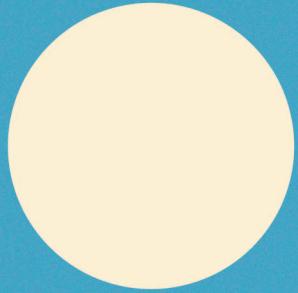
upon hearing Haitian troops sing the Marseillaise. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death" was now the rightful claim of the black soldiers they were fighting.

The Haitian Revolution encapsulates the historic mission of the Left. It is the truest realization of the Enlightenment, whose ideals – wrested from the hypocrites who hawk them and seized by the wretched of the earth – can become a radical project for human emancipation. Marx saw through the contradictions; his was both a critique of Enlightenment and a project to expand the ideals of political emancipation into a project for genuine human emancipation. It's the demand that the principles formalized in our political institutions should extend to our lived experience – in our social and economic life, in the home, and on our streets. The Haitian Revolution should also serve as a reminder to those on the Left who, abandoning thoughtful critique, can imagine no response to the contradictions of Enlightenment other than absolute negation. Remember that line in "The Internationale" – the original version, before Billy Bragg turned it into a sing-a-long for a UNICEF benefit concert – "for reason in revolt now thunders." It was never a cry for a revolt against reason, but a harbinger of reason itself in revolt. ■

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